



WWOOFer Info Booklet

Living, Learning & Helping Out at Vaikuntha
Nied Valley · Guerstling · France

“If you do not do what you cannot do, it is all right. But if you do not do what you can do, your life is a tragedy.”

— Sadhguru

Vaikuntha Naturnahes Lernen e. V.
Rue de la Nied, Lieudit Auf Evernese M178, F-57320 Guerstling
bene@vaikuntha.eu · Version 1.1 · August 2026

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Welcome to Vaikuntha! The essentials in brief

- 1 Watering comes first – before everything else.** The garden is watered **morning and evening**. This task takes priority over any other activity.
- 2 The kitchen is your responsibility.** You WWOOFers make sure the kitchen runs and stays clean. We help out – but the responsibility is yours. You're welcome to use it at any time.
- 3 Thursday is WWOOFer cooking day.** You cook for the community – your evening, your kitchen, your recipes.
- 4 Saturday morning: clean the main house.** Once a week the main house gets cleaned – always Saturday morning, together.
- 5 The WWOOFer bathroom is mopped daily.** Quick, but every day.
- 6 Saving water is a must** – especially in dry spells. Our water comes from our own well. Keep showers short, turn taps off completely.
- 7 When in doubt: ask.** Always. Better to ask once too often than to get it wrong once.
- 8 Alcoholic drinks are on you.** Food and non-alcoholic drinks are on the house.
- 9 When you leave: strip the beds,** sweep out your accommodation, sort the rubbish.
- 10 An absolute fire ban is currently in force** across the entire grounds (drought). Quiet hours: 10 pm–8 am. Smoking only outdoors, and put out every butt completely.

Emergency (France)

European emergency number **112** · Medical **15** · Police **17** · Fire brigade **18**

Address to give the emergency services: Rue de la Nied, Lieudit Auf Evernese M178, F-57320 Guerstling

Settling in at Vaikuntha ✓

This list is yours. Tick off what's done – at the end of your first week we'll go through it together.

Getting to know the people

- ☐ Met **Benedikt** — board member & your first point of contact
- ☐ Met **Jo** — technical lead
- ☐ Met **Andrea** — finances & women's representative
- ☐ Met **Jan** — coordinator of WWOOFer activities

Introductions

- ☐ **Kitchen introduction** (with Jan) — appliances, gas, supplies, routines, washing up & keeping order
- ☐ **Beds & watering introduction** (with Jan) — which beds, how much water, where the watering cans/hoses are
- ☐ Tour of the grounds — main house "Gunther", shower wagon "Isolde", caravan, garden, boundaries of the property
- ☐ Been shown the tools & equipment (machines only after an introduction!)
- ☐ Had electricity & solar explained — what I may plug in and what not
- ☐ Been shown the drinking-water taps

Rules & rhythm

- ☐ Read and understood the info sheet (page 1) — if anything's unclear: ask!
- ☐ Saved the emergency numbers & address in my phone
- ☐ My daily watering routine (morning & evening) is clear
- ☐ Bathroom-mopping routine is clear (daily)
- ☐ Joined or planned my first Thursday cooking day
- ☐ Took part in my first Saturday house cleaning

Arriving & tradition

- ☐ **Planted my welcome tree** 🌳 (or arranged a planting date with Benedikt if the season doesn't allow it yet)
- ☐ Shared my allergies / diet / health limits

☐ Shown my insurance documents (health & personal liability)

☐ Walked across the grounds barefoot at least once 😊

What we offer – what we expect

WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) is a non-commercial learning and cultural exchange: you help out **about 4 hours a day, 6 days a week**, and in return you get accommodation, meals and real learning experiences. Not a job, not a hotel – an exchange between equals.

What we offer

- **A home in paradise:** your caravan surrounded by green, in the Nied Valley
- **Good food:** fresh, shared, much of it from our own garden
- **Learning:** ecological gardening, self-sufficiency, crafts, life in community
- **Community:** respectful, German-French, spanning the generations

What you give in return

- **Committed help within your abilities** – as a guideline about 4 hours a day, 6 days a week, one day off by arrangement. Nobody asks of you what you can't do. But what you can do – give it gladly, with your whole heart.
- Reliability with the fixed tasks (chapter 4) – the community needs to be able to count on them
- Dependable communication and active participation in community life
- Care for your accommodation, the tools and the place

Flexible around the clock – but fair

When you put in your roughly 4 hours is largely up to you – some people love watering at 6 in the morning, others tinker in the evening. This freedom only works with honesty: **the deal has to stay fair**. If you feel the balance tipping (in either direction!), speak up – we'll do the same.

