



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# VOLUNTEER TOURISM

MARKETING TOOLKIT

**Welcome to your customized toolkit for navigating the world of tourism marketing! Whether you're just starting out or looking to enhance your existing efforts, this toolkit is here to guide you step by step. We've simplified complex strategies into easy-to-follow advice so that you can confidently promote your unique experiences and connect with travelers. Let's embark on this journey together and unlock the potential of your small business in the world of tourism.**


DISCLAIMER

This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by International Development Group LLC (IDG) for the Indo-Pacific Opportunity Project, task order number 7200AA19F00024. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of IDG and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

# CONTENTS

CLICK PAGE NUMBER FOR DIRECT LINK

<b>VOLUNTEER TOURISM EXPLAINED</b>	<b><u>5</u></b>
<b>TRAVELER PROFILE</b>	<b><u>21</u></b>
<b>GLOBAL TRENDS</b>	<b><u>47</u></b>
<b>CATEGORY CHALLENGES</b>	<b><u>55</u></b>
<b>POPULAR VOLUNTEER TOURISM DESTINATIONS</b>	<b><u>66</u></b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS TO MSME'S</b>	<b><u>73</u></b>
<b>SRI LANKA'S POTENTIAL</b>	<b><u>78</u></b>
<b>LEADING VOLUNTOURISM ORGANIZATIONS</b>	<b><u>89</u></b>



**"To travel and to serve,  
that's the heart of  
voluntourism. It's where  
wanderlust meets the  
deepest essence of  
humanity."**

# **What is Volunteer Tourism?**

**Volunteer tourism, often referred to as 'voluntourism,' represents a unique intersection of travel and service, where individuals venture to new destinations, not just as sightseers, but as active contributors to the local community. Through this form of tourism, travelers engage in cultural exchange, assist in community development, and gain meaningful experiences, all while making a positive impact on the places they visit.**

