

# Preparation

## **Q: Do I need to have certain skills before I arrive?**

A: It's best to prepare for the experience by doing your own research on your host country, it's history, and development issues related to your program. Generally, if you are accepted to the program, we have assessed that you already have the skills required to participate.

## **Q: What does VET do to prepare interns for their programs abroad?**

A: VET will place you with an organization and host-family prior to your arrival. You'll have a chance to speak with the staff on the ground before you arrive to answer any questions. Check out the participant section of the [Resource Center](#) in order to prepare for your program. We expect that you will also prepare yourself by conducting research about your travel abroad.

## **Q: What flight options are suggested or frequently used? When should I start looking at flights?**

A: You are welcome to look at costs for flights as soon as you wish, and you should aim to book your flight at least a month in advance. You should wait to book your flight until after you have been accepted to the program, confirmed your participation with VET, and understand the requirements you need for entry (visa, immunizations, etc). Your predeparture packet will have additional information about your arrival.

## **Q: Do I need a visa to participate?**

A: You can find out the requirements for your stay in your host country by visiting your passport country's guidelines for getting a visa which can often be found on the country embassy web page. **For US citizens, check the US State Department website** for travel to the country where you are going. Note that visa processing times vary depending on your destination. Particularly, visas to India can be time intensive, varying from 2 weeks to 3 months to process.

## **Q: Do I need vaccinations?**

A: Check with your physician and the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) for guidelines on what health precautions and immunizations are recommended or required for entry.

## In-Country

**Q: Is airport pick up and drop off included in the program or do I have to arrange that myself?**

A: The VET site team will pick you up from the local airport (see [Applicant Essentials](#) of the Resource Center for what airport you should fly into), and transport you to the location of orientation. They will also arrange your drop off at the end of your program. Note that these are normally arranged as group transportation so you should talk with a member of your site team to determine the timeframe you should plan to arrive and depart.

**Q: Where does orientation take place?**

A: Orientation typically takes place in a hotel or guest house before transporting you to your host family. The time spent in the guesthouse varies depending on the length of stay in your program. Shorter programs often involve a day or two at a hotel so that you can spend the majority of your time in the community, while longer programs often include up to a week at a hotel to ensure you intensive training that sets you up for successful immersion into the culture.

**Q: What do host families provide for VET participants?**

A: Host families provide a cultural link to the local community in which VET participants work, as well as providing a clean and safe location for the participant to stay for the duration of the internship. They provide three meals of local cuisine every day and a private room for the participant, as well as opportunities to join them in cultural/family activities.

## Host-Families

**Q: How are host families selected and matched with participants?**

A: Host families are selected from VET's network of community members who have expressed a desire to assist participants with their cultural integration,

and who meet our standards of health and safety. Most families are identified through recommendations and local networks of our in-country staff.

**Q: What is a typical host family like?**

A: All host families are local community members, and the living conditions of a typical host family are “middle class” by local standards. The sizes and dynamics vary, and participants are matched up with host families based on individual preferences.

**Q: Can special medical/physical/dietary needs be accommodated?**

A; Host families are able to accommodate special dietary needs (within reason). Host families understand common allergies (milk, gluten, peanuts), and can also accommodate for vegetarian and vegan diets within.

**Q: Can I arrange my own accommodations instead or stay at a hotel?**

A: In general, VET discourages participants from staying in alternative accommodations, but exceptions may be made in cases in which participants will be in the host community for a short time period.

**Q: Do host families speak English?**

A: For sites in Kenya, Uganda, and India, VET strives to ensure that at least one person in the home speaks English. In India, most host families do not have English speakers in the home. Since English is not widely spoken across all VET sites, many participants find that learning to communicate with their families in different ways often enriches their immersion into the culture.

**Q: When will interns know about their host family placement?**

A: Interns will be given host family information two weeks before the program start date. We do not provide family placements further in advance so that the chances for unexpected changes are minimized.

**Q: How close will my host family's residence be to my host organization?**

A: Distances between host-family residences and host organizations vary. However, the in-country orientation will cover day-to-day details such as

navigation of public transit systems and how to get to and from the host organization. We strive to ensure that you are not traveling far distances each day to get to work, but we also want to ensure that interns are placed with the best match in terms of host-family and organization.

## **Host-Organizations**

**Q: How are organizations selected and matched with participants?**

A: VET partners with organizations with deep roots in the community, have goals that align with VET's approach to development, and meet VET's standards for health and safety of participants. We make placements to ensure that the interests of the participant align with the priorities of the organization, thus fostering a mutually beneficial experience.

**Q: Can I get in touch with your partners directly?**

A: As part of VET's agreement with partners, we do not share their contact information with those who are not participating in the program. After you apply and have been accepted, you are more than welcome to have conversations with your host organization colleagues.

**Q: Will anyone at the organization speak English?**

A: English is one of the official languages in India. Your main supervisor will speak some English, but often your colleagues will speak in the local language to each other. With these sites, basic language is taught during orientation so you have a way to converse and build relationships..

## **Safety/Security**

**Q: What safety measures are put in place to minimize risk for interns/volunteers?**

A: Safety is VET's number one priority. We work with our international sites to develop emergency protocols and safety standards. We also train our host families and partner organizations on our safety and security protocols.

