

VOLUNTEER TOURISM: CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
THROUGH THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Volunteer tourism is a growing form of tourism. Although volunteer tourism is a form of traveling, it should not be considered part of the mass tourism industry. The purpose of volunteer tourism is to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between volunteers/travelers and their respective host countries. This tourism experience should allow for volunteers to develop a sense of self-awareness as well as to develop a deeper cross-cultural understanding. Through exploring their narratives, this paper will examine the development of that cross-cultural understanding in people who have participated or would like to participate in volunteer tourism programs in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. This paper expects to discover that both groups develop a greater cross-cultural understanding from their experiences within global communities. Although critics see volunteer tourism as being a selfish enforcement of colonialist stereotypes, it potentially offers volunteers an opportunity to interact with the host community in a positive manner, resulting in a respect for and understanding of the host country's culture.

Keywords: cross-cultural understanding, volunteer tourism, voluntourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Volunteer tourism is a relatively new branch of the tourism sector that is sometimes undifferentiated from other forms of tourism, including ecotourism, alternative tourism, and social work. This paper will be a qualitative study of the impacts of volunteer tourism on the participants. It will analyze whether volunteering internationally fosters cross-cultural understanding for participants and, if so, to what extent the volunteer gains a greater self-awareness. In examining the personal accounts from volunteer tourists about their experiences abroad, I aim to determine the motivations, expectations, knowledge gained and difference between volunteer tourism and just touring.

2. BACKGROUND AND POTENTIAL RESEARCH

As a volunteer tourist, two years ago, I spent three months living, learning, and working in the rain forest of Costa Rica in the ecotourism, environmental education and reforestation industry. I was essentially an eco-tour guide for these three months, leading groups of tourists through 850 acres of beautiful, pristine rain forest. On the tours I would teach the tourists about local flora and fauna and share with them the knowledge I had gained while living there. The idea was to foster a deeper appreciation for the natural world through educational experiences in tropical environments. It has been said that people cannot value what they do not understand, and so the hope was that through understanding the local plants and animals of the rainforest, the tourists would attribute value to it. As the tour guide, I would lead groups on horseback rides, and in waterfall rappelling and zip lining while explaining the importance of preserving the rainforest.

The ability to share the knowledge I had accumulated while living in this environment with travelers and tourists helped me to better understand the impact tourism can have on developing cross-cultural understanding. When facilitated properly, the volunteer tourism experience can generate a better understanding of the communities and culture of another country. Through immersing oneself in the culture of that other country, one is able to experience the lifestyle of this community and thus attribute value to it. I was able to be a part of the community at the eco-park and within the surrounding communities, and this allowed me to fully immerse myself in the Costa Rican culture. I experienced first-hand what the lifestyle here was like and what different communities were facing in Costa Rica. For example, the eco-park where I worked had a reforestation project but the staff was having trouble taking care of the saplings because they lacked a director and volunteers to maintain the trees and physically do the plantings. The staff were really grateful that I was willing to do the plantings and take care of the saplings during my stay at the eco-park, and although my contribution was small, I did feel I was making a difference.

On my off days I would volunteer with a local reforestation group in Playa Hermosa, Costa Rica. The mission of this group was to reforest the shorelines of the beach, which had been heavily deforested due to cattle ranching. Cattle ranching is a common form of income for many Costa Ricans, but it has harmful effects on the environment related to soil erosion and deforestation to create grazing pastures. The beach I worked at was a common place for sea turtles to lay their eggs but without the proper balance of sun and shade, the eggs would all hatch as one gender. This would clearly affect future populations, inhibiting the reproduction of these species. Through

this reforestation project I gained a lot of knowledge about tropical trees, their importance to the local communities and ecosystem, and the environmental issues the community faces. One tree we planted often along the beach was the Almendro tree (*Dipteryx panamensis*), a salt-tolerant, shade tree that can prevent further beach erosion (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2015). I was volunteering with a local organization dedicated to reforesting the shorelines of Playa Hermosa to ensure the stability of turtle species. The ability to interact with local residents and share their interests and passions gave me a deeper understanding of the Costa Rican people and communities.

