

The Ultimate Guide

To Volunteer Abroad



Highly Rated, 501 C 3 International Volunteer Organization

IFRE VOLUNTEERS

Since 2006, More Than 22,000 Happy Volunteers

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SUMMARY



This ultimate guide to volunteering abroad is packed with invaluable information and tips for anyone new to this scene. From getting started through to returning home, here you'll find all the guidance and answers you need when planning a volunteer abroad adventure.



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CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING ABROAD?



Welcome to the first section of volunteer abroad guidebook. Let's start with the definition of volunteer abroad: an international humanitarian trip where you travel, generally to developing countries, around the world to volunteer your time, skills or labor.

Volunteering abroad is a combination of volunteering in a developing country, traveling, cultural immersion, and the chance to have an exciting experience in a new country. Below are some key aspects of how volunteering abroad offers a blend of fun, adventure and the chance to have a positive impact on both communities and people.

- **Volunteer abroad programs help in developing countries** - when volunteering you travel mostly to developing countries. Projects are available in many areas, from social to environmental, and popular destinations include: Costa Rica, India, China, Brazil, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Peru, Mexico, Namibia, and Nepal.
- **Combining volunteering, travel, new cultures, with fun** - You will be working on your project, but in your free time you can hike through jungles or relax on beaches. You are there to help and learn, but also to make the most of the country and its people, so there's always time to be a tourist too.



- **Volunteer opportunities abroad help you learn a new language** - while you are volunteering, you will have the ideal opportunity to learn a new language as well as immerse yourself in the culture of your host country. If there's a language you have always wanted to learn, or get better at, this is the perfect opportunity to pick a country where that can actually happen.
- **Volunteering is all about embracing cultures-** no matter where you volunteer you will find yourself immersed in a new way of life. From rural villages to bustling cities you'll experience first-hand the different lifestyles, traditions and history of the country, as well as the diverse ethnic groups of people. You will get to see how people in another part of the world live day-to-day and take part in their daily activities.
- **Volunteer service abroad is an adventure** - while volunteer working abroad you may find yourself amongst magnificent landscapes of coastline and beaches, forests and mountain peaks or safari flatlands, rivers and waterfalls. Perhaps even a volcano or two! There is no better way to experience such sights than as part of a volunteer abroad program.



CHAPTER 2: WHY SHOULD I VOLUNTEER ABROAD?



Joining a volunteering abroad project is a fulfilling and worthwhile experience for both the community and the volunteer. It allows you to do some good in the world and experience new challenges, while working with people from a mix of cultures and backgrounds. People join volunteer abroad programs for many reasons. Here are a few key factors that motivate others to volunteer in a foreign country and why you should volunteer abroad.

YOU WILL IMPACT PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES:

While volunteering abroad, you will have a chance to make a positive impact in communities, with children in need, by teaching English skills, or helping to empower women, while assisting in the future sustainability and development of your host country. You will also boost the economy of the community when you buy local items for yourself, or gifts for your family and friends.



YOU WILL LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE:

During your volunteering work abroad, you will have the opportunity to learn or practice a second language and have lots of chances to use your new-found skills. Learning another language is not only fun, it's also a really good way to get to know the real essence of the country and an excellent answer to the question "why volunteer abroad?".

YOU WILL CREATE THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME:

Volunteering abroad involves finding great places with communities and people to help, but it is also about making the most of the opportunity for adventure. For some that means hiking volcanoes in Guatemala, trekking the mountains of Nepal, or forging through jungles in Costa Rica. For others working with sea turtles, teaching English to monks, or being a medical hero provides the ultimate exciting challenge.

YOU WILL BE IMMERSSED IN THE COUNTRIES CULTURE:

Whichever country you choose to volunteer in, there will be opportunities for you to immerse yourself in the local culture. You will be working with local people and living with a local host family giving you incredible opportunities to learn. If you're wondering why do most people volunteer abroad, this is it.

YOU WILL GAIN NEW SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE:

You will be volunteering on a project that will give you a whole new set of skills and life experience. You may gain office skills, teaching experience, hands on experience working with children or in medical and health related fields, and even some nature-based skills if you are working on a conservation project. These life changing experiences are the reason why you should volunteer abroad.



YOU WILL MAKE LIFELONG FRIENDSHIPS:

The strongest and most enduring friendships grow from shared experiences. Spending time with others, working or living together and learning new things forges a bond that can never be broken. As a volunteer abroad you will meet people from all backgrounds and nationalities who will enrich your experience both on the project itself and quite likely forever.

YOU WILL GAIN CONFIDENCE:

Choosing to join volunteer abroad opportunity may mean traveling alone to an unfamiliar destination for the first time in your life. It's an amazing opportunity to develop your confidence in many ways, from meeting and interacting with strangers to learning to get by with limited shared language skills. Why do you want to volunteer abroad if not to grow as a person?

YOU WILL DEVELOP YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE WORLD AND YOURSELF:

In your regular daily life it's easy to take things like money, access to food and water, or schooling for granted, and difficult to truly understand how different life is for people in less fortunate areas of the world. A volunteer abroad program provides unique insight into how other people live, and possibly make you think a lot about your own life and the opportunities you have.



