



Volunteer Handbook for Ghana

Akwaaba!

Welcome to our Volunteer Handbook for Ghana.

While no person or book or website can give a new traveler to Ghana a full understanding of its culture, we believe that this Handbook will go a long way in preparing you for your trip and the living experience there.

We have spent years revising this Handbook, based on the experiences of our volunteers and staff who have spent significant time in Ghana. They have all contributed their unique insights and advice to the information in this Handbook.

Although there is some overlap, our Volunteer Handbook for Ghana does not try to duplicate all of the general travel information you will find in published guide books such as the **Bradt Ghana Travel Guide** and **Lonely Planet West Africa** (We recommend Bradt).

Our main focus in the Volunteer Handbook for Ghana is on travel information that is specifically relevant to a volunteer like yourself who will serve others in Ghana and become a member of the local community.

We encourage you to share the Volunteer Handbook for Ghana with your family and friends and anyone else interested in your trip to Ghana. We also strongly recommend taking a copy with you on your trip.

As always, if you have any questions about the Volunteer Handbook for Ghana or any other issues or concerns, please get in touch with us.

Regards,

Scott Burke, Founder & Director
Cosmic Volunteers
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA

BEFORE YOU GO

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1. Entry Requirements for Ghana

In order to enter Ghana, you must have:

Passport

- Must be valid for at least the next six months

Tickets for your departure from Ghana

- Ghana's Immigration Department has the right to ask you at the airport to show copies of either your return flight home or tickets for land travel if you are leaving Ghana by land.

Vaccination for Yellow Fever

- Ghana's Immigration Department requires all travelers to have this vaccine.
- The vaccine must be administered at least 10 days before you arrive in Ghana
- Visit the Center's for Disease Control's web pages for Yellow Fever at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/yellowfever>

Visa

- You must obtain a visa from a Ghana embassy or consulate **before you leave home.**
- You must present your passport to the Ghana embassy in order to apply for the visa, because they insert a visa sticker into your passport. You can either visit the embassy in person or send them the visa materials (including passport) by mail/post.
- You must submit the following visa materials:
 - Passport valid for at least the next 6 months
 - 4 copies of the visa application form
 - 4 passport-size photographs
 - Photocopy of round-trip ticket or itinerary

- Visa fee of \$50 USD (money order or bank check)
 - Visa Letter from Cosmic Volunteers (Canada volunteers only)
- On the visa application form:
 - Indicate that you want a “Tourist” visa
 - You need to include the names and contact details of two contact people in Ghana. We will send you this information by email.
- The Ghana embassy recommends that travelers apply for the visa 2-4 weeks before they depart from home for Ghana. In our experience, the process by mail typically takes 7-12 calendar days from the day you mail the visa materials to the Ghana embassy/consulate.
- Visit the Ghana embassy’s web page for a visa application form and instructions: <http://www.ghanaembassy.org>

2. Health Preparation

We strongly recommend that you **visit a travel doctor** at least two months before you arrive in Ghana for information about immunizations and advice on how to stay healthy there.

We also strongly recommend that you obtain a **travel insurance** policy that will cover any medical costs you might have in Ghana. Cosmic’s staff uses both Multinational Underwriters (www.mnui.com) and Travelguard (www.travelguard.com) for **travel insurance policies**. Cosmic Volunteers does not provide health insurance to participants.

For **vaccinations**, Ghana requires you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination (see above “Entry Requirements”). All other vaccines are optional for Ghana. Cosmic Volunteers follows the current vaccination recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which are listed on our website at <http://www.cosmicvolunteers.org/vaccinations.html>.

If you take **prescription medicines**, make sure you have enough to last during your trip. Keep them in their original prescription bottles and always in your carry-on luggage.

Malaria is a potentially fatal disease that is a major concern for travelers to Ghana. Please speak with your travel doctor about whether you should take anti-malarial medicine. **You cannot be immunized against malaria.** Many anti-malarial drugs have to be started before you arrive in Ghana. For a full discussion of malaria, visit the CDC’s website at <http://www.cdc.gov/malaria>.

For **comprehensive health information** for travelers to Ghana, visit the CDC’s website at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationGhana.aspx>.

3. Register Your Trip with your Home Government

An optional but highly recommended pre-trip step is to register your travel plans to Ghana with your home country's government. Doing this can be helpful if you lose your passport in India or if there is a country-wide emergency and you need your embassy's help. You can register with your respective government online at the following websites:

USA Citizens: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui>

UK Citizens: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/>

Canadian Citizens: <http://www.voyage.gc.ca/index-eng.asp>

Australian Citizens: www.orao.dfat.gov.au

4. Power-of-Attorney

Another optional but recommended pre-trip step is to consider creating a Power-of-Attorney document (POA) which lets you appoint someone at home to manage important financial and legal matters on your behalf while you are in Ghana. This is a particularly smart thing to do if you will be staying in Ghana for an extended period of time, say at least one month. You can create a custom POA document for \$35 USD online with Legal Zoom, which Cosmic staff uses for its POA documents while traveling. Legal Zoom's website is <http://www.legalzoom.com/power-of-attorney/power-of-attorney-overview.html>. Keep in mind that, after Legal Zoom mails you the POA, you must get the document notarized by a notary public before the document can take effect.

5. Photocopy Important Documents

Before you leave home, make two sets of photocopies of all important documents. Put one set of copies in your checked luggage, and leave a set of copies at home with your family/friends. Keep your original documents in your carry-on bag while you are traveling to Ghana.

