

Guide to International Volunteering

Do your homework

Before you make any decisions, give yourself plenty of time to **research the volunteering opportunities available**. Make sure you have enough information about the organisation and the volunteer programme offered before you make any commitments (e.g. pay money, book tickets).

Be aware that you will normally **have to pay to volunteer overseas**. Most organisations ask for an administration or participation fee on their international volunteering programmes. Find out what this fee covers and ask for a breakdown of any other costs.

Check whether the volunteering programme includes **travel, accommodation and food arrangements** or if this is something you will have to organise on your own. If these are not included in the programme then you will probably need extra funds to cover the cost of these arrangements.

Rather than simply trusting written testimonials, try and **get in touch with other volunteers** who have been on the same project or through the same organisation in the past. This way you can ask questions and gain first-hand feedback on their volunteering experience.

Ask questions about the project and type of work you will be doing. You may also wish to consider ethical volunteering issues such as if there is a genuine need for volunteers, benefits to the local community, sustainability of the project, how they work with local authorities and the organisation's reputation.

Be aware that sending and host organisations may **operate in different ways** (e.g. charities based in the UK or in the destination countries, social enterprises and profit-making entities). It can be useful to find out how different organisations operate and what their priorities are.

Some programmes that place volunteers overseas are associated with a particular **religious creed**. While they may not require their volunteers to be subscribers of the same faith, ensure that your values and objectives are in line with those of the organisation.

Questions to ask yourself

- ✓ Decide **how long** you want to volunteer overseas as project durations vary from short term placements of a few weeks to longer term projects of two years or more. Also consider if you would be happy joining a semi-structured project or prefer a more organised experience.
- ✓ Some overseas projects ask for people with certain **skills or experience**. Be honest about what skills you feel you can offer and look for a role that is appropriate.
- ✓ **Think about your motivations** for volunteering. If you have any specific expectations about what you might gain from volunteering overseas, take the time to assess if and how these might realistically be met. A useful article outlining some of the main reasons why people decide to volunteer abroad can be found at: www.goabroad.com/resources/volunteer-guide.
- ✓ Consider if the volunteer role offered meets your **interests and expectations**. It is important to find an opportunity that is appropriate for your needs.

Practical Arrangements

Submit any **applications** or paperwork to the sending organisation well in advance.

Find out if you will need a **visa** in order to volunteer overseas and how you can apply for this. This may depend on the destination country, placement length and the type of work you will be doing.

Check if you will need any **vaccinations or medical tests** done before you leave. Book any appointments early to ensure you receive the immunisations or results in time for your trip.

Look at **insurance** very carefully to see whether the organisation's insurance will cover the kind of work you will be doing or if you will need your own travel insurance.

If you are **fundraising** to cover your expenses, be as creative as possible and make sure you are clear to potential sponsors about what you are asking for.

Attend any briefings, training sessions or orientation programmes offered. Obtain and read any **pre-departure information** so you are familiar with the schedule and any other additional tasks to complete before you leave.

Be prepared

Make sure you find out the answers to these questions before you leave home:

- ✓ Is in-country support available 24 hours and are there any emergency procedures in place?
- ✓ Is there a local representative of the sending organisation available onsite?
- ✓ How accessible will healthcare be whilst you are away?
- ✓ Do you need to take any prescriptions or medical supplies with you?
- ✓ What would happen if you needed to get back to the UK halfway through the programme?

Before you leave

Inform yourself about the country and community you are about to travel to. Find out about current events, the political situation, climate, culture and language. If possible, talk to other people who have been to the same destination. The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (www.fco.gov.uk) provide advice on travelling and living abroad.

Pack light and only take the things you will really need. Make sure your clothing and footwear are suited to local customs, weather and the task you will be doing.

Things to remember while you are abroad

- ✓ **Remain flexible** and open to change. Many volunteers have found that the work they signed up to do can be very different to what they actually undertake when they arrive in the community.
- ✓ **Expect differences** and challenges. Be aware that there may be different approaches to communication, time keeping, organisation and managing projects while you are abroad.
- ✓ **Take the initiative** to manage your own work schedule. Many short-term programmes are not heavily structured and you may not always receive a lot of guidance.
- ✓ **Behave responsibly** while you are overseas. Remember that you will be acting as an ambassador for your country so make sure you dress and behave in a manner appropriate to local customs.

Useful Websites

www.dfid.gov.uk/ics

The International Citizen Service offers a global volunteering experience for 18-22 year olds.

www.ethicalvolunteering.org

Guidelines and help on selecting an ethical international volunteering placement.

www.gapdaemon.com

Read useful articles and insightful case studies of volunteers' experiences overseas.

www.voluntaryworker.co.uk

Read articles on various types of voluntary work from all over the world.

www.volunteeringoptions.org

Detailed guidelines and advice on things to consider before deciding to volunteer overseas.

www.workingabroad.com

Information about organisations recruiting volunteers and vacancies in different regions.

www.wvv.org.uk

Find details of hundreds of opportunities on the World Wide Volunteering database.