“If you do not do what you cannot do, it is all right. But if you do not do what you can do, your life is a tragedy.”

— Sadhguru

That's the spirit we work in here – together with a principle that holds in our house: **“If I do something, I do it properly – or I don't do it at all.”** Better one task done with care than three left half-finished.

Daily & weekly – this is what we count on

Daily

Task	Details
 Watering in the morning  Watering in the evening	Priority no. 1 – comes before all other tasks. Early in the morning and in the evening when the sun is low (at midday, water scorches the leaves and evaporates uselessly). What to water, how much and with what, you'll learn in the beds introduction. If you only manage one thing in a day: this one.
 Mop the WWOOFer bathroom	The bathroom in the shower wagon "Isolde" gets a damp mop-down every day : mop the floor, clean the sink and shower, remove hair, leave the rooms dry. Takes 10 minutes, makes all the difference.
 Keep the kitchen in order	The kitchen runs under your responsibility: wash up after every use, wipe the surfaces, no food left out uncovered, stove/gas off. Details in chapter 8.

Weekly

Task	Details
 Thursday: WWOOFer cooking day	On Thursdays you WWOOFers cook for the community (Thursday is also community day, so guests may join). Plan ahead: what are we cooking, what do we need, who does what?
 Saturday morning: main house cleaning	Once a week the main house "Gunther" gets a thorough clean – always Saturday morning : floors, kitchen, common rooms, surfaces. Together it's done in 1–2 hours.

Always

- **Save water** – mandatory in dry spells (chapter 10)
- **When in doubt, ask** – about everything: appliances, harvesting, electricity, guests, tools
- **Pay for your own alcohol** – tally sheet in the kitchen, settle up with Andrea
- **When you leave**: strip the beds, sweep out the caravan, sort the rubbish (chapter 19)

How a week at Vaikuntha ticks

Day	What's on
Every day	Watering morning & evening (priority!) · mop the bathroom · keep the kitchen in order · project work as agreed · dinner together at the big table (summer around 9 pm, winter around 8 pm)
Monday	Easy start, weekly planning with Jan: which projects are coming up?
Tuesday	Project work · co-working guests may be in the house (Tue–Fri 8 am–6 pm) · open office hours 4–8 pm
Wednesday	Project work
Thursday	WWOOFer cooking day! · community open 3–11 pm, guests and members come by · office hours 4–6 pm
Friday	Project work · wrapping up the week together
Saturday	Morning: main house cleaning (fixed date) · then free/shared time · the 1st weekend of the month is community weekend
Sunday	Rest-day feel · office hours 4–6 pm · don't forget the watering 😊

Quiet hours: 10 pm – 8 am

During this time the grounds stay quiet. You can schedule your working hours flexibly – other people's rest stays untouched by that.

Meals

Breakfast and lunch are up to you in the kitchen – whenever it suits you and the tasks. **Dinner is always together at the big table:** around 9 pm in summer, around 8 pm in winter. It's the moment of the day when everyone comes together – be there.

Note: the exact daily routine changes with the season and current projects – you do the weekly planning with Jan on Mondays. Your day off (once a week) is arranged individually.

Who's who – and who do you ask about what?

Vaikuntha is made of people. You'll meet these four in your first week (it's on your checklist too):

Benedikt · Board Your first point of contact. Coordinates projects, registrations and everything organisational. Reachable at bene@vaikuntha.eu. Ask about: the association, plans, guests, problems of any kind	Jo · Technical lead Responsible for technology and infrastructure: machines, building, solar, the well and everything that needs fixing. Ask about: tools, equipment & machines, electricity, water, repairs
Andrea · Finances & women's representative Looks after the association's finances and settlements (including your alcohol tally sheet and expenses). As women's representative she is a confidential contact for all women on site. Ask about: money, settling up, shopping — and confidential matters	Jan · Coordinator of WWOOFer activities Plans the tasks with you, does the introductions (beds, watering, kitchen) and is your day-to-day direct line: what's on today, what has priority? Ask about: daily tasks, work planning, introductions, watering schedule

Ground rule

There are no stupid questions. **When in doubt, always ask** – better to ask three times than to drown a bed once, damage a tool or drain the solar battery.

You'll also meet: association members (especially on Thursdays and on community weekends), co-working guests during the week, neighbours from Guerstling and the surrounding area – and other WWOOFers, if there are several of you.