Documents to Photocopy:

- Passport ID page
- Ghana Visa
- Plane Ticket
- Yellow Fever card
- Contact information of Ghana Coordinator*
- Contact Information for Cosmic in USA*
- Contact Information for family/friends at home
- Travel Insurance Policy
- Credit card(s)
- Travelers Checks (if you have them)
- Power-of-Attorney (if you have one)

* We will send you this information by email before you leave for your trip.

6. Contact Information

Before you leave home, we will send you the mobile numbers of your Coordinators in Ghana and the US. **They will be your 24 hour contacts during your program.** Please carry their contact numbers on your person (not your bags) while en-route to and in Ghana.

If your flight(s) to Ghana is delayed for any reason, please first call your Ghana Coordinator 24 hours to let them know of the delay. If you cannot reach him/her for whatever reason, please call your US Coordinator 24 hours.

For non-emergencies, please contact us at our regular office phone at 1-215-609-4196 or by email at team@cosmicvolunteers.org. Our office hours are Monday-Friday from 9am to 5pm EST. We monitor emails and voice mails on weekday evenings and weekends.

7. What to Pack

Carry-On Bag

- Passport
- Plane Ticket
- Yellow Fever card
- Contact information of Ghana Coordinator
- Contact Information for US Coordinator
- Contact Information for home (family, friends)
- Travel Insurance Policy
- Cash (at least \$100 USD or equivalent)
- Credit card(s)
- Travelers Checks (if you have them)
- Any prescription medicine
- Any electronic equipment (laptops, mobile phone, camera, mp3 player)
- Toiletries (Toothbrush/paste, contact lens solution & case, feminine products)
- Reading materials
- Pen(s)

Tip 1: During air travel, some travelers prefer putting their passport, cash, credit cards etc. in a money pouch that is concealed under their clothes for security. We've found that it's just as safe and convenient to put your cash and credit cards in a front pants pocket, and keep your passport in a front shirt pocket.

Tip 2: While in Ghana, we always keep our passports in a seal-able plastic baggie (the kind used for sandwiches). This protects the passport from moisture in the hot climate where your passport can become soggy, especially if it's in your pocket while you're traveling around the country.

Checked Baggage

Don't overdo it. pack lightly so you can travel more easily and store your bag in small places. Think in terms of a backpack, duffel bag, or moderate-sized suitcase and a day pack. Because the climate is generally hot, you can often wash clothes out and dry them overnight. Bring lots of lightweight clothes. For men and women, it is better to dress conservatively.

Clothing:

- 2-3 pairs khaki pants (or jeans but jeans can be hot)
- 2-3 pairs shorts (for around the house and sports)
- 5-7 short-sleeved tops/t-shirts

- 1-2 long-sleeved shirts/tops
- Undergarments
- Women may want to bring a longer skirts instead of shorts and short dresses since it is more respectful of the culture
- Sturdy sneakers or shoes
- Sandals or flip-flops
- Cotton socks
- Sleepwear
- Light jacket or windbreaker
- A nice outfit for special occasions

Health and Hygiene:

- Handiwipes and anti-bacterial hand lotion
- Over-the-counter medications for pain relief, fever, diarrhea
- Insect repellent with DEET
- Sunscreen (stronger-the-better)
- Vitamins
- Toiletries (soap, shampoo)

Miscellaneous:

- Notebooks, pens, paper
- Glasses, contacts/solution - and bring a copy of your prescription
- Small travel pack/day pack
- Lightweight, quick-dry towel

Gifts and Donations

We are often asked by volunteers about this topic. We have a detailed article on the subject on our website (http://www.cosmicvolunteers.org/articles_donations.html). Basically, we do not encourage volunteers to bring items from home – I've found it's better to buy any items in the host country. I can't tell you how many orphanages, schools, and AIDS organizations I've visited around the world that had rooms full of donated stuff they couldn't use – cold-weather clothes, expired medicines, books the kids didn't understand or found boring because of cultural difference, etc.

ARRIVING IN GHANA

This section describes the normal schedule and activities for volunteers during their first several days in Ghana. The major points will include the airport arrival, travel to the volunteer location, and introduction to the culture, host family, and volunteer work.

Your actual schedule might vary from what is described below, depending on your arrival day and time as well as your volunteer location. Before you leave home, we will send you by email a detailed itinerary that covers your first 3-4 days in Ghana. Note that because most flights into Ghana arrive in the evening/night, you will most likely spend the first night in Accra in a hotel, then travel to your volunteer location the next day.

Arriving at the Airport in Accra

- When your plane lands in Accra, you will **exit the plane** via steps directly onto the ground then either take a shuttle bus or walk to the entrance door to the airport. You will immediately notice the hot climate!
- You will be directed to the **Immigration counters**. Have your passport and disembarkation card ready (you receive the card during the flight). The immigration officer might ask basic questions such as “How long are you staying in Ghana?” or “Is this your first time to Ghana?”.
- After the Immigration officer stamps your passport, walk to **baggage claim**.
- We strongly recommend that you **exchange currency** at the currency counter in the baggage claim area. Exchange at least US\$50 or equivalent for Ghana Cedis. (Always a good idea to walk out of the airport in any country with some local currency on you.)
- Grab your luggage, then walk through the **Customs** lines and towards the exit doors.
- Before you exit the airport, the staff will ask you to show your **luggage tags** given to you by the airport check-in staff before you boarded your flight.
- When you walk through the airport’s **exit doors**, look for our Program Coordinator who will be holding a sign with your name on it.
- There are usually **big crowds** waiting outside the airport exit door. The scene can look chaotic and intimidating. Try to look calm (even if you’re not) and smile and scan the crowd for our Program Coordinator holding your name sign.
- Some **taxi drivers and hotel staff** might ask you if you need a ride or a room. They can be aggressive to the point of actually trying to take your bags away, but it is very important to smile and remain composed and tell them your “friend” is here at the airport to meet you. That should convince them to leave you alone.
- You and our Program Coordinator will take a taxi to **leave the airport**. At this point, please **contact someone back home** to let them know that you arrived in

- Ghana safely. Your Program Coordinator will offer their mobile phone for a brief call or text message.
- The Program Coordinator will take from the airport to either a hotel in Accra for the first night or travel with you immediately to your volunteer location and host family.
 - During your first few days, your Coordinator will take you to regular meals at restaurants, all included in your program fee.

