

VSI Volunteer Handbook

AFRICA

ASIA

and

LATIN
AMERICA



Voluntary Service International

www.vsi.ie

®VSI is a non profit organisation.
Registered Charity No: CHY 9220

Voluntary Service International (VSI)



VSI is a registered charity: CHY 9220
VSI is registered as a limited company: No. 140520
(having no share capital).

VSI is a signatory to the Comhlamh Code of Good Practice
for Volunteer Sending Organisations and has helped to
devise the Volunteer Charter for overseas volunteers.

The VSI Volunteer Handbook is published by the Development Education Group of VSI. The Handbook is a practical resource for all volunteers taking part in International Volunteer Projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America.



Table of Contents

Introduction to Voluntary Service International.....	2
Africa, Asia, Latin America Programme.....	4
Expectations.....	12
The Cultural Experience.....	14
Preparing Yourself – Practical Matters.....	17
Preparing Yourself – Your Health... ..	20
Health Care While Travelling.....	22
Personal Safety and Work Safety.....	30
VSI Child protection Policy.....	32
Code of Ethics for Volunteers.....	33
Packing List; - What to Bring.....	34

This publication was produced as a resource to accompany training.
Designed by Carol Walsh T/A PACES Training.
Tel: 045 874095
Email: pacestraining@eircom.net

Introduction to Voluntary Service International

About VSI

Voluntary Service International is the Irish branch of Service Civil International, a worldwide peace movement started in 1920 in the aftermath of the First World War. Voluntary Service International was founded in 1965 after several projects in the late '50s. Since then VSI has undertaken a wide variety of voluntary and community work throughout Ireland and has sent volunteers to similar projects in over 70 countries worldwide. VSI is a membership organisation. Our current programmes include;



International Volunteer Projects Programme.

Africa, Asia and Latin America Programme.

Middle East Programme.

Teenage Programme.

Long Term Volunteering Programme.

Dublin Local Group.



VSI participants at an International Youth Exchange Project

The programmes are run by active working groups made up of volunteers, supported by the VSI staff team. Our Annual General Meeting (usually held in November) elects a National Committee from the membership to oversee the work of the VSI from year to year.

OUR VISION

Our vision is a world of peace, social justice and sustainable development, where all people live together with mutual respect.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to promote peace, social justice, sustainable development and intercultural understanding through volunteering in Ireland and internationally.

OUR VALUES

We base all our work on the following values:

Volunteering in the sense of acting out of self-initiative, without seeking material reward and for the benefit of civil society, as a method and a statement for social change, whilst never competing with paid labour nor seeking to contribute to strike-breaking.

Non-violence as a principle and a method.

Human Rights: Respect for individuals as stated in the universal declaration of Human Rights.

Solidarity: International solidarity for a more just world and solidarity between human beings at all levels.

Respect for the Environment and the eco-system of which we are a part and upon which we are dependent.

Inclusion: To be open and inclusive to all individuals who share the aims and objectives of the movement, without regard to gender, race, colour, religion, nationality, social status, sexual orientation and ability

Empowerment: Empowering people to understand and act to transform the social, cultural and economic structures that affect their lives at all levels.

Co-operation with local communities as well as other local, national and international actors to strengthen the positive potential within civil society as a whole.

The Africa Asia Latin America Programme

The Africa, Asia, Latin America Programme is a Development Education programme set within the Millennium Development Goals. The programme enables people to gain an insight and understanding of development issues facing people and countries of the developing world by participating in short term International Volunteer Projects, of practical benefit to local communities. The Programme is made up of four elements;

Preparation

Projects

Evaluation

Using your experience



Sports activities with local children at Mwanga, Tanzania

Development Education

Development Education is an active learning process, founded on values of solidarity, equality, inclusion and co-operation. It enables people to move from basic awareness of international development priorities and sustainable human development, through understanding of causes and effects of global issues, to personal involvement and informed action.

Development education fosters the full participation of all citizens in world-wide poverty eradication, and the fight against exclusion. It seeks to influence more just and sustainable economic, social, environmental, human rights based national and international policies.

Millennium Development Goals

- 1st GOAL** Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty.
- 2nd GOAL** Achieve universal primary education.
- 3rd GOAL** Promote gender equality and empower women.
- 4th GOAL** Reduce child mortality.
- 5th GOAL** Improve maternal health.
- 6th GOAL** Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and others diseases.
- 7th GOAL** Ensure environmental sustainability.
- 8th GOAL** Develop a global partnership for development.

PREPARATION

VSI organise a comprehensive preparation for volunteers taking part in the programme. VSI holds a weekend workshop which prepares volunteers for their volunteering experience. It gives you the opportunity to meet like-minded people and learn more about the volunteering experience.

The workshop will include;

1. Volunteering overseas -expectations.
2. An opportunity to learn from previous volunteers who will also attend.
3. The volunteering experience – what to expect.
4. An introduction to Development Education.
5. Information on the projects.
6. Talks from guest speakers on development issues
e.g. : HIV/AIDS; Fair Trade. etc.
7. Discussion on issues that may occur to volunteers while on projects.
8. Health and safety issues.

In addition we ask volunteers to;

Familiarise yourself with the Millennium Development Goals and Key Concepts of Development Education.

Review reports from previous volunteers (available at the preparation workshop).

Learn about the culture and society of the host country you will visit.

Meet people from the country you are visiting in advance of your trip.

Contact Irish NGO's working on development issues.

Get the Rough Guide/Lonely Planet Guide of the relevant country.

Internet and Books are a great source of information to learn more about history, society and political background of the country you wish to visit.

As a volunteer it is important that you take responsibility to learn more about the host country you are visiting before you go. It is important to ensure that you are well prepared for your volunteering experience.