Grounds, houses & accommodation

Vaikuntha lies in the Nied Valley near Guerstling, right on the German-French border. The river, old trees, meadows, a vegetable garden – our little paradise, and for the length of your stay, yours too.

Main house "Gunther"

- Community house for eating, meeting and workshops – this is where shared life happens
- In bad weather and in winter: shoes off (bring slippers!)
- When leaving in the evening: lights and appliances off, windows closed, surfaces wiped, dishes washed and put away, floor swept, rubbish sorted, doors locked

Your home: the WWOOFer caravan

- You're responsible for keeping it tidy and clean
- Only plug in heaters after checking with us (solar power! chapter 11)
- Air it regularly, no smoking, no open flames
- When you leave: strip the beds, sweep out, sort the rubbish

Shower wagon "Isolde"

- Your bathroom facilities: shower, sink, toilet (details in chapter 12)

Sleeping barrel ("Schlaffass")

- Overnight spot for members and registered guests – not the WWOOFer accommodation, but good to know about when guests are here

Garden, the Nied & meadows

- In the garden, keep to the designated paths – the beds are delicate
- Harvest only after checking with us (tempting as it is!)
- Swimming spot on the Nied: at your own risk, never alone, only sober and alert (chapter 13)
- Close gates and pasture fences behind you

Your kitchen, your responsibility

The principle

You WWOOFers may use the kitchen in the main house at any time. In return, it is **your responsibility**: we help out and love cooking together – but making sure the kitchen stays clean, working and welcoming is on **you**. It's the heart of the house.

After every use

- Wash pots, pans and dishes right away, dry them, put them away
- Wipe the worktops, don't leave food out uncovered
- Switch the stove and oven off completely, close the gas appliances
- Sweep the floor if needed, sort the rubbish

Rules

- **Use gas appliances only after an introduction** (it's on your checklist)
- Mention allergies before shared meals – and ask around yourself when you cook for others
- Dishwasher/washing machine only with the go-ahead and when there's enough solar power (chapter 11)
- Supplies: help yourself to whatever belongs to the community kitchen – when in doubt, ask. Agree special ingredients for cooking day in advance
- **Alcoholic drinks are paid for** – add yourself to the tally sheet in the kitchen and settle up with Andrea

Thursday: WWOOFer cooking day 🍳

- You plan and cook the shared meal for the community (Thursday is open community day, 3–11 pm)
- Plan early: recipe, ingredients, quantities – agree shopping with Jan in good time
- As always, we eat together at the big table (summer around 9 pm, winter around 8 pm)
- Seasonal produce from the garden comes first – whatever's ripe goes in the pot (check before harvesting!)
- It doesn't have to be a gourmet menu. Honest, good food cooked with love – that's exactly right

Watering is priority no. 1

The most important rule in this booklet

The garden is watered **morning and evening – this takes priority over all other tasks**. Plants will forgive an untidy shed. A missed watering day at the height of summer they won't forgive.

Watering the right way

- **Early in the morning** (before the sun is high) and **in the evening** (when it's low)
- Never in the midday heat – the water evaporates and droplets act like magnifying glasses
- Water at the roots, not over the leaves (especially with tomatoes!)
- Better less often but deeply than shallowly every day – details in the beds introduction
- Water sparingly: a targeted watering can rather than a generous hose, mulch keeps the moisture in

In the garden

- Keep to the designated paths
- **Harvest only after checking with us** – we plan around what's ripening
- No chemical pesticides – we garden ecologically. There are no exceptions without explicit approval
- Clean tools after use and put them back in their place
- Young trees and fresh plantings need special attention – including your welcome tree 🌿
- Feed animals only after an introduction

The garden is the heart of the association's purpose: feeding the community from its own land. What you do here literally ends up on everyone's plate – including yours.

Well, drinking water & saving it

Our water comes from our **own well** and is filtered. Drinking water is additionally treated by our water machine and tested regularly. But that also means: **water here is not unlimited** – it's a resource we manage ourselves.

Saving water is a must – especially in dry spells

In dry summers (like right now – the municipality has even declared a fire ban), every litre counts. Saving water then isn't a request but a binding rule for everyone.

In practice that means

- Keep showers short – wet, water off, soap up, rinse
- Always turn taps off completely, report dripping taps right away
- Take drinking water only from the designated taps
- Use washing-up water cleverly (a filled basin instead of a running tap)
- When watering: targeted, at the roots, mulched – no sprinkling at midday
- No waste water and no chemicals emptied onto the grounds or into the Nied
- No harsh cleaning products down the drains (our sewage treatment is biological)

Living with the sun

Part of our power supply runs on a **solar system with battery storage**. It works wonderfully – as long as everyone thinks along. At night, in winter and in bad weather, electricity is **not unlimited**.

