

Considering Volunteering Overseas?



Manchester
Metropolitan
University

If organised correctly, volunteering overseas can be one of the most enjoyable and rewarding ways of gaining a fantastic experience whilst expanding your global awareness to diverse cultures and gaining essential skills. Students who have gone overseas have returned to the UK, often feeling that it has been a life changing experience.

There are many points to consider before embarking on overseas volunteering; the organisation you choose to volunteer with, the volunteer role, the country you will visit and the practicalities involved in organising such an experience. Overseas volunteering is by nature a very different experience to volunteering locally, you may be expected to pay a contribution to the organisation towards your trip.

Below are some pointers for you to consider. These are aimed to equip you with the right knowledge and resources to help you make the right decision.

Research

- Do your research beforehand! This means looking on websites for various organisations that offer the type of volunteering experience you are looking for. [TimeBank](#) has set up a free online directory of organisations looking for volunteers to volunteer abroad. You can search by category and find details of organisations with a brief explanation of their work and a list of the areas they operate in. Go to www.intervol.org.uk
- Look for reviews and case studies of past volunteers' experiences and organisations' Facebook pages. You never know what information you can find when you look beyond an organisations website. You may be able to speak to a past volunteer personally.
- Find out if there is a fee you will be expected to pay towards your trip and what it will cover; training, insurance, travel, food, accommodation and vaccinations.
- Check out the Foreign Commonwealth Office website for up-to-date information on the country you will potentially be visiting and if it is safe to travel in specific areas www.fco.gov.uk/en/

Practicalities

Your trip is more likely to go more smoothly if you consider the practicalities before you go. If you are paying a fee you need to know what it covers. Once you know, everything else can be arranged before you go.

Flights – Do not presume that the organisation will book and pay for your flights. Find out ASAP if you need to book your own and exactly where to, what dates and who will be at the other side to meet you.

Money – What costs are you expecting in country and how much money do you need? This depends on the fee you pay and what it covers. Also think about security and the amount of cash on you at any one time.

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Insurance – This is a must when going overseas! Check whether you are covered by the organisation and if not look for the most suitable cover for your experience.

Immunisations – If you are volunteering in a developing country you will no doubt need some inoculations before you go. Check out the [Fit for Travel](#) website to get started. Do not rule out Malaria tablets either: - Check the [Malaria Hotspots Map](#) for information on Malaria areas.

Is it ethical?

Volunteering MMU suggests making sure the organisation you volunteer with is ethical. By ethical we mean fair; fair to you and fair to the community where you will be placed. We recommend you ask the following questions:

- What will I be doing and can I have a role description?
- Does the organisation work with a local partner organisation?
- Does the organisation make any financial contribution to its volunteer programmes and if so how much?
- Does the organisation have an ethical tourism policy?
- What time frame is the volunteer programme run on?
- Can the organisation give you precise contact details for your chosen programme?
- What support and training will you receive before you go and when you arrive?

For more information visit the [Ethical Volunteering](#) website

Other Considerations

- As most overseas volunteering is undertaken in developing countries, you will need to consider cultural differences such as food, religion and political unrest. It is important to be aware of the country you are visiting; the traits, customs and current goings on while you are there.
- Are you prepared to go out of your comfort zone? It is likely that you will not have the same access to amenities (and luxuries!) like you have at home. Think about all those things that you believe you cannot live without; and consider whether you can actually go without them for a prolonged period of time. Whether that be your weekly fry-up or your trusty hair straighteners.

Further help and information

www.intervol.org.uk

www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/goodpracticebank/Information/volunteeringoverseas

www.prospects.ac.uk/gap_year_volunteering_abroad

www.ethicalvolunteering.org

www.fco.gov.uk/en/

www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home.aspx

www.malariahotspots.co.uk/facts-maphotspots.asp