



# THINKING ABOUT VOLUNTEERING ABROAD?

There is a vast number of organizations and companies that offer opportunities for volunteering abroad with various levels of quality. It is important to thoroughly research the program you want to participate in. Here is a list of questions and tips to help you make an informed decision about choosing a volunteer program. Please note that MacEwan International is currently not affiliated with any volunteer organization.

## THE BIG PICTURE

- Why do you want to volunteer?
- Why do you want to volunteer in this particular place and with this organization?
- Which cause are you supporting?
- What motivates you to support this particular cause?
- Do the organization's values and mandate fall in line with your own?
- What is in it for you? (e.g., learning, cultural exposure, work experience, making friends, have a good conscience)
- What is in it for the organization or program?
- What are the impressions and the impact you will be leaving when you are done? What do you want to achieve with your involvement?
- What specific skills/knowledge/experience can you contribute?
- How will you measure your contribution?
- Is this an adventure trip that includes some volunteering (voluntourism) or is the main purpose volunteering for a cause?
  - ➔ **Remember: You will be the one who benefits most from your volunteer work.**

## YOUR SAFETY

- How safe is the country, the region, the city/village?
- How safe is it to travel to your chosen location?
- Will you need a visa or other documents to travel and volunteer in that place?
- What does the company provide to ensure your safety?
- Is there sufficient information or an orientation provided before you start your program?
- Where and with whom will you be living?
- What are the risks of your daily duties?
- What support do you have in an emergency?
- Who is the person responsible for you in an emergency? How can you or your family contact this person?
- Is there a Canadian embassy or consulate nearby?
- Does the organization have an office in Canada?
- Will you have access to proper healthcare and will your insurance cover the risks?
- Do you need specific vaccinations?
- How easy is it to get to and from the place you are in?
  - ➔ **Make sure you have sufficient and adequate health insurance for your time abroad.**
  - ➔ **Frequently check [travel.gc.ca](http://travel.gc.ca) for extensive information and security warnings in your target area.**

## YOUR WORK

- How included will you be in the community? Is that important for you?
- What kind of people will you work with? (e.g., locals, employees of the organization, other volunteers)
- Will you work with vulnerable populations? Does the organization have guidelines to work with that population and do they treat them with the same care, respect and caution as we do in Canada?
- What will your specific duties be?
- Do you have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform your duties?
- Will training be provided? What kind of training and when?
- What will your typical day look like?
- How many other people will volunteer at the same time or is it just you?
- Will you have free time?
- To whom will you report?
- What kind of recognition will you get for your work?

## YOUR MONEY

- Are there application and program fees?
- What is included and excluded in the fees? (e.g., flights, insurance, food, accommodation, visa, etc.)
- What is the cancellation policy?
- Is the organization willing to send you information about their funding and budget?
- What other costs do you need to budget for?
- Where do you need to transfer your money? Can you transfer through a Canadian financial institution?
- Who are you supporting with your money? (e.g., company, community, administration, supplies)
- If the program includes adventure activities or specific travel tours, how does it compare with non-volunteering travel packages?

## DO YOUR RESEARCH!

- Request detailed information from the organization
- Check reviews and stories of past participants
- Contact people who have been there
- Research news about the organization
- Contact a program advisor if you intend to get recognition for your program