

# **#2 Volunteerism and orphanage tourism: To do, or not to do? This is the question.**

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[Voluntarism \[ vol-uhn-teer-iz-uhm \]](#) The policy or practice of volunteering one's time or talents for charitable, educational, or other worthwhile activities, especially in one's community.

## **The United Nations**

The United Nations Volunteers believe that volunteerism can help expand and mobilize constituencies and engage people in national planning and implementation for the Sustainable Development Goals. They also believe volunteers help leave no one behind by reaching out to people, including those marginalized or difficult to reach, to bring people's voices and knowledge into collective actions (UN Volunteers, 2021).



## Why (not) volunteer?

There are many reasons to why people opt in to volunteer; giving back to the community and contribute to the world is generally a popular reason. Another reason on the top of the list is 'filling a gap year', experiencing the unknown while donating your time and efforts to a cause that means something to you, and not asking for anything in return. Sounds good, right? In theory, volunteering may save lives and contribute to improved conditions; But can your efforts unintentionally cause harm without you knowing? Are you causing more harm than good? Let's hope not. There are so many charities and organisations seeking volunteers worldwide, choosing the ones influencing positive changes and leaving people and places better off is hard, and is not always clear. Therefore, sustainable volunteering is crucial. What to look out for? Read on!

## **To do, or not to do?**

Sustainable volunteering is a commitment to giving back without leaving a destructive footprint. It is all about having a positive, lasting impact on communities, by respecting their needs and sensitivities. Before your journey begins to volunteer, you need to educate yourself and be conscious of the impact you are really having (David Garcia, 2019).

Think about the commitments you are about to make and the time you can spare for that cause. How long will you stick around? Will you be a 'weekend warrior', or a 'temporary resident'? Do you have skills and knowledge to pass on, so you leave a strengthened community behind? Once you leave, will they be able to continue the work and use the knowledge you give them? Are you emotionally 'there'-will you be able to handle what you see? These are some of the questions you must ask yourself prior to volunteering. Bear in mind: you may see and experience such acts that are not acceptable in your world, and are unlikely to ever happen; But remember, you will not be in your world. Your research and preparation prior to any visit are the way to avoid causing harm to the community and your own self.

## **The real crime may hide behind good intentions**

Orphanage tourism is a subsector of volunteer tourism or 'voluntourism' which refers to travelling overseas to 'do good' in other communities, often by visiting children in residential care facilities, usually located in less developed countries. It stems from the desire to give back to the host communities that one visits (Kate Doore, 2021). However, there is a huge debate and a great moral dilemma about the impact of volunteer tourism. According to [UNICEF](#) by volunteering in orphanages, many well-intentioned tourists are supporting an industry that tears families apart and exploits children. The long-term impact

on orphans is unclear, but it seems children develop unrealistic expectations about their futures (Freidus, 2017).



## The Big Issue

By volunteering at an orphanage, you may be contributing to separating children and their families and, worse, putting children at risk. The popularity of volunteering in orphanages is increasing, however these types of programmes - though often supported by well-meaning tourists - can fuel human trafficking, exploitation of children and harm their development. Both UNICEF and [Lumos](#) (a charity working to end the systematic institutionalisation of children worldwide) agree that many children in orphanages are not orphans, instead, they have been separated from their families to attract fee-paying volunteers who arrive with high hopes and good intentions, a desire to help.

## It is a global problem

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**80%**

on average 80% of children in orphanages have a living parent.



**5.4 Million**

An estimated 5.4 Million children are living in institutions worldwide.

Children belong with their families, not institutions. The consequences are devastating when children are torn away from their parents or caregivers and develop bonds with volunteers. Each time they get closer to someone (like you?) they experience a loss when you leave. I must also plant this question in your head: if you are not a qualified professional or social worker, do you belong there despite all your efforts wanting to support those children? Would you be able to walk into a children's home in your home country, and offer your services? The answer is probably no- this must raise an alarm.

Instead, if you want to help children, you may want to consider supporting care services and community projects where keeping children with their families is the aim.

Having good intentions is not enough. We are responsible for the impact we cause, leave behind and carry with ourselves. According to Freidus (2017) voluntourists often leave with superficial understandings of poverty and culture.

## [The Love you give - Pledge](#)

The Love You Give campaign is working to end orphanage volunteering and instead focuses on and promotes programmes designed to prevent family separation.

The following short film (20 minutes) opens untold stories of orphanages.

**\*Viewer discretion advised\***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDOzyoQHQOs&feature=youtu.be>

Planning a visit? Think twice!

Read on for #3 Slummary or summary?