Not only have I been able to volunteer in Costa Rica, I have been able to lead groups abroad on similar trips with a focus on volunteer tourism. I became a founding partner in an up-and-coming company called Las Olas Travel, an international volunteer company in both Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Las Olas Travel focuses on volunteer tourism and making a lasting impact within the communities and their surrounding environments. The goal of this company is to foster this idea of cross-cultural understanding through our volunteer programs and to continue to develop our organization with this in mind. Through this experience I have come to understand the volunteers' motivations, expectations. Through participating in reforestation projects, working in animal rehabilitation, and teaching English to local communities, I have noticed a deeper self-awareness in myself, in addition to a cross-cultural appreciation and understanding of the cultures and communities in which I have volunteered. I have also seen this awareness in the volunteers I have led abroad and would like to explore ways in which Las Olas Travel could further foster this deeper understanding by facilitating knowledge prior to, during, and after volunteer programs.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Volunteer tourism is a relatively new branch of the tourism sector, and because of this, it is sometimes undifferentiated from other forms of tourism including ecotourism, educational tourism, alternative tourism, and social work. Stephen Wearing defines volunteer tourism as applying to those tourists who “volunteer in an organized way. . . that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment” (Wearing, 2001). Volunteer tourism is therefore seen to be a mutually beneficial form of travel in which both the volunteer and the host community benefit in some way, whether it be through physical labor, cultural understanding, or financial assistance. Laura Ann Hamersley has also defined volunteer tourism as “utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to participate in a period of engagement and contribution to the local, national or world community” (Hammersley, 2014). Volunteer tourism programs occur all over the world, in rainforests, conservation areas, biological reserves and sensitive ecosystems. Typical projects associated with volunteer tourism are reforestation, cultural restoration, agricultural development, animal rehabilitation, and English instruction to at-risk children.

Most of the scholarly research in this area “focuses on three domains: volunteer tourists, organizing entities, and local communities” (Kirillova, 2014). It concentrates on community-based tourism programs that “aim to promote both conservation and community wellbeing (Butcher & Smith, 2010). Some critics of volunteer tourism claim that these programs “externalize the development process, empower paying volunteers as saviors with their Western knowledge and education, and function more as a volunteer

traveler's quest for career development than as a development tool" (Lupoli & Morse, 2015). Lupoli and Morse suggest that many motives of volunteer tourists may be selfish, emphasizing volunteer's personal or professional development rather than development within the communities they are working in. While this may be true in some cases and may vary based on the different types of people and the organizations they go through, it should not be generalized for all volunteer tourism programs. It should be a shared responsibility between the volunteer and the organization to promote cultural understanding through knowledge facilitation before, during and after the volunteer tourism trip. This paper places emphasis on the volunteer tourists, their motivations and knowledge gained, as well as the distinction between volunteer tourism and the mass tourism industry.

One thing that separates the volunteer tourism industry from other forms of tourism is the opportunity for volunteers to live with and interact with local communities, which may contribute to their overall understanding of the culture they are volunteering in. Cross-cultural understanding is defined as gaining a "sophisticated understandings of the local culture in which [volunteers] participate" and becoming more aware of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental issues the local community faces (Hall & Raymond, 2008). By developing cross-cultural understanding people learn to "recognize, interpret and correctly react to people, incidences or situations that are open to misunderstanding due to cultural difference" (Kirillova, 2014). In order to gain this cross-cultural understanding, the volunteer must first develop an open-minded approach to break down any pre-existing stereotypes and power assumptions of "us and them" (Hammersley, 2014). This concept, originally developed by Laura Ann Hammersley,

implies that there is potential harm associated with volunteer tourism. One danger is that volunteers might “assume expertise or expect to contribute their existing skills” while “disregarding the existing knowledge, skills and expertise” of the host community (Hammersley, 2014). By assuming superiority of knowledge the volunteers may enforce stereotypes dating back to colonialist times of European supremacy. Hammersley also suggests that companies working in the volunteer tourism industry can help prevent this and promote a healthy relationship between volunteers and host communities by “facilitating greater volunteer knowledge prior to travel” and by including critical reflections on the volunteer motivations, expectations and reflections on their volunteer tourism experience (Hammersley, 2014). By understanding that volunteers are “here to learn not here to help,” they are accepting that they are guests in the local community and must respect local cultures and practices without considering themselves an expert in any particular field (Hammersley, 2014). A volunteer needs to avoid “underestimating the contribution that host communities can make to volunteers’ knowledge, skills and experiences” (Hammersley, 2014). This approach to volunteer tourism can help diffuse existing colonialist stereotypes and power assumptions between developed and developing nations. Individual volunteers will acquire different meanings from their experience and different levels of cross-cultural understanding. This variance is mainly due to “their own cultural and social backgrounds, the purpose of their visits,” their previous understanding of the culture’s values and norms, the observed values while volunteering, and “the relationships of power between visitor and host cultures” (Wearing, 2001).