**Q: Do you have site-specific information on safety?**

A: VET operates in locations that do not pose an increased safety risk to participants. Of course, participants must be diligent in ensuring their own safety and are briefed on this during orientation. Site-specific safety information is provided to interns in a predeparture packet and reviewed in detail during the in-country orientation. Feel free to contact us if you have any specific questions or concerns about the safety of our international sites.

**Q: Do you have site-specific information on transportation to and from the host organization?**

A: Site-specific information on transportation to and from the host organization is provided to participants during the in-country orientation. Most commonly participants take public transportation to and from their host organization.

## **Health**

**Q: What are the most common illnesses at your sites?**

A: For health information for specific sites, participants should refer to the CDC website to learn about health concerns and appropriate vaccinations. Once participants arrive in their host community, they will also receive a health briefing during the in-country orientation.

**Q: What are some general precautions that interns should take in order to avoid illness?**

A: Interns should follow the recommendations of the CDC with regard to their specific internship site. This includes getting the appropriate vaccinations and following recommendations about mosquito netting, insect repellent, and clothing guidelines.

**Q: How do I learn about the immunizations and health precautions I need to take?**

A: Please check with your physician and the CDC to review immunizations required and recommended for travel.

**Q: Who can I contact in case I get sick and need assistance or miss work?**

A: VET's site teams are on call 24/7 for health issues and medical emergencies, and are the best ones to provide care to the individual. They are familiar with the local area and how to get care to participants as quickly as possible. VET has identified inpatient and outpatient facilities based on the needs of the participant. Information regarding emergencies and illness is provided in the pre-departure packet and discussed during the in-country orientation. If you are going to miss time at your host organization due to illness, you should contact your host organization supervisor.

**Q: Is there clean water available at sites where water sanitation is an issue?**

A: Clean water is provided by VET at all program activities, such as orientation, workshops and VET-facilitated excursions. Host families provide participants with clean water daily, which might be bottled, boiled, or sanitized to ensure participants have access to safe drinking water. Participants should bring a travel water container so they can always have water at their worksites and during field visits, where clean drinking water can not be guaranteed.

**Q: Is the food safe to eat?**

A: Food from street vendors is not recommended, especially when participants are still adjusting to the local foods. Host families make every effort to protect the health of participants by cooking food that is clean and will accommodate dietary restrictions within reason. Food plays an important role in culture, and participants are encouraged to slowly open up to exploring the new tastes as their stomachs adjust to the environment.

## **Educational Components/Training**

**Q: Will interns have to do any work prior to arriving in-country?**

A: All participants should spend some time considering the work they will do before arriving in their host country. However, most of the training and work begins after the participants' arrival at the site.

**Q: What sorts of training will interns undergo?**

A: VET interns will receive extensive sustainable development training through the program. This includes training on asset-based community

development and active involvement with volunteers, host organization supervisors, and VET's site team. Interns will also gain experience in proposal writing, as well as general experience in development project work.

**Q: What kind of research about the site and the organization should I do before arriving in-country?**

A: Participants should have a basic understanding of the country and specific site including its history; contemporary political, social, and economic conditions; and any other relevant information. Interns should also research the host organization's mission, approach, and ongoing projects prior to arrival in the country.

## Site Staff

**Q: How are VET's international sites staffed and what is their role?**

A: Each VET site team is comprised of a Program Director and at least one Program Coordinator. VET's **Program Directors** are regional experts in the field of community development, which makes them a great resource for interns as they develop and implement their projects. Each Program Director develops and maintains VET's relationships with the community development organizations and families who will host interns and is involved in developing —together with the community development organizations—specific internship opportunities. **Program Coordinators** provide extra support to VET's interns, host families, and community organizations. While interns are in the field, Program Coordinators serve as a bridge to the local culture and language; they also function as a lifeline when culture shock inevitably sets in, and are available to advise interns as they develop their work plans.

**Q: How can I get in touch with the site staff directly?**

A: Participants will be provided with contact information of the VET in-country team before they arrive. Family members and friends are encouraged to contact participants directly rather than VET site staff. For any concerns or questions, they may also contact VET's headquarters

**Q: How often will participants be in contact with site staff once they arrive in-country?**

A: The VET site teams provide the in-country orientation to all VET participants, and conduct regular check-ins with both host organizations and participants throughout the program. In addition to regular check-ins with participants, site staff is available to advise participants as they develop and implement their work plans. The site team is also on-call 24/7 and participants should feel comfortable reaching out at any time if they need to schedule a meeting with the site team.

## Other

**Q: Can I plan activities outside of the program?**

A: Yes! VET participants are encouraged to plan activities and excursions in their free time, but they should not plan activities that will take them away from their usual work. As part of the International Internship, Research Internship, and Gap Year programs, VET staff will plan a midterm retreat, which will include a weekend excursion.

**Q: What do interns do with their free time?**

A: Many participants spend their free time with their host families, exploring the communities, attending cultural events, reading a book, or spending time with other VET participants.

**Q: How much should I budget for during my time in-country outside of the program fee?**

A: Most interns bring \$200 - \$500 for spending money, but this is a personal preference. You may need more or less depending on your spending habits in your home country.

**Q: What are common purchases that interns will make not covered by the program fee?**

A: Many interns spend extra money on excursions, souvenirs, or special imported food. All meals, regular transportation, and housing costs are covered in the [program fee](#).