If You Do Not Find Our Program Coordinator

There might be a very unusual situation where you do not meet our Program Coordinator at the airport in Accra, such as a very late flight arrival. In this situation, speak to an airport representative and ask for help in making a telephone call to our Program Coordinator in Accra (All airport personnel and taxi drivers speak English). If you cannot reach the Program Coordinator in Accra, call Cosmic Volunteers' Coordinator in the US 24 hours, Scott Burke. He will arrange as quickly as possible for another Coordinator to pick you up at the airport, or he will direct you to take a taxi on your own to a hotel. (We will reimburse you for all costs: transport, hotel, phone, food.)

YOUR FIRST DAYS IN GHANA

Travel to the Volunteer Location

Your Program Coordinator will travel with you from Accra to the volunteer location. Depending on your volunteer location, this could be a 30-minute bus ride to the suburbs of Accra OR an exhausting 12-hour bus ride to Tamale in northern Ghana.

(Note: Before leaving the city of Accra, you may wish to take care of some errands such as exchanging currency, using an ATM machine, buying a mobile phone, buying electrical adapters, etc. Please let your Program Coordinator know.)

The trip will be on public transportation on either a “trotro” (minivan) or large passenger bus. There are cases, although rare, when the Program Coordinator will be able to take you in their own private car. All ground transportation from the airport to the volunteer location site is included in your program fee. However, if you wish to hire a taxi or private car for this trip, you are responsible for those costs.

At the end of the journey, your Program Coordinator will drop you off at your host family to begin your home stay. You will have the remainder the day/evening to become acquainted with your family and to rest from your travel.

Starting with your taxi ride from the airport, your road travel in Ghana can really provide you with an unparalleled insight into the people, the sights, sounds, and smells(!) of Ghana – all from the relatively insulated environment of a bus seat. So watch, listen, smile, ask questions, listen (to the endless car horns!), and just try to soak it in. As *Verge Magazine* says (Winter 2008): "Fifteen minutes on a bus usually teaches you more about a country's social, political, and economic conditions than three hours studying a guidebook."

Introduction to Ghana and the Volunteer Work

After your first night with your host family, your Program Coordinator will pick you up the next day and provide you with an **Introduction to Ghana**.

We do not use the word “orientation” because it implies volunteers sitting in a classroom, listening to formal lectures. Instead, the Introduction that you will experience is more informal and hands-on, with the Program Coordinator taking you around town to see life on the streets. This normally includes visits to local markets, cultural sites, and museums. They will also go over the major points in this Pretrip Handbook to make sure that you understand about staying healthy, safety, street smarts, living with your host family, the volunteer work, contact information, etc.

We also recommend that you take care of at this time any practical errands such as:

- Buying a mobile phone / SIM card / phone credit
- Exchanging money / travelers checks
- Using an ATM machine
- Buying electrical adapters
- Buying a mosquito net
- Buy any toiletries
- Buying a small flashlight

On either the same or next day, your Program Coordinator will accompany you to your **Volunteer Job** for introductions and a tour of the organization. You will meet with your Program Supervisor(s) for the first time and start learn some of the basics about the organization's work. There is also normally time for you to meet some of the people you will be helping such as orphanage children or medical patients. Depending on your specific schedule, you could begin your volunteer work today, such as playing with the children.

Jet Lag

Flying across multiple time zones disrupts your body's circadian rhythm, leading to sleep problems and other symptoms which fall under the condition known as "jet lag."

Symptoms often include insomnia, waking early, excessive sleepiness, headaches, irritability, digestive problems like constipation or diarrhea, muscle aches, and difficulty concentrating. Younger travelers and female travelers are more susceptible to jet lag, while some travelers are not affected much.

As a general guideline, the recovery rate from jet lag is one day per time zone traveled. So if you live in New York (five hours behind Ghana), it will take you about five days to recover from the jet lag.

To recover from jet lag:

- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your flight
- Try to sleep on the plane if it's nighttime in Ghana
- Adjust to the local day/night schedule immediately
- Try not to sleep until nighttime in Ghana, no matter how tired you are
- Exercise daily (during daylight hours, especially early morning)
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol

WHILE IN GHANA

Staying Healthy and Safe

The top causes of injury and death for travelers abroad are road accidents and drowning. This comes as a surprise to many, because the media tends to focus on terrorism, political strife, and infectious diseases as the most likely dangers for travelers abroad.

If you become ill or injured in Ghana, please seek medical treatment immediately. Then as soon as possible, inform your host family and local Program Coordinator. They will contact our staff in the US so that we can assist in any way we can, such as notifying your family back home.

There are both government and private health facilities near all of our volunteer areas, with emergency and outpatient care available. There are also pharmacies (“drugstores”) throughout the country where you can buy medications. A doctor’s prescription is often required.

