

# VOLUNTEER

A TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE AROUND THE WORLD



OPPORTUNITIES ON  
SIX CONTINENTS  
& 130 COUNTRIES



**159** ORGANISATIONS  
LISTED & REVIEWED



CONSERVATION  
& WILDLIFE



EDUCATION  
& TRAINING



OVER 120

Seasoned  
Volunteers Share  
Experiences &  
Top Tips

EMERGENCY & RELIEF



PRACTICALITIES



RAISING MONEY



AGRICULTURE & FARMING



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DIFFERENCE AROUND THE WORLD

MELBOURNE | OAKLAND | LONDON

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# AUTHORS

## Lonely Planet Authors

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are passionate, dedicated travellers. They take pride in getting all the details right, and in telling it how it is. They don't take payment or freebies in exchange for positive coverage so you can be sure the advice you're given is impartial.

### CHARLOTTE HINDLE

Charlotte Hindle was coordinating author for this book, and also wrote the following chapters: 'International Volunteering – An Overview', 'Choosing Your Volunteer Experience', 'The Practicalities' and 'Coming Home'.



During her gap year Charlotte travelled overland from England to Australia. In Melbourne, she temped as a foot courier before landing a job at Lonely Planet (LP). She worked at LP's Head Office for three years. In 1991 she returned to England to set up LP's UK office which she ran until June 2002. She then took a mini-career break to spend the summer with her growing family and to consider more flexible, child-friendly work options. Lonely Planet then approached her to contribute to the following books: *The Gap Year Book*; *The Career Break Book*; and *The Travel Writing Book*. When Charlotte helped update the first edition of *The Gap Year Book* she re-wrote the 'Volunteering & Conservation' chapter. Since then, Charlotte has been fascinated by this sector and has written newspaper and travel articles on it and organised debates and talks on the subject. Charlotte is waiting for her two young daughters to be old enough to volunteer with her: they plan to work with street children in Latin America.

Charlotte is a freelance travel journalist and photographer. Over the years she has written for the following LP guides: *Australia*, *Mediterranean Europe*, *Walking in Britain, England and Britain* and her photographs appear in many others. She also writes for *Wanderlust* magazine and the *Independent* newspaper.

### RACHEL COLLINSON

Rachel Collinson wrote the 'Do-it-Yourself Volunteer Placements' chapter.



While studying at university, Rachel taught English in Vienna, worked as a counsellor on a children's summer camp in the USA and volunteered on outdoor residentials. So when she embarked on a career break after seven years in international marketing, it was a natural choice for her to spend a period doing volunteer work with children. In Ecuador she took on various roles in a home for street children and looked after special-needs babies in an orphanage. Other volunteering stints included visiting foreign nationals imprisoned for drug trafficking and writing a marketing plan for the director of a remote national park in Bolivia. Rachel's sideline in travel writing began in Australia during her career break.

## MIKE RICHARD

Mike Richard wrote the sections of all chapters containing information for American volunteers.



Born and raised in the wilds of northern New England, Mike scribed his way through two university history departments before succumbing to global wanderlust. He has worked and played in Honolulu, studied Japanese in Hakodate, and taught English in Shanghai. Most recently, he served as a TEFL Volunteer with the US Peace Corps in Romania. When he's not writing for Lonely Planet or toiling away in a Federal Government cubicle, he can be found sampling the culture of Washington, DC.

## NATE CAVALIERI

Nate Cavalieri wrote the 'Organised Volunteer Programmes' chapter.



Nate's entrée into the world of international volunteering happened in 2002 when he was a student at the Pop Wuj School in Quezaltenango, Guatemala and he volunteered crack data entry skills to assist the deployment of American Red Cross volunteers to the Gulf Coast in 2005. Nate has volunteered and travelled extensively throughout Europe, Central and North America, sometimes working as a musician and correspondent to various publications including the *Village Voice*, *Metro Times* and *Spin*. This is his first title with Lonely Planet. He currently resides in Sacramento

California, where he works as a freelance writer.

## KORINA MILLER

Korina wrote 'Structured & Self-Funding Volunteer Programmes', 'Religious Organisations' and 'Start Your Own Charitable Project'.



Korina grew up on Vancouver Island. She packed her bags at 18 and hasn't quite unpacked since. En route she volunteered in India, in rural Uttar Pradesh and with remote tribal communities in Jharkhand. She also worked with minorities in southwest China on a sustainable tourism development project; ran an Asian arts charity in Vancouver; and managed an intercultural arts charity in London. These days she's back in Vancouver, working as a children's writing coach with a local charity. Korina studied intercultural communications and development at Vancouver's Simon Fraser

University and has an MA in migration studies from Sussex University. She's been an author with Lonely Planet since 1999, writing on everything from bears in the Canadian Rockies to street snacks in Beijing.

## SARAH WINTLE

Sarah Wintle wrote the 'Tying Up Loose Ends' chapter and the sections of all chapters containing information for Australasian volunteers.



Sarah traded her backpack for a suitcase marked 'Bangkok' as an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development (AYAD) in 2005 and returned one year later loaded with memories. She can take or leave the title, but the programme gave her the chance to spread her wings in Asia while she worked for a regional conservation organisation. When she wasn't putting together a brochure, writing communication strategies or editing in Laos, she was chasing the best *khào niaw má-mûang* (mango and sticky rice) in town, or travelling. She says her time away gave her a sense of *im jai* (full heart).

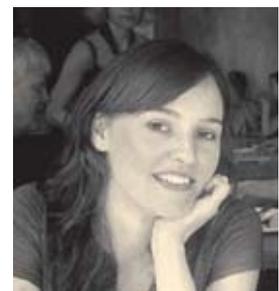
Sarah has been writing for Lonely Planet since 2004 and has contributed to *Australia & New Zealand on a Shoestring* and *South East Asia on a Shoestring* among other titles.