CHAPTER 2.1- IS VOLUNTEERING REALLY FOR ME?



Whether volunteering abroad programs are for you or not will depend on your value, beliefs, philosophies, and focus on life. Before joining, it is really very important to find whether volunteering is for you or not and answer the question why do you want to volunteer abroad. Here are a few questions to ask yourself which will help you decide:

DO I ENJOY HELPING OTHERS?

When volunteering abroad you will be engaging with people who need help. Your program may involve working with orphaned children, teaching English, helping on women's empowerment projects, or providing medical care. If you are keen to offer support and assistance to others and have a nurturing, kind or caring personality then volunteering abroad is for you.



CAN I STEP OUTSIDE OF MY COMFORT ZONE?

Most people take things like constant hot water, a reliable electrical supply and a flushing toilet for granted when they are living in their own home. However, during your volunteering trips abroad, you might be living in a situation where there is no hot water, no electricity, no western toilet and you need to live outside of your comfort zone. If you are ok with all these new realities of life than volunteering abroad is for you. If you're looking to become more comfortable with things like this, then this is a reason for why you should volunteer abroad.

DO I HAVE ANY SKILLS TO SHARE?

Of course, you can participate in volunteer abroad projects without any skills. There are many projects like working in orphanage where no skills are needed. You can simply go, help in any capacity, and share your love. However, if you are really thinking of making a difference then having some skills/qualification to offer will go a long way.

DO I LIKE MEETING NEW PEOPLE?

Volunteering abroad involves meeting lots of new people, from the host family you will be staying with to the local project staff, other volunteers and the people who live in the community where you are based. So make sure you love meeting new people and making new friends

DO I LIKE TRAVELING?

As volunteer abroad programs are generally based in developing countries it's best if you like traveling and are open to less luxurious travel experiences than you may be used to. Just make sure you love travelling and adventure.

DO I HAVE THE MONEY NEEDED?

Unfortunately, volunteer projects are not free. The cost (including airfare, vaccinations, and program fee) can run from hundreds of dollars into the thousands, depending on the duration of your time volunteering. When considering why you should volunteer abroad, you should make sure you have enough funds to do so.



CHAPTER 3: WHAT ARE THE BEST VOLUNTEER ABROAD PROGRAMS/PROJECTS?



There are so many countries and each one has their own list of projects and programs taking place throughout the year. They usually range from street children outreach, orphanage care, education for kids and adults, wildlife conservation, medical/healthcare programs, women's empowerment, and more. Here is a list of categories for the best volunteer abroad programs.

WORK WITH CHILDREN:

Working with children claims the number one spot of all volunteering opportunities. There are a variety of subgroups to choose from such as orphanage work, general childcare, working with street children at risk, or supporting ones with disabilities.

What makes these types of projects some of the best volunteer programs abroad is that they focus on providing a safe and secure haven for children of all ages from infants to young adults.



Volunteers use their time improving the children's confidence and teaching basic skills in various areas, while also helping to provide food, shelter, and hope for a better life.

TEACH ENGLISH TO CHILDREN, STUDENTS, MONKS AND ADULTS:

Teaching English is another popular choice. English teaching volunteer projects target students from all age groups and backgrounds, including children, adolescents, adults and monks.

Volunteers help with the preparation and presentation of lessons and offer general classroom support. The primary mission of these programs is to teach English skills in reading, writing, and speaking at primary, secondary, or high school levels of fluency. As English is a critical skill for obtaining work in many countries, teaching projects are among the top volunteer abroad programs.

MEDICAL/HEALTHCARE

Medical volunteers generally need some background in the medical or health field, and will be provided with the chance to use their skills as a doctor, nurse, midwife, medical student, etc. by assisting local practitioners.

Programs may be based in either rural communities or clinics and hospitals in poor areas within big cities. The best medical volunteer abroad programs let you shadow and learn from local medical staff, greatly benefiting you through added experience.

WORK ON PROJECTS DESIGNED TO EMPOWER WOMEN:

Many volunteers join women's projects, regarded as some of best volunteer abroad programs due to the wisdom and life experience they can impart. These programs aim to provide new skills to women in need and boost their confidence in the process. Volunteers generally offer support and training in areas like business, language, art, and handicrafts.

These skills help women overcome obstacles such as poverty by providing a stable and independent source of income and opportunities for networking and positive leadership and organizing.



WILDLIFE CONSERVATION:

Wildlife conservation efforts like elephant conservation, panda conservation and others are very popular and some of the best volunteer abroad programs as they often require basic living with fewer comforts and amenities available, providing an off the grid experience that is very valuable for younger people.

Wildlife conservation projects are dedicated to the protection and conservation of animals, their ecosystems and their natural habitats. Volunteers take part in a range of activities including: education, research and data collection, construction and maintenance, planting trees and community outreach/assistance.

CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION OF SCHOOLS AND ORPHANAGES:

Many volunteers also prefer to join construction and renovation projects as they allow them to see the impacts of their volunteer work immediately. If you're in good physical shape and want to be able to physically touch the fruits of your labor, construction programs are the best volunteer abroad programs for you.

Since volunteers work alongside local experts, no prior construction experience is required for these projects, and committing yourself to one is an incredibly worthwhile and rewarding choice.

NATURE CONSERVATION PROGRAMS:

With each passing year, more and more damage is being done to the natural environment around the world. This is an issue close to many volunteers' hearts, and if you're the same, nature conservation programs will no doubt be among the best volunteer programs abroad for you. There are lots of volunteer abroad projects to choose from if this is what you're interested in, and you can help protect nature in a various of gorgeous types of nature like jungles, mountains, picturesque islands and more.

MARINE LIFE CONSERVATION (TURTLE)

Marine life is among the most threatened categories of animals in the world. Some of the most crucial species in the ocean are the various types of sea turtle that are struggling due to loss of habitat, pollution of the seas and poaching of their eggs. The top volunteer abroad programs involving turtles allow you to help in every stage of a turtle's early life from the laying of the eggs to the desperate rush to the sea.



CHAPTER 4: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST COUNTRIES TO VOLUNTEER ABROAD?



Volunteer abroad opportunities are available in many countries across the world. However, because of factors such as safety, price, available projects, and the appeal of combining volunteering with the chance to travel, explore, and experience genuine cultural immersion, finding the best countries to volunteer abroad can be a tough task. Here are some details on a few of the most popular countries for volunteering:

ASIA:

NEPAL:

Lying in the lap of the glorious Himalaya Mountains, Nepal is a magnificent country populated with wonderful people who will truly welcome you and appreciate your help. This small country is one of the most popular and best countries to volunteer abroad, offering the chance to experience some of the world's amazing scenic wonders.



CHINA:

A land of mystery with amazing opportunities, China offers some of the best volunteer opportunities abroad. In China, you can experience life in one of the oldest cultures on the planet as it adapts and transforms to offer a fresh new face.

THAILAND:

A great place to visit, historic Thailand is also popular volunteer destination. In Thailand, you will have opportunity to discover ornate golden temples, urban nightlife and breath-taking natural beauty, while lending a helping hand to people who need you making it one of the great experience abroad.

Popular programs found in Thailand involve childcare, teaching, construction, nursing and medical projects as well as elephant conservation, which is a particular staple of volunteering in Thailand.

VIETNAM:

Vietnam is also one of the best countries to volunteer abroad. For many Vietnam is associated with the horrors of war, but the country has come far since those dark days and presents a modern face to the world.

The warm-natured residents, green lush scenery, colourful hill tribes, floating markets of the Mekong Delta, and miles of white sandy beaches draw countless volunteers to Vietnam each year. Popular projects in Vietnam include working in orphanages and teaching Buddhist monks in temples.

INDIA:

With its fabulous landscapes and sense of spiritual oneness, India is one of the best volunteer abroad countries in the world. India offers a stunning diversity of sights and sounds, scenery and culture, in its vibrant blend of ancient tradition and symbols of modern lifestyle.

Popular projects in India focus on children's orphanages, teaching English, empowering local women, and helping on street children and HIV programs.



CAMBODIA:

This stunning country offers an ideal placement for volunteers abroad looking to truly touch the lives of the locals while discovering the mysteries of the ancient world.

Popular volunteer abroad opportunities in Cambodia include working in children's orphanages, teaching English in rural schools, helping in health and medical facilities, or HIV/AIDS projects, as well as assisting local NGO's with general community development initiatives.

SRI LANKA:

Sri Lanka is one of the most popular countries for volunteers because of its renowned natural habitats of diverse flora and fauna. Many volunteers join Sri Lanka volunteer programs because of the smiling and warm-natured people, sunny climate, and great beaches. Sri Lanka is truly a popular volunteer abroad destination full of wonder, abundant beauty, and ancient culture.

Popular volunteering abroad opportunities in Sri Lanka include working in orphanages, teaching English to children or monks, and elephant conservation and rehabilitation projects.

AFRICA:

GHANA:

Ghana offers some of the best volunteer opportunities abroad. Here you have the chance to volunteer in areas from teaching and sports to journalism and human rights while learning more about the fascinating history of a country which has experienced thousands of years of history culminating in European colonialism and the slave trade followed by being the first black African country to gain independence.

Popular volunteer programs in Ghana are helping at orphanages, teaching in rural areas, as well as HIV/AIDS, general health and medical projects.



TANZANIA:

From the snows of Kilimanjaro to the plains of the Serengeti, Tanzania is a land of dazzling beauty. Many volunteers choose Tanzania as a volunteer destination because of its culture, people, and wildlife.

The best volunteer opportunities abroad in Tanzania include children's orphanages, teaching English and other skills, healthcare/HIV programs and working with Maasai women to help empower them.

NAMIBIA:

If you need time away from a hectic life then Namibia is the place for you to volunteer. Being three times the size of Great Britain but with a population of less than a million people it is the second-most sparsely populated independent country in the world.

