

AWA Domestic Staff Registry (“DSR”)

Finding the right domestic help can make all the difference in whether your experience in Delhi is a good one. An employer/employee relationship in India isn't as cut-and-dried as in the business world we know. Our office has developed the following information, suggestions and Frequently Asked Questions that we hope will be helpful.

Who qualifies to hold a DSR card?

You should know that to qualify for registration at the AWA's DSR, the employee must (1) be able converse in English (although those registered prior to 2000 may not excel in English), (2) have a valid form of photo identification, (3) three recent identical passport-size photos, and (4) provide an original letter of recommendation from an expatriate for whom they have worked in excess of one year. This letter (preferably type-written) should include exact period of employment, job performed, salary/perks paid and contain a working international email so that the letter can be verified with the employer. When we verify recommendations, we always try to ascertain facts that may not be evident in their letters, i.e. do they get along well with other staff? Are they capable of working completely independently in the kitchen?

What to look for in staff?

- Displays good hygiene, in themselves and in doing their job
- Responds to directions and learns by observing family patterns
- Honesty, dependability and trustworthiness
- Efficiency in completing assigned tasks
- Respects privacy and keeps your confidences
- Ability to get along with other staff
- Takes appropriate initiatives
- Able to handle own personal and/or financial affairs

Employers should keep in mind that treating staff like family can send the wrong message. Some domestics become spoiled from working for especially easy-going employers—employers who are not “hands-on” or who aren't used to being the boss. Some staff can seem so very friendly, when in fact they are simply being passive-aggressive and are actually quite manipulative. Some employers never educate themselves as to what groceries cost at the market or how much a plumber usually charges for a visit, etc. and can, therefore, be prime targets for savvy employees (padding bills, skimming petrol, false repair bills, etc.)

How do I find staff?

Word of mouth is often a good way to find exceptional domestic staff. Talk to other families working for your company. You may call our office to check up on anyone recommended to you or if they come to your house claiming to be registered with the DSR. That person may not even be registered, but we may have helpful confidential information on him or her.

The AWA hopes that private companies and embassies will keep a record of domestic staff who have successfully been employed by their foreign families. We urge individual employers to let us and their own corporate heads know of good and bad experiences with a domestic so that future employers are protected from those who aren't qualified or trustworthy.

Before you hire staff:

Matters relative to salary, perks, time off, holidays, etc. should be carefully considered and discussed before a permanent arrangement is agreed to and you find yourself at their mercy. It isn't worth having a family move into servants' quarters only to find out in 2 weeks or 2 months that they are expecting more than you are willing to give.

Domestic staff accustomed to working for foreigners can be very savvy and manipulative when it comes to acquiring perks. Regardless of the "extras" you give to your staff, keep in mind that you are the boss. Tell your staff that they are ultimately responsible for their own health and their own family responsibilities and that there are limits to what they can expect from you (medical expenses, school fees, etc.). Don't allow yourself to be a victim of bill padding. Try to familiarize yourself with the cost of groceries, petrol and different repair services; seek advice from your own employer and friends.

How to interview for staff:

A person's abilities in English are sometimes overstated. Come with a grocery list, recipe or something for them to read if you require that skill. Below are some sample questions (depending on job description: cook, housekeeper, ayah, driver). Just talking

will help you determine whether his/her level of English is sufficient for your needs and a bit about their personality.

Do you need quarters? How many would live there? Do you expect frequent visitors? Ask about their children. If they have grown children, find out what they do all day. Will you be giving any rent allowance if you cannot provide quarters? If they commute, ask if they will have a problem getting to work on time each day? Will you be giving any transportation allowance?

How much formal education have you had? Do you speak English well enough to read recipes, take messages and/or follow written instructions, take phone messages? Do you know where to shop for specific items you may want (fresh pork, beef, vegetables, fruits, spices, local cleaning supplies)? How would you prepare a fresh red sauce for pasta? How do you make a white sauce? What types of dishes can you make well? (breakfast, soups, casseroles, baked goods?) ***Talk about food to see how knowledgeable a cook he or she really is.*** Do you know how to set the table for a formal dinner, serve snacks/drinks at a party? Can you arrange flowers?

Have you had your own children? If not, have you cared for an infant before? Can you read books to our children? What can you tell me about first aid? Do you know what CPR is? What would you do in the event of major bleeding? What activities do you enjoy when keeping a toddler occupied?

If you own a pet: What experience have you had with animals? Do you know what items a dog should *not* eat?

Do you know when the vacuum cleaner needs emptying? Will you clean the a/c filters? Do you speak and/or read Hindi fluently in order to take care of outside contractors in the house? (plumbers, carpenters, electricians) Do you feel comfortable negotiating service prices on my behalf?