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# EXPERT ADVISORS

## KATHERINE TUBB



Katherine is the founder of 2Way Development ([www.2waydevelopment.com](http://www.2waydevelopment.com)), an international volunteer agency that places individual volunteers into development NGOs in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Katherine was a volunteer herself with VSO in Nepal where she worked for an environmental NGO. Katherine started her career working in the tourism industry, primarily as a researcher, and published work relating to ecotourism and sustainable tourism. She has a masters in development studies from the London School of Economics.

## PAUL GOODYER



Paul Goodyer, CEO of Nomad Travel Stores and Travel Clinics ([www.nomadtravel.co.uk](http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk)), started travelling when he was 17. Following a few bouts of ill health and disasters with dodgy travel equipment, he set up Nomad in 1990. With five outlets combining travel clinics with travel gear shops, Paul and his wife, Cathy, his brother, Professor Larry Goodyer, and his staff, work hard to prepare people for travel. In 2002 Paul and Cathy set up a charitable project called Karmi Farm (<http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk/t-karmifarmcharityproject.aspx>) – a medical clinic for the local hill farmers of Darjeeling and Sikkim province (see [Click here](#) for a full case study). Paul advised on the ‘What To Take’ and ‘Health & Hygiene’ sections of this book.

## ANTHONY LUNCH



Anthony taught in The Gambia as a volunteer with VSO in the 1960s. He went to Oxford University and then joined Unilever, where he worked as a marketing manager in Belgium and UK.

Later he became MD of the French multinational, Phildar UK, and then held senior positions in corporate finance and international trade development.

He was appointed to the VSO Executive Council for seven years and in 1990 visited Nepal, where his son was doing a gap year. He became deeply involved with the village of Sermathang, helping build a larger school and starting a volunteer programme. In 2001, he set up MondoChallenge ([www.mondochallenge.org](http://www.mondochallenge.org)), focussing on career breakers and older volunteers, and expanding into countries throughout Asia, Africa and South America.

## DR KATE SIMPSON



Dr Kate Simpson has spent over six years researching and working in the international volunteering industry. She has written extensively about gap years and international volunteering and has completed a PhD on these subjects at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Currently, she works with volunteers and the international volunteering industry to improve practices within this sector. For more information about the ethics of international volunteering, visit [www.ethicalvolunteering.org](http://www.ethicalvolunteering.org).



# 01 International Volunteering: an Overview



PHOTO [WWW.BIOSPHERE-EXPEDITIONS.O](http://WWW.BIOSPHERE-EXPEDITIONS.O)

Monitoring cheetahs in the Namibian savannah with Biosphere Expedition

‘Time is money.’ How often have you heard that said? Perhaps it came to mind as you spent yet another late night in the office trying to meet a deadline; or perhaps you work in a profession where your time is billed in blocks of 15 minutes. Maybe you’ve just retired, having worked hard for years in return for an annual salary. Unless you’re a professional parent, the chances are you’re used to being paid for the work you do. And, whatever your circumstances, you probably consider your time a precious commodity.

So, why give your time for free? Or, as is the case with the majority of international volunteering opportunities, why pay for the privilege of working for nothing? This chapter offers a broad cross-section of answers to these questions.

‘Think globally, act locally’ was a phrase coined in 1972 by René Dubos, an adviser to the UN Conference on the Human Environment. Although the phrase initially referred to looking after our environment, it touched a global nerve and came to mean acting locally in any worthwhile capacity. Then, 12 years later, Bob Geldof and Midge Ure formed Band Aid and challenged the world not only to

'think' globally but 'act' globally as well, and raised money for famine relief in Ethiopia. Whatever you think of this campaign (and subsequent ones such as Make Poverty History), the actions of Geldof and Ure ignited high-level debate about world inequality. The ongoing efforts of many ensure that such imbalances are kept in the global media spotlight.

Buying white wristbands and donating money from the comfort of your lounge room to send abroad is one thing. Actually giving up your time and going to a poorer part of the world to contribute your knowledge, skills or labour is quite another. But this is exactly what an increasing number of people around the globe are choosing to do with their holidays, during gap years, on career breaks or upon retirement.

However, the more popular international volunteering becomes, the more difficult it is to pinpoint where to go, what to do and which organisation you want to volunteer with. For starters, the sheer number of volunteering opportunities today can be overwhelming. Then there's the problem that not all volunteering is good volunteering. There are plenty of volunteer organisations that are not meeting or responding to local needs, not working in proper partnership with host communities and certainly not working towards sustainable solutions. And, let's face it, no-one wants to become that volunteer who has just built a bridge where no bridge was needed.

Volunteering abroad should be the best thing you've ever done, but the onus is on you to act responsibly, do the research and find a volunteer programme that works both for you and for the host community. This book aims to equip you with all the tools to do just that.

One volunteer, Linda Walsh, who worked with street children in Rio de Janeiro for Task Brasil ([Click here](#)), urges:

Go and volunteer. Love the experience, even when there are times when you feel unappreciated, tired, fed up or lost with the language. No matter what, if you throw yourself wholeheartedly into it you will love it and it will do more for you than you could ever imagine.

As Clodagh O'Brien, who volunteered in Borneo with the Orangutan Foundation UK ([Click here](#)), succinctly puts it:

Every insect bite, cut, argument and awful bus journey was well worth it.

## Why Volunteer?

This is a good question and one you need to think very carefully about. The most common reason to volunteer is the desire to 'give something back'. Vikki Cole, who volunteered on an environmental project with Trekforce ([Click here](#)) in Borneo, explains:

Without sounding clichéd, I really wanted to be able to look back on my life and to have done something of substance that didn't directly benefit just me.

Jacqueline Hill, who volunteered with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO, [Click here](#)) building management capacity with local NGOs in Bangladesh, had similar feelings:

It had been a long-term dream. I had a vague plan that I'd spend the first 20 years of my career earning for myself and the next 20 giving something back.

