

Voluntourism: Doing Good on Vacation

→ Do you dream about traveling the world, experiencing different cultures, and making a difference along the way?

You might want to look into voluntourism, a meaningful way to combine travel experiences and service opportunities.

by Lisa A. Beach



According to a 2015 survey by the nonprofit Tourism Cares,

55% of travelers donated dollars, time, or supplies while traveling in the last two years.



Responsible Travel,
a UK-based organization,
reported a

**33% increase
in volunteering
vacations last
year.**

Ready to tap into your wanderlust while doing good in the world?



Select the Right Volunteer Opportunity

» Align your values, beliefs, and preferences with service opportunities to ensure a good match. Think about why you want to volunteer and research causes you're passionate about. Determine where you want to travel (domestic vs. international), then assess your strengths and skills to pinpoint how you can best serve a specific community project. For example, do you want to teach English, help build a school, or collect climate change data as a citizen scientist? For a detailed questionnaire to help you make the right fit, visit voluntourism.org.



Focus on Local Impact

» You'll want to volunteer with a charity or tour operator that partners with local workers rather than takes jobs away from them. Make sure your service fulfills a real need in the local community and doesn't exploit locals or take learning opportunities away from them. The project should focus on long-term sustainability and self-reliance rather than create dependency on continuous voluntourism efforts. And, consider how your travels will impact the destination — will it drain local resources or fuel the economy? Remember, you are a guest in this community.



How to Prepare

» If you're working with a tour agency or a charity, ask about practical logistics, including trip costs, transportation, accommodations, meals, safety, liability, insurance, medical forms, etc. Also, make sure you know what to bring — and what not to bring. Besides making the typical "what to pack" checklist, prepare your heart for the amazing opportunity that awaits you! Use this service opportunity to enrich not only your life, but also the voluntourism team's and local's lives too. You might cultivate life-long friendships that open doors (and minds) — and bridge cultures in the process.

What to Expect

» **Prepare yourself for the culture and experience you're about to embark on.** Do some research on the people you'll support, the environment and climate you'll work in, the community's need you'll fulfill, and the project you'll participate in. Get acclimated to the destination and the people before you even land. Talk to previous volunteers for first-hand insights. Another tip? Manage your expectations. If you'll only be volunteering for a short time, you might not see the impact of your work or even see the project completed before you leave.