Popular opportunities found in Namibia include teaching programs, nature conservation, and childcare.

KENYA:

Kenya is one of the best countries to volunteer abroad. Many volunteers when they think of best volunteering opportunities abroad in Africa, think of Kenya. While the country is filled with stunning nature from the crystal beaches of the Indian Ocean to the majestic heights of Mount Kilimanjaro, Kenya's real treasure is her people, with tribal groups sharing this magnificent land. Wildlife abounds, and eighteen national parks are home to innumerable species.

Popular projects in Kenya include orphanage programs, teaching English in rural communities, and medical/health programs.

UGANDA:

Uganda is also a popular volunteering abroad destination. When you choose to volunteer in Uganda, you'll discover one of Africa's most majestic countries. Dotted with exotic islands and full of life and color, Uganda offers a never-ending abundance of biodiversity, from its spacious savannah to its verdant jungles.

Popular projects in Uganda are orphanage programs, teaching English in rural communities and health programs.



SOUTH AFRICA:

South Africa is very popular destination among volunteers looking for best volunteer abroad opportunities to combine with backpacking. South Africa's nature-scape includes thousands of plant species that grow nowhere else in the world. Her animal population is equally varied, from elephants in the north to her own species of penguin in the south. South Africa's culture and people will abide in your soul forever. Popular projects in South Africa include helping at orphanages in Cape Town, and working on healthcare, teaching or physical education projects.

LATIN AMERICA:

PERU:

If you are attracted to vibrant cultures with a rich history to explore then Peru is one of the best countries to volunteer abroad. As nearly a third of the population live below the poverty line the time and effort you offer through a volunteer abroad program will be greatly appreciated by these warm and friendly people. Popular programs in Peru are street children projects, medical and health initiatives, teaching English in rural schools, and helping at children's orphanages.

BRAZIL:

Brazil is one of the best countries to volunteer abroad. Brazil is a land with many enchantments. Its rugged mountains, nearly impenetrable rainforests, cosmopolitan cities, and famous beaches are sure to offer volunteers lots to do and explore while they're volunteering. Popular projects in Brazil include teaching English, childcare, teaching handicrafts and conservation programs.

HONDURAS:

The country of Honduras is brimming with clear turquoise waters, pristine beaches, lush jungles, and breath-taking mountains. Located amongst a canopy of rainforest trees near the beautiful Caribbean, Honduras welcomes volunteers looking to work on a multitude of projects.

The best opportunities for volunteering abroad in Honduras are the education, health and medical, and environmental programs.



COSTA RICA:

Costa Rica is a tropical delight, and the jewel in the crown of Central America is the most popular destinations in Latin America. Whether your free time involves golf, ecological hikes or visiting fierce rivers, it will be made immensely more enjoyable when combined with the use of your time, skills and energy in a volunteer program.

Popular volunteer opportunities abroad in Costa Rica include orphanage projects, teaching English, women's cooperative projects, medical health, work with the elderly and turtle conservation.

ECUADOR:

One of the most popular choices for volunteering in Latin America, Ecuador is a land of spectacular diversity in its scenery and wildlife both on land and in the sea. Change your life and the lives of the less fortunate by taking part in this unique country of striking architectural and ecological contrasts.

Popular projects found in Ecuador are focused on orphanages, teaching and working with street children at risk and conservation projects on the Galapagos Islands.

GUATEMALA:

one of the best countries to volunteer abroad, Guatemala is a delight for both history buffs and nature lovers. In this country so rich in culture and history, volunteers in Guatemala can take part in a range of volunteer abroad opportunities including: education, research and data collection, construction, planting trees, general maintenance and community assistance.

MEXICO:

Mexico is a popular destination for many volunteers looking for volunteer opportunities abroad. Mexican people provide a warm welcome, delicious cuisine, and the chance to explore stunning landscapes and iconic sights to all volunteers willing to share their time, skills and knowledge with the less fortunate.

Popular projects in Mexico include teaching, special education or working with turtle conservation programs.



CHAPTER 5: HOW TO SELECT THE BEST VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION?



When you begin your internet research you will find hundreds of volunteer organisations, and this can leave you feeling confused! Selecting the right or best volunteer abroad organizations is extremely important because this decision affects your safety, budget and overall experience. Making the wrong choice could ultimately ruin your time spent as a volunteer. Here are few tips that should help you to choose the right organization.

CHECK THE ORGANIZATION'S WEBSITE:

This is an easy way to determine how credible they are. If the people you're researching are one of the best organizations to volunteer abroad with you should find:

- Clearly written information without grammar or spelling mistakes.
- A blog with recent posts and regular updates.
- An 'about us' section which clearly explains current programs.



- Photographs of previous volunteers working on their projects.
- Social media accounts on sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with recent posts that show a good level of communication with their followers.

These are simple ways to see who is interacting and keeping their volunteers happy and informed which is a real requirement to qualify as one of the best volunteer organizations abroad.

CHECK THE AFFORDABILITY, ARE THEY REASONABLE?