The three areas you need to focus on daily for staying healthy and safe in Ghana are:

- **Food and Water**
- **Avoid Insect Bites**
- **Avoid Injuries**

Food and Water

Traveler’s Diarrhea is the most common illness suffered by travelers to Ghana. It’s usually caused by bacteria in the food or water you consume, and usually occurs within the first week of travel. You must be extra cautious about food and water.

Some very important tips:

- Do not drink tap water at any time in Ghana
- Do not consume ice cubes
- Drink only bottled water, boiled water, or carbonated drinks in bottles/cans
- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Avoid restaurants that look dirty
- Avoid food from street vendors
- Avoid raw fruits and vegetables unless you peel them
- Brush your teeth using only bottled water
- Stay hydrated (see “Hot Climate”)

Avoid Insect Bites

You must avoid insect bites in Ghana because you are at risk for illnesses such as malaria and dengue fever. Malaria is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected female *Anopheles* mosquito. The first symptoms of malaria are normally fever, chills, sweats, headaches, muscle pains, nausea and vomiting (For a definitive diagnosis, you must have a lab test). The peak biting period for malaria is dusk and dawn.

To prevent insect bites:

- Stay indoors at dawn and dusk as much as possible
- When you are outside at night, wear long sleeves and long pants
- For sleeping, wear long sleeves and long pajama bottoms
- For sleeping, use a mosquito net treated with permethrin (mosquito nets cost \$5-\$10 USD in Ghana)
- Use an insect repellent with 30%-50% DEET

Avoid Injuries

- As a **pedestrian**, you must be very cautious, especially at night:
 - Vehicles always have the right of way
 - Assume that vehicles will not stop for you
 - There are normally no sidewalks anywhere outside of major towns
 - Most streets have open sewers on each side, some as deep as 10 feet
 - Streets often have no lighting, so stay out of the road at night as much as possible since drivers might not see you
 - Jogging can be very dangerous due to traffic and uneven surfaces
- For **road travel**, accidents happen very frequently in Ghana. During your stay you will probably see the remnants of horrific accidents (usually buses and trucks). Wreckage is often left at the scene for weeks. Most accidents involve speeding and careless driving. Here are some tips for safe road travel:
 - Do not travel in vehicles at night
 - Never sit in the front seat of any vehicle, since most accidents are head-on
 - Wear seat belts when possible (many vehicles don't have functioning seat belts)
 - For city-to-city travel, take large buses rather than a "trotro" (minivan)
 - Ride on the government's "STC" buses and other large-bus companies
 - Do not take private, unlicensed taxis or cars
 - Never ride on the top of any vehicle
 - Do not ride on any motorcycles, either as driver or passenger

- Do not go **swimming**. The rip currents in the ocean are very dangerous, even for the best swimmers. Ghana's lakes are filled with water snakes and other fun creatures and are not clean environments to swim in.
- Do not have contact with **animals**. You will often see dogs and cats as well as farm animals (cows, goats) walking among people on the streets, even in large towns. You could get rabies, insect bites, and skin rash/infections, etc.

Personal Greetings

Greetings in Ghana are **formal and extremely important**. People will normally say "You're welcome" when they meet you. Always offer a greeting and respond to one properly. Failure to do is a major insult and will not be easily forgotten. When introduced to someone, you must always offer to shake their hand. If you do not, the person (and anyone else present) will be very embarrassed and offended.

In smaller towns and rural villages, it is customary to say hello (or at least nod and smile) to everyone you pass by on the road. This is not as practical in a large city like Accra or Kumasi, but you can still try.

It is very rude to simply walk up to someone in Ghana and just start speaking your business without first offering a greeting such as "good morning" or "how are you" or at the very least "hello". Examples would be greeting work colleagues, asking directions on the street, asking a shopkeeper for a price, ordering with a waiter, or hiring a taxi driver.

There is a special way to **shake hands** in Ghana: It starts out as a typical western hand shake, but at the end of the handshake, each person pulls their hand back a bit (while still touching each other) and snaps their fingers together. Definitely ask your Program Coordinator how to do the "Ghana handshake."

Stranger in a Strange Land

As a foreigner in Ghana, you will draw a lot of attention simply by your status as an outsider and visitor. You will be giving up the relative anonymity that you experience at home. There is very little sense of privacy or solitude in Ghana.. If you have not traveled abroad much before, this phenomenon can be quite disconcerting and downright exhausting at times.

Especially in rural areas, people will stare at you and sometimes call out to you, and you will be the subject of (friendly) gossip in the community. People will watch your every move, even if you don't notice them doing it. You will sometimes meet people, especially children and rural villagers, who have never seen a foreigner in person.

Ghanaian children are very fond of yelling out the word “obroni” (“white person”) to foreigners, usually followed by good-natured giggling and smiles. Keep in mind that a “foreigner” can have any skin tone or appearance. A great way to respond to the “Obroni” calls is to call back with “Obibini” which means “black man. You’re guaranteed to receive even more laughter from the kids. Children will also sometimes try to touch your skin, or hold your hand, or even jump in your arms.

The key to dealing with all this attention, like with everything else in Ghana, is your attitude. Remember that people are merely being curious about you. Ghanaians are known world-wide for their friendliness and kindness to foreigners, so do not worry that people are making fun of you or sizing you up for a scam. Your time in Ghana will probably be your only chance in life to be treated like a celebrity (minus the paparazzi!), so smile and try to embrace it.