Hammersley explores the idea of cross-cultural understanding being developed through a systematic method of self-reflection and pre-departure knowledge of the community and culture the volunteer will be immersed in. The purpose of “facilitating greater volunteer knowledge prior to travel” and a critical evaluation and reflection both during and after the volunteer tourism experience can influence volunteers’ “expectations and understandings of their experiences” (Hammersley, 2014). This calls for volunteer service organizations to “maximize the learning potential” for future volunteers in order to develop a deep cross-cultural understanding (Hammersley, 2014).

4. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many critics claim that volunteering internationally has the potential to reinforce a colonialist stereotype that perpetuates power inequalities stemming “from neo-colonial constructions of Western superiority” (Hammersley, 2014). However, this stereotype can be mitigated through continuous self-reflection by the volunteer, greater access to cultural values, practices and knowledge prior to departure, and the development of an open-minded approach of “here to learn not here to help” (Hammersley, 2014). Deep cross-cultural understanding can be generated from volunteer tourism experiences, allowing volunteers not only to make a difference in the places they volunteer, but also to foster a greater self-awareness and understanding of the culture around them. The question this paper seeks to explore is whether volunteer tourism can foster a deeper cross-cultural understanding for participants.

5. METHOD

This research was based on two focus groups, one of potential volunteer tourists and one of returned volunteer tourists. The potential participants were a random group of people who have not previously taken part in a volunteer tourism program. The returned volunteer tourists have previously participated in volunteer trips that I have led to either Costa Rica or Nicaragua.

An online survey provided insight into the motivations, expectations, and preconceived notions of host communities held by potential participants in a volunteer tourism program. Because they had not yet taken part in such a program, surveying potential participants provided more accurate data about the expectations and motivations for potentially doing so.

I conducted personal interviews of previous participants in volunteer tourism programs exploring their motivations, expectations and reflections on their experience. This consisted of a 20-30 minute interview regarding volunteers' cultural engagement, their perception of their impact and role within the community, and the development of cross-cultural understanding through the experience, and the differences between volunteer tourism and the mass tourism industry. The survey technique was adapted from Hammersley's suggestion of an "educative methodology" to help foster meaningful cross-cultural relationships and create a learning experience for both volunteers and communities abroad.

The potential participant survey was an anonymous survey online aiming to examine the motivations for taking part in volunteer programs and the expectations or preconceived notions the potential participants have about the culture, lifestyle, and

projects they would be working in. This survey was distributed to potential volunteers who had not yet volunteered abroad.

The post-trip and self-reflection survey allowed previous participants to further explore their reactions and experiences within a new culture, better understand their expectations, and reflect on the impact of that experience within the community and within themselves. Consisting of personal interviews with previous participants in volunteer tourism programs I have led, this part of the survey aimed to determine to what extent the volunteers are consciously gaining self-awareness and how they are interpreting their role in a new culture. The personal interviews aimed to understand the participant's reflections and opinions on the amount of community involvement, the extent of the impact made, cultural engagement, and how volunteer tourism differs from the mass tourism industry. The goal was to gain insight into the actual experiences of volunteers who participated in programs in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The expectation was that these surveys would show that cross-cultural understanding can be achieved through volunteer tourism programs and that there is a distinction between volunteer tourism and mass tourism.

6. LIMITS OF RESEARCH

This research considered the literature and previous research done on volunteer tourism as well as analyzed the effect on participants of programs I have led in Costa Rica and Nicaragua: Did they foster cross-cultural understanding? What are methods that could be implemented to deepen cross-cultural understanding? All community impacts were based on the volunteer's perceptions of the work they did and their own self-

awareness while volunteering abroad. The potential participant survey measured the response of would-be volunteers who have not yet experienced a volunteer tourism program.