Wanting to help others, wishing to do good and hoping to make a difference are all important reasons to volunteer. But nine times out of ten, they're not enough to make you to feel that your time was well spent: there need to be other reasons. And, as you can imagine, there are plenty to choose from. Mike

Laird, who travelled with the Scientific Exploration Society ([Click here](#)) to work on scientific, archaeological and community-aid projects in Bolivia, lists a well-balanced mix of altruistic and personal motivations for volunteering:

To see the delight on people's faces when they realise they now have a clean and safe water supply or better school facilities. To know that they will benefit from these for years to come. The personal benefits are almost too many to mention: being exposed to new cultures; seeing new places and sharing in great experiences; making new and lasting friendships and discovering a bit more about myself. That apart, I also got fitter, lost weight and felt terrific when I came home.

Mike picks up on a key point for travellers – volunteering is an excellent way to get under the skin of a country and come to grips with a different culture. The cultural-exchange element of international volunteering is a key part of what both you and your hosts will get out of the whole experience. Plus, you can build volunteering into almost any segment of your travels, whether you decide to arrange it formally or just turn up and find a placement yourself (see [Click here](#)).

## Is International Volunteering the New Colonialism?

The question of whether volunteering is the new colonialism gets asked a lot, and the short answers are: 'yes', 'no', 'sometimes' and 'maybe'. International volunteering is part of a long tradition of people from the West setting off to help or change the countries of the Global South (aka the developing world) and have adventures while they do it. Where once these people were missionaries and soldiers, colonialists and explorers, teachers and entrepreneurs – now they are international volunteers.

If volunteers travel in the belief that they have little to learn and a lot to give, then they do risk being little more than 'New Age colonialists'. No-one becomes an international volunteer for purely altruistic reasons: they also do it because it is exciting, because they might learn something, because they want to meet new people who live differently and because, just maybe, they might have something to offer. By acknowledging why you volunteer, you are telling our hosts that they are people you can learn from and with, not that they should be the grateful recipients of your altruism. You ask them to be your teachers, instead of forcing them to be your students.

So, whether international volunteering is the new colonialism or not is, in large part, down to the attitudes of you, the volunteer, and the organisation you go with. If you don't want to be a 21st-century colonialist, rule out organisations that suggest you'll be 'saving the world' or give a patronising image of the developing world. Then question yourself. Be open about why you want to be an international volunteer and what you have to learn from those you visit. Avoiding being patronising will take some effort and research, and will require getting rid of many of the usual preconceptions about the developing world.

For more information, look at the Volunteer Charter at [www.volunteeringoptions.org](http://www.volunteeringoptions.org).

**Dr Kate Simpson**

The educational aspect of volunteering is equally crucial. In almost every placement you'll have the opportunity to learn a foreign language or to brush up on one. And many of the new skills you'll acquire or develop can be used back home in your profession. Recognising that transferable skills can be gained while volunteering, the global management consulting group Accenture was one of the first companies to sign up to VSO's Business Partnership Scheme. Accenture spokesperson Gib Bulloch elaborates:

Volunteering with VSO allows staff to hone their leadership and communication skills. Often working in challenging environments where they need to coach or influence people, they also develop key listening and understanding skills. Plus, volunteering abroad means that staff can add 'overseas work experience' to their CV – so crucial these days if you want to progress within an organisation.

Ben Keedwell, who volunteered with Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP, [Click here](#)) developing a visitor and community centre in a national park, agrees wholeheartedly and goes even

further:

International volunteering helps to increase understanding of development issues, consolidate practical skills, and gain first-hand experience of working in the field. Volunteers can develop self-confidence, focus their career objectives and show adaptability, self-motivation and dedication. All of these benefits can kick-start a career and can sometimes be more valuable than undergraduate (or even postgraduate) education.

Many volunteers have found that international volunteering has either helped their career or given them the necessary experience to change careers. For instance, Ann Noon wanted to switch from working in tourism to the charity sector. She volunteered as a press and marketing manager for the Inka Porter Project (no longer running), and says:

If I'd not gone to Peru, I almost certainly wouldn't have got the job I have today with Sightsavers International, a charity that works to combat blindness in developing countries. I am convinced that I did the right thing, even though it all seemed like a leap into the unknown at the time.

Similarly, Amanda Allen-Toland, an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development (AYAD, [Click here](#)) with the Thailand Business Coalition on AIDS in Bangkok, could not have predicted the positive impact her volunteering experience would have on her career. She is now working as a programme manager for the Asia Pacific Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS in Melbourne, Australia. She explains:

It's paid dividends for me. I'm in an area I want to be in with a higher level of responsibility, excellent pay and job satisfaction. It's the icing on the cake. My experience working with TBCA and living in Thailand was so fantastic that even if my next role had been making fruit shakes, I'd do it all over again.

## Kinds of International Volunteering

There are thousands of volunteer opportunities around the world and a number of different approaches to getting involved. The rest of this chapter offers an overview of what's out there. Detailed listings of recommended volunteer organisations are provided in [Chapters 5](#) to [8](#), according to what they offer. If you're after something completely different, read [Chapter 10](#) on how to set up your own grassroots charity.

## Areas of Work

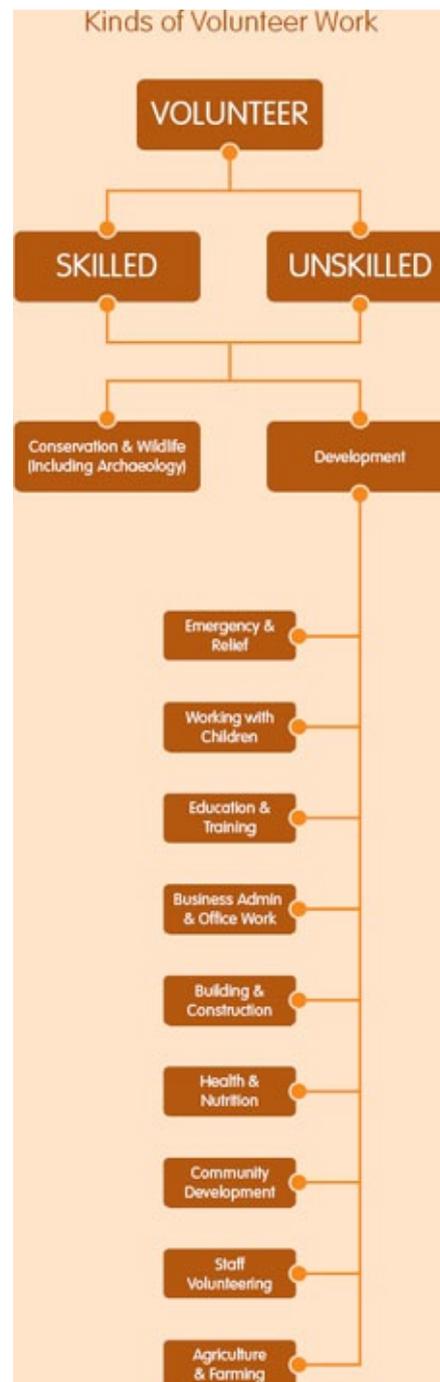
What tasks you perform as an international volunteer depends both on what you want to do, and on what is needed by the community or environment where you're going.