**volunteering**

**+ traveling**



**Traveler's**

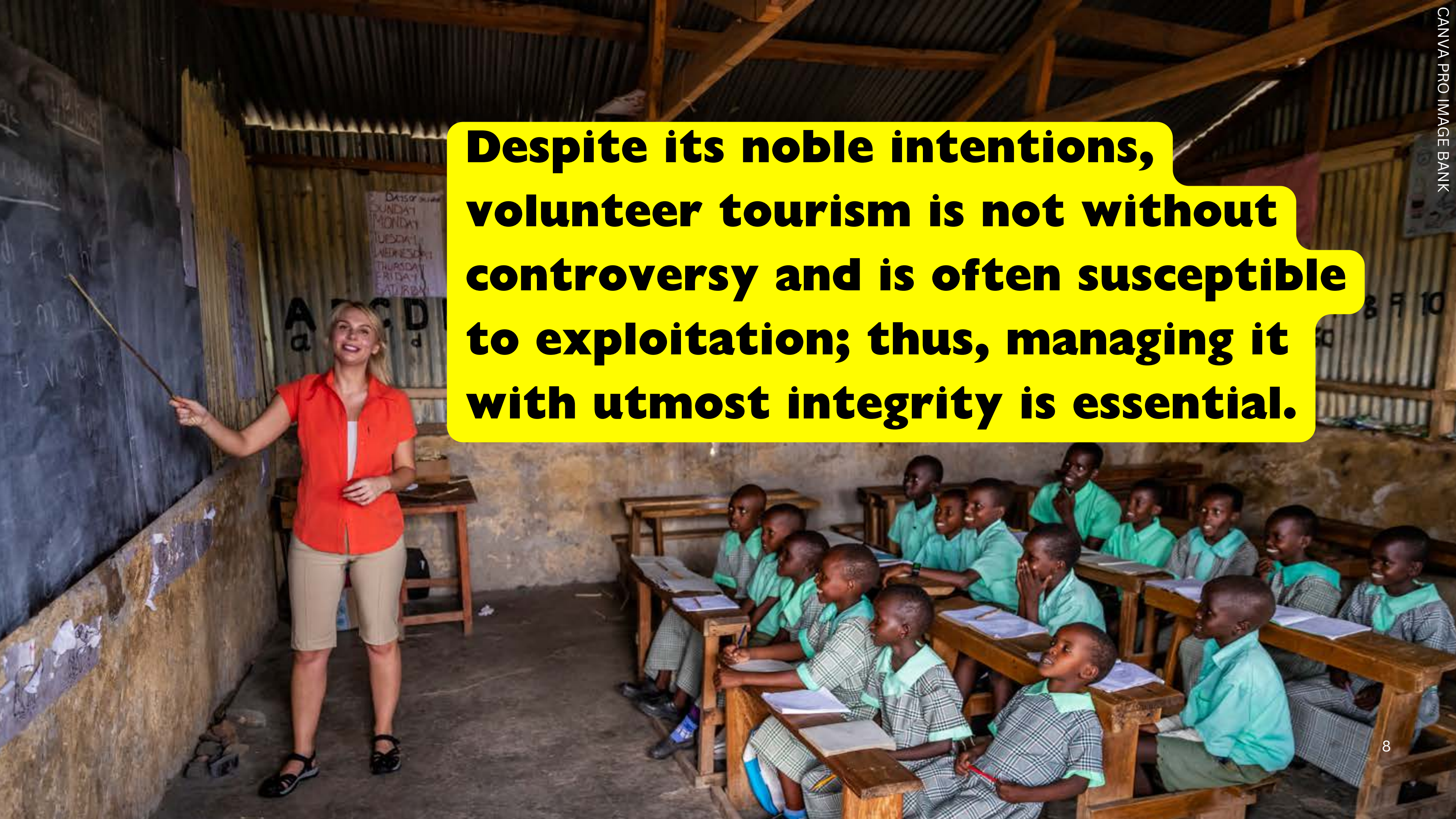
**pay**

**to**

**work on**

**short-term projects.**

**Despite its noble intentions, volunteer tourism is not without controversy and is often susceptible to exploitation; thus, managing it with utmost integrity is essential.**







**When approached with awareness and integrity, volunteer tourism can be a deeply rewarding and transformative experience.**



**What do volunteer  
tourists expect?**

# Meaningful Work


**Volunteer tourists want to contribute in a significant way. They expect their efforts to have a tangible and positive impact on the communities or environments they're serving.**

# Cultural Exchange

**Many seek an immersive experience, hoping to learn from and engage with the local community, understanding their customs, traditions, and way of life.**

# Safety

**Like all travelers, volunteer tourists expect their hosting organizations to ensure their safety — both in terms of physical safety and health precautions.**



# Support & Guidance

**Especially for those new to volunteering abroad, there's an expectation of training, supervision, and support from the host organization. This helps them effectively carry out their roles.**

A smiling man with a beard, wearing a white t-shirt with the word 'VOLUNTEER' printed on it, stands next to a white van. The van has 'SUPPLIES' written on its side. The background is slightly blurred, showing the van's rear light and window.

# Clear Communication

**Transparency regarding the objectives of the project, the role of the volunteer, and where their fees (if any) are going is crucial. Volunteers expect honesty about the challenges and successes of the project.**

# Logistical Assistance

**Some may expect the tour organizer to provide logistical support like transport and accommodation arrangements.**



# Personal Growth

**Voluntourism is often seen as a transformative experience. Participants expect opportunities for self-reflection, personal development, and acquiring new skills or knowledge.**

**VOLUNTEER**

# Fair Play

**If they are paying to participate, they expect the majority of their fees to go directly towards the project and community, rather than administrative overheads or profits for the organizing company.**


FOOD 18

# **Ethics & Accountability**

**Volunteers want assurance that the projects they're involved in are ethical, sustainable, and genuinely beneficial to the local community. They don't want to inadvertently cause harm or perpetuate negative stereotypes.**

# Connection

**Many voluntourists look forward to bonding with fellow volunteers, sharing experiences, and forging lasting friendships.**

A close-up photograph of two hands against a light blue background. The hand on the left is dark-skinned and open, with fingers slightly spread. The hand on the right is wearing a light blue nitrile glove and is gently touching a bright red, textured heart. The heart is positioned between the two hands, resting on the gloved hand.