PROJECTS

Project Host Organisation

A local NGO will be your host organisation. Their role is as follows:

- To meet you at the airport where possible
- To carry out orientation which usually takes a day.
- To organise transport to your destination.
- To provide a facilitator for the project to assist with organisation.
- Meet you after the project and carry out an evaluation.
- On occasion, personnel from the organisation may visit the project.

The project usually has a mix of international and local volunteers. You can take this opportunity to learn about different cultures on the project and enjoy the diversity. This is often celebrated by each nationality hosting a night to reflect their country so it is a good idea to bring flags, maps, photos and interesting information about your country.



Project Organisation

Generally there is a facilitator from the host organisation on camp with you.

They organise a rota for project to include kitchen duties, cleaning duties, activity group.

Usually projects start at 7.00am. with the kitchen group preparing breakfast for everyone.

The majority of the group work on the project in the morning up until mid-day or mid-afternoon.

The kitchen team prepare lunch for everyone which is normally around mid-day.

Activities are organised for the afternoon to familiarise you with the community. These can include home visits, visits to local organisations, doctors and schools.

The group eats together for tea and may organise games, camp fire discussions, singing and maybe some dancing!!

The weekends are generally for leisure. Once again be aware that local people on the project may not have disposable income to travel in to the nearest town or the money to socialise.

The work you will do:

An International Volunteer Project is a unique form of volunteering, bringing together people from different countries, cultures and backgrounds to live and work together with local communities on short-term volunteering projects. The projects are designed to assist and encourage local initiatives that will be continued when the volunteer project is completed. The projects help these groups in their long-term work for a more just and peaceful society. The projects also aim to break down barriers between people and to develop international understanding.

The types of projects

The work you will do on a volunteer project in countries of the South will vary from location to location. Many of are a practical nature e.g.

- to build extra classrooms onto a local school
- to renovate a rural health centre
- to plant trees and other environmental projects
- to make play facilities at a centre for children with disabilities

There may be little in the way of tools and machinery on the project, in many cases they might not even have enough wheelbarrows or other basic tools. It is common for the volunteers to perform more manual labour than skilled building tasks.

The volunteer group will be made up of international volunteers, volunteers from schools and colleges in the country and local volunteers from the village or town.

Often villagers will join the project for 1-2 days and students from the village school will be there everyday.

The length of projects

We encourage volunteers to join in 2 or 3 short term projects during their two month stay in a developing country, as well as visiting other development and community projects. However, it is also possible to join an individual project.

Project locations

Africa: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Asia: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri-Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam.

Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru.

Accommodation and Conditions



Projects are mostly held in rural areas and conditions on the projects can be basic e.g. no electricity; no running water etc.

Leisure and Free Time

There is usually a study theme to each project and volunteers should prepare themselves to contribute to the discussions. There is a lot of interaction with the local community where the project is based including teaching in schools, family visits, viewing local beauty spots and places of interest. It would be wise to bring a musical instrument, a deck of cards, board games etc.

Team Meetings and Discussions

You will have a team meeting at least once a week to talk together about the project and how things are going. Making new friends and bonding as a team are often cited as one of the most meaningful aspects of the experience.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is an essential part of the programme experience as it helps VSI and SCI to improve the programme in future years. VSI organises an Evaluation Workshop each October which gives us the opportunity to meet with you again and discuss all the wonderful and amazing things you experienced while you were away. It also gives you a chance to reflect on what the experience means for you and how to put the experience to good use. It gives you the chance to meet up with the other participants who have been to many different countries. In addition participants complete a four page evaluation form on completion of their projects which is made available to future volunteers.

"Tanzania– I learnt how so much can be achieved when people and spirits are willing. There was great community spirit and it showed how much can be done without modern machinery! I will be raising awareness about Tanzania in my classroom and I hope to link up my school with the school in Tanzania."

Maria -volunteer to Tanzania

Using your Experience

Commitment doesn't end at the airport! Volunteering overseas forms part of a continuum that starts when you first decide to volunteer overseas to your activism when you return home. There are many ways you can assist within VSI or within like minded organizations working for a better world.

Becoming Active with VSI

As a volunteer you have the privileged position of being able to learn about your host community and experience what it is like to work in a developing country. These experiences can provide an invaluable source of information for people who themselves are considering the possibility of volunteering overseas. VSI always needs help with the preparation of volunteers and in the promotion of our volunteer programmes.

- Joining a solidarity or campaigning group
- Supporting fairer trade through your purchases
- Fundraising for projects you worked on while overseas
- Raising awareness about issues you have experienced with your family, fellow students or work colleagues.

Further Education & Training



There are many education and training courses available in Ireland. If you want to learn more about development issues. VSI will give advice and guidance about further studies at their [Evaluation Workshop](#).

EXPECTATIONS

If this is your first volunteering experience abroad, you are likely to feel anxious before you travel. You may be wondering...*'What will the country be like?'*.....*'Where will we sleep?'*.....*'Is the work difficult?'*....*'Why am I doing this?'*...*'What can I expect?'*

What are your expectations?

It is important for volunteers to begin examining their expectations as early in the planning process as possible. To ease any anxiousness you may have regarding expectations, we hope most of your questions will be answered during our preparation weekend. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have, especially if there are volunteers present who have completed a similar project.



Villagers and volunteers work together on an environmental project in Sri Lanka.

Great Expectations...

What do you expect from your volunteering experience? Knowing your expectations is one of the most important ways you can prepare for your time overseas. Maybe you don't think you have any expectations. If so, you're in for a shock because a hidden expectation which clashes with reality is always surprising. The best way to avoid disappointment is to evaluate your expectation before you go. Are they realistic? Have you based them on the right motives?

Some things you can expect are as follows;

Differences

Expect to encounter differences. Different is not wrong, it is just different. There will be different approaches to food, work and communication.

Make an effort to notice and appreciate these differences for the very short time you are in-country and make an effort not to let frustration get the better of you when you encounter things you are unaccustomed to.

