

5

MISTAKES OVERSEAS VOLUNTEERS MAKE

+ HOW TO AVOID THEM!



Printable
travel
journal
inside!

By Involvement Volunteers International

www.volunteering.org.au

5 Mistakes Overseas Volunteers Make

PLUS WHAT TO DO INSTEAD!

"Volunteering can be daunting, especially if it's your first time."

First time volunteering overseas? Don't worry, we've got you covered.

This helpful eBook will point out common mistakes made by volunteers overseas, plus what to do instead!

As a first-time traveller, reading this eBook will provide a **HUGE benefit** to your volunteering journey.

And as for you seasoned travellers, the tips in our eBook are well worth a read, as any established backpacker will know, it's always good to keep taking advice and learning along the way!

Volunteering can be daunting, especially if it's your first time. New cultures, new environments, new weather, new room-mates, new foods, and so many more unknown factors.

It may be your first time travelling solo, or even your first time abroad. You might find yourself well outside your comfort zone at times... but don't be afraid - that's where the magic (and the personal growth!) happens. That's the stuff great travel stories are made of.





Give yourself a massive pat on the back. You are one of the few people from developed countries who are willing to forego a “proper” holiday in favour of a more intrepid adventure.

You prefer an experience where you will see the REAL country, and the REAL people, rather than just drinking cocktails out of a pineapple shell (although they’re quite nice too!).

And most of all, you are signing up to a humanitarian project where you will give back to those in need.

We value YOU, the volunteer, and the contribution that you make.

But volunteering inevitably comes with its challenges. So, to make things easier for you, here are the top five mistakes that volunteers make... and how to avoid them.



Mistake 1: Not choosing the right organisation...

... and not asking the right questions

There are tonnes of organisations out there that are doing amazing things in the world. Yet, some will be a better fit for you than others.

You may be setting yourself up to fail if you book a volunteer trip without looking at the company's principals and goals beforehand.

"Doing a little research can go a long way."

How can YOU, the volunteer, with your unique skill set and qualifications, make a difference on this project?



At IVI, **we have projects to suit a wide variety of interests**, from medical volunteering, to teaching, wildlife conservation, sports coaching, nutrition education, and even journalism internships!

If you are debating which project is right for you, then take our **quiz** to find your match.

See the next page for questions you can ask when making your enquiries...



Questions to ask a volunteer company

1. Are they a registered charity or a non-profit organisation?

2. Do they align with your beliefs/ethics?

3. Are they experienced in the industry?

4. How long have they been active in that region of the world?

5. Do they have the blessing/permission of the village chiefs/elders?

6. What are the short-term and long-term aims of the project?

7. Do they have local contacts on the ground ready to help you?

8. Can they supply a breakdown of how your volunteer fees are spent?

9. Is airport transfer and travel to the project site covered in the fees?

10. What incidental costs will you incur over there?





Mistake 2: Packing too much

On most volunteer projects, **you will be responsible for carrying your own luggage.**

You will often be taking it on and off trains, buses, and boats, and sometimes even lugging it up steep hills to your homestay or accommodation.

Volunteers move from site to site regularly, so you may find yourself squeezing everyone's luggage into the boots of small(ish) cars, and sometimes it's a challenge to make it all fit.

For this reason, it's imperative that you pack as light as possible.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR TIPS ON PACKING!



PACKING ITEMS AND TIPS TO TRAVEL LIGHTER AND SAVE SPACE



Merino/ **microfibre** thermal layers (instead of bulky jumpers).



Sarong (which doubles as a headscarf, scarf to keep warm, or even an emergency beach towel).



Chamois-style or microfibre **travel towel**. These are lightweight and can hold more water, but dry faster.



Lightweight **rain jacket**. When layered with a thermal top, lightweight fleece, and then rain jacket, it can keep you surprisingly warm.



Mini-sized toiletries. You can usually buy more toiletries at your destination. Shampoo bars are another great option!



Invest in **packing cubes** (available on Amazon and in travel stores). Roll each item of clothing tightly and then stack them into the cubes – it's a game changer for saving space!



Re-think your **makeup and hair products** – do you really need them all? Or can you get away with less



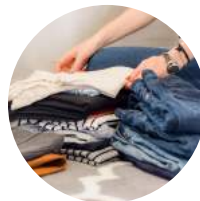
If you're an **avid reader**, load a few books onto an iPad or Kindle device – this helps to keep the luggage weight down, as “real” books are heavy.



Many developing countries have a **“shoes off”** policy in the house, so it's handy to wear sandals or flip-flops that you just slip in and out of (rather than having to doing up buckles/ laces, etc). In other words – you might want to leave your fancy sandals or shoes at home.



Backpack or suitcase? A backpack will always be easier when in-country. You may have to walk on dusty paths or up steps, which you will regret with a heavy suitcase!