Slow Pace of Life

The pace of life is **very slow** in Ghana. You will notice things like people are habitually late to meetings, buses never run on time, and restaurant might take 2 hours to prepare your meal. Even people walking down the street can appear to be moving in slow motion!!

Don’t worry. Relax. When you arrive in Ghana, we recommend that you quite literally take off your wristwatch, place it in your luggage, and forget about it until you’re flying home. The sooner you accept the slower rhythm of daily life in Ghana, the sooner you will start to have an enjoyable stay. This is usually easier for long-term volunteers, but even short-time volunteers can adjust quickly and embrace the slow pace of life in Ghana.

If the slower pace of life – or anything else for that matter – upsets you in Ghana, please do not get visibly frustrated with people. While it might make you feel better to let off some steam, huffing-and-puffing and yelling at people will only serve to embarrass and anger locals and make the situation much worse, and locals will lose a great deal of respect for you. You will get the best results if you handle things quietly, discreetly, smiling, behind the scenes, and always treat people with courtesy and respect.

Money

Ghana is overwhelmingly a cash-based society. Very few merchants anywhere in the country accept credit cards. So **expect to pay cash for everything**.

First, we recommend that you **bring from home at least \$100 USD** (or equivalent currency) in cash. Do not bring bills larger than \$20, because money exchangers might

consider them to be counterfeit (there's only a small chance of this, but it's one less hassle you can easily avoid).

While in Ghana, the best way to get cash is to use an **ATM machine**:

- ATM's dispense money in Ghana Cedis.
- There are ATM's in most towns even in rural areas.
- ATM cards with MasterCard logos probably will **not** work.
- ATM cards with Visa logos almost always work.
- Standard Chartered Bank and Barclays Bank are the best banks to use an ATM.
- Ghana Commercial Bank will probably not work for your ATM card.

If you need **fast cash from home**, your family can send you instant cash using services like Moneygram (www.moneygram.com) or Western Union (www.westernunion.com), with Moneygram by far the cheaper option. If you do not need the money in a timely manner, have your family make a deposit at your bank account back home, then you can withdraw the money in cash using your ATM card.

The **Cedi** is the legal currency of Ghana. The government re-denominated the "Ghana Cedi" and issued new notes in July 2007. As of January 2008, the currency is to be known as just the Cedi. The exchange rate for the old notes was approximately 1 USD = 9,500 Cedis. With the new notes, the exchange rate is 1 USD = 1 Cedi. During your stay, you will probably still come across old notes – ask your host family or Coordinator how to exchange them.

For **spending money** during your trip, count on spending \$5-\$10 per day. The actual amount can vary considerably, depending on factors such as:

- Your daily commuting costs between your host family and volunteers job
- How often you buy meals outside your host family
- Whether you buy / use a mobile phone
- Extra sightseeing you choose to do
- Shopping for clothes, toiletries, souvenirs

You can **exchange your cash** for Cedis at the airport, as well as at banks and private money-changers on the street. Ask your Program Coordinator to find a bank or a reputable private money-changer.

We do not recommend **travelers checks** because it can be very difficult to find banks where you can cash them, and the process is often time-consuming. You should also bring at least one **credit card** to use for emergencies, such as cash advances.

For **money transfers within Ghana**, the cheapest way is to use the Ghana Post Office. Bring your cash in Cedis and the name, city, and telephone of the person receiving the money. The clerk will give you a reference number for the receiver (in Ghana) to pick up the cash (in Cedis).

Hot Climate

Ghana has a tropical climate, with lots of heat and humidity year-round. Temperatures can reach close to 100 F (37 C) in some of our volunteer areas. You must take care on a daily basis to stay hydrated and avoid the sun as much as possible. If you become severely dehydrated, you might need to take oral re-hydration salts. You will rarely find air-conditioning in Ghana (unless you stay at an upscale hotel), but the temperature cools down considerably after sunset, so it is comfortable sleeping.

Tips on handling the heat:

- Stay hydrated daily with water
- Wear a hat outside
- Wear loose-fitting clothes made from breathable fabrics
- If you exercise, do so at sunrise
- Do not sunbathe
- Use sun block if you will be outside for long periods

Symptoms of dehydration:

- Restlessness and irritability
- Sunken eyes
- Dry mouth and tongue
- Increased thirst
- Skin goes back slowly when pinched

Leave Your Values at Home

You will probably have your first “I’m not in Kansas anymore” moment very early on in your stay in Ghana. It might go something like:

- Your taxi driver offering a marriage proposal
- The orphanage director showing up 2 hours late for your first meeting
- A herd of cows walking down the street in Accra
- A school teacher whacking a misbehaving child with a bamboo stick

One of our recent volunteers in Ghana wrote:

“My values and belief systems were confronted daily and I had to reconsider things that I had taken for granted. I don’t know if I’m more worldly as a result, but it definitely changed the way that I view societies.”

Understand that you are in a **different country now**, living in communities that have cultural practices, life experiences, needs, infrastructure (lack of), and a world view that can be very different to yours:

- Perfectly nice Ghanaians will often ask seemingly intrusive questions about your appearance, marital status, religion, and income. Do not act offended by such comments or questions; simply smile and be as pleasant as possible while revealing as little or as much as you wish.
- Your host family will not understand your desire to come-and-go as you please. They will have a strong paternalistic sense of responsibility for you and will get very worried if you are not home by sunset; they might call your mobile in a panic. Don’t get annoyed. Listen to them, follow their rules. This is their household, not yours.
- There are thousands of pre-teen girls in Ghana selling goods on the street everyday (often in lieu of going to school). To you, this is child labor and should be stopped immediately. But to her family, the girl’s income is their only way to buy food. Do you refuse to patronize these girls, or do you gladly buy their goods – hoping it will help the family? Or do you not consider the situation at all???
- Elders are revered and treated with the greatest respect in Ghana. In many rural villages, it is customary to greet elders by crouching down with your arms resting on your knees. Please treat them with respect and follow the custom. If you are not sure what to do, ask those around you – they will all appreciate your thoughtfulness.

