

# VOLUNTEER

A Traveller's Guide to Making a Difference Around the World

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# Authors

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, the *Independent* newspaper and *The Family Travel Website*.

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 recently 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.

## 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.

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 residential. 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.

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 stopped travelling the world 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. 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 for the past eight years, writing on everything from bears in the Canadian Rockies to street snacks in Beijing and beachcombing in Fiji.

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.

## 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 *khão nỉav mả-mũang* (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.

## 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.

# Expert Advisors

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).

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 ([www.nomadtravel.co.uk/pages/charity-project](http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk/pages/charity-project)) – a medical clinic for the local hill farmers of Darjeeling and Sikkim province (see p254 for a full case study). Paul advised on the 'What To Take' and 'Health & Hygiene' sections of this book.

A man with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a pink button-down shirt, is gently holding a cheetah cub. The cub is lying down, and the man is looking down at it with a focused expression. Other people's hands are visible, also touching the cheetah. The background is a blurred savannah landscape with trees and a bright sky.

# 01: International Volunteering: an Overview

'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 the Task Brasil Trust (p170), 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 (p175), 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 Worldwide (p115) 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, p94) 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 (p137) 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

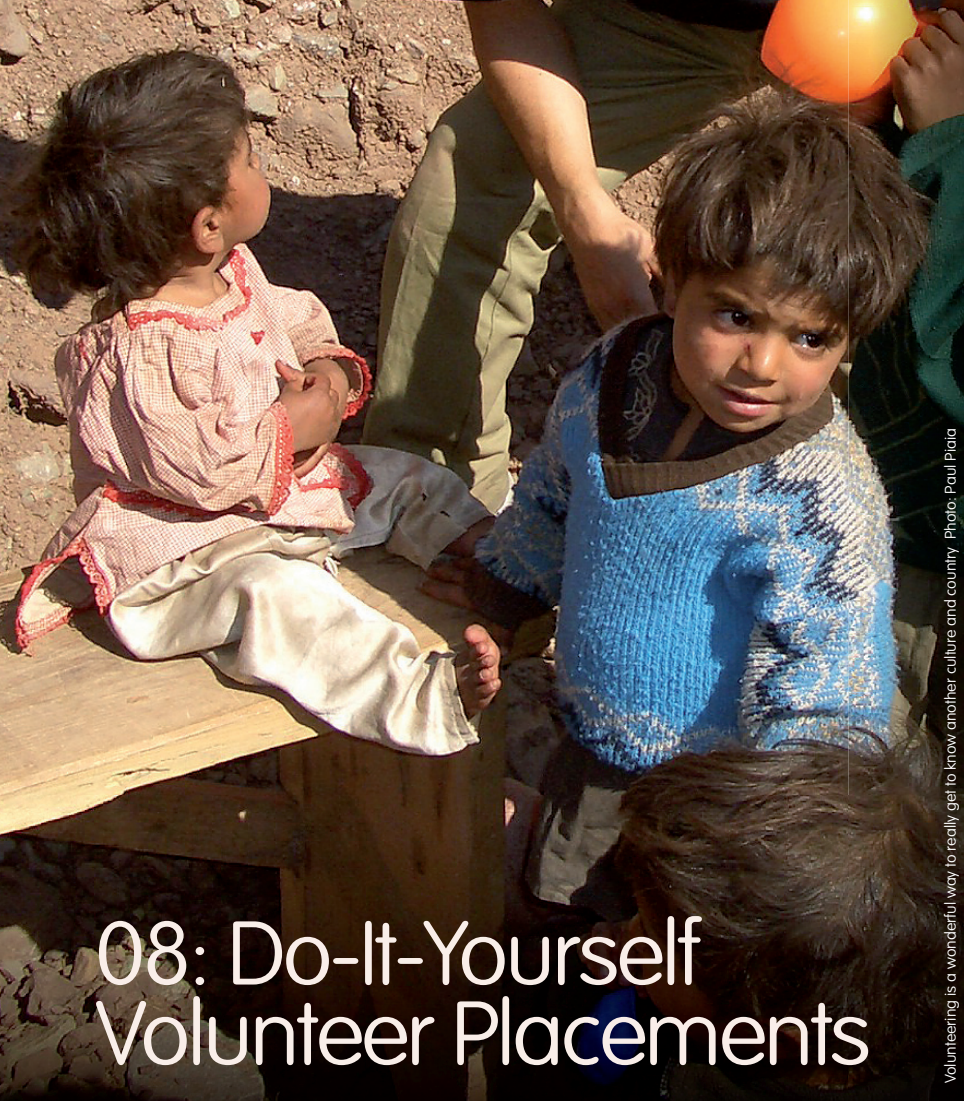
# 02: Choosing Your Volunteer Experience

Watching the Malagasy sunset from  
a volunteer beach hut  
Photo: Kiri Gillibrand

## Arranging a Worthwhile Placement

The majority of volunteer placements are organised through an intermediary called a 'sending agency' (see p17 and Chapters 5 to 7 for more details). This means that it's crucial to choose an agency that operates in a way you feel comfortable with and that does its best to place volunteers on projects that are genuinely sustainable and responding to local needs. Even if you choose not to go through a sending agency, but contact an NGO or programme directly, you still need to take the same things into consideration.

