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Safety, Back-up and Security procedures

This is an important part of the service Projects Abroad offers you. Your safety and security is our prime concern - so we have many procedures and systems to ensure your group have the support they need to enjoy their placement with peace of mind. Each of our placements are fully researched, safety audited and risk assessed in accordance with the British Standard BS8848 for the Adventure Travel Sector. Projects Abroad is also a founding member of the Year Out Group, a partner in the Know Before You Go campaign through the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and a member of the International Volunteer Programs Association.

Our Assurances to you:

SECURITY
We take your security abroad very seriously. Before we go anywhere, the countries must be politically stable and safe. If they are not, we don’t go. We are in contact with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office regarding safety and stability and we have the added security of our own full time overseas staff who know the local area well. We strive to ensure that every trip runs smoothly for each group and that in the case of an emergency, the problem will be resolved correctly and efficiently with the minimal amount of distress to the individual.

PRE-DEPARTURE ADVICE
Once the group have been accepted on to one of our projects we will send you insurance and visa information as well as lots of advice on what to take in terms of kit and for safe travel in the country you are to visit. Our experienced Country Volunteer Advisors will contact you once you have applied and are always available to give advice and answer any questions you may have - both before you go and while you are away.

For groups who have applied to come away with us, we will send one of our experienced staff to come and visit you. We will speak to your group, and parents about both the project and the destination that you have chosen, as well as extra information regarding fundraising, insurance, visas, flights, transport and safety in destination.

We will send out a draft itinerary outlining the main activities that will take place each day and their times, as well as weekend and afternoon trips.

PLACEMENT DETAILS
Before you go you will be allocated your placement details. These include the addresses and numbers of where you will stay as well as details of your placement and supervisor.
We believe our in-country support to be unparalleled. Every single one of the countries we work in has at least one Projects Abroad office, and full time staff. Each country has a Country Director and various other members of staff. They are trained in the UK and in-country to follow best practice procedures, including monitoring, security, and emergency procedures. All of our staff have comprehensive background checks undertaken before being hired to ensure the safety and security of both the volunteers and fellow staff members. The advantage to hiring people from the community, aside from helping local families, is that the local knowledge gained over the years of living in the area is invaluable and couldn’t be taught. This knowledge is then applied to not only keep our volunteers and staff safe, but to also enhance the trip being undertaken.

The office acts as a point of contact with our staff. Our permanent overseas staff organise the details of our placements and accommodation according to strict criteria and high standards. They are there to assist with any concerns, problems, advice and general administration that may arise during your time away. Each group will be assigned full time support from our staff whilst your group are overseas.

During your stay you will work closely with our supervisors as well as our partners at the projects. There will be Projects Abroad staff on hand throughout your trip to make sure everything on your trip runs smoothly.
Accommodation

All accommodation is checked regularly by our overseas staff. Accommodation is only accepted if it is clean, hygienic and comfortable. In host families at least one member of the family will be able to speak basic English, and the family will understand Projects Abroad’s aims. At local hostels and hotels we make sure you are staying in a safe and secure environment. Checks are made before and during volunteers’ stays. These checks include:

- A single bed is available for each volunteer
- When the fire alarm was last tested and whether instructions are present
- If there is a working smoke alarm fitted in each room
- Clearly displayed evacuation procedures, routes and fire exits
- Where the fire exit leads and whether or not it is being obstructed
- Clearly displayed emergency phone numbers
- A fully stocked first aid kit and where it is located
- Fire extinguisher locations, when they were last tested and whether they have any instructions present.
### Placement

Our overseas and UK staff work closely with our partner organisations to ensure they understand the nature and purpose of Projects Abroad. All our placements are regularly checked by our overseas staff and visited by Head office staff.

### Supervisors

Each group, regardless of whether on a Teaching, Medicine, Conservation or other project is allocated a supervisor. The supervisor is not only responsible for enabling groups to carry out their work, but also for ensuring that they are happy and assisting them at their placement with any problems or concerns. Should a volunteer have any problems, be it physical pain, illness or emotional distress, then their supervisor will be their first contact. Our supervisors are trained to handle a wide variety of circumstances, but in the rare occasion where a situation is out of their ability or control then they will be in immediate contact with a more senior member of staff who can help.

On every project a supervisor or staff member carries a medical kit in case of a minor accident. It’s usually fairly rare that any volunteers hurt themselves but on projects that involve more physical activities, such as building or sports, the risks can be greater and so our staff members are prepared for such circumstances.

### Meeting on arrival

We will meet you at the airport. We use our own members of staff when possible, but in some cases we may use an approved transfer company to pick volunteers up from the airport. You will be met by someone carrying a Projects Abroad sign, who will welcome your group. They will carry some form of identification that you can validate. It is also our responsibility to help you get back to the normal international point of departure at the end of your placement.
Induction

Each group will have an induction to the country and area where they will be living. This varies from country to country but generally includes:

- A Welcome Pack with details of the local office, other volunteers, maps and other useful information.
- A tour of the area on local transport. All transport will be risk assessed by Projects Abroad.
- We will advise you on local customs and what to expect while you are away and help you feel confident in your new environment.