Within this framework you've got a number of broad choices, shown in the diagram on [Click here](#). The first choice is whether you want to work with people (usually called 'development volunteering') or with the environment and animals (referred to as 'conservation and wildlife volunteering').

Once you've made that basic choice, decide whether you consider yourself a skilled or unskilled volunteer. This is not as straightforward as it sounds. Skilled volunteers are often people such as teachers, accountants, civil engineers or nurses who work in their professions abroad. However, everyone has skills to offer: a parent might be skilled in conflict resolution, or a university graduate in acting and drama. In the final analysis, being skilled or unskilled will not necessarily dictate what area you work in, but it will impact on the level of responsibility you're given.

Whatever you decide, it's wise to be prepared for your role to change or develop. You might apply to

do something, then find that something rather different is required of you once you reach your placement.



## Development Volunteering

There are nine main areas within the development volunteering sector:

- ~ **Emergency and relief** An option for highly skilled and experienced volunteers only, this is where doctors, nurses, midwives, psychologists and so on, respond to humanitarian crises, conflicts, wars and natural disasters abroad (see [Click here](#)). Some volunteers are on 72-hour standby to go anywhere in the world. Many of the organisations working in this sector have longer-term volunteer opportunities for skilled non-medical staff, such as logisticians or administrators.
- ~ **Working with children** Typically, work in this area might include volunteering as a sports coach, working in an orphanage or with street children. Rachel Oxberry arranged her own placements (for information on how to do this, see [Chapter 8](#)) in two orphanages in Ecuador and remembers:

I worked in a home looking after 20 children who were either abandoned or orphaned. I thought I was going there to help out generally and teach English but I actually took on the role of 'mother' too trying to teach routine and discipline as well as doing the cleaning and laundry. I also coached sports taught drawing and played games with the kids. I volunteered in an orphanage for children with special needs as well. I looked after babies under the age of one, preparing their food, feeding them, changing nappies and doing baby massage.

~ **Education and training** Most volunteer placements in this category are teaching English (with or without qualifications) in preschools and primary or secondary schools, although teaching adults is also common. Depending on your talents or qualifications, however, you could end up teaching almost anything. Sarah Turton volunteered with the Junior Art Club ([Click here](#)) in Ghana and taught English along with art and photography. This is how she describes her time there:

Sometimes I had over 40 students crammed into a classroom designed for much less. Some of them would stroll in half an hour before the end of class or not turn up for weeks at a time and then expect to pick up where they left off. This was the way it had to be for students where farming and helping sell came first, and I had to develop a flexible teaching style. It was very tough at first and exhausted me but I loved every single second of my time there.

~ **Business administration and office work** Depending on your experience, you might work for a local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) writing fundraising proposals, managing a project or volunteering in their marketing, PR or finance departments. The aim of these placements is usually to train local people in the skills you possess so that they can become self-sufficient (such work is referred to as capacity-building).

~ **Building and construction** Good old-fashioned manual labour often plays a big part in volunteering overseas. You are usually sent as part of a team to help build schools, community centres, houses, bridges, dams or latrines. There is also a need for skilled volunteers in this area to work as civil or structural engineers and construction or site supervisors. Emma Campbell went with VentureCo Worldwide ([Click here](#)) to Ecuador and quite literally volunteered with her bare hands:

We built a house on the coast of Ecuador, near a national park, so that future volunteers could base themselves there. We had no power tools so everything was done by hand! We were supported by a very friendly and hard-working bunch of locals that VentureCo were paying.

~ **Health and nutrition** Health professionals are required in this area, but you don't have to be a fully trained nurse, doctor, speech therapist, nutritionist or physiotherapist to contribute. Non-medical volunteers can often help in other areas, like the promotion of health and hygiene issues in a local community. Kate Sturgeon volunteered with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors Without Borders, [Click here](#)) in Zimbabwe and explains:

I was the project nurse for an HIV/anti-retroviral programme working alongside the Ministry of Health to provide free anti-retroviral drugs in one of the first HIV/opportunistic infections clinics in the country. I ran 'follow-up' clinics, seeing all patients who had started on these drugs either weekly, monthly or quarterly to monitor their progress and any side effects.

~ **Community development** This covers a wide variety of community and social programmes. You might help women's groups set up income-generating schemes (eg selling handicrafts), work with a local village on empowerment issues or help establish a system for disposing of rubbish in a village or region.

~ **Staff volunteering** Some volunteer organisations, particularly those aimed at the youth market, need

in-country volunteer staff to help manage and run their overseas programmes (see [Click here](#)). You might be a medic on an expedition, an interpreter at a field base or a project manager working with a group of 17- to 24-year-olds. Michelle Hawkins volunteered with Raleigh International ([Click here](#)) in Ghana, Costa Rica and Nicaragua and describes the roles she filled:

On the first expedition I was a public relations officer in Ghana. On the second I was project manager on a construction site in an Indian village in the rainforest. My role was to ensure that everything happened on time and under budget. I was also responsible for motivating the Venturers, briefing each one to be a 'Day Leader' and then assessing and reviewing what they had done well and what could be improved.