Frustration

Expect to be frustrated. No matter what your situation, you'll always be encountering the unexpected. Schedules probably won't happen as planned!

There will be 'down' times when you have to wait for materials on-site or for someone to show up or make a decision. Use this time to enjoy the people around you. Talk with them and ask them questions about their lives, families and work. You may never have this opportunity again.

Flexibility

Expect to be flexible. Flexibility continues to be the most valuable word to remember as you go overseas.

Adapt

Fit into the situation. When plans are changed, go with the flow. If you are sleeping in close quarters, get creative about making some space for yourself. Be willing to be stretched, challenged and changed by the experience you are having, you will be grateful you did, when you return home.



School Latrine Project Bangladesh

The Cultural Experience

As part of your volunteering experience you will be involved in community life and you will eat, sleep, and work within the local community. Community life involves learning about your host community, experiencing cultural differences and sharing every waking hour with your team. With this great opportunity for growth comes responsibility. Each volunteer is expected to act responsibly with his/her every action. This chapter prepares you for what to expect and what is expected of you.

Culture Shock

One certainty is that your hosts and host country will be quite different from what you are accustomed to at home. The language and accommodation will most likely be different; your hosts will dress and act differently. People might greet each other in unusual ways and may even be mildly offended by your clumsy, yet well-intended, attempts to demonstrate friendliness. You'll be exposed to unusual customs and eat unfamiliar food. In summary you may experience culture shock!

You may find yourself responding to culture shock by withdrawing or alternatively by becoming overly energetic trying to fit in.

You may even become angry and resentful toward the hosts "different ways" or you may feel you are not experiencing much culture shock at all. A good way to counteract culture shock is to open your eyes and ears, open your mind, put on your sense of humour and a smile, be prepared to laugh at your own blunders and genuinely become a part of the new culture. Attempt to learn the language, at least the basic courtesies like hello, goodbye, good morning, etc.

Question your hosts about their country, their way of life, their past and future. Show as much interest in them as they will undoubtedly show in you. If you have problems adjusting to the culture differences, discuss this with your team members or team leader.



Pounding grain in a village in Senegal

The cultural experience can be one of the most enriching and challenging part of your volunteer adventure. Respecting the culture you are living and working in is essential to the success of your time within the community. It is highly recommended that you learn some basic greetings as the host community will appreciate your efforts.

Please keep in mind that different things are valued in different cultures For example;

Domestic animals such as cats and dogs may not be regarded in the way you are accustomed to.

Time may be regarded differently; the quality of the relationship or discourse may be more important than the time it takes, or being on time for something.

Women may not experience the same degree of freedom or respect they are used to.

Transport is different, there can be over crowding, and driving at high speed, use your own common sense as to whether you use this transport or not.

In some cultures

It is important to greet by asking how the other person's family is before getting onto the main point of the conversation.

You must ask permission before taking a photograph of someone or of a sacred, cultural place.

Women may be required to cover their shoulders, knees or heads, or may be required to wear a skirt at all times. Men wearing shorts may be frowned upon.

It may be considered rude to disagree or say no to guests.



Masai group in Tanzania.

SOME BASIC TIPS:

If you don't know –ask!!

Be flexible and ready to apologise if necessary.

Smile and be willing to learn.

Try not to compare it with “back home.”

Appreciate the host country.

Respectful Exchange

Although you are making a significant contribution of time, talent and money, you are still a guest in the host country you visit. It is important that you are respectful of the host country, and remember you are a guest of local culture. Keep that in mind that you and your team will be quite obvious in the local community, and many people in the community are likely to be very aware of how you are spending your time. With that in mind, please take note of the following.

It is polite to respect the ethics and morals of the country that you are visiting. If you are not sure, please ask. Clothing should be appropriate for the work site or after work event. Team members should dress comfortably, yet modestly.



Photographing local people and sacred, cultural places should be done with reservation. It is respectful to ask permission before pointing the camera at such subjects.

Consumption of alcohol at work sites is prohibited and should be moderated all other times. In some communities even moderate alcohol consumption may be frowned upon. Use of tobacco may be offensive to others.

Please respect the values of your hosts and fellow team members. Use of illegal drugs by volunteers is strictly forbidden at all times.

Be conscious of flashing expensive possessions around e.g. i-pods, blackberries etc.

Gift Giving

Our SCI partners have asked that team members not to bring gifts such as radios, watches or special favours for individual families. Such gifts often create jealousy, competition and enmity. Donations to the local association which benefit the whole community such as school supplies, small tools and clothing are welcome and appreciated.

Team members occasionally are approached by host-country locals about paying for a particular item or sponsoring a child in the community. This too is discouraged, to promote independence, not create dependence. Such acts of generosity raise the local's expectations of future volunteer's. If you are interested in further supporting the host community please discuss this with the sending or host coordinator before taking any steps.

PREPARING YOURSELF – Practical Matters

Do not forget...without these you cannot travel!

Your Travel Ticket.

Passport: You will need an up to date current passport. Check to see when it expires.

Visa, if necessary: When you are applying for a visa, you should always apply for a tourist visa. Although you are going on an International Volunteer Project, the majority of countries do not recognise voluntary work as a special activity for getting a different visa. To obtain a working visa is a long process.

Vaccination Card: Sometimes it is checked at border crossings!

Documents: Make **TWO** copies of any important documents (passport, visa, card numbers, insurance, travel tickets...). Leave one copy at home with someone whom you can easily contact in case you lose them and keep one copy with you in a separate place from the originals. A good idea is to scan your documents and save them in your e-mail account, so you can access them anywhere you travel.

Money: Always carry a reasonable amount of cash but have also traveller's cheques. You will also be able to use credit/electronic debit cards in many of the countries but remember that most of the projects are in remote areas where there is usually no access to cash points. Do not carry all your money in one place! Take advice from previous volunteers who went to the same country.