Rules

- Lights off when leaving a room, unplug chargers when done charging
- **Only after checking with us:** fan heaters, kettles, hotplates, hair dryers – anything that draws a lot
- Don't plug in additional appliances on your own (not in the caravan either!)
- Washing machine/dishwasher only with the go-ahead – ideally at midday in full sun
- Never open fuse boxes, inverters or batteries

Rule of thumb

Big consumers run when the sun is shining. If you're not sure whether an appliance is okay: ask.

Shower wagon "Isolde"

"Isolde" is our mobile sanitary unit and your bathroom during your stay.

Daily WWOOFer task

The WWOOFer bathroom gets a **damp mop-down every day**. Share the task among yourselves if there are several of you – but it happens daily. A clean bathroom is respect for everyone who uses it.

Rules in the shower wagon

- Take your shoes off or wear clean shower shoes
- Leave the rooms clean and **dry** (moisture = mould)
- Remove hair from the shower and sink – every time
- Only suitable toilet paper in the toilet, nothing else
- No harsh cleaning products down the drain
- No smoking
- Use water sparingly – keep showers short (chapter 10)

So everyone stays healthy

Emergency numbers (France)

European emergency number **112** · Medical emergency **15** · Police **17** · Fire brigade **18**

Our address for the emergency services: **Rue de la Nied, Lieudit Auf Evernese M178, F-57320 Guerstling**

Absolute fire ban

Because of the ongoing drought, **open fire is strictly prohibited on the entire grounds until further notice** – no campfires, no grilling over open flames, no candles outdoors. Smoking only outdoors, with every butt put out completely. Smoking is generally banned in buildings and sleeping quarters.

Machines & tools

- Use vehicles and machines only when clear-headed and rested – and only after an introduction
- Report damage immediately – honesty over perfection
- Work and construction areas may be exempt from the barefoot principle and are marked – sturdy footwear applies there

Swimming spot on the Nied

- Swimming at your own risk – there is no lifeguard
- Never swim alone, only when clear-headed and alert
- Children only with a parent or guardian
- No music, no cars, no camping by the Nied

The grounds

- Natural grounds = natural hazards: uneven paths, branches, tools, animals, water – move with care
- Use a headlamp at night
- Report visible hazards, don't just steer around them

Respect – for people, animals and the place

All the rules at Vaikuntha share the same core: **mutual respect**.

- We treat nature, plants, animals and people with equal regard
- Respectful, non-discriminatory behaviour – always, with everyone
- Personal boundaries and a "no" are respected at all times
- Violence, threats and abusive behaviour are not tolerated
- We raise conflicts early and calmly – no bottling up, no talking behind backs
- We leave places at least as tidy as we found them
- Report damage and mishaps right away – it happens to everyone, and it's never a problem if you say so

Quiet hours: 10 pm – 8 am

Quiet conversations yes, music and tinkering no. People (and animals) are sleeping.

Guests & visitors

- Vaikuntha is not a public facility – please arrange visits with Benedikt in advance
- Unannounced overnight stays, unauthorised camping and private parties are not permitted
- Photos/filming for social media & co. only by arrangement – and ask the people you photograph, too

What Vaikuntha stands for (from the statutes)

Vaikuntha Naturnahes Lernen e. V. is a registered **non-profit** association. That's more than a formality: everything earned and built here serves the purposes set out in the statutes and nothing else – nobody profits personally. Should the association ever be dissolved, its assets go to NABU Saarland for nature conservation.

The association's purpose – and what it means for you

From the statutes (§ 2)	In everyday life that means
The association "betreibt eine landwirtschaftliche Fläche ... mit dem Ziel, die Selbstversorgung seiner Vereinsmitglieder sicherzustellen" – it runs an agricultural site with the goal of ensuring its members' self-sufficiency , covering in particular food, electricity, water and the avoidance of waste.	That's why the garden, solar, well and waste sorting aren't side issues here but the very core – and your help with them is real association work.
An ecological garden and species-appropriate animal husbandry	No chemical pesticides, animals treated with respect and only after an introduction
Passing knowledge between the generations	Old knowledge (scything, preserving, crafts) is passed on – ask the older ones, show the younger ones
Supporting the village of Guerstling, ecological enhancement (flowering areas, tree planting)	We are good neighbours – greet people warmly, be considerate, lend a hand in the village
Nature-based education for children and young people	WWOOFers often help out at events and camps – valuable and lovely
Space for art, music and culture	Bring your instrument! Creativity is explicitly welcome here

Our guiding principle: **"Living and learning with nature and from nature – in the rhythm of the seasons."** Community over individualism, cycles over throwing away.