How long have you had your driver's license? What type of cars have you driven? Do you think you drive fast or slow? Do you know who has the right of way at a traffic circus? Have you driven outside of Delhi, to Agra or Jaipur for instance? Do you know where expats do much of their shopping? Would you keep an eye on me while shopping? help with bags? Can you recognize when something is wrong with the car? Do you know anything about mechanics? Where will you get the car repaired?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Is there a salary survey so I'll know how much I should pay my employees?

Salary survey results are misleading because there are just too many variables to consider in any employment arrangement. Do you have quarters? How big is your home? How often do you entertain? Does your cook read English recipes? Is your ayah able to read to your children? Does she also cook for them? How many other domestics work in your home? Will you need the cook every night? *Every situation is unique.* Some staff cope with the fact that not every boss will treat them the same; employers come from different backgrounds and have different expectations, as do your employees.

What should I do if someone comes to my house asking for a job?

Always check with our office to learn if someone is registered in good standing. Forged cards are not unheard of, or we may not have been able to rescind their card if they have not been visiting our office.

What hours can I expect my staff to work as a general rule?

Many Indian families' staff work a 7 day week and include all food, clothing, etc. for much less salary than the foreigner pays; however, those staff won't be able to converse in English. However, most foreigners employ staff for a 10-12 hour day, six days a week. Most domestic staff will have a couple or more hours during the day when they have a break, and may leave the house to run personal errands when work load allows.

What "perks" are expected?

In times gone by, quarters were usually provided. However, with fewer large, independent houses left standing and fewer decent staff quarters being built, many domestics are going to need a higher salary to pay their rent which has gone up with the general cost of living as Delhi's economy is booming.

If you have quarters, of course you will include electricity and water. You might include a ceiling fan, hot water geyser and possibly even a desert cooler in those quarters. Some employees may even expect a bed, linens, a stove, etc. However, many staff will be well outfitted and not expect you to do much. All these are things you should know and consider before committing to a relationship.

It is quite common for staff to ask for advances or loans. Hopefully, they won't try this only a few weeks into their new job. If you feel strongly against giving loans in general, it may be something you should address before hiring. Certainly, many employees may, at some point, ask for an advance, and after some time you may feel comfortable with it. In most cases, loans are paid back quickly through garnishing wages.

If you don't have sufficient quarters available, you may be expected to pay a conveyance fee (transportation costs) for bus fare or petrol for a motorbike. Most drivers expect their employer to give a stipend for telephone costs. Most expect a 'clothing allowance,' amounting to a cash payment (Rs. 1,000 – 1,500) in spring and winter.

Some employers offer limited medical expenses (always get receipts), or might include certain grocery items (flour, vegetables, etc.) besides the normal tea & bread at break times in the main house, and some even will contribute towards children's tuition after a time.

It may be wise to discuss when the employee will not be allowed to take vacation, i.e. when you are on leave from Delhi.

Should I have my employees sign a contract?

It is not common practice to have formal written contracts with domestic staff, however, matters relative to salary, perks, time off, duty hours, duty description and severance should be carefully considered and discussed from the beginning, or at least after the trial period. It isn't worth having a family move into quarters only to find out in 2 weeks or 2 months that they are expecting more than you are willing to give.

Do I need to lock all of my cupboards?

Until you have long-term trust established, keep your valuables (and liquor) locked away. Small items may walk out of your home if you provide enough temptation. Also consider that your staff knows he or she is responsible for your valuables left in plain view, and as we all have service contractors or visitors into your home from time to time, it is best not to make a habit of leaving cameras, cell phones, Ipods, wallets or the like in plain view. Let the staff know where to put away any such valuables out of sight if they know a service contractor or visitor is coming into your home.

My cook wants to use our washing machine for his clothes. What should I say?

If your cook is asking this question, it may be too late to comfortably say no. How much leeway you give to your staff is completely up to you, but be forewarned that becoming too friendly or unnecessarily helpful to your staff sends the wrong message and will often lead to grief on both sides. These differences in our expectations and theirs are what make one staff member invaluable to one employer and totally unsuitable to another.

How do I know if the cook is padding bills?

If you will be relying on your staff to do all your grocery shopping, having repairs made, etc., you should familiarize yourself with the cost of fresh produce (may differ depending on the area you live in), imported grocery items, petrol, cooking gas, car repairs and contractors' services. We don't want to imply that all staff will take advantage, but you

should do your best not to remain in the dark about money issues. After all, they see us as having everything.

I'm not really that happy with my staff, but shouldn't I write them a decent letter?

You should write an honest letter; don't go overboard on praise or criticism. There may be information of value to any future potential employer that you could write about in a separate letter directly to our office. A good reason to supply your international email address in a recommendation letter would be to allow others to ask you specific questions about your staff's capabilities and/or limitations.