You can either fight this type of reality or **learn to adapt to it**. We strongly suggest the latter. You have to accept the responsibility that comes with being a stranger in a strange land.

How can you do accomplish this?

- Be humble and respectful
- Observe & Listen
- Be Inquisitive
- Ask Questions
- Do not judge
- Do not act offended by comments or questions
- Offer your help
- See yourself in others
- Smile

The phrase “This is Ghana” is one you will sometimes hear from Ghanaians. It is usually said with a shrug and a smile – as the town’s electrical power goes out yet again, or the traffic cop delays your bus to demand a bribe from the driver, or the hotel runs out of water for the next 12 hours. “This is Ghana” is a clever way that locals sometimes deal with their frustrations with daily life there, so try it yourself sometimes.

Saving the World

It is admirable that you want to have a positive impact on people’s lives in Ghana. After all, that should be why you signed up to volunteer in Ghana, and that is why Cosmic sends volunteers there.

But please understand: **You will not “save the world” during your trip to Ghana.** Or on any trip abroad, for that matter. If you even have the phrase “save the world” in your vocabulary, you are in for a rude awakening in Ghana and your stay will be filled with major disappointment and disillusionment.

A typical pattern of some foreign volunteers is to show up in the local community, see an endless number of problems to be solved, start to make elaborate plans to solve those problems, work feverishly on executing those plans – then, ultimately experience a great deal of frustration when they realize that they have taken on too much, too quickly. Neophytes to traveling abroad can feel this even more intensely.

Our advice for your is to **work small**. As Chinese Buddhism says, “The sage does not attempt anything big.” Focus your efforts in Ghana on one person, one project at a time, because those small successes lead to big accomplishments **over time**.

For example, if you are at an orphanage, simply focus on giving the children your time, your caring, and love. Yes the orphanage might need a new roof, or more books, or even medicines for the children – and you can help out with those projects if you wish; but focus first on the kids and making them feel loved.

Living With Your Host Family

One of the most rewarding, challenging, and meaningful experiences of your time in Ghana is likely to be the time you spend living with your host family. You are encouraged to cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing. Be sensitive to the feelings of others and enjoy the company of people with different life experiences! Here are few more tips to help you prepare for your Ghanaian living experience.

- One of the best ice-breakers with host families is to share with them photos from home – of you, your family, school office, neighborhood, pets, city, etc. Many Ghanaians are interested in foreigners' lives, so we would encourage you to share pictures and stories of your life at home.
- Our host families will treat you as another member of the family, which means you will pick up after yourself, keep your area neat, and help out with the cooking and cleaning when appropriate.
- Many Ghanaian families have several generations living in the same household. Children in Ghana, like children anywhere, can be both adorable and a handful, so try to maintain your patience with them in order to integrate smoothly in the household.
- Please advise your family before you invite anyone to the house. Your family will really appreciate your courtesy.
- If you make plans to go out for an evening, please advise your family and make arrangements to get home and back into the house. They may express some worry that you're going out at night. Try not to be offended, they are just concerned about your safety. They will likewise encourage you to go out with family members, coworkers, or friends, so that you are not out alone at night.
- If you make plans to travel out of town, please let your family know where and for how long. If possible, give them a contact name, address, and phone number.
- Keep items of value, such as cameras, cash, and passport locked in your luggage.
- Please use your own toiletries and towels.
- Try to learn at least a few words of your host family's first language – whether it's Twi, Ga, Ewe, or one of the dozens of other languages in Ghana. Your family will absolutely love to help you learn and practice, especially the children. Don't feel shy – they will totally appreciate your willingness to learn and speak their language.
- Your host family will gladly boil water for you for safe drinking.
- Laundry is often done by hand in Ghana. It is usually done by the women of the household, but your offer to help will most likely be welcomed by your host family.
- Always wash your own undergarments.

Volunteer Work & Schedule

Some of our programs in Ghana are individually-based, meaning that you will sometimes be the only volunteer at your organization. The programs are sometimes unstructured with fluid or altogether non-existent schedules. This is due to cultural norms of Ghana as well as the organizations where our volunteers are placed.

You must be a resourceful, self-starter who can jump in on day one and start to contribute. For example, do not be surprised if you walk into the orphanage the first day and no one says a word to you about what you should be doing. Before you leave home, ask us what supplies you might bring from home, such as sports equipment or art supplies for the kids

Generally speaking, your work schedule will be Monday through Friday, from 9am to 5pm. If there are slow times at your volunteer job, please speak to your supervisor for guidance – but do not be surprised if they do not offer much direction. Also speak to your Program Coordinator for guidance, as they are always available to you.

Do not take it personally if your local work colleagues are indifferent to you. Simply work hard, put the time in, and have a great attitude.

Food

Ghanaian cuisine consists primarily of starches, soups, beans, and meat and fish. The starches consist mainly of 1) rice and 2) doughy balls made from mashed cassava, plantain or yams.