Insurance: You **MUST** take a comprehensive health insurance policy and comprehensive travel insurance as well. There may be situations where you have to get medical care in the country you are in or return home immediately. SCI can insure you while you're taking part on the individual volunteer projects. Ask the VSI office for more details.

Local Addresses: Bring the contact details of the local SCI branch or partner organisations including emergency phones. Ask VSI for details of how to reach the meeting place (usually the office of local association). Bring the address and contact details of the Irish embassy in the country you are visiting. If there is no Irish embassy or consulate there, find out which embassy covers Irish citizens.

Preparing yourself -Safety Issues...

Safety is everyone's concern but you, as the volunteer, have a key role in keeping yourself and others around you safe.

Arrival: When you arrive in the country/your project, inform your family/friends that you have arrived safely. Keep them informed during your trip.

First night: Book your first night's accommodation in advance. Ask previous volunteers for advice on travelling from the airport and good places to stay for the first few days. The local organisation often offers to meet people at the airport and bring them to a local hostel or hotel. Ask VSI for details.

Acclimatising: Take it easy for the first few days after you arrival, get used to the heat, humidity, new time and new people. Try and arrive several days before your project is due to start.

Valuables: Do not take them if not necessary. The less you have then the less chance to be robbed. Do not look rich!

Going somewhere on your own: If you're leaving the group, inform someone about your journey, when you plan to be back, etc. Take advice from the local leaders and volunteers.

Always carry small notes or a second wallet in your pocket so if you are mugged you have something to hand over. If you are mugged hand over something – it's not worth the fight.

Wear dark sunglasses: Always walk with confidence and look as if you know where you are going. As far as possible try to arrive into a new place in the morning as opposed to the evening – this will give you time to orientate yourself with day light.

Gauging risks: Seek advice from the local leaders and volunteers if you do not know the place, do not travel alone if possible, and do not go out after it gets dark.

Clothing: Dress appropriately to country habits/rules. Wearing lots of jewellery or expensive clothes can invite unwanted attention. Wear appropriate clothing i.e. being sensitive to cultural issues e.g. cover your shoulders and wear long shorts/skirts below the knee in some Muslim countries, while travelling and at the project site. This should include closed toed shoes which will help avoid cuts, unsafe debris and other hazards.

Marriage ring: It might be useful for women to avoid harassment. Bring a **spare pair** of glasses or contact lenses in case of loss or breakage.

Youth Hostel Card:

It might be useful in some countries you are travelling to take one with you.

Public Transport:

Take the advice of the SCI branch, partner organisation, local volunteers or previous volunteers in relation to travel by public transport. If possible avoid any form of transport known by reputation, or common sense to be unsafe. This includes poorly maintained buses, trucks, ferries and any overcrowded vehicles especially those with standing passengers and no obvious handhold.

Overnight buses

If taking overnight buses DO NOT leave your valuables out of your hands. Pack them into a bag and nurse the bag all night.

Walking:

Ensure your safety as a pedestrian. Consider wearing reflective arm bands at night if walking on a busy road.

Hitch-hiking:

It is not recommended, however, sometimes it can be only means of the transport. Remember that, not like in Ireland, you will be asked for money for the lift. Ask before you get in how much it will cost!

Swimming:

Find out about local beaches, lakes, rivers, wells, ponds etc. before you swim. Check that they are clean and safe. Swim only in areas known to be free from dangerous currents, sharks, sea snakes, poisonous fish, crocodiles etc.

Never-ever swim on your own, nor swim if you have consumed alcohol, eaten a large meal or taken recreational drugs.

'More than a million people, the vast majority in the poorest countries of the world, are being killed each year often because unsuitable vehicles are being driven on unsuitable roads by poorly trained drivers' (WHO 2003).

Mobile Phone:

You may be able to use your mobile in the country you are travelling too – check with your service provider (O2, Vodafone, Meteor) before you go and make sure that you phone is unlocked, if not ask them to unlock it. This may take a few days to put into place.

Otherwise you may be able to buy a local SIM CARD which you could use instead of your Irish one but in your own phone– a local volunteer may be able to buy one on your behalf or direct you to a shop, which sells them.

Preparing yourself—Your Health

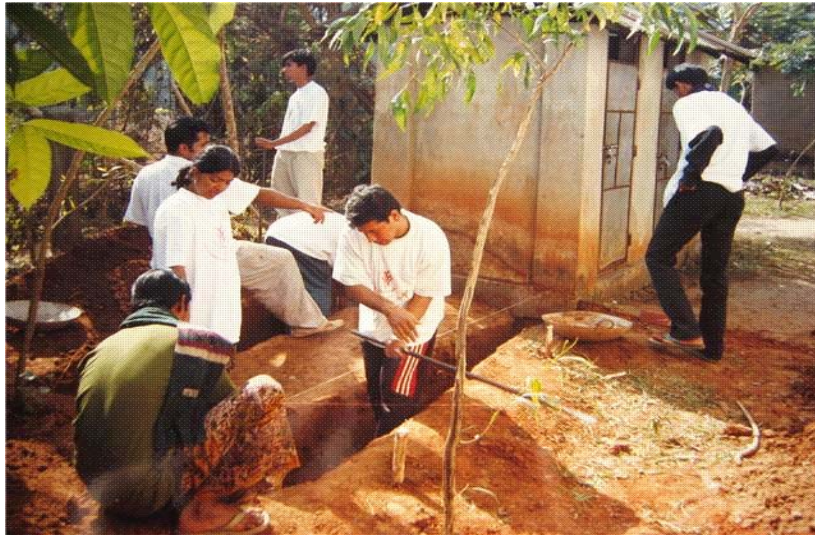
The following is to provide you with some basic information on: possible health problems while on volunteer projects and while travelling in Africa, Asia or Latin America.

