

SASTS GoXplore Reference – Cape Town Volunteer Programme

Certain projects such as social welfare (orphanage, girls/boys homes, centres for the care of disabled, etc.) are only available while living with a host family in a local community, with the exception of an Autism school situated close to the Observatory hostel. These projects also require a minimum volunteer period of 8 weeks.

FAQ:

Below are a few Frequently Asked Questions with regards to volunteering in Cape Town.

1. *What are the major differences between living at one of the hostels, with a host family in a local suburb, and living in the township?*

The biggest difference will be your lifestyle or standard of living. The hostels are conveniently located very close to the city centre, shopping malls, markets, beaches, restaurants, nightlife, etc. and you will be living a “city life” and sharing a large house with many fellow volunteers of a similar age. Living with a host family gives you greater insight into Capetonian life, culture, foods, etc. as you will be living with a few other volunteers, in a typical middle-class family setting with a host mom, dad, brother/sister and experience the local day-to-day life. Living in the township takes this cultural immersion to the next level where you still live with a host family, but in a much poorer community. It is a far more isolated life but here, you have the perfect opportunity to experience the “real Africa”!

2. *Why are volunteers needed in the city centre and surrounding affluent/upper-class areas? Will I really make an impact here?*

Most of the projects (schools, day-care centres, clinics) in these areas serve children from lower-income communities and townships. With most job opportunities being in the city centre, most of their parents work here, mainly as cleaners, gardeners, delivery services, etc. so it's easier for the parents if the children attend school close to their place of work. Also in the past, the government built decent schools in poorer communities but just a few weeks after completion, these were often vandalised and most of the equipment was stolen - it therefore made better sense to build schools in better/central areas and bus the children in everyday. Another common misconception is often created by the physical appearance of children at these projects – children attending schools or crèches in the city are often dressed very well. The simple reason for this is their parents not wanting people to know/see that they come from poor families. We often hear of parents not having enough money for food or school fees because they've spent their money on clothing and other items for their kids.

These schools also generally have a very high teacher-student ratio: in most cases, you would find 1 teacher in a class of 35-45 children. The schools work on very tight budgets and they cannot afford to hire more teachers. As you can imagine, having a volunteer to assist them makes a massive difference and is greatly appreciated. The children also love being around foreigners and learning about their home countries and different cultures.

3. *Does everyone in South Africa pay school fees?*

The simple answer is... YES! Every child, from kindergarten/crèche to primary school and high school all pay school fees, regardless of whether they are from wealthy, middle-income or lower-income families or areas. Even children going to schools in really poor townships, still pay some form of monthly fee.

4. *Why can I not live in one of the hostels and travel to my project of choice in one of the local communities or townships?*

We do not offer this option for two simple reasons: 1. Travel time/distance and 2. Safety. Most of our projects in the local communities are easily accessible from the nearby host family home (generally 5-10mins walk) but would be very complicated to reach with public transport from our hostels. It would more than likely involve taking at least 2 or 3 connecting minibus taxis plus a 20 – 35min walk, each way. You could use a private cab or Uber but this would be very expensive. Secondly, it's just not safe for a volunteer who is not familiar with the area or informal public transport systems, to travel such long distances on their own.

5. *How do I decide on a type of project and accommodation?*

It's very important that you think carefully about this before making a final decision. Your volunteer project category should always be your main priority – remember, you are coming to Cape Town as a volunteer and therefore your volunteer work will be your main focus. You know yourself best so choose a category that you feel you will enjoy and thrive in. Once you have made your decision here, consider the accommodation options. For most project categories, you have the choice of living in a hostel in the city, or living with a host family in a local community. For each individual, there are positives and negatives to each option, again, depending on your personality and desired outcomes.

6. *What is the biggest misconception by volunteers about Cape Town?*

Cape Town is by far the most westernised city on the African continent! It's very different from the Africa our volunteers may see on TV back home before they arrive. Africa is generally portrayed in a very negative light in the world media and this definitely has an impact on volunteer expectations of the city and country – some volunteers come to Cape Town expecting a rural town and people living in extreme poverty. They come to Cape Town “to save Africa”! It's important to remember that Cape Town is a huge city and tourist destination, and is developing all the time. The volunteers play an important role in this development by helping the young children see a bigger and brighter future. Sometimes volunteers don't feel like they are making any impact because the results are not immediately visible – they need to understand that they are contributing their bit towards a long term goal. The best way to explain this is to use an example of building a house... Each volunteer's contribution is one brick and only once you have all the thousands of bricks in place, can you see the end result of the finished house. Until the house is complete, each volunteer only sees themselves as a single brick.

There is a very famous quote here in Cape Town, which we often hear from our volunteers as they leave at the end of their volunteer programme:

“I CAME TO CHANGE CAPE TOWN, BUT CAPE TOWN CHANGED ME!”

