

Introduction to

Volunteering



**DONATION
BOX**



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Volunteering





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INTRODUCTION

There are many different reasons to consider volunteering. Although many people choose to volunteer in an organization or charity near their home, the concept of taking a volunteer vacation, also sometimes referred to as volunteer tourism, is gaining increasing popularity. One of the advantages of this option is that it makes possible for you to immerse yourself in another culture and become involved in another country. Volunteering can be the easiest way to do so.

It is no longer necessary to join the Peace Corps in order to volunteer abroad. There are now many different types of programs in which you can participate. These programs vary from short-term programs to commitments that last up to a year. You can teach English in a foreign country, save marine life and much more. There are volunteer programs that are suitable for practically every ability, interest, schedule and age.

In most instances you do not even need to have any specific education, training or experience. The only requirements are a desire to help and learn. There is truly nothing like volunteering as a way of experiencing another culture beyond much more than just the sights. While volunteering is certainly not everyone, volunteer travelers do have the unique opportunity to gain a one-on-one perspective of the local people while also learning more about the culture than can be gleaned through a tour or a guidebook. At the same time they can also have a positive impact.

Volunteering in another country can truly provide you with the experience of a lifetime. You can have encounters and experiences that will affect the way in which you view the world as well as yourself. Volunteering will change you and also make you more aware of shared truths, needs and inequities around the world.

Beyond the benefits you will receive personally, volunteer programs are also extremely valuable to local native communities as well. Natural resources can be preserved and maintained and community structures can be established. This makes it possible for locals to devote increased time to their families, communities and work. At the same time bonds of friendship can be established that will promote understanding and peace through different cultures.

Are you ready to have a once in a lifetime experience?

Let's get started!

CHAPTER 1

Choosing a Volunteer Program

There are many different types of organized volunteer programs that are available for you to choose from. Understanding the various types of volunteer programs can help you to choose a program that will be satisfying and rewarding.

Short Term Programs

There are many types of programs that provide volunteer vacations for travelers that do not have a lot of time available, but are still interested in helping in some manner. These programs can vary in terms of time commitments. Generally, in this type of program, volunteers will work with a group on a longer term project and pick up where a prior group left off. You might build a church or a new school or you might teach English.

Other options include working in a health care clinic or working toward environmental preservation. Many emergency relief programs are short term in nature. For the most part, no prior experience or educational level is required. There are also some specialized short term programs that are individualized and ideal for women business owners, retired executives, medical professionals or other individuals who are able to offer special skills.

Short term programs make it possible for you to volunteer and help while also including some cultural sightseeing or educational events and lectures during your time abroad. These short term programs are usually ideal for persons who are not able or ready to make a longer term commitment or who desire the security offered by a group. Short term programs commonly last anywhere from three weeks to three months.

Long Term Programs

A long term program can typically last from around three months up to a year. These programs are ideal for individuals who wish to obtain a more in-depth volunteer experience and who have the time available to make such a commitment. Long term volunteers may be involved in health care, teaching, environmental conservation or other types of projects. One of the benefits of this type of project is that it provides more independence than is often possible with a short term volunteer project.

Depending on your personal preferences this can be either an advantage or disadvantage. Long term volunteers do not need to have any special skills. Of course, it should be noted that if you do have certain skills you will likely be provided with a placement in which you can put those skills to good use. Long term volunteer projects might also include some skill and cultural training.

Work Camps

Work camps are commonly scheduled during holiday or summer vacations. Many work camps are specifically designed for college age or high school students, but can also be open to older individuals as well. The activities involved are typically physical in nature and might include the construction of buildings, maintaining natural areas, etc. They are often structured toward work groups rather than individuals.



Teaching Programs

Teaching programs can occur in both short term and long term programs. There are many programs that are available for college graduates where they can work as English teachers and receive a living stipend and sometimes room and board. Such programs often require at least a one year commitment, if not longer. In most instances, volunteers only work a few hours per day, making it possible for them to have ample time for traveling or even for taking classes. A few weeks of skill training as well as periodic reviews and meetings may be required, but for the most part volunteers can remain fairly independent.

Research and Environmental Programs

There are some specialized environmental programs that accept volunteers on both a short term as well as a long term basis. These volunteers may work in either research or preservation. Work tasks often vary. It should be kept in mind that you may be required to have a degree or prior experience to obtain a long term placement, but there are some short term programs that will accept volunteers with no prior experience.