This is not meant to be an alarmist list or overview, but we have included quite a number of illnesses for your information.

Staying healthy in an environment that is very different to the one you are used to depends a lot on:

1. **Your preparations before you go**
2. **Your daily health care while travelling**
3. **How to handle any medical problem that may arise**
4. **Returning home**

The following information has been prepared by volunteers and is not meant to be a substitute for seeking professional medical advice. Before going on a project you should contact a specialist health centre dealing with tropical medicines and vaccinations.



Digging foundations on a community project in India

Preparing yourself -before you go...

Make sure you are healthy before you go. Have a medical and dental check before departure. It might be useful to have an eye exam, tuberculin test and for women a Pap smear.

Check that your childhood immunisations are up to date. Check if you are allergic to any medications – get a note from your doctor describing these allergies (in both common and chemical names of those medications).

Know your blood group and record it on travel documents.

Vaccinations – check those you need in the country that you are going. begin the process of immunisation early enough, since some series can take weeks/ months!

The following are generally recommended for those who stay longer than one month in Asia, Africa and Latin America;

Hepatitis A - transmitted by contaminated water/food/close contact with infected people; Symptoms-jaundice and fever, incubation period of 3-5 weeks.
Protection: Vaccine, Gamma Globulin serum –expensive but gives protection for 4-6 months

Hepatitis B – transmitted through blood, blood products, needles, tattoos etc.
Protection: Vaccine. It is expensive, so check it first with GP.

Yellow Fever- transmitted by mosquito bite. Symptoms: acute fever, muscle pain, jaundice –can be fatal;

Protection: Vaccination (compulsory for Africa).

Typhoid – transmitted by contaminated food/water. Symptoms: Fever, headaches, diarrhoea.

Protection: Vaccination (can be combined with Diphtheria and Tetanus).

Tetanus – transmitted through soil or rust contamination; Symptoms lockjaw, muscle spasms.

Protection: Vaccination (or booster) see Typhoid.

Cholera – transmitted through contaminated food/water. Symptoms Diarrhoea, vomiting, dehydration.

Protection: Vaccination but WHO advises people not to have it. (check it out)

Polio – Transmitted through food; Symptoms –paralysis.

Protection: Vaccination/Booster.

TB – transmitted through close contact with carrier. Symptoms: Coughing, fever, chest/back pain.

Protection: BCG –you probably had one as a child. You can have a simple test to see if it's still valid.

Meningitis- transmitted through bacterial or viral infection. Symptoms: Headache, fever, stiffness.

Protection: Vaccination

Rabies- transmitted by bite of rabid animal. Symptoms: Death.

Protection: Vaccination –expensive. Check with your GP or Tropical Medical centre.

First Aid course – It might be useful to do a First Aid course before you leave, especially if you will be far from quality medical care (available through the Red Cross, local clinics, some schools).

Contraception

Making your mind up as to whether you will require contraception while abroad is a very personal matter. If there is a possibility that you may have sex, bring contraceptives with you. Do bear in mind that if you are taking the pill, a dose of diarrhoea or vomiting may wash it out of you system.

Also remember the AIDS epidemic all over the world.



Match of the day in Tanzania!!!

Medical Supplies to take with you

Medicine

If you need to take any regular medicine during your stay overseas, be sure that you bring enough for the whole duration. If you need to buy them in another country, take with you trading name of the medicine. The commercial name that you know from here may be different overseas. All medications should be carefully labelled and sealed-(effect of humidity!)

Additional medical items you may want to bring;

Water purification tablets (Potable- Aqua), extra pair of glasses and/or contact lenses (with a good supply of lens solution of course).

Sanitary towels/ tampons. Sunscreen lotions, Insect repellents, lotions with DEET, baby powder or medicated powder for heat rashes and to prevent fungal infections (available from your GP), Saline Solution (0.9% NaCl).

Disinfectant soap (Betadine, Dial), adhesive bandages, sterile gauze pads, roller bandages, adhesive tape, elastic bandages, anti-septic solutions (Betadine, hydrogen Peroxide solution). Regular Pain killers (Paracetamol, Panadol, Tylenol, Aspirin enterocoated), Vitamins, Minerals plus Iron supplements, oral dehydration sachets (dioralyte, Electrolade, Rehidrat), Antibiotics, Anti-diarrhoea tablets (if your GP prescribes them). Sterile needles/iv cannula in the event that medical care will not be readily available.

Medical information

Medical history notes about your allergies, diseases, blood group and possible reactions to medication.

Sun protection

Bring sun cream (>25 SPF) Sun block (25+), Sun hat and a cotton scarf for the back of your neck. Sun glasses.

Miscellaneous items

Ear plugs (always useful!), handkerchiefs if you feel that you might have dietary difficulties.

Malaria Tablets

Consult your GP or Tropical Medical Centre before you decide on which malaria tablet you should take. Usually you should start taking tablets before you leave Ireland.

Health Care while travelling

Acclimatising:

Take it easy for the first few days after you arrival, get used to the heat, humidity, new time and new people.

Take a shower at least once a day, wash your body carefully, dry thoroughly, especially skin folds (bacteria and fungi's favourite place).

Jet Lag:

If you have travelled 10-15 hours inside a tin can you will need time to get over this. Avoid alcohol, limit your teas/coffees and drink plenty of water.



Keep Clean:

Scrupulous personal hygiene is proven to reduce the risk of illness. Please make an effort to keep your hands clean to ensure a more enjoyable productive trip. It may be a good idea to have an antibacterial wet wash hand cleaner and baby wipes available for cleaning hands. It is highly important that you clean your hands thoroughly after using the toilet and before eating or touching your face.



Also watch where you swim or wade: in some areas, rivers or wet, flooded fields can harbour snails carrying worms that can cause schistosomiasis and other hookworm or threadworm infestations. Water can also be contaminated with leptospirosis.