Welcome tree & barefoot grounds

🌳 Your welcome tree

At Vaikuntha, everyone keeps a tradition on their **first visit**: planting a tree or another woody plant suited to the site – the **welcome tree ("Begrüßungsbaum")**. The planting is an expression of connection with this place and its natural development. Your tree keeps growing here long after you've moved on – and when you come back, you visit it.

- Agree the spot, species and timing with Benedikt (the season and our care concept have a say too)
- If the season makes planting impossible, it's done later – or you take on care sponsorship of a young tree in the meantime

👣 Barefoot grounds

A principle we take seriously: **"Vaikuntha must be walkable barefoot."** The whole grounds should be safe to use without shoes all year round. For everyone, that means:

- No sharp-edged materials, no broken glass, no nails or screws left lying on shared areas
- After building work: comb the area, tidy up, sweep
- Work and construction areas are temporarily exempt and marked – sturdy footwear applies there
- And of course: try it! Barefoot across the meadow in the morning – that's why you're here 😊

When things are happening here

Status	When
 Community open	Thursdays 3–11 pm · 1st weekend of the month (Sat & Sun) · around events (from 24 h beforehand)
 Open with limits	Other weekends (Sat & Sun), with registration – no parties, may change at short notice
 Co-working	Tue–Fri 8 am–6 pm, 2 desks
 Open office hours	Tue 4–8 pm · Thu 4–6 pm · Sun 4–6 pm

Outside these times Vaikuntha is a **closed community** – guests only by invitation or registration via anmeldung@vaikuntha.eu.

What this means for you as a WWOOFer

- Thursdays get lively – and you're cooking (WWOOFer cooking day meets community day: no coincidence!)
- On community weekends everyone pitches in together – a lovely chance to get to know the members
- If strangers show up on the grounds unannounced: approach them kindly and refer them to Benedikt
- Please announce your own visitors in advance (chapter 14)

When you have time off

On the grounds

- Swimming in the Nied (rules in chapter 13), hammock, making music, reading, simply being
- Sitting together in the evening – currently without a campfire (fire ban), but with a sky full of stars

Trips nearby

- **Niedaltdorf dripstone cave** – just around the corner
- **Saar Loop near Mettlach** – Cloef viewpoint and treetop walk
- **Maginot Line, Fort Schoenenbourg** – history you can touch

Hiking & cycling

- Grenzlandweg trail through the German-French cultural landscape
- Druidenpfad – circular walk starting in Niedaltdorf
- Cycle paths along the Nied and the Saar

Eating out & shopping

- Restaurants in the area: Ali Baba, Restaurant Niedmühle, Wackenmühle, Leickshof, Hessmühle, Taj Mahal
- Shopping: Bouzonville (FR) or Siersburg/Rehlingen (DE)

The formalities – and saying goodbye

Insurance (your responsibility)

- As a WWOOFer you are **yourself responsible** for health, accident and personal liability insurance
- Health insurance with coverage abroad for France (the EU EHIC card is usually enough for EU citizens)
- Please show us your documents in the first week (it's on the checklist)

Liability

- Staying on natural grounds comes with typical hazards (uneven paths, tools, machines, animals, water, branches)
- Act with care, follow the introductions, avoid visible hazards
- Serious or repeated breaches of the house rules can lead to being banned from the grounds – thankfully, we've never had to do that

Your departure – checklist

- ☐ **Strip the beds** and put the linen in the laundry
- ☐ Sweep out the caravan, take all your personal belongings with you
- ☐ Sort and dispose of the rubbish
- ☐ Return any borrowed tools/books/other items
- ☐ Settle any open amounts with Andrea (alcohol tally sheet, expenses)
- ☐ Farewell chat with Benedikt: feedback in both directions – what was good, what can we do better?
- ☐ Visit your welcome tree one more time 🌳 – it stays here and waits for you

And after that? Stay in touch! Many WWOOFers come back – some become members. Individual membership €15/month, families €25/month, reduced rate by arrangement.

Space for your thoughts

Recipes from cooking day, skills you've picked up, vocabulary (DE/FR), ideas for Vaikuntha ...