

U.S. Volunteers Abroad

Thinking about taking part in a international volunteer opportunity? Here are some things to consider before you go, to help ensure you have a safe and successful volunteer experience.

Before You Go

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Have you:

- Independently verified the organization's history and experience in leading groups to volunteer abroad? Go beyond the brochures and marketing materials offered by the organization to ensure they have a record of successful and safe trips.
- Researched how previous volunteers rated their experience? Are there credible complaints about the organization you are considering joining?
- Made sure the sponsoring organization thoroughly checks out the in-country organization before entering into partnership with them, and personally inspects the in-country project site, documenting each visit?
- If your trip has you volunteering in an orphanage or working with children, make sure you check out the following information [page](#).
- [Read up on your intended destination?](#)
- Made sure all your travel documents, including your [U.S. passport](#) and visa, if necessary, are up to date?
- [Checked out health and disease conditions](#) at your intended destination?

Does the international volunteer organization have:

Safety Plans

- Risk assessment procedure, global risk management plan, and country-specific emergency response plans
- Pre-departure security briefings
- 24/7 office support in case of an emergency
- First aid-qualified project staff
- Emergency evacuation plan

Volunteer Preparation

- Orientation to educate volunteers on policies, destination country, and safety concerns
- In-country medical insurance, medical evacuation insurance, pre-trip physicals, and vaccinations

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- Handbooks or guides that include relevant historical, cultural, language, and environmental information
- Enrollment of all volunteers in the Department of State's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#), to help ensure the U.S. embassy in your destination country can help you in case of emergency

While You're There

In-country Volunteer Support

Make sure the international volunteer organization:

- Works directly with host nation project leaders who speak local languages and know the location of nearby police stations and hospitals
- Has 24-hour local office support

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