# Who are these voluntourists?

# Students

**Many students, particularly those in university or college, volunteer as a way to gain practical experience, fulfill academic requirements, or engage in service-learning opportunities.**



# Young Adults

**Young adults, especially those in their 20s and early 30s, are often drawn to volunteering, including voluntourism, as a way to explore the world, find purpose, or take a break before settling into a career.**

# Retirees

**Many retirees seek volunteering opportunities as a way to stay active, give back, and use their life skills and experiences in meaningful ways.**





# Professionals

**Some professionals volunteer in areas that align with their career expertise. For instance, doctors might offer their services in medical camps, or educators might teach in areas with limited resources.**

A close-up photograph of a person's hands clasped in prayer, resting on an open book. The hands are positioned in the upper right quadrant of the frame, with fingers interlaced. The book is open, showing its pages, and is held in the lower right quadrant. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the hands and the book. The overall mood is one of devotion and service.

# Faith-Based Individuals

**Many people, motivated by their religious or spiritual beliefs, engage in volunteer work as an expression of their faith and commitment to service.**



# Gap-Year Travelers

**Young adults taking a year off between high school and college or between undergraduate and graduate studies might choose to spend part of that time volunteering abroad.**



# Families

**Some families choose to volunteer together as a way to bond, teach children about service, and experience different cultures.**

# Corporate Employees

**Some companies have corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs that encourage or even sponsor employees to volunteer, either locally or abroad.**

# People In Transition

**Those going through significant life changes, such as a career shift, the loss of a loved one, or a divorce, might turn to volunteering as a way to find purpose and direction during a challenging time.**



# Locals

**Apart from international voluntourism, many individuals volunteer within their own communities, driven by a desire to contribute to local causes and organizations.**



**What motivates  
these  
voluntourists?**



# Altruism

**Many individuals are genuinely motivated by the desire to give back, help others, and make a positive impact on the world. Voluntourism offers an opportunity to contribute to communities or causes in need.**

# Immersion

**Unlike traditional tourism, voluntourism often allows participants to deeply immerse themselves in a local community, gaining a more genuine understanding of its culture, traditions, and daily life.**



# Skill Development

**Some volunteer projects offer individuals the chance to hone specific skills, whether it's medical practice, teaching, construction, or conservation work.**

# Resume Building

**For some, especially students or young professionals, voluntourism can be a way to gain practical experience and enhance their resume or academic applications.**

RESUME

# Adventure

**For those seeking something different from a typical vacation, voluntourism can offer new challenges and adventures, pushing them out of their comfort zones.**

# Affordable Travel

**Some see voluntourism as a way to travel at a reduced cost, especially if accommodations and meals are provided.**





# Morality & Ethics

**Some individuals believe in the principle of global citizenship and feel a responsibility to contribute positively wherever they can.**

# Escapism

**For some, voluntourism can be a way to take a break from their routine lives, seeking meaning and purpose in a different setting.**





# Authenticity

**Voluntourists often seek genuine interactions with local communities, desiring more than just passive sightseeing. Their pursuit of authenticity allows them to deeply connect with and appreciate the places they visit.**