Religious Programs

There are numerous religious organizations around the world that provide opportunities for individuals to travel and volunteer in many different capacities. Catholic service organizations are extremely prolific, but you do not have to be Catholic in order to participate. Jewish World Service is another option. Such programs often operate for varying lengths of time. They can also be individualized or group oriented.

Disaster Relief

There are many international and national disaster relief programs that will accept volunteers for different periods of time. In some instances you may be required to have special skills, but there are programs in which all that is required is a desire to help. Generally, volunteers are responsible for making their own way to the final destination as well as for supporting themselves while they are there. It should be kept in mind that this can be a life altering, once in a lifetime experience but disaster relief volunteering is certainly not for the casual traveler. You should not expect any type of luxury.

Tuition Programs

There are some work camps and short term programs as well as long term programs that charge a fee in order for volunteers to participate. This fee is charged to cover lodging, meals and transportation as well as administrative costs. The cost for an all-inclusive three week program can typically range between \$1,500 to \$2,000; air fare not included. You can also add on additional weeks. Longer short term programs are usually less expensive and average around \$800 per month.

Self-Supporting Programs

Relief, long term and walk-in local programs may also sometimes require that volunteers be self-supporting. There are some programs that may offer homestays or group lodging, but generally speaking, you will be responsible for covering your own meals and lodging in addition to transportation and airfare. Depending on exactly where you are volunteering, the cost can actually be relatively inexpensive and can even cost less than \$20 per day. You might also be required to pay a small fee to cover administrative costs.





Stipend Programs

A stipend program usually requires a one or two year commitment. This type of program will pay you a small living stipend while you participate in the program. In many instances you might also receive lodging, but in other cases you may be responsible for paying for your own meals and lodging. The stipend will usually be sufficient for covering basic living expenses but you should not expect to be able to save a lot of money.

Accommodations

The accommodations provided to volunteers in most programs are quite adequate, but you should understand they will not be luxurious. Generally, you may be required to share lodging with other volunteers. This may be in a camp, apartment or house that is maintained by the organization. In other programs, you might be provided lodging with a local family. You might also be required to locate your own lodging if you are participating in a stipend or self-supporting program. In this case, you may be responsible for not only finding the lodging, but also paying for the lodging as well. Meals may be included in a short-term program cost, but this is not always the case. If meals are included and you elect not to take them, you should not expect a refund. In self-supporting programs you will usually be responsible for your own meals.

Selecting Programs

When you decide to volunteer abroad, the next step is to determine whether you are interested in a short term or long term program. You should also give some thought to where you would like to travel and when you would like to go. It should be kept in mind that there are some programs that operate only seasonally in certain destinations. Are the age range and size of the volunteer group important to you? It is also important to give some consideration to the types of activities that interest you. Consider whether you have any special education or skills that might be useful. Do you have any particular needs or physical challenges that might impact your ability to participate in certain destinations or activities? At the same time you must also analyze your budget and determine whether the costs are affordable.

Locating Volunteer Programs

Once you have decided where and when you would like to volunteer, it is important to conduct some research of available programs. There are many programs that are offered in a variety of destinations. There are also programs that only operate in a specific country or region. It is usually a good idea to begin your search at least three months, if not six months before you actually plan to travel. This will allow ample time for the application to be processed as well as for you to obtain any necessary visas and immunizations. Make sure you request brochures and literature from the organization or program in advance. You should also request references and names and telephone numbers for previous participants so you can contact them and gain a good idea of what to expect.

It is critical to be sure you have a good understanding of what is included in the volunteer program and the expectations that program has of volunteers. You should also get a solid breakdown for the costs involved and be sure you are aware of any costs that are not included in the overall fee. Once you have applied to the program and you have been accepted into the program, be sure to read all of the information provided carefully.





Always keep in mind that while participating in a volunteer program can provide a rewarding experience and allow you to learn more about a culture or country, it is not quite the same thing as traveling just for tourism purposes.

Once you have accepted a volunteer position, you have made an important commitment. Even if it is only for a few weeks you have committed to give of yourself. Specifically, you have agreed to live in a community. That community may not be accustomed to foreigners and their unique cultures.

This is why it is vital that you conduct research ahead of time so you can be prepared and learn as much as possible ahead of time about that culture, their customs and expectations. This will allow you to be as sensitive as possible to the locals.

The most important thing is to make sure that you are patient and open. You must also be flexible and keep in mind that not everything happens according to plan. It also helps to maintain a sense of humor and keep in mind why you elected to volunteer.



CHAPTER 2

Planning your Volunteer Experience

In order to have the best volunteer experience possible, it is important to conduct some research prior to your departure.