Footwear:

It is advisable to bring comfortable practical footwear –do bear in mind that there may be all sort of insects, snakes, scorpions etc and bare feet are vulnerable.

Wear shoes/ sandals as a protection against hookworm, tick bites, scorpion bites, and fungus infections. Be careful about sitting on the ground for the same reason.



Wash your hands!! Many illnesses can be spread by “dirty hands” - spread by faeces to mouth route.



Prolonged Sun Exposure

Avoid direct sun and have a siesta in a mid-day if possible. In case of sunstroke lie down in a cool, dark, quiet place, get yourself plenty to drink, take off any spare clothes, take cool baths/showers (not cold, just to feel cool), put a wet towel on your head, wear wet clothes. Take it easy for the next few days. You should wear sun protection cream and wear a hat/scarf to protect your head and the back of your head. Exposure to too much sun can lead to sunstroke or heat exhaustion – the treatment for this is rest and rehydration (3-5 litres of liquid a day). Some people get heat rashes or prickly heat (red rashes of little blisters) on any part of the body. Synthetic materials can contribute to this and can aggravate it. It is advisable to wear cotton clothing. You should have cool showers and if possible expose the rash to the air. Soothing creams e.g. Calamine lotion should only be used as a last resort.

Small Cuts and Scrapes

If you receive a **small cut or scrape** you should clean them and cover them ASAP as otherwise they may become infected.

Clean Water

A lot of illnesses are transmitted through contaminated water therefore all drinking water should be bottled or boiled (recommended to boil for 10 minutes) or, if this is not possible some method of water purification should be used. When buying bottled water you should check that the seal on the top has not been tampered with.

For water purification you can bring a supply of purification tablets e.g. **Puritabs** (available in chemists-this gives the water a harsh flavour) or **Micropur**. Alternatively bring iodine (not the normal household variety –ask in the chemist) and add a few drops or bring a water filter (not the most effective).

There are occasions when you are in contact with water without thinking about it e.g. washing teeth etc/. You should avoid ice in drinks, salads and uncooked foods, which have been washed in local water (see food section also).



Toilets

In many developing countries the standards of toilets will not be what you're used to at home. In cities toilet paper is often used but not flushed down the toilet. Instead it is placed in a bin or container. Where toilet paper is not used you will have to do as the locals do and use water for cleaning. This can take some getting used to. At work camps the facilities will be very basic. No matter what the situation you should take care to wash your hands thoroughly after using the toilet. In many Asian societies you use your left hand for cleaning after the toilet and so in some circles it is considered impolite or insulting to use your left hand for eating, greeting etc.

Periods

Women volunteers have often found that their periods may be disrupted, disappear or become more frequent. It takes your body some time to adjust to a new environment. Women should bring a supply of tampons with them. Sanitary towels are often available in cities and large towns.

Diarrhoea

You should prepare for your bowel movements to be a common topic for discussion on your projects and travels, particularly if you are suffering any sort of complaint!

Diarrhoea is a symptom and not a disease...the symptoms normally last 2-3 days and it is strongly advised to let it take its course naturally.

If diarrhoea persists you should consult a doctor and only as a last resort should you take anti-diarrhoea tablets.

Things you should do...

Drink a lot of water. Eat starchy foods like eggs, bananas and rice. Avoid oily and spicy foods. It can be advisable to take a rehydration drink e.g. *Dioralyte*, *Oralite* or *Rehydrad*.

You can also make your own rehydration drink.

REHYDRATION DRINK

TO MAKE

Add 2 level teaspoons of sugar/honey and ½ teaspoon of salt to 1 litre of water (make sure it's clean). Stir well and drink. You can also enquire about homeopathic remedies. Some past volunteers have recommended bringing some sort of flavouring product e.g. glucose as the drinking water can often have its own distinctive flavour!

Question: If you really have to take that 10 hour bus journey to catch a flight home! should you take tablets like *Immodium* or *Lomotil*??.

Answer: These tablets are effective in that they block up the system but they don't get rid of the bug!

More severe conditions with diarrhoea include

Bacillary Dysentery – Diarrhoea plus blood and mucus in the stools. You may get abdominal cramps, muscular aches and mild fever. It is self limiting and lasts 4-5 days and should be treated for diarrhoea. If persistent see a doctor.

Amoebic Dysentery – Similar symptoms to bacillary but with a less sudden onset. Chronic abdominal pain with 2-3 offensive stools a day. There may be blood and mucus in the stools. You may get diarrhoea and constipation alternately.

Giardiasis – Profuse unpleasant frothy diarrhoea. You may get abdominal pain and distension, nausea and vomiting. Both 2 & 3 can cause long term complications if not treated (e.g. a course of Metronidasole or Flagyl) so see a doctor ASAP.

Constipation -If you are constipated you should not take any medicine initially. Eat lots of fruit and oily foods. Avoid bananas, rice and starchy foods. Use laxatives only as a last resort.

Eating safely – The following recommendations apply to all situations, from food vendors on the street to expensive cafes and restaurants. Cooked food that has been held at room temperature for several hours constitutes one of the greatest risks of food borne illness.

Make sure your food has been thoroughly cooked and is still hot when served.

Avoid and uncooked food apart from fruits and vegetables which can be peeled or shelled. Avoid fruits with damaged skins. Remember the dictum

– ‘**Cook it, peel it or leave it**’

Meat can often be a source of many illnesses –check the source if possible. Ice cream from unreliable sources is frequently contaminated and can cause illness. If in doubt – avoid it.

In some countries, certain species of fish and shellfish may contain poisonous bio-toxins even when they are well cooked! Local people can advise you about this. Un-pasteurised milk should be boiled before consumption.

Beverages such as hot tea, coffee, wine, beer (these are diuretics and can lead to dehydration) and carbonated soft drinks/fruit juices which are either bottles or otherwise packaged are usually safe to drink. Again like bottled water check the seals on the bottles.