**VOLUNTOURISTS ARE**

# **authentic experience seekers**



# experience

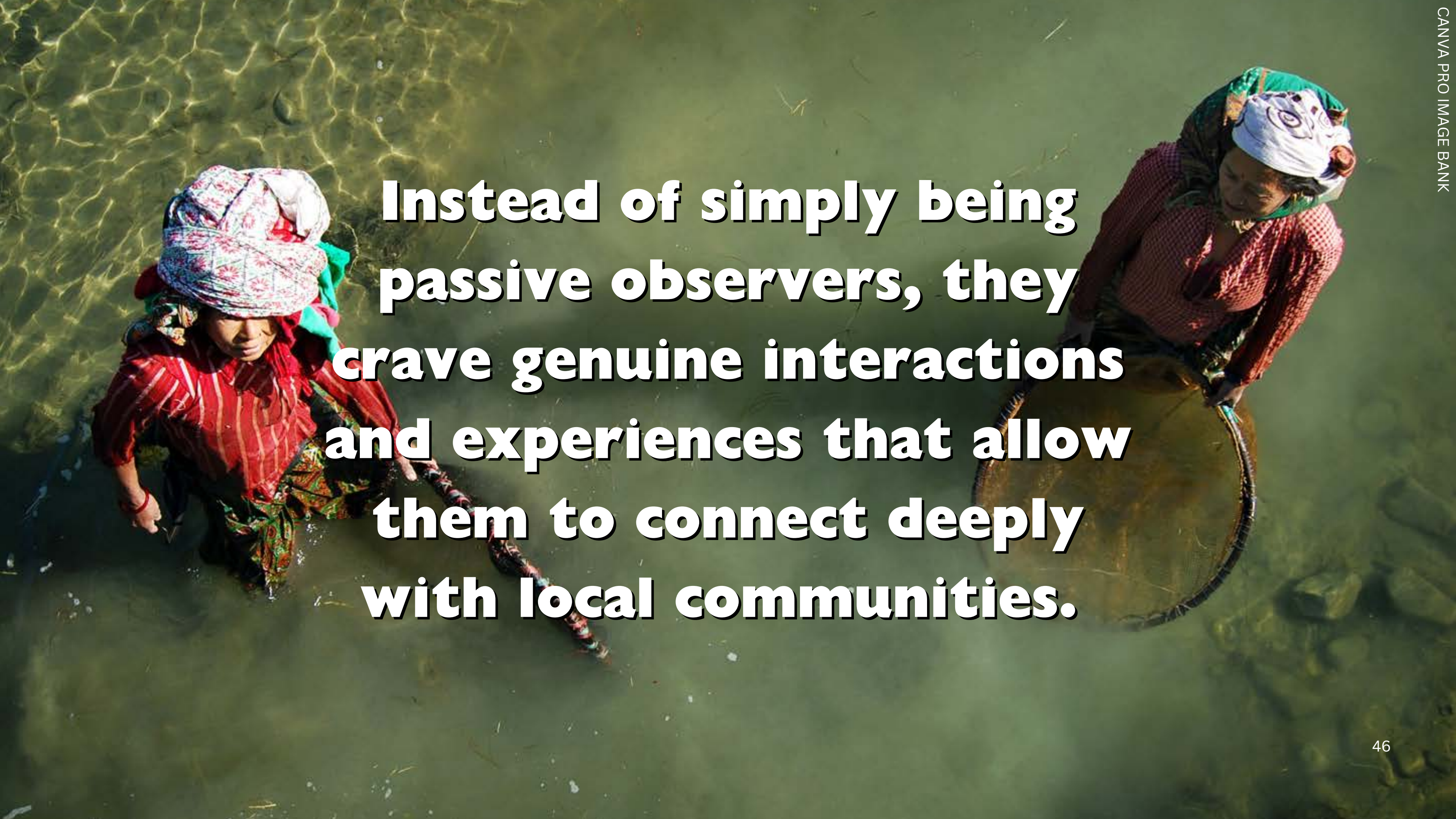
IS THE NEW LUXURY

# Luxury

IS CONNECTION

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt, dark blue jeans, and white gloves, is bent over on a rocky beach. She is holding a clear plastic bag and appears to be picking up a piece of trash. In the background, another person is visible near the ocean waves under a clear blue sky. The text 'status = AWARENESS & IMPACT' is overlaid in the center of the image.