Health and Insurance

All of our volunteers are covered by our comprehensive medical and travel insurance. This includes repatriation for certain cases. If a volunteer falls ill, our staff will be on hand to assist with hospital arrangements and insurance liaison, and will, of course, make sure that the patient is comfortable.

Our insurance cover includes medical and emergency travel expenses, luggage and personal effects, money, personal accident, personal liability, cancellation and curtailment, rescue and assistance, legal expenses, and travel delay. Cover becomes effective once full payment has been received.

Our insurance document, which each group receives, includes:

- Summary of the main benefits
- Excess costs and the maximum amount each cover is insured for
- The various forms of cover
- Information on cancelling insurance
- Information on claiming on the insurance
- 24 hour emergency medical services
- Information on compensation and complaints
- Main exclusions
- Laws applicable to the insurance

Our insurance covers volunteers for their outward and return journeys as well as their placement. For more information on our insurance, please contact us.

It’s worth noting that volunteers will be made aware before departure of specific vaccinations that are necessary when travelling to their chosen destination. We aren’t
medical experts so our advice on vaccinations and other medical matters can only be informal. However, we do know that when getting multiple vaccinations, it pays to look and travel around in order to get the best deals. Some medical institutions will give people certain vaccinations for free, whereas others will charge so it helps to shop around and choose early on what is best for you.

Visas

Depending on your group’s choice of destination and length of stay, you may need visas. Our Visa Team will provide your group with detailed information about the specific visa requirements after you have applied.

Things to Consider:

PROJECT TYPES

Projects Abroad prides itself on its wide variety of destinations and projects available to volunteers around the world but as such, this variety brings up differing levels of risk and physical exertion. Projects Abroad will never force an individual into an activity that is too demanding of them but volunteers should keep in mind what their project choice may require of them. Projects such as building, sports, some community projects, agriculture and some conservation projects will require more physical activity.
HEALTH
It is paramount that volunteers disclose all physical and mental health prior to departure to ensure potential situations can be planned for in order to minimise risk to both the individual and the volunteers or staff around them.

If working as a group with Projects Abroad, it is advised that the group leader work closely with the local staff to keep each other updated on any changes in any individual’s behaviour or health.

FITNESS
Though most of our projects are based predominantly in one community, some of our conservation projects and weekend trips will involve more physical activity. Volunteers should consider this when thinking about their personal fitness before embarking on a trip. We will never force any volunteers into an activity that they feel they cannot do but if a staff member feels that a certain activity will pose a risk to a certain volunteer then such individuals may be asked to refrain from joining in and so may miss out on participating in that activity. This instance is very rare though as our staff train and teach every volunteer equally and work in a progressive environment; starting off with the basics and gradually increasing the difficulty and levels of expertise with practice.

BEHAVIOUR
Whilst on a project, there is a certain level of behaviour expected of the volunteers to ensure both the safety of individuals and groups, as well as the continued close relationships that Projects Abroad has with the communities that it works in. If you are a group leader and you have any concerns about an individual’s possible or current behaviour then please let us know.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS
Before departing on a project with Projects Abroad, all dietary requirements of all the volunteers involved should be shared with our staff so that amendments to the planned meals can be planned ahead.

Vegetarians and vegans should take note that communities in a few select destinations can be relatively limited in terms of vegetables available and so there may be a low variety in meals available to them. If any individual has a known allergic reaction to any foods then our staff should be made aware of this prior to departure to ensure their wellbeing.
Safety, Back-up and Security procedures

Projects Abroad ensures that the technical knowledge and experience needed to use such equipment is taught in detail to our volunteers through PADI recognised Dive Centres. Such registered centres must adhere to high safety standards and competency including proximity to medical support, equipment, environmental factors, instructor qualifications and experience. The qualified staff are trained in delivering the PADI Open Water Diver course to volunteers and groups so that this experience is safe for all those involved.

All scuba equipment is checked before every dive. In the case of any piece of equipment appearing faulty or liable to break then this piece is removed, replaced and recorded by our trained staff. Safety is paramount to Projects Abroad, particularly in an environment as foreign and unpredictable as the ocean, this is why such checks are conducted on a daily basis and staff hold the right to refuse particular individuals access to the water if they feel that they pose a risk to themselves or others.

SCUBA DIVING

On conservation projects in destinations such as Belize, Cambodia, Fiji and Thailand, our volunteers use scuba diving apparatus in order to spend extended periods of time underwater studying a variety of marine life. This unique experience is one that not many get to experience and gives us an extended insight into a diverse environment and ecosystem that most only experience for brief moments of time.
Volunteers are taught in a progressive style, initially being instructed and trained on land before entering the water. After this stage, all volunteers practice their skills in shallow water before progressing on to deeper water when instructed to do so by a qualified staff member.

In the event of an emergency, PADI qualified staff members are trained in specialist marine first aid and are nearby to help. These staff members can contact staff members on the land who can come via a boat to either search for the individual or transport them to land and on to the nearby medical centre.

VEHICLES
Vehicles are checked and inspected systematically before every trip that is undertaken, as well as being serviced annually.