~ **Agriculture and farming** This one is almost exclusively for skilled volunteers. Communities often need horticulturalists, foresters, agronomists and agriculturists.

One further option, if you have extensive travel plans and only want to spend a day or two doing something for others, is to get in touch with the organisation in your country that arranges prison visits abroad. In the UK, contact the UK charity **Prisoners Abroad** ([☎+44 \(0\)20-7561 6820](tel:+44202075616820); fax +44 (0)20-7561 6821; [info@prisonersabroad.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonersabroad.org.uk); [www.prisonersabroad.org.uk](http://www.prisonersabroad.org.uk); 89-93 Fontill Rd, Finsbury Park, London N4 3JH, UK). Their CEO, Pauline Crowe, reminds us:

Visiting a British prisoner detained overseas can be a really positive experience if you approach it with the right motivation and sensitivity. It's important for people detained in faraway places to know they are not forgotten. In some places it's reasonably easy to arrange a visit – particularly in South America and Southeast Asia. Visit the local British consulate and they will give you information about how to arrange it, what you can take in etc.

Australians who want to visit prisoners abroad can contact either the **New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties** ([☎+61 2 9286 3767](tel:+61292863767); [www.nswccl.org.au](http://www.nswccl.org.au)) which has an Australian Prisoners Abroad Subcommittee, or their nearest Australian embassy.

## Conservation & Wildlife Volunteering

The words 'conservation' and 'wildlife' sum up most of the options for volunteering in this area. The majority of opportunities involve short-term stints working on long-term projects alongside scientists or other experts. Sometimes you're based in one location but often you join an expedition through a particular region.

### Conservation Volunteering

Volunteering in conservation could involve clearing or constructing trails in African national parks, studying flora and fauna in a cloud-forest reserve in Ecuador or monitoring climate change in the Arctic. There are countless, wide-ranging options available.

For instance, Karen Hedges went to Madagascar with Azafady ([Click here](#)) and worked on a variety of projects:

We planted trees with various communities and held workshops for the local people to teach them the importance of replanting in a country that has lost so much of its natural habitat. We also did a forest survey to measure how quickly forests in St Luce were diminishing through local use.

Archaeology and palaeontology also come under the conservation banner and are two fields that rely

heavily on international volunteers (see opposite). Robert Driver travelled to Belize with Trekforce and worked in the jungle:

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Our project involved clearing and 3D-mapping the most prominent ancient Mayan ruined city in northern Belize, called Kakantulix. The area of jungle around it had been subject to logging by the local community, who were reliant on the trees as a source of income. We had to clear the site of low-level vegetation and then map each ruin to gain an accurate image of what the site once looked like. The maps were forwarded to the Institute of Archaeology and Wildtracks (our project partner) and the area has since received protected status, is attracting sustainable tourism and is, in turn, generating an income for the local community.

## Wildlife Volunteering

If you choose to work with animals you might do anything from helping monitor sea turtle populations in Costa Rica to analysing the migration of grey whales in Canada to working in a home for neglected or orphaned wild animals in Namibia.

Samantha Elson has participated in five programmes in Sri Lanka, Azores, the Altai Republic, Namibia and Peru with Biosphere Expeditions ([Click here](#)). She describes her broad range of experiences:

I've worked with extremely enthusiastic scientists and have always felt part of the team. Volunteers are not just given the donkey work. It is really rewarding and I have learnt so much. I have no zoological training but have had the chance to do everything from photographing whale flukes for identification, measuring snow-leopard footprints in the snow, to releasing a cheetah from a humane trap.

Elaine Massie and Richard Lawson (see [Click here](#) for their Top Ten Tips from Two Volunteers) have undertaken 15 projects with Earthwatch ([Click here](#)) and recount one of their best moments from the sea turtle programme in Costa Rica:

With a population on the verge of extinction every hatchling counts, so volunteers check each nest, count the number of hatchlings and put them in a bucket. They are then walked along the beach, released and allowed to crawl to the ocean escorted by volunteers, to ensure that none are eaten by crabs on the way. This is a wonderful job. Picking the wiggly hatchlings out of the sand at the nest site and seeing them scamper down the beach into the ocean is brilliant. Elaine wished the first couple of hatchlings, 'Goodbye, good luck and be careful,' not realising that she'd be releasing hundreds of hatchlings. Then she seemed unlucky not to wish them all the same. So, almost a thousand were wished 'Goodbye, good luck and be careful,' as they were safely seen to the ocean. Turtle hatchlings may well be the cutest baby animal ever and deserve all the protection and luck they can get.

## Marine Conservation

Marine conservation straddles both the conservation and wildlife camps. Tasks for volunteers may include underwater surveys of coral reefs in the Philippines, diving with whale sharks in Honduras or helping with dolphin conservation in Florida.

## Archaeology

If you fancy yourself as the next Indiana Jones or Lara Croft, archaeology is probably not for you – volunteers are more likely to be digging out fire pits than unearthing buried treasure. You don't have to be a scientist or historian to take part, but you do need to be patient and committed. Real-life archaeology can be painstakingly slow and laborious, and you must log and record every find, no matter how insignificant.

This said, archaeology does have its glamorous side and there are opportunities to excavate burial chambers, temples and

ancient shipwrecks.

Volunteers typically cover all their own expenses and camp or stay on site or in local guesthouses. You can work for just a few weeks or for a whole season and there are usually a few free days a week to do some exploring. However, you should be prepared for back-breaking, dusty days spent hunched over in the sun – bring a wide-brimmed hat and a big tube of sun screen!