There are several versions of this doughy meal, including “Fufu,” “Banku,” and “Kenkey.” The steamed dough ball, which is essentially tasteless, is typically served with a spicy sauce or in a soup bowl with either fish or meat (chicken, beef). You eat it by tearing pieces of dough with your right hand and dipping it in the soup for flavor. The more popular soups are palm nut and groundnut soup.

If you get tired of Fufu – and many foreigners do – a delicious alternative is “Red Red” (yes two words!). This dish has three items – fish, beans, and fried sweet plantains. Note that fish in Ghana is almost always served whole with the head and tail.

Most dishes in Ghana are very spicy-hot. They love to cook with hot red pepper and chili peppers. If you are not used to spicy food, you can ask you host family or the restaurant to tone it down for you.

On the street, you will find an endless number of vendors selling all types of food. The favorite of most foreigners are roasted plantains. There is also **Kelewele**, a spiced fried plantain snack. You’ll also find fried yams, cassava and sweet potato. In the mornings,

you will see lots of people crowded around vendors selling liquid “porridge” in plastic bags; it’s very temperature-hot and filling. There are also many meat vendors, but we don’t recommend trying them because of health concerns.

For drinks, bottled water can be found in shops and restaurants all over Ghana. “Volta” water is the most popular brand. For soft drinks, you will find Coke, Fanta Orange and Sprite everywhere. You have to drink the soft drink at the shop because the shop returns the bottles to the bottler. A popular street drink is “deha”, made from fermented corn and sold in plastic bags. Beer is widely available, the most popular is Star Beer made in Ghana.

Do not be surprised if you lose weight in Ghana. A variety of factors can contribute to this, like decreased appetite in the hot climate, lots of walking, lack of western fast food, and the fact that you might find Ghanaian food unappealing.

Religion Is Everywhere

Religion permeates daily life in Ghana. Almost 75% Ghanaians are Christians, due to the spread of Christianity by western missionaries over the centuries. Muslims are estimated to be 15% of the population, but the real number is believed to be slightly higher. Many Ghanaians, even Christians and Muslims, still practice some aspects of traditional African religions, and in rural areas especially there are practicing medicine men.

Ghanaians are very open about their faith, and you will see and hear references to God and religion all the time. On the street, you will see buses, trotros, and taxis with religious sayings on their windows such as “The Lord is my Savior.” Also, the signboards for most shops include a religious reference such as “God Is Good Internet Cafe”, “Jesus Loves You Hair Salon”, and “Allah Is Great Auto Mechanics.”

On Sunday most families spend at least 2-3 hours at church service. They will likely ask you to come along the first Sunday you are there. Even if you are not a believer, the cultural experience of going to a Ghanaian church service is wonderful, so think about accepting their offer.

For Women Travelers

As a female visitor in Ghana, you are likely to experience unwanted attention from men. Fortunately, the level of this in Ghana is relatively low compared to many other countries. However we still want you to be aware that it does exist in Ghana. The sexual attention will usually amount to “come-ons” and inappropriate comments. Very rarely will there be inappropriate touching or actual assault. **You will almost certainly receive “marriage proposals” on a regular basis;** it’s best to laugh them off good-naturedly.

Keep in mind that you are not at home and that different rules apply. Women generally play a submissive role to men in Ghana. A woman who acts like a man will not be respected. Men you meet may misinterpret your appearance, body language, or simple presence as invitations to approach you. Even a smile to a stranger may be misunderstood. You will need to modify your behavior in order to avoid unwanted attention.

Here are some tips on avoiding unwanted attention:

- Do not wear form-fitting or kimpy clothes
- Consider wearing a “wedding ring” and say you are married
- If you are traveling, never admit that you’re traveling alone. Tell people that your boyfriend or husband will be along shortly to join you
- Use humor to diffuse the situation
- If the man persists, be very direct and firmly tell him to stop, and be specific
- Always walk in a group after sunset
- If you go to nightclubs, go with a group of friends
- Do not go to a secluded area or hotel/apartment with a man you do not know well

Street Smarts

- Learn some basics about Ghana before you arrive:
 - Ghana’s President is John Atta Mills (2009 –)
 - Population is 23 million
 - Life expectancy is 59 years
 - Ghana was a British colony until 1957
- Food and eating:
 - Many people, especially in rural areas, eat with their hands
 - If you eat with your hands, only use your right hand
 - Never use your left-hand to shake someone's hand
 - Never use your left-hand to give something to someone
 - When offered food, it is rude to refuse – eat at least a few bites
 - Be careful of facial expressions or comments about food

- It is not polite to eat while standing in public or walking down the street
- Street vendors sell water in 500 ml (16 oz) small plastic bags
- Street vendors also sell homemade carbonated cola drinks in plastic bags
- 1.5 liter bottle of water costs about \$.75 USD
- Hotel Tips:
 - Hotels require you to leave the key at the front desk when you're out
 - Many require you to pay the bill at check-in
 - Room rates are usually fixed
 - It is acceptable to ask to see the room before you decide to book it
 - There is rarely hot water
 - Water often runs out, especially at night
- Tribal chiefs are an integral part of village life. If you are lucky enough to meet one, treat them with the utmost respect. Greet them as you would elders (as discussed earlier)
- People will try to overcharge you – for just about everything!
- Buy a small flashlight when you arrive (cost around \$1). Use it to walk around outside at night and around your house when the power goes out.
- Bring a compact mirror from home or buy one in Ghana, because your accommodations might not have any mirrors, even in the bathroom.
- You will often hear the expression “I will go and come”, meaning “I will go then return”.
- People sometimes call each other by hissing (like a snake). This is very informal and should not be tried by foreigners who don't know the culture very well.
- Young people sometimes address each other as "boss" or "master".
- Be sure to visit the outdoor markets throughout the country. They are wonderful places to see different people as well as products people sell
- Be very careful with your bags in markets and crowded streets
- Be prepared to wash your own laundry
- Always wash your own undergarments
- Even in large cities, you will often be woken up early each day by roosters
- Men urinate in public just about anywhere – side of the road, alleys, etc.
- The smells on the streets of Ghana are strong and ever-present, such as smoke from kitchens burning wood, open sewers, vehicle exhaust fumes, cooking spices.
- You will often hear blaring music, especially in urban areas.
- Bargaining is expected in markets. It's best to ask a Ghanaian for help.
- There are often city-wide power blackouts at night – even in Accra
- Always ask someone before taking their photo or video
- HIV/AIDS carries a huge stigma; patients are often shunned, even by family
- Bribes are an established way of life with police, especially traffic police.
- Many roads are dirt roads, even in the “city” of Accra.
- Make sure you have small coins on bus rides and trotros so you can buy snacks and water from street vendors.
- Ghana television shows “Nollywood” movies from Nigeria (yes with an “N”).