It is known that people on train journeys having accepted food from strangers have woken up a few hours later without their money belt etc. Be aware of this possibility and also that refusing to share food, even with strangers, can be considered very rude.

Fever can be a sign of many different diseases. Check the temperature every 3-4 hours; wear as little clothes as possible, drink lots of cool liquids (clean water, rehydration drink), take aspirin or paracetamol, cool baths, wet towel on your head to lower the fever.

Malaria is one of the biggest killers in developing countries and is transmitted by the bite of a female mosquito (how can you tell a male one from a female one?). The best way of preventing mosquito bites is by wearing long sleeves, trousers, scarf around your neck, socks at dusk and at night, by wearing insect repellent (ask what is used locally) and by using a mosquito net or coil (which you can burn).

Buying Mosquito Nets

<http://www.pyramidbodyguards.co.uk/> stocks mosquito nets that are not only fairly traded, but for every 10 nets purchased, they will donate one net to Save the Children for use in the developing world. Might be worth a look!

Mosquito and other insect bites can be painful and if you apply some anti histamine cream ASAP after the bite this can lessen the severity of the bite. If you are prone to insect bites consult you GP about taking anti-histamine tablets before your journey.

Malaria Tablets: Consult your GP or Tropical Medical Centre before you decide on which malaria tablet you should take. Usually you should start taking tablets before you leave Ireland.

Mosquito nets impregnated with permethrin provide the most effective barrier protection against insects. Coils, mats and vaporised insecticides are also useful.

Diethyltoluamide (DEET) in lotions, sprays or roll-ons is safe and effective when applied to the skin, but the protective effect lasts only a few hours.



Volunteer accommodation with mosquito nets!

When to seek Medical Care

If you are not feeling well while on a project or while travelling you may be in need of medical care depending on the symptoms and how serious you think your condition is. Your project leader or the staff/volunteers in the office of our sister SCI branch/partner organisation will be able to recommend a doctor or medical clinic which you can go to. The Irish embassy will also be able to recommend where to get suitable medical treatment. This might only be available in the capital city/major city and not in a rural area and so you may have to travel to get adequate medical care.

Returning Home

You should consider having a full medical examination on your return from the developing world. You should definitely have one if;

1. You experience illness in the weeks following your return home, particularly if fever, persistent diarrhoea, vomiting, jaundice, urinary disorders, skin disease or genital infection occurs.
2. You consider that you have been exposed to a serious infection while travelling. You have spent more than 3 months in a developing country.
3. You have **fever** and if you have been in a malaria endemic area seek medical attention immediately.



Tree Planting in Mexico

PERSONAL SAFETY

The following tips are common sense while travelling in a foreign country.

Dress conservatively.

Don't wear expensive-looking jewellery or watches (even if they are fake!).

Conceal essential valuables and documents. Do not put valuables in easily accessible pockets or backpacks.

Do not display large amounts of cash. Go somewhere discreet if you need to remove something from money belts or hidden pockets.

Keep a copy of your passport/ documents separate from the original.

Lock your luggage if it is out of sight.

Be extra vigilant when out on the street-look out for bag snatchers, pick-pockets and scam artists.

Abide by local customs and laws.

Ensure someone knows where you are at all times.

Do not wander off alone, especially at night.

Bring minimum number of credit cards and make a note of numbers for recording loss.

Keep hold of shoulder bags.

Do not resist attackers. If confronted, give up your valuables. None of your valuables are worth more than your life.

Work Site Safety

Safety is everyone's responsibility. If you think something is unsafe it probably is.

Each volunteer is required to work in a safe manner, and to bring any safety concerns to the attention of the team leader, do not wait for an accident to happen.

Each volunteer has a responsibility not to abuse or misuse materials or equipment. Assess any task before carrying it out.

General Advice

Always wear long trousers and boots when walking through undergrowth or long grass.

If there are ticks in the area, do regular checks for them on the skin.

Check clothing and shoes before putting them on, particularly when left unworn over night.

When sleeping outside always have the bed raised off the ground- tuck the mosquito net into the mattress.

If you meet a snake do not panic; keep very still until it goes away.

Don't walk about with bare feet or open-toed shoes.

Carry a torch and spare batteries when walking at night.

Think First: Avoid putting yourself or others in danger. Be cautious at all times and ask questions if you are unsure about how to use equipment, how to perform a task or whether you should be even doing it.

Lifting: When lifting heavy objects keep your back straight, do not lift more than you can handle. Be aware of other volunteers, helpers and obstacles when lifting large or awkward materials and tools. Recognise your limits. Avoid struggling to keep up with other team members. When you get tired, take a break; sit down and rest often.

Report Accidents Immediately to the team leader. Do not horseplay or cause distractions to anyone on the site, which may result in an accident or incident occurring. Do not throw materials to each other to save time. Always work in a chain. No alcohol or illegal drugs are permitted on site at any time. Volunteers who need prescribed drugs (inhalers, etc.) should make sure they have a sufficient supply on site. If you feel unwell at any time during your trip, please speak to your team leader.

Fire: The host organisations make every attempt to provide safe accommodation but the final responsibility for personal safety lies with each individual team member. Do not smoke in bed. In case of fire, crawl low, under the smoke, to escape.

Animal Associated Hazards:

Animals in general tend to avoid human beings, but they can attack, particularly if they are with young or unable to flee. Wild animals and, in areas of endemic rabies, domestic dogs, cats and other animals should be avoided. If you are concerned about Rabies discuss this with your nurse or doctor. Poisonous snakes are prevalent in many parts of the world, although death from snake bites are relatively rare. Scorpion stings may be painful but seldom life-threatening except possibly in infants. Check your shoes before you put them on!

Clothing and Equipment

Footwear: Sturdy work boots preferably steel toe cap safety boots-should be worn at all times.

