

Basics of Environmental Volunteering: How Can You Get Started?

Each country in the world boasts of unique beauty. Where Australia has lush forests and arid landscapes in equal measure, the flora and fauna of Canada are renowned for their diversity. Maintaining the natural ecology of a region and hence, the country, is down to the efforts of several local and national organisations working round the clock to ensure that animals, birds, aquatic life and flora continue to thrive, especially in protected areas.

If you have been toying with the idea of volunteering with such organisations, but are unsure, we've compiled a set of guidelines about what to know and how to get started:

*** Ask yourself: 'What are my motivations to do this?'**

The first step is to find what drives your passion in environmental volunteering. Finding a cause that lights a fire in you can help you zero in on the local organisations working for those causes. You are also more likely to invest more time and resources in volunteering if you are allied with a cause close to your heart. So, start with finding your primary driving force.

*** Work with reputed organisations:**

Offer your time to organisations that you rely on and which have a proven track record.

*** Have the right expectations:**

Volunteering is an all-encompassing world. You can donate your time, money or professional skills to further the aims of the cause you are allied with. Take the time to assess what you can offer in terms of volunteering. Some people are great at fundraising, others are adept at using social media to garner attention for a cause. Still others can offer their professional skills in accounting and advocacy to help a local centre working for the flora and fauna of Canada. Pondering over what you can offer can help you align with the right organisation and have the right set of expectations from the work. For example, some environmental volunteering work requires traveling to remote locations in Canada, living in the outdoors, working for most of the day, etc. - in this case, expect not to have a warm bed, hot food or even a lot of sleep while you're working.

*** What to pack for out-of-country work:**

Some environmental volunteering work may take you outside the Canadian borders. If it does, you should carry your passport, credit card(s), visa, emergency contact information, flight schedules, and a letter from the organisation that you are travelling with, attesting to your presence in the designated region for specific tasks. Ask them to provide you with an ID that you can show if stopped in another country. Other than these documents, you must pack light in terms of clothing. Do carry essential medicines, rubber gloves, bug repellent sprays, rubber soled boots, and so on.

*** The right etiquette is important:**

When you volunteer for an organisation, especially in another city or country, you must display the correct etiquette in terms of dressing and behaving appropriately, and showing respect and consideration for the region that you go to. This last entails being respectful of indigenous cultures, being ecologically sensitive in your use of the region while working, abiding by local laws, etc. The organisation you work with expects you to represent them in the best way possible at all times.

*** Know how your donations are used:**

If you volunteer during your time off at a local centre and make regular donations, you have the

right to ask how your contribution is used. Ethical organisations will offer a report of annual expenses and how donations were used to feed and medicate animals, pay staff salaries, fund research, and so on. Or you can contribute to fundraisers aimed at raising money for specific causes; most organisations readily offer an immediate receipt of payment.