**status =**  
**AWARENESS & IMPACT**

The image shows two women wading in shallow, clear water. The woman on the left is wearing a red and white striped shirt and a colorful, patterned headscarf. She has a large, round basket or basket on her head. The woman on the right is wearing a red and white checkered shirt and a white headscarf with a colorful pattern. She is holding a large, round wooden bowl or basket. The water is clear, and the background is a soft, out-of-focus green. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**Instead of simply being passive observers, they crave genuine interactions and experiences that allow them to connect deeply with local communities.**



**Let's look  
at key  
trends.**



# Community Development

**Youth empowerment, teaching drama, IT, English, literacy, other languages, physical education, special educational needs, disaster relief, refugee projects, psychology etc.**





# Environment

**Sea turtle and coastal conservation, shark conservation, rainforest conservation, primate conservation, rhino conservation, Galapagos island conservation, African savannah, protect the oceans etc.**

# Health Care

**Dentistry, medicine, midwifery, nursing, nutrition, pharmacy, physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, public health etc.**



# Child Care

**Child care, disability care, general care, social work**

**In the evolving landscape of global travel and volunteer opportunities, it's essential to approach specific sectors with increased awareness and sensitivity. One such sector is "Child Care Tourism," particularly concerning orphanage tourism.**

# Human Rights

**Human rights internship, women empowerment, law internship etc.**

# Agriculture

**Agriculture encompasses a wide range of activities beyond traditional farming; crop cultivation, sustainable agriculture, agroforestry, permaculture, organic farming, livestock management, beekeeping, fisheries, seed banks and much more.**

# Cultural Preservation & Research

**This is usually a specialized niche that includes art restoration, archaeology, historical building restoration, volunteering in museums and historical sites, and documenting oral history and intangible cultural heritage.**

**Here are some  
of the key  
ethical  
problems  
associated  
with  
voluntourism:**





# Short-Term vs Long-Term

## Needs:

**Many voluntourism trips are short-term, sometimes only a week or two. This can sometimes lead to projects that provide immediate satisfaction for volunteers but don't address the long-term needs or desires of the community.**



# Unskilled Labor:

**Volunteers might take on tasks they're not qualified for, such as construction or teaching, which can lead to subpar results or even harm. This can sideline local professionals who could do the job more effectively.**



# Cultural Insensitivity:

**Without proper preparation and cultural understanding, volunteers might unknowingly disrespect local customs or values.**

# **‘White Savior’ Complex:**

**Voluntourism can perpetuate the notion of westerners "saving" less privileged communities, which can be demeaning and perpetuate stereotypes.**

# **Economic Displacement:**

**By offering free labor, voluntourists can sometimes take away jobs from local workers, impacting the local economy negatively.**

# Orphanage Tourism:

**One of the more controversial aspects of voluntourism revolves around orphanages. Visiting or volunteering in orphanages can perpetuate a harmful system where children are sometimes kept in poverty to attract continuous volunteer donations.**



# Dependency:

**Continuous influx of volunteers can sometimes lead communities to become dependent on foreign aid and assistance rather than building sustainable, local solutions.**

# **Lack of Background Checks:**

**Some organizations don't conduct thorough background checks, which can be especially problematic for volunteers working with vulnerable populations, like children.**

# Mismanagement of Funds:

**Not all organizations allocate funds transparently or efficiently. There's concern about how much of the money paid by voluntourists actually reaches the intended community or cause.**






A collage of travel-related items including a map, a yellow toy airplane, a silver compass, and a black camera.

# Commercialization:

**As voluntourism has become more popular, some organizations prioritize profit over genuine impact, leading to "experience-first" projects that might not benefit local communities.**



**Despite these challenges, many noble projects around the world diligently ensure the integrity and sustainability of volunteer initiatives, taking great care to align benefits with community needs.**

# Nepal

- **KEY PROJECTS: EARTHQUAKE REBUILDING EFFORTS, TEACHING ENGLISH, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HEALTHCARE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN THE ANNAPURNA REGION.**
- **HIGHLIGHTS: A RICH CULTURAL EXPERIENCE WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO TREK THE HIMALAYAS OR VISIT ANCIENT TEMPLES.**

# Costa Rica

- **KEY PROJECTS: WILDLIFE AND SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION, REFORESTATION, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND TEACHING ENGLISH.**
- **HIGHLIGHTS: A BIODIVERSE COUNTRY KNOWN FOR ITS RAINFORESTS, VOLCANOES, AND PRISTINE BEACHES.**