**The Council for British Archaeology** ([☎+44 \(0\)1904 671417](tel:+441904671417); <http://new.archaeologyuk.org>; St Mary's House, 66 Bootham, York YO30 7BZ, UK) and the **Archaeological Institute of America** ([☎+1 617-353 9361](tel:+16173539361); [aia@aia.bu.edu](mailto:aia@aia.bu.edu); [www.archaeological.org](http://www.archaeological.org); 656 Beacon St, Boston, MA 02215, USA) both publish annual lists of fieldwork opportunities around the world. The website [www.archaeologyfieldwork.com](http://www.archaeologyfieldwork.com) also has field-work listings for the USA and worldwide. Some of the mainstream volunteering organisations also place volunteers on archaeological digs (see Scientific Exploration Society [Click here](#), Condordia [Click here](#)).

If you fancy helping out on a marine excavation, the **Nautical Archaeology Society** ([☎+44\(0\)23-9281 8419](tel:+441904671417); [www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org](http://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org); Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Rd, Portsmouth PO4 9LD, UK) offers specialist courses in Foreshore and Underwater Archaeology for aspiring marine archaeologists who have a PADI Open Water or equivalent diving certification.

## Where in the World?

The short answer is 'anywhere'. Volunteering opportunities exist on every continent except Antarctica (although, who knows, by the time this book goes to press a conservation or wildlife expedition there might just be on the cards). However, the majority of volunteer placements are in Africa, Asia and Latin America, although a varying number of countries within these areas can be off-limits to volunteers for security reasons (see [Click here](#) for more information on this issue).

You can also volunteer in almost any geographical environment. There's lots of work in cities and towns as well as in rural areas and small villages, and in jungles, rainforests, deserts or on underwater (marine conservation) projects.

## Sharon's Story

There was rarely a dull moment during my six months – apart from the winter evenings. I ended up being interviewed by a TV crew about why I had come to teach Tibetan children; I was taken out to dinner by the local police, who took it in turns to stand up and make speeches thanking me for coming to do voluntary work, and who also serenaded me in turn (I then had to sing a song for them). I was propositioned by a man dressed as a monk; I visited various reincarnated holy men and had an important empowerment from one; I visited a nomadic family in their tent and bravely ate a home-made sausage which was dripping with blood. I visited a 'sky burial' site and saw some tufts of hair and bits of bone; I saw a frozen lake against a backdrop of black and snow-white mountains and a turquoise dawn sky. I saw the biggest plains in the world; I sat on the grasslands in summer and marvelled at the beauty of enormous flower-filled meadows surrounded by velvet hills that reminded me strangely of Ireland. I met the sweetest children in the world, who bring themselves and each other up, wash their own clothes in freezing water, walk from the classroom to your flat so that they can hold your hand and make the average Western child look like a spoilt, demanding brat.

My advice to people reading this book is: 'Go for it!'

Sharon Baxter

Sharon Baxter volunteered with Rokpa UK Overseas Projects (see [Click here](#)) in Yushu, Tibet, for six months. She taught English as a foreign language to three classes of children ranging from five-year-olds to 19-year-olds at a boarding school. The children had all lost either one or both parents and generally came from very poor families.

## Package Placement or DIY?

Once you know what you might want to do and where you might want to go, there are two things you need to consider. The first is what sort of volunteering experience you want, and the second is how to find the right volunteer opportunity for you. All the organisations offering volunteer opportunities are

different and it is really important to find the one that best fits what you are looking for.

Local charities or NGOs in search of volunteers often don't have the time or resources to recruit directly (although some volunteer placements are organised this way). Instead, the most common practice is that they work with partners in Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who match the right placement with the right volunteer. Throughout this process the emphasis should always be on meeting the needs of the host programme abroad, rather than on your individual requirements as a volunteer. (To avoid signing up with an organisation that does not operate this way, see [Click here](#) for a discussion of ethical volunteering.)

In these cases, partners can be limited companies, not-for-profit organisations or registered charities, although the latter often recruit and run their own volunteer programmes. Regardless of their status, all three are normally referred to as 'sending agencies'. Within this framework there are three main types of experiences that you can choose from: organised programmes, structured and self-funding programmes and do-it-yourself placements.

## Organised Volunteer Programmes

This category is comprised of organisations that offer all-inclusive, highly organised volunteer experiences. Almost everything is arranged for you: your volunteer placement; international flights; board and lodging; travel insurance; visas; orientation courses; in-country support and transport. Volunteers can work on either development or conservation and wildlife projects. They often work in teams, but individual placements are also common. The cost of volunteering through one of these organisations can seem high, although their 'all-inclusive' nature means that everything is covered in the cost (bar pocket money).

Organisations that recruit skilled volunteers like VSO, Australian Volunteers International (AVI, [Click here](#)), Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA, [Click here](#)) or Skillshare International ([Click here](#)) also fall into this bracket due to the organised nature of their placements. This is also the case for organisations providing emergency and relief services, like MSF or Doctors of the World (Médecins du Monde, [Click here](#)). However, this is where any similarities with other organisations in this category end. For full details, see the relevant sections in [Chapter 5](#).

Organised volunteer programmes can be divided into three types:

- ~ **Options for the under 30s** Organised volunteer programmes catering specifically to the youth market including gap-year students.
- ~ **Volunteering plus** These are organised volunteer programmes that offer a 'sandwich' or combined volunteering experience, combining a volunteer placement with other travel-related experiences. For instance, you could learn a language for one month, volunteer for one month, then undertake some adventurous group travel for a further month or two.
- ~ **Volunteering holidays** A good proportion of conservation and wildlife programmes fall into this subset because of their short time frames (often one to three weeks; see [Click here](#) for more information on the time frames involved). Otherwise, some organisations cater more to the holiday-maker who wants to do a spot of volunteering rather than to the serious and committed international volunteer. The increase in the number of this type of organisation has created a new term: voluntourism.

For details on organised volunteer programmes, see [Chapter 5](#).

# Structured & Self-funding Volunteer Programmes

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Some charities and sending agencies offer a structured volunteer programme but might require you to find your own accommodation or book your own flights. Basically, not everything is organised for you, and this is reflected in the fee. There is support from your agency but much less hand-holding than with an organised volunteer programme – both in your home country prior to departure and once you're abroad.