When you start your research to select the organization, you will be confused to see the difference in fees among different volunteer abroad organizations. You will see program fees that can range from \$300.00 to \$3,000 for a 2-week period. There are also some organizations purely motivated by profit and work as a middleman.

To avoid these kind organizations who are motivated purely by profit check their website carefully. How are they spending your money? How much is allocated to the project and host family? Are there huge 'admin fees' or other hidden costs? Answering these questions will help you decide if the program offers a good volunteer experience, and the best organizations are transparent about how your money is spent.

REVIEWS AND RATINGS OF THE ORGANIZATION:

The best organizations to volunteer abroad with that run great program get positive reviews from other volunteers. So, do some research online on what they are saying. Try to avoid organizations which are getting a lot of negative reviews.

REFERENCES FROM PAST VOLUNTEERS AND THE ORGANIZATIONS BUSINESS REFERENCES?

If you feel you need more reassurance, ask for the contact details of previous volunteers so you can get a direct review of the program. Also make note of the business references the organization has. Are they trustworthy? Do they fit well with what the organization claims to be about?



LET THE COMMUNICATION BEGIN:

When you are choosing an organization to send you to another country reliable communication channels are important. Send an email directly to the organization and see how soon they reply. This should happen within 24 hours and they should answer your questions or concerns in a sensible and professional way if they are one of the best volunteer abroad organizations.

Send several test emails to guarantee consistency if you need further reassurance. After all, you need to know that the organization is behind you all the way, both at home and once you are volunteering abroad.

CHECK OUT THE ORGANIZATION'S COMMITMENT TO THE LOCAL CAUSES THAT SUPPORT THE PROJECTS:

Go to the website and look at how committed they are to local causes. The best volunteer organizations to volunteer abroad with are always coming up with ways to help local communities, perhaps by building a playground for children, sponsoring local events, or by planting trees and gardens for nature conservation. Look for photos and updates on their projects.

CHECK HOW MANY YEARS THEY HAVE BEEN IN BUSINESS:

This one speaks volumes as to how dependable and reliable an organization is. The more years in business they have the more experience they have in the volunteer abroad field. Established organizations generally have affordable programs and offer the excellent experience you would expect.

FILLING OUT THE APPLICATION

Once you have selected the which of the best organizations are right for you, you should proceed to book your spot. Booking your spot is usually self-explanatory, and is done by filling out an online application and paying a certain amount as a deposit. It is advisable to book in advance so that you can have ample time for preparations.



CHAPTER 6: WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE LEAVING?



6.1 GETTING READY TO VOLUNTEER ABROAD

Once you booked your volunteer trip, now it's time to start the next exciting phase - preparing for your adventure. There's a lot to think about at this stage, so use this handy checklist to make sure you cover everything in time for your departure.

- **Visa-** All countries with volunteer abroad programs require foreign citizens to have a visa before they can enter. Some countries issue these on arrival, but others don't.

In these cases, you must apply for the visa before you travel. If you are unsure about the visa situation for your destination country it's best to check with their embassy website, or with the volunteer organization you are working with.

- **Passport:** To enter another country for volunteering work abroad you are required to hold a valid passport with at least 6, (sometimes 9), months validity. Some require one or more pages to be blank and available for visa stamps, and most countries expect visitors to show proof of onward travel, such as a return air ticket or a bus ticket to a different country.



- **Vaccination:** When travelling abroad it is best to protect yourself against any potential health concerns. Well before your travel date be sure to consult your doctor, the website of the Center for Disease Control or an official website for your destination country about which vaccinations you may need to have.
- **Air tickets:** In most cases volunteers are responsible for sourcing and paying for their own airfare for volunteering trips abroad, so start looking for great deals as soon as you can. Set up alert notifications for cheap airfare comparison sites such as Orbitz, or Kayak as well as Google Flights and Skyscanner. Make sure you book a roundtrip as this is cheaper, and be flexible with your travel dates, as arriving a few days early would give you time to settle in.

A few tips for finding cheap airfare

- Book in advance
- Check deals regularly and be willing to alter travel dates
- Travel during the low season
- Do plenty of online research and compare offers

PACKING LIST

What to pack for volunteering abroad depends on many factors like country, season, projects, culture etc. It is good idea to travel light as several items may be purchased in the host country.

Here is a list of some basic general recommendations for what to bring with you when going on volunteer programs abroad.

- Clothing should be appropriate for the region you're visiting, both in terms of climate and culture, some of which require more conservative clothing.
- Mosquito nets are a good idea depending on destination.
- Sunscreen and headwear to protect against the sun, particularly useful in coastal areas.
- Check with your organization if you need basic hygiene products like soap, shampoo etc. or if they can be purchased at your volunteer destination.
- Bring books for entertainment and a journal to record all the lifechanging experiences you will have!