7. DATA INTERPRETATION

The expectations and motivations of volunteer tourists are often complex containing multiple reasons for taking or wanting to take a trip of this nature. The motivations of volunteer tourists can be classified into four categories, as suggested by Stephen Wearing in his book “Volunteer Tourism: Experiences that make a Difference”. The first category was Altruism, which is defined as the principle of unselfish concern for the welfare of others and which relates specifically to “saving the world and doing good, but generally related to helping others” (Wearing, 2001). Previous volunteers reflect on their motivations for participating in a volunteer tourism program in Costa Rica or Nicaragua:

The whole purpose of going on this trip was to do volunteer work and be very selfless in our work (Hannah W, personal interview: 23.10.15).

I felt like I was contributing more when I got to get my hands dirty and did work that I felt was really meaningful. To plant 160 trees and looking at that afterwards, knowing that in 100 years those trees are still going to be there growing was an amazing experience (Hayden, personal interview: 22.10.15).

We worked at a small forestry and we were able to help plant seeds, maintain the plants that were already there by watering them and we also got to take some of the trees up the mountain and physically plant them. The work was more hands on and we got to physically see the impact we were making (Michael, personal interview: 23.10.15).

Many volunteer tourists had an expectation of making a tangible difference in the places where they were volunteering and had the desire to make a change or a positive impact of some kind. As shown in the reflections above, volunteers felt they were contributing the most when they could physically see the results of their work. Sometimes, however, there was an over idealistic expectation of the work they were doing that can lead to disappointment. As Hammersley mentions, “the volunteer experience is not just about the tangible aspects and outcomes of projects, but about the building of relationships of understanding” (Hammersley, 2014).

The second motivation category that Wearing discussed was Travel/Adventure, which is “related to the excitement of travel and the adventure of going to new places and meeting new people” (Wearing, 2001). This particular category also relates to tourism in general because it was the most common reason for travelling. Almost all of the volunteers interviewed shared the desire to travel and explore a new country and community, as did many of the anonymous potential participants.

The third motivation category was Personal Growth, which relates to “the participant’s wish to seek growth and learning on a personal level” but also included developing their professional interests (Wearing, 2001). Volunteers wanting to participate in volunteer tourism experiences typically desired a deeper understanding of themselves, and when given the platform for self-reflection often discovered more about themselves and how they relate to the world. Hayden Lowe, a volunteer in Costa Rica two years ago shared her reflections:

The marine project helped me grow because it gave me more insight into what it’s like working with marine animals. I want to work with sea turtles and marine

animals in the future so it allowed me to see what it takes to take care of them. One day I was able to be in a tank with a sea turtle that made me love them even more and grow my passion as well as motivate me to become a marine biologist (Hayden, personal interview: 18.11.15).

Volunteer tourism promotes self-awareness and personal growth but can also contribute to professional development. Many volunteer tourists participate in these programs in order to develop international skills that can enhance their careers and professional resumes. Some may argue that this is a very selfish way to “generate ‘cultural capital’ based on experiences which benefit [volunteer tourists] in their careers” (Butcher & Smith, 2010). In some cases this may be true, but it is also important to understand the positive effects that can arise from professional development through volunteer tourism because the volunteer “projects play a role in developing people who will, in the course of their careers and lives, act ethically in favor of those less well-off” (Butcher & Smith, 2010). Not only does this allow volunteers to consider the global community in their professional careers, but volunteering abroad can also inspire participants to develop their careers around certain experiences they had while in a host country. As Hayden showed in the above quote, working in Costa Rica with marine life such as sea turtles inspired her to continue her education in marine biology and also allowed her to develop a better understanding of volunteer work and the importance of it.

The fourth motivation category was Cultural Learning, which is “experiencing local communities along with the sense of sharing the experience with other challenges” (Wearing, 2001). This category was very important when discussing cross-cultural understanding and in determining whether volunteers inherently want to learn about other cultures. It is very important for volunteer tourism organizations to prepare volunteers by

giving them essential knowledge about the community, culture, and country they will be working in.

It was very helpful to gather together for group sessions to learn what we need to know before we go on the trip like about the culture, expenses and general expectations (Bradley, personal interview: 22.10.15).

My biggest role would probably be most similar to that as a student. I would expect learning to be the biggest component of traveling. Learning about culture, people, and Costa Rica in general (Potential volunteer, online survey: 2015).