In terms of independence, the next rung on the ladder is self-funding volunteering programmes. An agency will match you with an overseas placement but you're pretty much on your own from then on. You pay all your own costs, organise all the practical details (eg flights, visas and accommodation) and receive very little additional support.

For a detailed look at structured and self-funding volunteer programmes, see [Chapter 6](#).

## A Note on Religious Organisations

Religious organisations can operate both organised volunteer programmes and structured and self-funding volunteer programmes. The main difference is that much of the work is faith based. In addition, many of the placements are for periods of one year upwards. And, as you'd expect, religious organisations mostly conduct development rather than conservation and wildlife programmes.

For details of volunteering with religious organisations, see [Chapter 7](#).

## Do-It-Yourself Volunteer Placements

If you don't fancy any of these options, you can cut out the middle man and tee up a volunteer placement directly with a grassroots NGO or locally run programme. There are two main ways of doing this: you can either organise a placement using one of the many online databases of worldwide volunteering opportunities, or arrange a volunteer placement once you arrive in a country.

For details on do-it-yourself volunteer placements, see [Chapter 8](#).

## Who Can Go?

Almost anyone can volunteer: if you're aged between 18 and 75 you should be able to find a placement. New Zealand's largest provider of overseas volunteers, Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA), has an upper age limit of 75 years, for instance. If you're over 75, talk to your sending agency (and your travel insurance company) and you might be able to come to some arrangement. Catherine Raynor, Press Officer for VSO, remembers:

We had one volunteer working as an engineer in Mongolia and he had his 70th birthday while there. He became something of a local celebrity because the standard life expectancy in Mongolia is significantly lower. Various parties were held for him around the country and, at one point, he was even paraded through the town where he worked.

Interestingly, volunteering has been part of the international scene for long enough to allow some people to use it as a kind of lifelong education. In such cases, people usually find that what they learnt and what they had to offer were very different at different stages of their life.

Among southern hemisphere types, volunteering is particularly on the rise among the over 60s. In Australia, a government study found that Australians are world leaders in volunteering within their local

communities once they are retired. A census in New Zealand, conducted in 2001, revealed that over one million people participated in volunteering in that country. On the international front, Australians and New Zealanders have taken to incorporating self-funding volunteering stints, such as assisting with a whale conservation project, into their travel itineraries and a record number of volunteer places are being offered on skilled volunteer programmes like Australian Youth Ambassador for Development (AYAD).

Volunteering attracts people from all round the world. Whether you go abroad alone or with a group of compatriots, you will meet and mix with volunteers of all nationalities and creeds. International volunteering is also drawing an increasingly diverse spectrum of candidates from within individual countries. In North America, for example, since the inception of President Kennedy's Peace Corps ([Click here](#)) in the 1960s, volunteering overseas has often been stereotyped as a vehicle for relatively well-off – and generally white – twentysomethings to go out and 'save the world' by digging wells and teaching English in the developing world. However, recent world events have made volunteering an attractive option to Americans, for example, of African, Asian and Hispanic descent, of both liberal and conservative political stripes, and from a variety of faiths and backgrounds. Many more people have come to appreciate the benefits of international volunteering – including the forming of rewarding relationships, the gaining of linguistic and technical skills and the creativity and cultural awareness that flow from the experience.

In addition, there is a growing number of organisations that cater for volunteers with a disability. Anthony Lunch, Managing Director of MondoChallenge, says:

We are happy to welcome volunteers with a disability as long as their GP feels they are able to undertake the project. We always alert our country managers to the situation and they take all necessary steps or precautions. One of our volunteer teachers in Nepal suffered from multiple sclerosis and we are currently in negotiation with another volunteer in her 50s who has a stoma bag that needs to be changed regularly by medical staff. Obviously, everyone travels at their own risk, but we will always do our best to give volunteers any extra in-country support they may need.

See the listings in [Chapters 5](#) to [8](#) to find out which organisations can cater for volunteers with a disability.

## Organisations for Asian Volunteers

The leading organised volunteer bodies in Asia are skills-based and include programmes such as **Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV)** ([+81 3 5226 6660](tel:+81352266660); [www.jica.go.jp](http://www.jica.go.jp)) and **Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)** ([+82 31 7400 114](tel:+82317400114); [www.koica.go.kr](http://www.koica.go.kr)). Much like Australia's AVI programme ([Click here](#)), JOCV are placed in over 50 developing countries (with most going to Africa and Asia) and work in as many as 70 skilled fields including agriculture, forestry and electronics. Between 1965 and 2007, over 30,000 JOCV were sent to enhance 'bilateral friendly relations at the grassroots level.' The competition for JOCV volunteer positions is fierce, but the training and services that enable the two-year assignments are exemplary. The Korean equivalent, KOV, has been operating for 18 years and has sent skilled Korean volunteers to 27 countries. Its volunteers assist in many hands-on projects, from abalone farming to brick making and animal husbandry.

There's plenty of scope for Asian volunteers with other organisations operating both domestically and further afield. For further information, try:

- ~ **Yayasan Salam Malaysia** ([www.salam.org.my](http://www.salam.org.my)) A referral service that organises volunteer opportunities for Malaysians at home and overseas, focusing particularly on education, health and community development. It also offers various relevant training courses.
- ~ **Hong Kong Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS)** ([+852 2527 3825](tel:+85225273825); [www.avs.org.hk](http://www.avs.org.hk)) A referral service that 'mobilises and organises volunteer services' and should be of particular interest to any aspiring volunteers living in Hong Kong. The website is available in Chinese and English.
- ~ **National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre** ([www.nvpc.org.sg](http://www.nvpc.org.sg)) Singapore's leading volunteering agency brings together charities and not-for-profits with anyone interested in volunteering in Singapore. Non-residents are welcome to apply.

~ **Volunteering India** ([www.volunteeringinindia.org](http://www.volunteeringinindia.org)) Run by the Society for Promotion of Environment and Sustainable Development, this organisation is based in Jaipur and runs a range of activities and programmes.