Rule of packing: lay out what you want to take and half it (and maybe even half it again!). You won't need everything you think you will, and you can usually buy cheap clothes from the local market stalls.



Mix and match your **clothing**. Take things that you can wear multiple ways and that all go with each other. That way, you'll get several outfits from just a few items.





Mistake 3: Not adapting to local culture

When staying in local villages or with families in homestays, **it's important to observe the local customs**. But be warned – you may not always agree with them!

Many developing countries have rules around what women should wear, and it's quite common to be asked to cover up more than you might in western countries. You may also see other local laws and customs that are different from what you're used to.

Although it's ok to be curious and ask questions, it's important to **act polite and be respectful** at all times. It makes your hosts feel comfortable, opens doors, and creates opportunities. It's not always easy, but after the culture shock eases (which it will), you will discover so much by opening your mind to a different culture.

Learning some of the local language can help (even if it's just "hello" and "thank you,") and taking the time to learn how to pronounce names correctly.

Ask people about their families, where are they from, do they have any kids, what do they do in their spare time, etc. This will spark more conversation. By taking the time to connect, you can gain a greater connection to the local people and come away with some awesome stories!



Mistake 4: Not going with the flow

When volunteering, we often use this motto; "make a plan, but don't get attached to it."

Although a lot of planning and preparation is put into all our trips, there's still **a large element of the unknown.**



Volunteering in developing countries can require you to "go with the flow" as situations and needs can change quickly. Communications can get held up, itineraries change, travel plans can get delayed. And yes, "Fiji time" is definitely a thing!

Other cultures have a very different view on time and are often more laid back. Pushing harder with them doesn't necessarily get things done. This can be difficult for to adjust to and can take time to get into the swing of things.

"Stay flexible, remain cheerful, and have a laugh with the locals...."

...this will help to stop feeling too frustrated!

You can always talk to your in-country supervisor at any time, who will have lots of tips for you and can provide support when needed.

It's all part of the experience and can help you to build resilience, patience, and understanding. All learning opportunities which can help in day-to-day life. See, volunteer travel is more than just a holiday, it's a valued life experience!

At IVI, we give you
24-7 support
throughout your
project!



Mistake 5: Thinking you have to change the world in just one trip

As a volunteer on an ongoing project, your hard work is not always met with instant satisfaction of seeing immediate improvements. Sometimes it can feel like you're just putting out fires. Sometimes it feels like what you do will never be enough (cue feelings of guilt when you arrive home). It can be frustrating as it's hard to see your impact after just a few short weeks.

But we can assure you – **change DOES happen.**

Remember to step back and look at the bigger picture. You may not see it straight away, but the collective effort from many volunteers over months or even years can make a huge impact, and often a ripple effect into other communities.

If your volunteer organisation is on social media, make sure you continue to follow them after you arrive home, so that you can watch the progress of future teams. Remember that you paved the way for those to come after you. You were an important part of the process.

"We also have many volunteers booking with us again"

Re-visiting the same project, say a year or two later, can be a fantastic way to see the progress being made and to say hello to old friends again (you will likely form some amazing connections).

Booking a new project in another country, can be a great way to get an all-round experience of volunteering, push yourself out your comfort zone, and to explore an entire new place. If you have the time and budget, you may want to book multiple projects for the same trip.





Welcome to Involvement Volunteers!

Remember – some people just choose a holiday. But **your choosing to give back**. And this is something that the villages and communities are so very grateful for.

We value all of our past, present, and future volunteers. If you have decided to start your volunteering journey with us, then welcome, and it's fantastic to have you on board!

WHAT NEXT?

IF YOU HAVE DECIDED ON A **SPECIFIC PROJECT...**



GET YOUR **BOOKING** STARTED NOW.

IF YOU ARE **UNSURE** OF THE COUNTRY OR PROJECT TYPE...



BROWSE OUR SITE AND TAKE THE **QUIZ**.

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR **INSPIRATION...**



CHECK OUT OUR BLOG OR **INSTAGRAM**.

If you still have questions, please **contact us**, and speak to one of our friendly staff (no question is too silly!).

PHONE + 61 (0)413 318 840

WEBSITE www.volunteering.org.au





Printable Travel Journal

Use this printable journal to document your planning and experience of your trip. This is a great way to reflect and a nice mindful activity to do whilst on your project.

IVI LOVES to hear feedback from our vollies.... Don't forget to send us a review when you're back! We are always interested to hear travel stories, and what you write can help us to improve our volunteer experience! 😊

Top 3 volunteering goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Why did you choose to volunteer?



What are you most nervous about?

What are you most excited about?

Places I want to see/ activities I want to do

First impressions of the country and people



My experience so far...

Standout experience or story from your trip?

List the challenges you faced

Overall experience? Anything you would do differently?

