

Ten Tips for Taking a Volunteer Vacation

These days, many travelers are forgoing traditional vacations in order to take part in a volunteer vacation. Volunteer vacations gives average travelers the chance to volunteer abroad by taking part in a worthwhile project such as helping to preserve endangered wild animals or ecosystems through wildlife conservation programs, often in remote parts of the world, and much more.

Dr. Matthias Hammer, Executive Director of non-profit wildlife conservation volunteer organization Biosphere Expeditions, offers his top ten tips on how to choose the right volunteer vacation:



1/ Make sure it is a well-established organization with a proven track record of making a real difference in the projects it has become involved with – has it won any awards for its work?

2/ If for example the project is about wildlife conservation, make sure that the program is run on verifiable scientific grounds. While you give your time as an interested traveler who wants to make a difference, you need to have peace of mind that the project you are helping with is being run by a qualified scientist.

3/ Ask where your money goes. To truly make a difference, it is best if as much money and resources as possible go to help the local environment in the country the project is in. Reputable organizations will always publish information about how funds are distributed to the public.

4/ Make sure that the organization keeps you up to date on how your volunteer project is progressing. Even though you may have only been there for one or two weeks, many volunteer programs run for many years. Make sure that you will be sent regular reports to see what is happening with the program.



5/ Many volunteer vacations will take place in remote parts of the world where you may have close encounters with potentially dangerous wild animals. Make sure the organization that you are volunteering with has an excellent safety record and takes the whole issue seriously.

6/ Do some background research on your expedition leader and make sure that they are qualified. To some extent you may be putting your life in their hands, so you need to be sure they have all the necessary qualifications.

7/ Determine what new skills you will learn on your volunteer vacation and how you will be taught these skills. One of the biggest bonuses of a volunteer program may be learning something new in an exciting environment and you want to make sure that the people who are teaching you are well qualified.

8/ Make sure that you have clear goals about what you hope to accomplish out of the whole experience and don't be afraid to ask questions or seek the views of travelers who have gone before you. Reputable organizations will always offer to put you in touch with previous travellers – if they don't, beware.

9/ Find out who you will be traveling with. As you may be virtually living “next door” to each other for some time, you need to be comfortable with the type of people you are likely to be with. The organization should be able to tell you about the kind of people who typically attends their projects. Facebook, blog pages, and social media outlets can be invaluable information gathering tools for volunteer vacations.



10/ Most importantly, determine if it will be fun. Although most volunteer vacations have a serious purpose, you should have fun considering that you are spending your valuable vacation time “giving back”.

For more tips, advice, and information about volunteer vacations and volunteer wildlife conservation programs visit the Biosphere Expeditions website at www.biosphere-expeditions.org or contact info@biosphere-expeditions.org.

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