There are hundreds of sending agencies based all over the world. And it's all too easy to make the wrong choice. Ian Flood is a 48-year-old mechanical engineer with 16 years' experience with Rolls-Royce. He did a language course in Ecuador and his language school organised for him to volunteer in a day centre for street children. His experience turned out to be a disappointing one:



Volunteering is a wonderful way to really get to know another culture and country. Photo: Paul Plaia

## 08: Do-It-Yourself Volunteer Placements

If you've read this far, you're probably seriously considering volunteering as part of your travels, or even as the sole purpose of an overseas trip. Previous chapters may have given you an idea of the type of work you'd like to do (see pp11–15), and which continent or country you'd like to volunteer in. What you may be weighing up at this point, however, is the benefits and risks involved in teeing something up yourself versus paying an intermediary to arrange it all for you.

You may have arrived at this point by doing some online research and have been overwhelmed by the hundreds of agencies offering their services and charging a fee for it. But you may not feel comfortable paying a sending organisation – it may not fit with your image of what volunteering should be about. Simon Roberts, who taught English to underprivileged children with Luz del Mundo in Bolivia (p230), shared this sentiment:



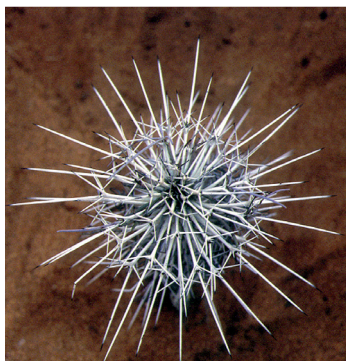


Photo: Azibody

A spiny forest plant from the arid southeast of Madagascar

After initial research we decided we didn't want to volunteer for an organisation where we had to pay for the experience, as we felt this was contrary to our idea of volunteering. The institution we went for was very small and had a grass-roots feel to it.

How, then, do you follow in Simon's footsteps and find volunteering opportunities independently of a middle man? And what are the issues to consider when volunteering independently? For instance, would it be better to arrange the placement before you leave home, or once you arrive at your destination? And how can you ensure that you make a worthwhile contribution as a volunteer and have a good time while doing it? This chapter will give some answers to these questions.

## Is Do-It-Yourself Volunteering Right for You?

In many cases the decision to do-it-yourself stems from the frustrations caused by the high costs and time restrictions associated with volunteer placement organisations. However, many prospective volunteers make a hasty decision to go it alone without properly thinking through the demands and challenges. Reflecting upfront on your strengths and weaknesses, your preferred ways of working and your skills and values will help you decide whether a do-it-yourself placement is right for you.

Kirsi Korhonen, who took on a few volunteering roles in Bolivia, including one at the animal refuge Inti Wara Yassi (p229), and a position at the boy's home Amanecer, made an informed decision to volunteer independently:

We chose to find our own opportunities, to make sure the money went where it was needed and to give ourselves more freedom. Plus, my friend and I are both very experienced in travelling and in all things travel-related.

All volunteers must possess certain core qualities if they are to make a worthwhile contribution, (see pp41–44). However, going it alone places special demands on the volunteer. No matter how much research you've done, there'll be an element of the unknown. You will have to assume complete responsibility for yourself and your actions, as you will have no support network to fall back on. In addition, you will often be out of your comfort zone.

Elizabeth France, who performed a variety of roles with United Action for Children in Cameroon (p231), suggests that self-motivation and persistence are vital for a successful DIY experience:

From my experience, the most valuable people are those who have a 'stick-to-it' attitude, as they won't give up when the going gets tough.

Other key attributes which help in facing the kind of unpredictable situations that can crop up when you're volunteering independently include self-reliance, maturity, patience, communication and interpersonal skills, sensitivity to cross-cultural issues and a good sense of humour. In working out whether do-it-yourself volunteering is for you, you need to ask yourself honestly whether you can consistently demonstrate such qualities amid the inevitable challenges of a placement.