

VOLUNTEER WORK OVERSEAS



What does it mean to be a volunteer?

Voluntary work can take many forms, and people decide to become volunteers for a variety of reasons. Numerous programs exist which allow participants to volunteer their time and skills, from a two-week work camp to a two-year professional placement - almost anywhere in the world.

Types of skills required for voluntary work?

The types of skills that can be put to good use are almost infinitely varied, but some examples include: building and restoration, childcare, national park track maintenance, teaching English, agricultural work and scientific research. Voluntary work overseas can be quite challenging; but many returned volunteers say that they got more out of the experience than they were able to contribute.

Things to consider before volunteering

Before volunteering, there are a few things you need to consider. The most important question you should ask yourself is "Why am I doing this?" Whatever reasons you come up with (such as a need for self-fulfilment, altruism, or just a desire to travel and escape the 'rat-race' for a while), they aren't necessarily right or wrong, provided they are well-considered. If you can prepare yourself beforehand by precisely knowing your reasons for wanting to volunteer, you may find your answer to this question will be more valuable to you while you are away than just about anything else you take.

Volunteering can enhance your employment prospects

One thing to remember is that putting your course or job-hunting on hold while volunteering is often not a backward career move. Certainly many professions change at an increasing rate, and a period away from home may make it difficult to keep up with levels of professional development. However, many potential employers will be more impressed by your experience, perceived character traits and display of initiative than just your academic record.

Preparing to volunteer overseas

There are many things you may have to cope with when you decide to volunteer for an overseas placement: culture shock, poverty, local customs and conditions, security, racism, sexism, language barriers and unstable political foundations are just a few. It is

important to balance these with the overwhelming good that will come out of your work, and to make sure that you prepare yourself as much as possible by researching the country and the organisation you will be working in.

What is your financial situation?

Most organisations/programs charge a fee (it varies greatly), some long term programs offer a small payment or provide housing or transportation. Considering your financial situation is crucial in preparing yourself for an overseas volunteer placement.

What type of organisation would you like to volunteer for?

Many prospective volunteers are attracted to a specific organisation from the outset; others find themselves confronted by an array of options. Find out the philosophy or the mission statement of the organisation. It is important that you be in agreement with the overall approach and philosophy of the volunteer organisation or project (particularly if they have a religious or political framework) in order to be able to commit yourself wholeheartedly. Remember, if you choose to get involved in an organisation that meets your interests and needs, then you're more likely to enjoy the work and get a lot more out of the experience.

What do you want the volunteer program to include?

Different organisations support their volunteers in different ways. Some take their volunteers by the hand and lead them through every stage of their voluntary placement, providing on-going training and supervision. Other organisations pretty much leave their volunteers alone, encouraging them to use their initiative.

Experience/qualifications required and short-term and long-term placements

Some organisations accept volunteers with little or no relevant qualifications or experience in the work to be undertaken, and where necessary, pre-departure or on-site training may be provided. Generally speaking, these are features of short-term placements. Most long-term placements and some short-term placements require well-qualified and seasoned personnel, carefully selected to meet the specific needs of the host community or organisation. Some examples of organisations offering long and short-term placements are listed:

LIVE

Leadership, Involvement &
Volunteer Experience Unit

Ground floor, 723 Swanston Street
The University of Melbourne, Parkville Victoria 3010, Australia
Tel: +61 3 8344 0799 | Fax: +61 3 9349 1039

Web: www.services.unimelb.edu.au/live

Longer- term (6 months or more)**Australian Volunteers International**

<http://www.australianvolunteers.com/>

Australia's largest and oldest volunteer sending organisation. It places Australians from different skill areas into Asia, the Pacific and Africa for 1 and 2 year assignments.

Australia Youth Ambassadors Program

<http://ausaid.gov.au/youtham/>

An Australian Government program for under 30s offering placements for up to one year in the Asia/Pacific region.

United Nations Volunteers

<http://www.unv.org/>

The UN's own volunteer program. 70 % of volunteers come from developing countries.

Australian Aid for Cambodia Fund

<http://www.aacf.ws/>

Supporting educational and social projects in Cambodia through the provision of volunteers.

Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders)

<http://www.msf.org.au/>

Volunteer doctors/nurses/logisticians & support staff work in trouble spots around the world.

Melbourne Overseas Missions

<http://www.mom.org.au/>

Volunteers work with Catholic dioceses and parishes in Papua New Guinea and some other countries for programs in education, literacy, health and general development.

Skillshare Africa

<http://www.skillshare.org/>

A British based agency which recruits skilled volunteers for placements in several African countries.

Shorter-term (under 6 months)

[NB. Some of these organisations primarily operate programs in Australia, but also provide some opportunities to volunteer internationally.]

AISEC - Youth Development Exchange Program

<http://www.aiesec.org/>

Conservation Volunteers

<http://www.conservationvolunteers.com.au/>

Council on International Educational Exchange

<http://www.ciee.org/>

Earthwatch Institute- <http://earthwatch.org/>**International Volunteers for Peace**

<http://www.ivp.org.au/>

Kibbutz Working Holidays - <http://www.kibbutz.com.au/>**Operation Crossroads Africa**

<http://www.operationcrossroadsafrica.org/>

SEEK Volunteer - <http://www.volunteer.com.au/>**World Youth International**

<http://www.worldyouth.com.au/>

Peace Brigades International

<http://www.peacebrigades.org/>

Other useful websites on volunteer opportunities:

<http://www.volunteerinternational.org/>

<http://www.idealists.org/>

<http://www.volunteerabroad.com/>

<http://www.acfid.asn.au/>

Finally...

No matter where you decide to go and where you decide to volunteer, one thing is for certain; volunteering for a cause you truly believe in can change your entire outlook on the world and yourself. Also, know that, you have helped to improve the lives of many people who you ordinarily would not have come into contact with. The cultural exchange which takes place between volunteers and locals is something that is truly remarkable and will make your decision to become a volunteer the right one. Make sure you do some self assessment before you decide to volunteer overseas and ask yourself:

- How do you define volunteering and why you want to volunteer?
- What people, events, and experiences have led to your interest in volunteering abroad?
- What do you hope to get out of the experience?
- What do you hope to contribute?
- How do you see this affecting your life?
- How can you prepare for the experience?
- What can you do to get the most out of the experience?

Further information and support

The Leadership, Involvement and Volunteer Experience Unit (LIVE) provide a range of volunteer services including; volunteer information, training, placement and general advice on volunteering.

Contact Ali Kassem on 8344 9316

akassem@unimelb.edu.au or visit;

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/live/cvp/index.html>

Further information can be found in the *Volunteer Work Overseas* folder and *International Aid and Development* folders, the *Volunteer Work Overseas* (book by Peter Hodge), and the *International Work Camps 2001 Handbook* (published by International Volunteers for Peace). Located at the LIVE Unit, ground floor, 723 Swanston Street. Contact 8344 0799 or visit; <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/live/>

Much of the information contained in this flyer was adapted from Peter Hodge's Volunteer Work Overseas (1998; Global Exchange Pty Ltd).