

## **Common Mistakes Made by Rookie International Volunteers**

No matter how much research and preparation you put in before your departure, your first volunteer trip abroad is certain to come with its share of surprises, not all of them pleasant. The good news? You can review the blunders made by other first-time volunteers as a precautionary measure. Below are some of the most common mistakes made by international volunteers in their travels abroad.

1. **Packing too much.** A light packer makes a happy traveler. If there's one regret we've heard consistently from traveling volunteers, it's that they brought too much stuff. You don't want to be weighted down by a bunch of heavy bags, especially if you'll be taking public transportation or walking for long distances. Always bring less than you think you'll need.
2. **Rushing.** If you behave impatiently or give the impression that you're hurrying things along, you run the risk of offending the locals—and missing out on some of the inherent beauty and culture of the locale. Adjust to the local pace and remember that it's not a race.
3. **Dressing inappropriately.** Research the standard attire of the region before the trip and do your best to pack accordingly. Leave bright colors at home in favor of more neutral shades. Even in warm climates, it's usually wise to opt for a more conservative style of dress.
4. **Not speaking the local language.** It can be a daunting prospect to speak a foreign language if you're not fluent, but refusing to try can offend some natives. If you have at least some familiarity with the regional tongue, give it a go. If not, be sure to speak in clear, easy-to-understand English, refraining from slang or jargon.
5. **Traveling with the wrong companion.** To avoid trekking solo, many volunteers opt to make the journey with an acquaintance, only to regret it later. Choose your travel companion carefully. Make sure you select someone you know well and whose personality blends with yours. And if you can't find someone, keep in mind that making the excursion alone can bring rewarding benefits, such as meeting new people and enjoying full control over your activities.
6. **Exhibiting bad table manners.** If a local offers you a regional dish that appears less than appetizing, resist the urge to decline, which may come across as an insult. Accept graciously and give it a try—after all, it may taste better than it looks.

Of course, it's impossible to predict every potential mistake of your first trip abroad, but learning as much as possible about the culture and customs of your destination should keep the missteps to a minimum.