~ **Thai Volunteer Service** (+66 (0)2 691 0437/9; [volunteerservice@gmail.com](mailto:volunteerservice@gmail.com); <http://thaivolunteer.org/myweb>) Focused on promoting volunteering among Thai university students, this outfit supports NGOs in the Mekong River region by linking up grassroots organisations to face the impacts of globalisation in a united way.

Sarah Wintle

## Finding the Time

A volunteer placement can last from a couple of days to two years or more. This means that volunteering can be fitted into your life at any time. If you're in full-time employment and want to spend one or two weeks of your annual leave volunteering, you can.

Robin Glegg, who has been on three wildlife projects with Biosphere Expeditions, explains:

Each expedition 'slot' lasts 12 days, although you can sign up for multiple slots. I signed up for one slot. As some of the locations are fairly remote, this gives you two days' travelling time if you are taking a two week break from work. This works in well with my holiday schedule. Twelve days can be a little short in the field, but it is a practical time frame and a reasonable commitment for most working people.

However, many people want to volunteer for longer and choose to do it at a stage of their lives when they have more time. This means that your first encounter with volunteering might come in the year between school and higher education, or between university and before starting full-time employment.

David Grassham, who helped upgrade facilities in a village school in India with VentureCo, says:

I had just finished university and wanted to have a year doing something completely different from the norm, and something that I may not have time to do once I eventually do start working.

Of course, plenty of people in the workforce take extended breaks or have gaps when changing jobs or careers. Jackie Bowles, for instance, worked with children and adolescents in Rio de Janeiro through Task Brasil:

I was dissatisfied with my job and really wanted to change my career. I didn't have any family responsibilities so I felt this was the perfect time to volunteer.

Kate Sturgeon, who volunteered in Zimbabwe, says:

I had three years of nursing on an HIV/infectious diseases unit at the Royal Free Hospital in London and I'd completed a Tropical Nursing Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Infectious Diseases. I felt I had enough experience to confidently work abroad. I then negotiated a career break from the Royal Free Hospital and they held my post open for me.

When you, the employee, decide you want to take a career break, that's great, but all too frequently it's your employer that makes the decision. This is what happened to Peter Bennett, who taught English in Sudan for seven months with the Sudan Volunteer Programme ([Click here](#)):

In financially depressed times, the bank I was working for made significant redundancies. As a senior manager I had been involved in deciding who we could do without – only to discover on the day that my name was on the list too. To be honest, I had also been thinking that I didn't want to spend all my working life absorbed in some fascinating but ultimately meaningless occupation, only to find that when retirement day finally arrived I didn't have the energy or enthusiasm or the good health to enjoy it.

If you find yourself in this situation, it could be the perfect springboard into volunteering. What better way to spend your redundancy cheque?

In recent years, international volunteering has become increasingly popular with retirees, who have a lifetime of skills to offer, as well as savings, maturity and a bit more time. In particular, North Americans with a few more years under their belts – and a few more dollars in their bank accounts – are applying for international volunteer placements in greater numbers than ever before. Some of these folk witnessed or participated in, the early years of the Peace Corps and are eagerly (re)living their volunteer dream in retirement. Others have never found the time to venture abroad amid career and family responsibilities and are taking advantage of their new-found personal freedom to work overseas. Oliver Walker is 63 and taught English in Sri Lanka with MondoChallenge. He feels:

... there is a need for older volunteers who have seen a lot of life. They have time on their hands and are often young at heart, looking for adventure and a worthwhile experience. Volunteering is so rewarding

Deborah Jordan and David Spinney were both retired head teachers when they went to Ethiopia to work in education with VSO ([Click here](#)). Julie Jones, a grandmother, went to Kenya with Inspired Breaks ([Click here](#)) to work in an orphan outreach programme:

My family and friends were a great support and gave me encouragement. My nine-year-old granddaughter thought it was 'cool' to have a granny doing something a bit unusual. What I did at Omwabini cannot be described as 'work'. Together with other volunteers, I visited far-flung communities, went out with a mobile clinic and spent time in a primary school where most of the children had lost at least one parent to AIDS.

## Development-speak

Your bags are packed and you're off to volunteer, but where are you going? Is it the 'Third World'? The 'developing world'? A 'less-developed country'? Or are you travelling from the 'Minority' to the 'Majority World'? There are a lot of different terms, all with quite different meanings. Here are a few explanations.

- ~ **Third World** This term came out of the Cold War era and was used to denote countries that neither supported the West nor the Soviet bloc. Now it is used for countries that are seen as 'poor'. The implied hierarchy in the terms 'First' and 'Third' World, and the sense that these worlds are somehow separate from one another, means this term, though still used, is increasingly being rejected.
- ~ **Developing world** Probably the most popular term – and one that suggests that change is possible. However, it implies that much of the world is 'growing up' and that the only route to success is to be more like the countries deemed 'developed' or 'grown up'.
- ~ **Less-developed countries (LDCs)** This term was a favourite of school geography syllabuses, and is now seriously out of vogue. It sounds like the put-down that it is!
- ~ **Majority & Minority Worlds** These terms get away from the idea that the only way to categorise the world is according to a scale of greater or lesser development. Instead, they recognise that the majority of the world's population lives in developing countries, and that the majority of the world's countries are 'developing'. Hence, this is the Majority World. These terms are particularly popular with people looking for alternative forms of development, and those who question whether the world even has enough resources to allow everyone, everywhere to achieve 'Western-style' development. The only drawback is that most people don't have a clue what, or where, you are talking about when you use these terms.
- ~ **The Global South** This was an attempt to define development geographically – but it doesn't really work (just ask Australians or New Zealanders!). Now used as a political, rather than a geographical, category it has fewer hierarchical implications than the term 'developing' and, unlike the term 'Majority World', most people will know, more or less, what you are on about.

In reality, all these terms are problematic, as they try and lump everyone and everywhere into just two big categories, and the world is a lot more complex than that. Use them, but use them with caution, and be aware that there is an ideology lurking behind every label. In this book, we've used 'developing world', as it's the most widely understood.

Dr Kate Simpson

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