- Light sleepers should consider earplugs and an eye-mask as you will generally stay in shared dormitories.
 - **Raising funds:** If you need some ideas on how to pay for your volunteer program abroad there are lots of resources to draw on. You can use online funding sites such as [GoFundMe](#), or GiveForward, as well as others for students, and large groups. You can also look to local churches, businesses or volunteer groups for help funding your trip. They may be just waiting to help someone like you be of service in another part of the world.
 - **Suggested reading:** Another good idea is to find online blogs, or travel books which focus specifically on your country of interest. Examples of travel books or blogs that focus specifically on volunteer trips abroad are [Mapping Your Volunteer Vacation](#) by Jane Stanfield and the [Nerdy Nomad blog](#).
- **Bring a gift:** A small gift for your project is always a nice sign of respect and appreciation towards your project. If you are working with children then a small gift such as toys, games, stationery or learning resources go a long way in the nurturing of a child. If you are teaching English perhaps old textbooks, reading books, or English workbooks would be both practical and welcome, as would pencils and notebooks and is a great way to kick off your volunteering work abroad.

6.3 WHAT INFORMATION YOU MUST KNOW BEFORE YOU GO?

You are packed, have the agenda for your volunteer work abroad and your tickets are booked. Now it's time to make sure you have all the information about your project handy. For the most rewarding volunteer experience, everything must be clear and familiar before you go. Here are a few key reminders to help prepare you:

- ✓ **Get all the information on the project and country:** Make sure you have all the necessary information about the destination country including the exact location, whether it's rural or urban, the name of the project, and the weather in the season you will be there. Get names, websites, email addresses, phone numbers; anything that will help you to transition easily.
- ✓ **If volunteering in an orphanage:** You should know the number of children involved in your volunteer program abroad and their age. You will also want to know gender ratios (number of boys and girls), your working hours and days, a tentative schedule of the orphanage routines, staff members' names, and how many there are, and the name of the supervisor or main person you will report to.



- ✓ **It's also wise to ask about any expected dress code**, how far the project is from your accommodation, whether any transport is provided between there and the project, what your duties and responsibilities will be and whether the project gets a good number of volunteers.
- ✓ **If volunteering in a School**, ask about the number of students and type of school. Is it a primary, secondary, or high school? Find out if you are in a big city or a rural village, and which grade level you will be teaching during your volunteer work abroad. How many hours a day and which days will you work? Are there textbooks or worksheets, or do you need to bring yours with you? Check the dress code or any other regulations the school may have, where the project is based, and how far it is from your housing. Ask if you will be the only teacher or if there will be others there too?
- ✓ **If volunteering on medical program**: You will want to know what type of medical project it is, as in whether it's based in a big city or small town hospital, a rural clinic, or a mobile healthcare unit? How far is it from your accommodation? What is the average number of patients seen in a day? Establish the hours and days you will be working and if you will be shadowing the doctors and nurses or be taking a lead role with hands-on experience. How many doctors and nurses are on staff? Is there a speciality focus like gastrology or gynaecology, or is it just general medical work? If relevant credentials in this field are necessary; make sure you have proof of yours with you before leaving for your volunteering work abroad.
- ✓ **Learn all about your host family**: Your host family are very important to your volunteer abroad experience as they will be your local contact to both the project and the community. Try and get as much information about the family as you can. Names, how many are in the household, their jobs, their address and a phone number if available. Ask them about things like access to hot showers and laundry facilities, if you will you have a room to yourself, about the type of food and what time they eat. Check out their traditions and culture and the language they speak and learn a few key phrases. They will be your family away from home, so it's wise to prepare well for a smooth acceptance into their household and lives when volunteering.



6.4 GET CONNECTED WITH THE LOCAL IN-COUNTRY-SUPPORT STAFF:

These are very important connections to have on your volunteer program abroad. They provide the lifeline between you and your adventure. They will often be your sole contact for helping you resolve any problems or mishaps that may arise so make sure to get their information including names, email, an office address if they have one, and a phone number, and try to stay in touch at least once a week.

- ✓ **What can you expect while volunteering?** Remember these are developing countries you are going to in. Some things to expect while you are there are poverty, extreme health problems, lack of education, slums and underdeveloped communities.
- ✓ **Make a final call:** Before taking off for the airport make a final call to your chosen volunteer agency to make sure all the details are clear, ask any last-minute questions and check that nothing has changed. You'll have complete peace of mind during the flight once this is done knowing that your volunteer working abroad will be as perfect as it can be.

6.5 YOUR ADVENTURE BEGINS

When you arrive in your country of choice, you will experience a range of different feelings, senses and emotions. Beautiful and diverse landscapes and vibrant cities which are complemented by the warm hospitality of the people will leave you excited and full of energy. On the other hand, coming face to face with poverty, city slums, and homeless people of all ages, combined with low health and hygiene standards, and people and communities that are in desperate need of love, care, support, facilities and resources can feel desperately sad and overwhelming..

Whether you are working with people, animals, the environment or on developing facilities and structures for the community, your volunteer service abroad and time in that country will prove to be a rewarding experience.



6.6 HOW TO MAKE YOUR VOLUNTEER ABROAD EXPERIENCE REWARDING

Once you are in your host country the trip really begins. Below are a few ideas to help you get the most rewarding experience possible.