Before you leave Delhi:

No matter what nationality you are, if you are leaving Delhi and believe your staff deserves to be registered with our office, they should be advised to come in on a Thursday (just before you leave for good) between 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. They will need your original letter of recommendation **addressed to the DSR**, which states how long he/she worked for you, specific duties, salary, perks, etc. We must have a working *local* telephone number or working *international email* address for you. Receiving a DSR registration card is not a given, but rather a privilege. We don't consider a letter of reference to be a recommendation. **Please write to our office directly to give confidential information. The truth about a person's strengths as well as their weaknesses is much more likely to help them get hired by an employer who will be a good match.**

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER:

ON APPOINTMENT:

- Hire an employee on a trial basis.
- Maintain a record book to include all payments made (salary, advance, loans, perks) and consider having the employee sign.
- Have a record of personal information on each employee with a photograph. Suggest filing the records with the local police station.
- Note the employee's DSR file number as well as any information that may prove helpful in the event of an emergency, i.e. the names/addresses/contact numbers of family or friends in Delhi or their village. Keep the DSR informed when and why you terminate his/her employment.
- Consider giving your business/personal calling card to your *employee to use in an emergency*, i.e. accident on the street. Advise the employee that the information is confidential and shall not be used for any illegitimate purpose.

MEDICAL EXAMINATION:

Employees who will have direct contact with your family should undergo a physical examination (chest x-ray; urine and blood testing) to test for communicable diseases.. The employer is generally responsible for the cost of such testing. Be sure to have the doctor/clinic send the results directly to you.

SALARY & BENEFITS: (should be communicated/confirmed at time of appointment)

- *Salary:* Amount to be paid, including overtime rates if any, and when payment is made. Confirm whether or not annual salary increases will be made based on performance, cost of living, etc. (usually between 5-10%)
- *Allowances/Perks:* Clearly indicate any perks, i.e. quarters or allowance for same; clothing allowance; transportation/petrol; tea or any type of food allowance, etc.
- *Bonus:* Usually a bonus is paid at Diwali or Christmas. This payment can be pro-rated for actual time worked.
- *Medical Expenses:* Clarify who (spouse? children?), if anyone, is eligible for reimbursement of medical expenses and the limits thereof. Make sure dated receipts from a bona-fide establishment are produced by the employee.
Note: Health care for locals is far less than that for foreigners.
- *Severance Pay:* To be confirmed at time of appointment. Usually, 15-30 days pay for each year of service; however, this payment may be withheld for cause.

DUTIES:

- *Responsibilities:* Establish daily, weekly or monthly routines clearly. Drivers are usually expected to take the car for maintenance checks and perhaps even be responsible for keeping insurance up to date. Special instructions regarding the care of appliances, children and pets should be given at time of appointment.
- *Duty hours:* Generally, employees expect to work an 8 to 10 hour day. This can be split into segments, depending on the job. For instance, a cook *might* be expected to work from 7-9 a.m.; then from 11-2 a.m., and perhaps 4-7 pm, or something along those lines. A driver might be expected to be on call between 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- *Overtime:* Give reasonable advance notice when late nights or working a holiday is required. Agree to the overtime rate and if any other extras apply for late nights, out of town driving, etc.
- *Holidays:* Generally, employees are given one day off per week. Make clear at the time of appointment regarding religious and public holidays to be considered as paid time off.
- *Rights:* Employer has the right to inspect employee's living quarters in his/her presence without prior notice. Make clear at the time of appointment about any curfew on the number of guests or additional persons residing in the quarters without permission.

- *Penalties:* Employee is entitled to payment for all time worked. Payment should not be docked for minor infractions such as tardiness or breaking an object. However, if an employee is habitually late or careless, and he/she does not improve in spite of warning(s), this may be cause for termination.
- *Miscellaneous:* Be straightforward in telling an employee what extra duties may be expected from time to time, i.e. expecting a housekeeper, cook or driver to watch children for a while; give advance notice when possible to the cook if company is expected.

TERMINATION:

Decide what you would fire someone for and let them know it, i.e. habitual tardiness; poor personal hygiene; damage to quarters; having extended family move into quarters without permission; padding the bills; inaccurate record keeping; causing trouble with other staff members, etc. It is not uncommon to require their vacating quarters within 24 hours of dismissal. Get your keys before you fire them! Consider having a witness with you.

A written letter is expected upon termination of any employment indicating the time period worked, the job performed and the salary/perks paid. The letter need not be either scathing or glowing, but should state honestly how the employee performed and under what circumstances/conditions, i.e.

- Was the housekeeper responsible for a small apartment or a large house?
- Were there children or pets to care for? Laundry, ironing, playdates?
- Was the cook responsible for the shopping, household accounts; many parties? Able to read English?
- Did the cook keep the kitchen/utensils clean and practice good hygiene?
- Did the driver have any accidents? Was he a social drinker to your knowledge? Did he maintain the car?

Our office can only provide accurate information if employers keep us informed. Please feel free to write a letter directly to our office on any negative experience on domestic, whether or not you got them through our office. Write to awadelhi@yahoo.com

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