We make sure to check for:

- A seatbelt in good condition for every seat
- A seat for every volunteer that is securely in place
- Clearly marked emergency exits
- MOT confirmation
- Valid insurance
- The driver has a valid licence
- All tyres, windows and structural properties are all in good condition
- A legitimate driver with all the valid credentials
As with many of our projects, particularly conservation based work, our volunteers will come into close contact with a wide variety of animals and plants. Each project destination has one, if not multiple members of staff, who are experts in their field and very familiar with the local flora and fauna. This knowledge, usually gained from years of living locally, is invaluable and should be followed by all volunteers at all times.

Most of the animals that we work with are harmless and volunteers are taught the correct way to handle, feed and look after such animals. The few animals that we work with that can cause potential harm are treated with specific rules under the strict guidance of the leading staff member to ensure both the safety of the volunteers as well as the animal.

Before embarking on any of our projects, both volunteers and staff members must read their copies of our child protection policy to ensure the correct protocol is adhered to when either working with children or young volunteers.

Projects Abroad is committed to a practice which protects children from harm. The best interests of the child are paramount and are the primary consideration in our decision-making. Projects Abroad accepts and recognises our responsibility to develop awareness of issues relating to child protection.
Having projects located around the world means that Projects Abroad has to plan for a huge variety of possible emergency and crisis situations, including political unrest, natural disasters and diseases. To ensure the safety and well-being of all of our volunteers and staff, Projects Abroad has a crisis management plan in place for every country with procedures in place for each possible scenario.

Each crisis management plan includes:

- An overall up-to-date description of the country including its political, religious, geographical and economical state
- A list of all potential natural disasters and other crisis's that could occur
- A list of all the documented communicable diseases
- Advice on what diseases are most prevalent, where they are most likely to be contracted and how someone might contract such diseases, as well as steps to take prior to departure to minimise these risks, such as inoculations.
- A simplified action plan for before & after a disaster / political instability in an area not necessarily directly affected by the issue
- The management team of the country displayed as a hierarchal diagram
- A list of all the staff in each office around the country
- A plan of action with volunteers for:
  - Natural disasters
  - Political unrest / violence
  - Personal safety issues / road traffic accidents
  - Communicable diseases and illness
  - Fire / theft at accommodation
- A plan of action for staff
- Important numbers and contact details including multiple embassy details

On top of the crisis management plans, Projects Abroad also conducts risk management plans which evaluate the severity of a hazard’s outcome as well as the possibility of such an event occurring. Once a risk level has been calculated for a specific hazard, the appropriate steps are then planned for and taught to all the members of staff at that location.
Safety, Back-up and Security procedures

We always strive to continually improve as a company and we feel the best way to do this is via advice from both the local communities in which we work and our volunteers. For this reason, we regularly encourage local communities to give us feedback on a wide variety of aspects from which we will do whatever we can to meet their suggestions. All of our volunteers fill out both an ‘End of Placement Feedback Form’ and a ‘Debriefing Questionnaire’, each of which are focused on aspects of the project work and company aspects as a whole respectively. We also use this information that our volunteers provide to give us an insight in to how they felt before, during and after their trip so we can accurately gauge what aspects need the most improving.

Projects Abroad conducts a thorough risk assessment on every project to ensure that all possible risks are accounted for and minimised. The severity and probability of each risk is analysed first before control measures and additional actions are suggested and implemented. These risk assessments are reviewed and updated regularly by a trained member of staff before being given to every volunteer before they leave to start their project. This process not only ensures that all volunteers are aware of the potential dangers but it also aids every volunteer and staff member in deciding what is the best course of action if one of these risks occurs.

Improvements
Membership & Partnerships with other organisations

The Year Out Group: Projects Abroad is a founding member of the Year Out Group. This is an association of independent UK-registered organisations of various sizes, one of whose principal activities is the provision of high quality structured programmes in the UK or overseas. Members agree to adhere to a Code of Practice.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office Know Before You Go campaign: As a partner in the Know Before You Go campaign, we are working with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to do all that we can to help British travellers stay safe overseas. Before you go overseas, check the FCO website at www.fco.gov.uk. It is packed with essential travel advice and tips, and up-to-date country information.

International Volunteer Programs Association: As an organisation member, the IVPA ensures that all of our projects adhere to their principles and practices as guidelines for good programming. This ensures that our projects are of the highest quality when it comes to communication, safety and behaviour guidance, as well as always striving for a higher quality service.

“I think this is a great way for students to bridge the gap between family holiday or “school trip” or individual volunteering. The best thing we did was finish building the chicken coop and put the chickens in it! Very satisfying. The Safari, Mt Meru waterfalls and the Maasai experience were unforgettable. Seeing my students develop their confidence and cultural awareness was wonderful.”

Ros Noble, Trip Leader, Ackworth School, Tanzania

“I look back with great satisfaction and pride with what our group was able to achieve during the two weeks in Nakuru, making a real impact on the local community that we lived in. I had an amazing time in what is an amazing country…………. I feel that it really developed our teamwork skills as a group as well as my own personal skills. It was the experience of a lifetime!”

Matt Smith, Trip Leader, University of Loughborough, Kenya