



Voluntourism and Intrepid

Volunteering is a popular way to be able to 'give something back' to the world - whether to a local community or organisation, the world 'as a whole' or to the natural environment. People give their time, skills and sometimes goods or money towards a positive outcome.

Intrepid Travel aims to provide fun, affordable and sustainable travel that is beneficial to local communities. We are committed to responsible travel principles - to operate and travel in a way that is culturally, economically and environmentally responsible.

We receive many enquiries from travellers interested in combining their travels with a positive opportunity to give back and bring benefits to others, possibly through volunteering. This is often called voluntourism.

A worthwhile volunteering experience is one that:

- Brings real benefit to the host community and the volunteer.
- Doesn't take away a paid job from a local person.
- Is working with a local partner organisation or community. It is not imposed upon the community.
- Not a 'one hit wonder' but is contributing to a structured longer term program.
- Offers support and training to the volunteer, so their contribution is appropriate and relevant.
- Empowers the local community.
- Has the right attitude - the volunteers' approach needs to be about what they can learn from the local hosts and the experience, and not what the volunteer can do for the local community.

Worthwhile short term volunteering opportunities are hard to find.

It can be difficult to achieve the above in very short volunteer placements i.e. those under two weeks, unless the volunteer is doing a very specific task e.g. planting trees, counting wildlife.

Expectations should be modest. Motivated volunteers may bring new ideas and solutions together with a fresh perspective which can reinvigorate and inspire those around them - but change takes time. The reasons why things are done in certain ways may be steeped in hundreds of years of history and tradition. Some other considerations and challenges you may need to take into account include:

- Short-term postings are generally not advised when involve working with children i.e. orphans, children with disabilities. Children need stability. There can be emotional/psychological effects with rotating short term care and interaction.
- Volunteers that may be working with children need either to be monitored at all times, or have background or reference checks completed. Neither may be easy to arrange.
- It can be difficult to match the skills of a mixed group of travellers with the requirements of a local organisation.
- Language barriers can add to the challenge.
- If the culture of the country and community are vastly different to the volunteers, it can take some months before a volunteer adequately understands enough about the culture, to move on from their own steep learning curve and bring positive benefits.

Intrepid's position

Intrepid Travel is primarily a travel operator and we believe that is our strength. We have some very long standing and rich relationships with local communities, but believe that communities seeking assistance and potential volunteers are best served by specialist agencies.

There are many excellent volunteer sending agencies around the world, that source and respond to community and organisational requests for volunteer assistance and that recruit and place volunteers. To be very effective, these agencies need a range of specialised skills and they prioritise the needs of the hosting communities.

Therefore we do not currently operate short-term volunteering opportunities. We do however encourage you to consider some of the following alternative ways of giving back to communities.

Ways to give back to communities

- **The Intrepid Foundation.** The Foundation supports a range of community based projects in developing countries. More information on these can be found at: www.theintrepidfoundation.org All of these projects need and welcome your support. Learning about and fundraising for their activities in the weeks prior to your trip can bring an added positive dimension to your pre-trip preparation. We may be able to suggest some specific needs or put you in touch with a representative of the charity. We may then be able to arrange for you to visit the charity and witness their work in person. Any fundraising efforts for the Intrepid Foundation will be matched by Intrepid Travel dollar for dollar up to AU\$5,000 per donor and a total of AU\$300,000 for all donors in each financial year.
- **Homestays/community stays.** Staying with a family or in a community may give you an interactive experience with local people. In addition, you bring your hosts direct income and your purchase of goods and services brings flow-on benefits to others in the community.
- **Fair trade enterprises.** Choose to spend your time and money at local restaurants and community enterprises that directly support community development. A list of relevant places can be supplied on application. For some great ideas within Indochina visit www.stay-another-day.org
- **Think global, act local.** There may be many opportunities for volunteer work with development agencies and issues based non-government organisations (NGOs) that are working on projects relating to your travel destination, close to home. Many Western countries have peak bodies for volunteering or for non-profit organisations. Their websites may give you a myriad of suggestions. For example, you could volunteer support in administration, which can help agencies reduce their overheads and maximise the percentage of their revenue that is put to work overseas.
- **Advocacy.** Poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, exploitation of the vulnerable, poor health services, discrimination, climate change ...the list goes on of problems in the world that need addressing. A very important way you can help is by spreading your understanding of the issues and giving a voice on behalf of those who aren't adequately heard. Signing petitions, supporting or starting campaigns, attending or organising rallies, writing letters, calling your local parliamentarian, choosing to purchase products and services from organisations with a strong social and environmental conscience - all these actions can make a real difference. OXFAM's website has some great suggestions.