When volunteer tourist organizations prepared the volunteers before the trip, those volunteers gained a basic understanding of the country they worked in and developed a desire to continue the learning experience while they were abroad. Many volunteers that were interviewed expressed the desire to learn about another culture and broaden their horizons in regard to international travel and cultures abroad:

I expected this trip to open my eyes to the world because I had never experienced the world before. I wanted to see a different point of view than what I'm used to and experience another culture to see how people live in comparison to the suburban lifestyle I grew up in (Hayden, personal interview: 22.10.15).

I feel like I gained a better perspective of their culture. I was able to understand how individuals live, what they do for work, and the political issues going on there that involve the animals and the environment. Once you've been to a place you are more aware of what's going on in that country and you aren't as ignorant to the issues there (Daisy, personal interview: 22.10.15).

Going on that trip changed my perspective in ways I couldn't imagine. It brought me an appreciation for the things I have in life but also of the other people's lives. It helped me appreciate the differences in cultures and countries around the world (Hannah W, personal interview: 23.10.15).

As demonstrated in the reflections above, many volunteers wanted to learn about the cultures and communities they would be working in and came back from their volunteer tourism experience with a better understanding of the issues facing different countries and the communities within them. These volunteers also gained a deeper self-awareness after attending volunteer tourism programs, whether it was in regard to social interactions or development of personal or professional skills.

I think I opened myself to other people since I've always been a naturally shy person. I had to force myself to open up to people and get to know them. It made me more outgoing as a person and not so afraid to go up to someone and spark a conversation and learn about them (Hayden, personal Interview: 22.10.15).

Some volunteers expressed stereotypes they may have had before participating in the volunteer tourism program, and noted that after their experience abroad they were able to see a different perspective and break down those stereotypes.

I'd never been out of my own culture and I didn't really know anything about other cultures since we typically just accept American created stereotypes. I was able to learn more about the country and the people and how many times the stereotypes are wrong (Hayden, personal interview: 22.10.15).

Many stereotypes existed about the lifestyle, behaviors, and attitudes of cultures around the world and some critics of volunteer tourism claim that these programs may enhance these stereotypes. However, Hammersley suggests that we can dissolve the idea of "us and them" through volunteer tourism because it allows volunteers to immerse themselves within a culture and learn about how other communities really live. Some volunteers

reflected on how this knowledge had changed their perspective upon returning from their volunteer tourism experience:

I feel like coming back I was able to give other people a better perspective about how Costa Ricans live because we don't usually see that; we see beaches and resorts but actually being part of their community we gained a better understanding of what this country is really like (Hannah C, personal interview: 23.10.15).

You don't really know what a country is going through. You might see that there is a bunch of trash on the beach and think 'I'm going to come in and fix this' but you have no idea how their system of things works (Hannah C, personal interview: 23.10.15).

These volunteer's reflections show how volunteer tourism can generate cross-cultural understanding after their trip has been completed. Once volunteers had returned from their volunteer tourism program they were able to share the knowledge they gained while abroad with other people to further dissolve stereotypes about other countries. Volunteers should be aware that it is not their role in the volunteer tourism realm to inappropriately assume expertise, because by doing this they are "disregarding the existing knowledge, skills and expertise of the local community" (Hammersley, 2014). In order to avoid this reinforcement of colonialist stereotypes that promote Western superiority, volunteer tourists must understand that they are a "listener, learner and guest" in their host communities (Hammersley, 2014).

Many communities face specific issues that cannot be solved or managed through Western ideas and systems. For example, in a rural town in Nicaragua, a majority of the people who live there litter objects that could be recycled such as plastic bottles, aluminum cans, and glass bottles. One program coordinator within the reforestation

project in Nicaragua shared that many volunteers who come to participate in reforestation have the assumption that this littering issue can be solved through recycling facilities. What the volunteers fail to realize is the amount of poverty in the area and that residents and local businesses cannot afford recycling pick up costs. The volunteers are coming into the community, assuming expertise because of how they dispose of recyclables in the United States. They then try to impose on these communities a Western system that does not work with those communities' existing knowledge and expertise. For this particular community, a lack of environmental education and the knowledge that littering and burning trash are wrong that is the core of the problem. Without the knowledge that something is wrong, why would the community want to implement recycling systems that they cannot afford?

