

Here are some questions we believe all volunteers should ask- not just of us, but of any volunteer organisation. If you can't get the answers, maybe you need to ask yourself if you should travel with them?

Our transparency means we'll answer honestly, and we'll gladly expand on our answers below if you'd like to know more!

How can I be sure that what you're telling me is true and not just marketing hype?

You can ask other people for starters, and we encourage you to do so! As soon as we've agreed a likely placement for you and long before we ask you to commit, we'll put you in touch with previous volunteers and we'll also put you in touch with our local partners.

We've also – voluntarily – undergone an independent audit carried out by The Responsible Tourism Partnership – our claims in our responsible travel policy have been checked and double checked. Its available to read at <http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/PressView.aspx?id=29>

We are the first organisation to complete such an audit and The Responsible Tourism Partnership.

How and where is my money spent?

Each project is costed individually, and the details are clearly shown on each project page. We show not only how your money is spent, but also where it is spent – which is perhaps even more important. We assume that you want the vast majority of your money to be spent with your hosts, not in the UK with us!

How will my skills be used effectively?

Your skills and experience, whether professional or not, will be individually matched to the project's needs – as local need changes, so will the brief for volunteers. We'll give you general ideas about the sort of work you'll be doing almost immediately, but it is only through discussion with you and with the project that we'll agree your final placement role and tasks – usually be about 8 weeks before you travel.

I'm only going to be there for a few weeks – how can my input be of any real use?

With our local partners, we're able to keep an eye on the bigger picture and ensure continuity in the project. Designed specifically for you, your placement will build on the work of previous volunteers. When you return, your report will update us and future volunteers, and we will ask you to tell future volunteers your story – honestly warts and all!

You will 'pass the baton' to them and they will continue your work – together you will make a real difference. This way short term placements can be effective. If you go for a few weeks in isolation with no continuity your input is unlikely to be effective – and could be detrimental to the very community you want to serve..

Who decides what my role will be?

The community, our local partner and you – and it will only be decided after thorough discussion of your skills and experience in the context of the project. These discussions involve you and the local community – this decision must be the result of a conversation, not a monologue

Who knows about me before I arrive and what do they know?

The community will know everything that you have given us permission to share with them – when we say 'informed consent', we mean it. We facilitate your placement as designed by our local partners, in discussion with the local community, but your input in this process is vital.

We firmly believe that there must be informed consent for you and the project. So, as to who knows about you: us, our local partner, the project and specific people you will be working with – and of course, your host knows about you too!

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Whose idea was the project and who runs it?

This is an easy answer – local people and local people. These may be government institutions (such as the schools we work with), community self help groups, local charities and not for profits – and sometimes all of the above together!

None of the projects we work with is conceived or managed by us – each has arisen out of local need and with a real understanding of local context.

Can I talk to previous volunteers?

Most definitely – in fact it will be hard not to! We will introduce you to previous volunteers who have worked in your project, and we expect and encourage you to contact them. Their experience and advice will be invaluable to you as you prepare for your own placement, and networking with previous volunteers is an important part of enabling you to build on the work of previous volunteers.

Can I talk to local people before I travel?

Again, we expect and encourage it. Direct communication with the projects is often not possible for you – few have emails or landlines – but you will be able to communicate directly with our local partners, who are in regular contact with the projects, and they can relay any questions you may have.

Will I be safe?

Your safety is important for all of us! Our local partners have conducted full risk assessments of the projects, and have checked out local accommodation. You will be in touch with our partners before you travel and can talk with them about any safety issues which may be of concern, and your orientation on arrival will include plenty of information and guidance, including on safety issues.

All volunteers have full 24/7 support from our partners, and this includes being provided with a local mobile phone / simcard so that contact with them is easy.

What's all this I hear about adequate insurance?

Volunteers often assume that their standard travel insurance will cover them while they're at work as volunteers. This isn't necessarily the case, and many travel policies don't provide cover for work – whether paid or voluntary work! Please make sure that, whichever insurance cover you choose, you really are covered for the volunteer work that you'll be doing.

We have worked with an international insurance provider to tailor make insurance cover for volunteers.

Is there any continuity?

This is an absolute essential – continuity promotes sustainability. We don't place volunteers unless we're sure of continuity and on occasions such as significant or lengthy religious festivals where volunteers aren't present, our local partners continue to liaise with the projects.

Not only is there continuity through volunteers' presence, but also through their work – your work will build on the achievements of previous volunteers.

What kind of support is there for me?

During your preparation, while you're there, and when you return there is full support from us and from our local partners – 24/7 for you and for the projects, both locally and here in the UK.

With your consent, we'll put future volunteers in touch with you, and we'll send you newsletters and updates about your project – even when you're back home, you can continue to be involved.