# Kenya

- **KEY PROJECTS: WILDLIFE CONSERVATION (PARTICULARLY THE BIG FIVE), HEALTHCARE INITIATIVES, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND EDUCATION.**
- **HIGHLIGHTS: THE CHANCE TO WITNESS THE GREAT MIGRATION IN THE MAASAI MARA AND IMMERSE ONESELF IN MAASAI CULTURE.**

# Camboodia

- **KEY PROJECTS: TEACHING ENGLISH, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HEALTHCARE INITIATIVES, AND ORPHANAGE WORK (THOUGH THIS LAST ONE IS CONTROVERSIAL AND SHOULD BE APPROACHED WITH CAUTION).**
- **HIGHLIGHTS: EXPLORING ANCIENT WONDERS LIKE ANGKOR WAT AND DIVING INTO THE RICH HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE KHMER PEOPLE.**

# Peru

- **KEY PROJECTS: RESTORATION AND MAINTENANCE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES (LIKE MACHU PICCHU), COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ANDEAN VILLAGES, ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN THE AMAZON RAINFOREST, AND TEACHING ENGLISH.**
- **HIGHLIGHTS: THE RICH INCAN HISTORY, DIVERSE LANDSCAPES FROM MOUNTAINS TO RAINFORESTS, AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN CITIES LIKE CUSCO.**

**As the appeal of voluntourism continues to grow globally, it's imperative for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to approach it with awareness and discernment. While voluntourism can offer valuable opportunities for community growth, skill development, and global collaboration, it's not without its challenges.**



VOLUNTEER

**Recommendations to MSME's:**



# Thorough Vetting:

**Ensure a thorough selection process for voluntourists to match your enterprise's needs.**



# **Cultural Orientation:**

**Provide volunteers with an introduction to local customs, expectations, and business practices.**

# **Clear Communication:**

**Maintain open channels of communication with both volunteers and local employees to address concerns and ensure harmonious collaboration.**



# **Sustainability Focus:**

**Prioritize projects that can continue to benefit your enterprise even after volunteers depart.**



**Sri Lanka, with its rich cultural heritage, diverse ecosystems, and history of both natural and man-made challenges, offers various areas where volunteer tourism can make a positive impact. Here are some top areas where Sri Lanka can benefit from voluntourism...**

## **Environmental Conservation:**

**With its diverse flora and fauna, projects can focus on rainforest conservation, wildlife protection (especially for endemic species), and marine conservation including turtle sanctuaries.**

# **Cultural Heritage and Preservation:**

**Sri Lanka boasts a rich tapestry of historical and cultural landmarks. Volunteers can assist in restoration projects, documenting traditional practices, or even aiding in museums.**





**Education:**

Teaching English, IT, or other skills can empower local communities, especially in rural areas.

Volunteers can also assist in training teachers or developing educational materials.

## **Healthcare:**

**Support in rural health clinics, awareness campaigns for diseases, or even specialized medical camps can help communities with limited access to healthcare facilities.**

## **Post-Disaster Reconstruction:**

**In the aftermath of natural disasters, such as tsunamis or floods, volunteers can play roles in rebuilding communities, homes, and infrastructure.**



## **Agriculture and Organic Farming:**

**Given that agriculture plays a significant role in Sri Lanka's economy, volunteers can assist in sustainable farming practices, organic farming initiatives, or training farmers in new techniques.**

A photograph of two women walking away from the camera on a dirt path. They are carrying large metal water pots on their heads. The woman in the foreground is wearing a grey patterned headscarf and a dark skirt. The woman behind her is wearing a colorful headscarf and a blue and yellow patterned top. The background shows a lush green tea plantation on a hillside.

## **Community Development:**

**Engaging with local communities to build essential facilities, support local artisans, or even assist in grassroots-level initiatives can lead to sustainable growth.**



## **Women Empowerment:**


**Initiatives that focus on skill development, self-employment opportunities, or health awareness specifically tailored for women.**

A young man with dark, curly hair is shown in profile, looking down and to the left. He has a thoughtful or somber expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The lighting is soft, highlighting his features.