It is also important to note the role volunteer tourism organizations play in facilitating this understanding and breaking down existing stereotypes between the global North and South. The sending organizations must first be aware that similar organizations may “represent a form of neo-colonialism or imperialism, in which volunteer tourists inadvertently reinforce the power inequalities between developed and developing countries” (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Once the sending organizations have an understanding of this issue they can develop ways to prevent that from continuing. One method to accomplish this is to have a constant flow of knowledge from the organizations to the volunteers about the communities and the dynamic issues they may be facing. With this knowledge, volunteers will be able to develop the “here to learn not here to help” attitude that can foster better relationships between the volunteers and host countries (Hammersley, 2014).

From the interviews, I found that many returned volunteer tourists believed there is a clear distinction between volunteer tourism and the mass tourism industry. While volunteer tourism is a branch of tourism, it is “one of the fastest growing trends in the global tourism industry” (Lupoli & Morse, 2015). Although it is grouped into the global tourism industry, there are important distinctions to make between volunteer tourism and general tourism.

When you just travel as a tourist you get to see more of the fancy aspects of an area but you don't get to understand what the true culture is like and what the everyday life is for some people, you only see the main highlights that are put into brochures or on tv. Whenever you volunteer you get to make more of a difference and see that you can make others happy by volunteering and in turn it makes you happy knowing that you are doing more meaningful things in the world rather than just being a tourist and walking around looking at everything (Hayden, personal interview: 23.10.15).

You can go anywhere and not really be there, but when you get to volunteer and stay with local families you can see not only how you are impacting them but how they impact you (Hannah C, personal interview: 23.10.15).

The difference between volunteer tourism and just tourist travel is that you don't get to see the actual country as a tourist. I feel like as a volunteer you get to experience more of the culture and see the actual country in a different way. You are able to experience special one on one relationships (Katie, personal interview: 23.10.15).

As seen from the above volunteer reflections, volunteer tourism allowed participants to develop unique relationships with the local community that wouldn't be created through the typical touristic experience. Volunteer tourists were able to experience the country and also participate and interact with the communities to gain a better understanding of the host country's' culture, beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles. Many times as a tourist one is

more of an observer of a community rather than an integrated member of that community. While a person can learn a lot by being the observer, many times people can gain a deeper understanding of communities by participating within them, talking with locals, and living their lifestyles.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Volunteer tourism is a rapidly growing sector of tourism but needs to be separated from the mass tourism industry because of their different goals and outcomes. When traveling with a volunteer tourism organization, a participant should be able to interact, live and work within the communities of the host country. The purpose of this experience within the community is to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between volunteers and their respective host countries. As shown by interviews of previous volunteers in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, a development of cross-cultural understanding should be and is a result of the volunteer tourism experience. Some critics say that volunteer tourism can enforce neo-colonial stereotypes and contribute to the idea of Western superiority and assumed expertise. But from the interviews conducted with previous volunteers I found that a majority of the volunteers developed a better understanding of the host country's culture, lifestyle, and issues from their volunteer tourism experiences. I also discovered that volunteers developed a greater self-awareness from their experience. Volunteer tourism is a distinctly different form of traveling than just touring because it promotes the idea of responsible travel where in one goes to countries to learn about them and the communities within them. Volunteer tourism potentially offers volunteers an opportunity to interact with the host community in a positive manner, resulting in a respect for and understanding of the host country's culture.

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APPENDIX SECTION

Survey

These are the personal interviews and their related questions.

Pre-departure Questions

- + Age, sex, country, duration of stay, projects worked in
- + What were your expectations before the trip?
- + What impacts and roles did you see yourself having within the community?
- + What was your motivation for going on this volunteer trip?
- + What were your assumptions of the culture and country before going on your trip?
- + What knowledge about the culture and community did you receive before your trip?
- + Did you feel this was a significant amount of knowledge?

Self-Reflection during trip

- + Did you keep a daily journal while volunteering abroad?
- + What were your reactions about the community and culture based on your pre-departure knowledge?
- + What contribution do you feel you are making?
- + What role do you see yourself playing in the community?
- + What expectations did you meet or not meet and why?

Post Trip Evaluation

Describe your satisfaction and thoughts about the following:

- + Cultural engagement - Do you feel you were provided with opportunities to interact with the culture?
- + Do you feel a deeper understanding of the culture you volunteered in? Why or why not?
- + Were you satisfied with the tasks you participated in? Which ones? Why or why not?
- + What was the level of career enhancement you received from this volunteer experience?
- + Do you feel you grew as a person? Why or why not? In what ways?
- + What impact do you feel you have made in the community you volunteered in?
- + What other post-trip reflections would you like to contribute?