- **Understand everything about your project** - Make sure you have all the information about the country, and program, host family, transportation, language, and safety concerns relating to your destination country before arriving at your volunteering program abroad.
- **Notify your country coordinator immediately about any problems you may experience.** Your country coordinator is a vital lifeline and a great resource when trying to sort out any difficulties which may arise. Use it.
- **Support and show passion for your cause and project:** You've planned, researched and devoted lots of time to finding the right experience for you, so once in place it's important to continue to immerse yourself in your cause. Show up with a smile, share your skills, hobbies, and passion for people and always be of service.
- **Stay positive and appreciate the experience:** By being actively involved, going to new places, eating unfamiliar foods, saying yes to opportunities for adventure and exploring the country you'll create a happy balance of both project volunteer work abroad, and fun travel experiences.
- **Embrace the culture:** Learn the language, dress like locals do, eat the wonderful cuisine, respect the religions and traditions, indulge in some market shopping, art, music and festivals. Basically, just have fun learning about your host country.
- **Discover the country:** You have off-time, so what can you do? Why not explore your host country? Whether you like the idea of trekking through jungles, taking a moped ride through the marketplace, lazing on a beach, or visiting local historical sites, your trips abroad will be amazing and filled with wonder. Take the chance to experience the country you're in fully.
- **Don't expect the luxury of a 5-star hotel:** Volunteer programs abroad in developing countries may not be able to offer the same standard of comfort in accommodation that you are used to at home, but you will always be housed in the best place they do have. Take the opportunity to embrace an alternative way of living without worrying about the differences. It will definitely make you appreciate what you may have taken for granted in the past.



CHAPTER 7: SAFETY AND CULTURAL SHOCK WHILE VOLUNTEERING ABROAD

Although people in general are kind and hospitable, it's inevitable that every country around the world has some level of criminal activity. In poorer countries petty theft and robberies may be motivated by people looking for money or valuable items so they can survive. Before traveling to any country it's important to be aware of the potential dangers and threats, as only then can you take steps and precautions to help minimize the risk of something happening to you.

- Read up on current news events and safety issues or concerns in the country you will go to.
- Buy a good travel insurance policy before you leave your home country
- Do not carry your original passport around, instead make a photocopy of your photo and arrival stamp page and carry these with you at all times.
- Obtain contact details for local emergency services
- Register your travel details with your local embassy or authority and inform family and friends of your travel plans.
- Don't take any unnecessary valuable items with you.
- Be aware of your surroundings and who might be watching you, especially when using ATMS, taking out your wallet or using your phone.
- Try to avoid standing around looking at maps and guidebooks and plan your day and routes at home or in a coffee shop instead.
- Respect the culture and dress appropriately to avoid unwanted attention.
- Always carry your wallet and bags at the front of your body and never leave bags or possessions unattended in public places during your volunteer service abroad.



DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN ABROAD

DO:

- ✓ Talk to local people as much as possible while volunteer working abroad, even if you don't share much of a language.
- ✓ Try all the traditional cuisines and beverages.
- ✓ Embrace and respect the culture of your host country
- ✓ Explore the natural surroundings
- ✓ Jump on opportunities to practice your language skills.
- ✓ Be respectful and polite to everyone.
- ✓ Carry tissues or toilet paper around with you. You may be charged in public toilets for this otherwise.
- ✓ Take part in the religious and local traditions of your new community,
- ✓ Check with your volunteer organization or research the country yourself to find out what is considered polite and correct before you arrive.

DON'T:

- ✗ Expect to find everything that you would find at home (foods, toiletries, supplies).
- ✗ Bring unwanted attention to yourself – conceal valuables and dress appropriately.
- ✗ Use unregistered taxis, and always negotiate the fare before getting in.
- ✗ Assume all food and drinks are safe. Choose beverages in bottles or cans you open yourself, and favor restaurants which are busy with locals.
- ✗ Show any disrespect for the hospitality or service of the local people where you volunteer abroad.
- ✗ Miss any opportunities to embrace yourself in the culture and surroundings of the country.
- ✗ Forget to check with your organization for more information on the customs of specific countries, and back it up with some research of your own.



CULTURE SHOCK: WHAT TO EXPECT?

Experiencing new environments, sights and sensations are all part of volunteering abroad in an unfamiliar country. However, while this can leave you feeling excited and eager to know more sometimes the very same things can trigger culture shock.

Here are a few things to consider that will help you minimize any negative effects culture shock may have on you while volunteering.

Research the country: Before you go make sure to do enough research on your destination country to get a basic idea of what you may experience once you're there. Familiarize yourself with its customs, history, economic situation and laws and check out the living conditions, environment, education and health systems. Although it's impossible to be fully prepared, gaining some useful insights will help you understand the country and its people much better and make for a much more rewarding time volunteering abroad.

Embrace your Host Family: They are there to provide you with food and accommodation, but also to act as a support network for you. Spend time getting to know them and learn as much as you can from them about their country, lifestyle and language.