Gloves: Everyone should have a pair of gloves with either leather or rubberised grip.

Eye Protection: Wear protective glasses when using hammers, chisels, power tools, lime wash, chemicals, when dust is in the air.

Face Mask: Wear a dust mask when sanding, installing insulation, painting, lime wash or using chemicals and when working in demolition or doing strip out work.

Ear protection: Use ear plugs when using a power tool or are in the vicinity of loud machines.

Child Protection Policy

Principles of Good Practice when working with Children

Your volunteer experience is about more than work, throughout your experience you will interact, to varying degrees, with the local community, and volunteers. Interaction with local children is a key component of the trip. Children may befriend you as you work on site, as you eat a meal or even as you walk to and from your accommodation each day!

Whenever we have contact with any child it is important that they always adhere to the following guidelines and to ensure that the safety and welfare of any child is a priority in all our dealings with them.

Health and safety on the worksite is of paramount importance, children should not be encouraged to work on site by any team member.

Team leaders should be aware of what is happening with their teams and keep an eye on anything that does not seem in order, such as a team member taking a particular interest in a child or walking away with a child.

It can be useful at times to provide entertainment for the local children if it allows work on the site to go ahead in a safer manner. In such situations, at least two team members should be allocated responsibility for keeping the local children entertained away from the building site.

Team members should be thoughtful about their language and tone of voice.

Team members should never participate, with children, in games of either an aggressive or sexual nature.

Team members should never invade the privacy of children or make any unnecessary physical contact with a child or group of children.

Individual team members should never be alone with any child or any group of children.

Team members should not spend excessive amounts of time with any one child or group of children.

Team members should not make any demeaning remarks or gestures to or about a child.

When taking photographs of children, team members should always ask the permission of their parents or guardians.

Code of Ethics for Volunteers

Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to learn more about the people of your host country.

Be keenly aware of the feelings of others, thus preventing what might be offensive behaviour on your part. This is especially applicable when taking photographs

Cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and looking. Realise that often the people in the country you visit have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own; this does not make them inferior, only different.

Instead of looking for that (beach paradise) **discover the enrichment of seeing a different way of life through others eyes.**

Instead of the western practice of “knowing all the answers” **cultivate the habit of asking questions** and listening to the replies.

Remember that you are only ONE of many tourists visiting this country.

Acquaint yourself with local customs -people will be happy to help you. Do not expect special privileges. If you really want your experience to be “a home from home” it is foolish to waste money on travelling.

When you are shopping, remember that the “bargain” you obtained was possible only because of the low wages paid to the maker.

Do not make promises to the people in your visited country unless you are certain you can carry them through.

Locals always appreciate receiving photographs that you have taken of them, but if you promise to send photos, then do so.

Spend time reflecting on your daily experience in an attempt to deepen your understanding.



Farewell to the volunteer team from Vanuatua Islanders

What you will need when on a Volunteer Project in a Developing Country?

General



- Passport/Visa + copy of documents
- Vaccination Card
- Address of local Irish Embassy
- Rucksack
- Sleeping Bag
- Sleeping Mat
- Mosquito Net
- Hooks, Nail, String to hang it up)
- Sewing Kit
- Torch
- Swiss Army Knife (not in hand luggage!)
- A day pack
- Water Bottle
- Eating Utensils
- Money Bag
- Small Locks

First Aid Medical



- Malaria Tablets
- Diarrhoea Pills
- Laxatives
- Pain Killers
- Insect Repellent
- DEET
- Water Purification Tablets
- Bandages
- Plasters
- Scissors
- Syringes
- Antiseptic
- Anti-histamine
- Sunscreen
- Sun-block

Toiletries



Self:

Nail Brush
Baby Wipes
Soap etc.

Clothes:

- Travel Wash
- Clothes Pegs
- String/rope (clothes line).

Other:

- Tampons
- Sanitary Towels
- Contraceptives

Quick Tip:

Once your rucksack is packed, place it on your back and walk around the block 6 times.... Then, *re-assess!!*

What you will need when on a Volunteer Project in a Developing Country...

Clothes



Clothes:

Should be practical and take into account local sensitivities.

Other Items:

- A raincoat
- Sun Hat
- Sunglasses
- Work Gloves (2)
- Hike/Work Boots
- Sandals

Other /Miscellaneous



- Camera
- Books
- Deck of Cards
- Travel Games
- Reading light
- Travel Guide
- Photographs (of yourself and family).
- Irish "Cultural" items (e.g. flags, postcards, songs etc).
- Small gifts (e.g. balloons, crayons, colouring books, balls, skipping ropes, playing cards) .
- Musical Instrument



Helpful Web Site Addresses for Volunteers

Lets Go TravelGuide.....www.letsgo.com
Lonely Planet Travel Guide..... www.lonelyplanet.com
Rough Guide..... <http://travel.roughguides.com>
Travel Directory.....www.travel.org
World Travel Guide..... www.wtgonline.com

Health and Travel Issues

Centre for Disease Control..... www.cdc.gov
Irish Department of Foreign Affairs.....www.foreignaffairs.gov.ie
Tropical Medical Bureau (Ireland).....www.tmb.ie
Suzy Lamplugh Trust (Personal Safety).....www.suzylamplugh.org

General Information

Culture Information.....www.CULTUREGRAMS.com
Currencies and Exchange Rates.....www.xe.net/currency
International Dialling codes.....<http://kropla.com/dialcode.htm>
Weather Report.....www.weather.com
World Factbook.....www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook

Development Education

Development Education Website.....www.developmenteducation.ie
National Youth Council DE website.....www.youthdeved.ie
Dochas (NGO umbrella body with many DE links)....www.dochas.ie

Volunteering Websites

Volunteering in Ireland.....www.volunteer.ie
Volunteering Abroad.....www.volunteeringoptions.org

Voluntary Service International
www.vsi.ie