## **Mental Health Awareness:**

**Given many factors including civil conflict, there's a need to address trauma and mental health issues.**

**Volunteers with expertise in psychology or counseling can engage in awareness campaigns or therapeutic sessions.**



**When considering volunteer tourism in Sri Lanka, it's essential to ensure that efforts are culturally sensitive, sustainable, and in line with the needs and wishes of the local communities. Working with local organizations and NGOs can provide a framework for effective and ethical engagement.**



**Here are some reputed  
volunteer organizations:**

REPUTATION  
IS EVERYTHING



Make a difference in 2023! Discover our cheapest programs >



Destinations ▾ Projects ▾ Travel Styles ▾ How it works ▾ Pricing About ▾



CONTACT

APPLY

MyIVHQ

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER HQ WEBSITE

**International Volunteer HQ (IVHQ):  
Offers affordable volunteer programs in  
various sectors across different countries.**

# International Volunteer HQ

World's #1 rated volunteer travel organization

Excellent ★★★★★ Trustpilot 4.8 out of 5

310 projects 44 countries 1 to 24 weeks

Where do you want to go?  
Select your top destinations

What do you want to do?  
Select the causes you care about

SEARCH

Or explore best options for:

Solo

Teens

Gap Year

Families

Over 40s

Groups

Medical

Mission Trips





FIND A PROJECT

DESTINATIONS ▾

PROJECT TYPE ▾

WHO VOLUNTEERS ▾



**Pod Volunteer:**  
**Offers projects in conservation, animal welfare & community.**

## FEATURED PROJECTS



VOLUNTEER WITH ELEPHANTS  
ABROAD

[Find Out More](#)



MARINE CONSERVATION  
VOLUNTEERING ABROAD

[Find Out More](#)



ANIMAL VOLUNTEER WORK

[Find Out More](#)



# **WWOOF**

## **Worldwide opportunities on organic Farms.**



### **Learn**

By lending a helping hand and participating in a cultural and educational exchange.

Check Experiences



132543 volunteers since 1992

★★★★★ Rated Excellent

Gold standard for safety

Hassle-free approach

Risk-Free Refund Policy

# Volunteer Abroad & Internships

Trusted projects that make a real impact

## Projects Abroad

One of the largest volunteer abroad organizations, they offer a wide range of projects, from childcare to marine conservation.

Projects ▾ Destinations ▾ Search

# Where do you want to go?



Africa



Asia



Europe



Australasia



Latin America

## **GO ECO**

**Offers sustainable volunteer travel opportunities in environmental and community projects around the world.**

Volunteer Abroad in over 40 countries and 150 affordable programs. From working with exotic wildlife to teaching English to children, from guided projects for teens to international internships for students - we offer something for everyone! [read more](#)



# VOLUNTEER ABROAD


OPEN TO ALL NATIONALITIES WITH PMGY

**Plan my gap year**

**Offering affordable and impactful projects in developing countries.**



**14 DESTINATIONS | 1-40 WEEKS | SAFE & SECURE**

A woman with her hair in a ponytail, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a blue and white patterned skirt, is leaning out of the window of a bright blue train. She is looking out at a lush green landscape with trees and a blue sky with white clouds. The train is moving through the landscape, and the background is slightly blurred, suggesting motion.

**Sri Lanka, with its rich tapestry of cultures, ecosystems, and histories, offers a unique backdrop for the transformative journey of volunteer tourism.**




**Yet, as with all journeys, the integrity and authenticity of the experience are paramount. MSMEs stand at the forefront of this endeavor, ensuring that each voluntourism effort leaves a positive, lasting imprint on both the traveler and the community.**



**By embracing best practices, ethical guidelines, and genuine collaborations, Sri Lanka can not only enhance its tourism sector but also foster sustainable development, mutual understanding, and global connections.**





**Here's to crafting meaningful, enriching, and impactful voluntourism experiences on the enchanting island of Sri Lanka.**