Determine How Much Time you are Able to Give

One of the most important considerations you can make in planning your volunteer experience is how much time you are able to give. Do you just want to learn more about a culture or are you interested in a journey and experience that will last a year or more? Remember that there is no wrong answer or right answer. The way in which you volunteer will be based heavily on the amount of time that you are able to give. Even if you only have a small amount of time to give, international and local organizations are always in need of help. Any amount of time that you are able to give will make an important difference. Determining the amount of time that you are able to give will help in determining where to begin your search for the right program.

If you are interested in a long term commitment that lasts up to year, you might consider beginning your search with such organizations as:

Americorps

www.americorps.gov

Peace Corps

www.peacecorps.gov

Visions in Action

www.visionsinaction.org

Matching your Experience with a Program

It is also important to consider the skills you are able to offer. Think about the way in which you would like your volunteer work to be structured. Options can include a full-time 9-5 daily option to only a few hours per day. Consider the amount of time you would like to have off. Some of the most in-demand volunteers include nurses, doctors, attorneys, certified teachers, computer specialists and scientists. If you fall into one of these categories you might begin your search through a trade and professional organization such as:

VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas)

www.vsointernational.org

Idealist

www.idealists.org

There are many short-term English teaching positions that do not require applicants to actually have teaching credentials. Extended placement as well as paid placements will usually require a TEFL or Teaching English as





a Foreign Language certificate. Courses for this certification are available online. You can find more information about this certification at www.teflcertificationabroad.com.

Most volunteer trips involve participants who simply have a desire to help in any capacity possible. Regardless of whether you are teaching English, building houses or helping to save the environment, your skills and time can be put to good use.

What are your Interests?

Are you interested in traveling to a specific region or country? Do you have an interest in working on a specific issue? After you have narrowed your search based on the amount of time you can volunteer and how much you want to work while you are there, you will have a better idea of what to look for in a volunteer program. There are practically endless options and opportunities available to volunteers to work around the world. You can help the elderly or children, build houses or churches, construct water wells, work with animals in the sea or on land, teach a language and much more. Whatever your interests might happen to be, there is an organization where you can help.

Conduct Research

Doing your homework ahead of time is crucial to planning a successful volunteer experience. Fortunately, there are many resources that are available to help you get started. Two excellent resources include:

www.idealists.org

www.volunteerabroad.com

Some international volunteer organizations you might consider include:

Cross Cultural Solutions

www.crossculturalsolutions.org

EarthWatch

www.earthwatch.org

Global Vision International

www.gvi.co.uk

Global Volunteer Network

www.globalvolunteernetwork.org

Habitat for Humanity

www.habitat.org



Institute for Field Research Exhibitions
www.ifrevolunteers.org

Miracle Foundation
www.miraclefoundation.org

WWOOF
www.wwoof.org

Budgeting for your Volunteer Experience

It is also important to carefully analyze how much you can realistically afford to spend for your volunteer experience. What is the most you are able and willing to pay? As is the case with any travel experience, the cost can often make a volunteer experience seem as though it is not feasible. It should be kept in mind that organized volunteer trips are not inexpensive. Most volunteer experiences are organized through non-profit groups and charities. As a result, the cost of the trip will not only pay for services that are included such as transportation and room and board, but also for a monetary contribution toward the operating cost of the organization. In addition, the lower the cost of the trip, the fewer services you should expect to be included. For instance, air fare is almost never included in the cost. Fly for Good provides discounts with many airlines that are only available to traveling volunteers. Discounts can amount up to 30%. www.flyforgood.com.

Always make it a point to inquire with any organization in which you are interested how the monetary contribution will be distributed. For instance, how much of the total cost will account for the cost of living and how much money will be put toward operating costs or administrative fees. All 501(c)3 organizations are required to disclose the way in which funds are distributed. Private businesses are not required to share such information. If the organization is not able to provide this information, this should serve as a warning.

DIY Volunteer Travel Options

One way to cut down on the cost of volunteering is to sign up on your own. A DIY volunteer trip can be easier to organize within your own country because you already speak the language. Of course, if you are already planning a trip and you have your accommodations lined up, you will also find that you have very little difficulty in locating a local organization where you can volunteer. Before you travel, be sure to research the area. After you arrive you should be able to find local projects in a range of ways including through bulletin boards posted at youth hostels and even the concierge at your hotel or resort.

There are also online databases for volunteer projects within English speaking countries:

United States

Corporation for National Community Service
www.serve.gov

HandsOn Network



Download the remainder of this book for \$9.99.

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[Learn more about volunteering](#)