Observe: Integrating into a new country is easier when you pay attention to what is around you. Take the time to explore the safe areas of the village town or city your volunteer work abroad based in. Get to know the residents by looking at their houses, visiting stores, finding local hangouts and participate in local activities. People-watching gives you the chance to observe attitudes, behaviors and the ways they interact with others, and will open your mind to a different way of living.

Network: Living in a new environment, away from your established network of family and friends may sometimes leave you feeling lost or lonely. As the majority of volunteers experience similar feelings at some point in their placement it's important to prioritise making friends with your fellow volunteers. Spending time with people who speak the same language and are sharing the same experience as you helps create life-balance, whether it's inside or outside of your program

THINGS TO SEE AND DO WHILE VOLUNTEERING ABROAD:

Whether you are looking for good food, shopping, nightlife, history, cultural immersion, action, adventure or relaxation, you will not need to look far to find it in the country you have chosen to volunteer in. During your volunteer placement make sure you take the time to discover the many wonders your new location has to offer.



CHAPTER 8 : COMPLETING YOUR PROJECT AND RETURNING



Your volunteer program abroad will be an experience to treasure forever. Remember to take lots of photos of the places you visit, your host family and the people you work with in order to keep the wonderful memories fresh. They are also a great way to share your stories with your friends and family.

If you're wondering how to volunteer responsibly, contribute to the development of volunteer programs by providing your organization and project with positive and constructive feedback, and writing honest reviews to help future volunteers. Sharing your memories on social media sites, or by email to the organizations involved (for them to use as a review or testimonial) or adding your experiences to volunteer discussion boards will really benefit others.

Talk to people from your project or volunteer organization about how you can offer remote support and help develop the program further. Keeping in touch is also a great way to monitor your project's progress, and perhaps plan another visit.



8.1: THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY VOLUNTEERS

How will I get from the airport to my host family/volunteer abroad housing? Your organization will arrange meet and greet transportation to your accommodation. Be sure to inform your organization about your flight times, and find out where you will meet each other.

Will there be support from anyone in the host country? Yes, in most instances in-country support is available, but it's always best to check with your organization directly, and if so, obtain all contact details for them

How many other volunteers will be on the program with me? The number of volunteers varies from project to project, and may depend on the season you volunteer in with summer being the most popular. Some projects only allow a certain number of volunteers at any one time, so it's worth asking your volunteer agency or organization if that is the case.

If I volunteer with my friend can we be placed in the same volunteer work abroad and be housed together? In most circumstances there should be no problem with this, but it's best to make such plans known to your volunteer organization well in advance so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Are meals and housing provided? Most programs' fees will include accommodation and 2-3 meals a day. Check with your program to find out exactly what is provided.

I am a vegetarian; will that be a problem? Host families want to look after volunteers in the best possible way, and they are usually more than happy to work around dietary requirements. It is best however to advise your organization and host family before arriving so they are aware of the situation and can prepare accordingly.

Will my host family be able to speak English? Most host families accommodating those who are volunteering abroad will speak some English. However, you are visiting their country and living with them, so it is the perfect opportunity for you to learn or practice their language too.

Can I travel to other cities during my days off? Yes, while volunteering it is recommended that you visit and explore as many destinations as you can.

Do I have to bring my own bedding and mosquito nets? If you are placed with a host family, then bedding will be provided for you. However, if you are joining one of the program based in areas which experience high humidity, such as coastal areas or the rainforest, then it is recommended you take a mosquito net, just in case.



What if I don't speak the language? If you don't speak the native language then you should still be able to get by, but even knowing a few words and phrases will make your experience more fun so why not take some lessons, or teach yourself the basics before you go? Some placements require volunteers to have a certain level of proficiency in the host country's language, especially in Latin America, so be sure to check if this applies to your chosen volunteer work abroad.

How will I get to my project every day? That generally depends on the project you are working on. For some placements you may be able to walk, while for others you may need to use public transport. Check with your project provider about the transportation options available to you.

Can I speak with a previous volunteer from my chosen project? Check your organizations website or call them to see if they offer any networking opportunities with people who have previously been a worked with them. If you are unable to make contact with anyone then use online volunteer reviews as a useful guide.

Where will I be working? This will depend on the volunteer program abroad that you have signed up to do. In Ecuador there are volunteer opportunities all over the country, ranging from rural villages, beach towns and cities to jungles. Check with your organization for the possible options across regions and project types.

What kind of food will I eat while I'm there? Staying with a host family probably means you will get to experience traditional dishes. These vary between regions, so once you know where you'll be placed it's easy to research local specialities and diet.

How many hours per day will I be work? Daily schedules vary from placement to placement, but the average is usually between 4 - 6 hours. Some projects may involve working early morning or late nights, so be sure to check what is expected of you with your volunteer organization.

How much money do I need to bring? This depends on what you plan to do during your volunteer abroad experience. When accommodation and meals are provided you only need cash to cover any transportation costs to your project, and personal expenses such as souvenir shopping, soft drinks and snacks and essential toiletries. On the other hand, if you plan to travel around the country after your project ends, go sightseeing in your free time, eat out, socialise, take part in adventure activities, go shopping or visit local attractions you should factor this into your pre-trip budgeting.

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