Romance

Getting involved romantically during your trip, whether with a fellow volunteer or local Ghanaian, can be a complicated and outright dangerous thing. There is the risk of pregnancy as well as STD's like HIV. If you do become involved and have sex, always use a condom. Also keep in mind the social aspects of romance, especially if you are involved with a Ghanaian. There is definitely a pronounced double-standard against women. Women generally play a submissive role to men. Showing affection in public is generally not acceptable. If you as a foreign woman have long, animated conversations with a Ghanaian man, he might interpret this as sexual interest. As an "exotic" foreigner, your romance will be a juicy topic of conversation to locals, and you should assume that your entire community will find out about it (and quickly!). Many locals will see you a person with "loose" morals. Also be aware that under Ghanaian law, homosexual activity is officially illegal and local attitudes are harsh – many Ghanaians (especially in rural areas) either deny its existence or blame it on the "devil."

Mobile Phones

We strongly encourage you to have a mobile phone in Ghana. This can be a phone you bring from home or a phone you purchase in Ghana.

- You can bring a phone from home, but the phone must be "unlocked." Most mobile phones from America are purposely locked by the carriers and will not work in Ghana.
- For locked phones not from America, you can take the phone to shops in Ghana who will "unlock" the phone for a fee of \$5-\$10 USD.
- With an unlocked phone, you just need to buy a SIM card in Ghana. The SIM card will have a local Ghana telephone number
- New mobile phones in Ghana start at around \$30
- SIM cards are bought separately and cost about \$10 USD
- Mobile phone usage in Ghana is mostly pay-as-you-go
- You buy phone credits ("units") from street vendors and phone shops
- Incoming calls are free – including incoming international calls
- There are several service providers in Ghana, for the most part they are the same
- Connections are often very fickle in Ghana and dropped calls are common
- Note about landlines: Your host family will probably have a landline which you should give to your family back home. Incoming calls are free on the landline.

Family and Friends Calling You from Home

Your folks back home will be able to call you either at your host family or on your mobile phone. They can use their landline phone to direct dial your Ghana number.

However unless they have an “international” phone service plan, direct-dialing can get very expensive. We recommend instead that they buy prepaid phone cards from a company like Nobelcom. Another option – one that we recommend – is for them to call you using an Internet phone service like Skype or Yahoo. The connections are much clearer this way, and it's usually slightly cheaper than calling from landline phones.

Giving Out Your Contact Information

You will meet a lot of people during your stay, even if you are staying only one week. Locals will frequently ask for your contact information, so that they can stay in touch with you after you return home. In our experience, these requests are genuine and innocent, and even if you give them your information, you will never hear from 99% of them. One way to manage this situation is to carry business (calling) cards that you can give out, that have your name, email address, country and telephone number. You can get 250 **free** customizable business cards with Vista Print (www.vistaprint.com) which ships worldwide. Many locals, especially children, will be very excited to have a calling card of a foreigner. If someone gives you their contact information and you promise to contact them – follow-through and do it.

Ground Transportation Costs

- Cosmic Volunteers pays for:
 - Airport pickup
 - Transport to volunteer location / host family
 - Transport during Introduction to Ghana & Volunteer Work

- Volunteer pays for:
 - Daily travel between the host family and volunteer job
 - Return transport to Accra after program end date
 - Return transport to airport
 - Any sightseeing excursions

Ground Transportation: Local

By “local” we mean around your neighborhood/town.

When you are settled in to your program, and you start to travel without the assistance of your Program Coordinator, here is some information you might find useful:

Taxis

- Taxis in Ghana do not have meters.

- You must negotiate the fare BEFORE getting in the taxi.
- There are two types of taxis – private and shared. They both look the same but they operate differently
- Private taxis are the kind you are familiar with: One passenger, single destination, one rate.
- Shared taxis operate like buses: Multiple passengers, multiple destinations, different rates depending on each person’s distance traveled.
- There are many-many taxis in Ghana, 24/7. [The Bradt Handbook](#) author says that Ghana might have the most taxis of any country on earth, and he might be right.
- If you are taking a taxi to the bus depot or trotro station, tell the driver the bus station’s destination. For example, if you are in Kumasi and want to take a bus to Accra, tell the taxi driver to take you to the “Accra bus station.”

Trotros

- “Trotros” are minivans that hold about 12 people
- Trotros are very popular with locals but very dangerous due to bad roads and driving practices
- Trotros have a driver as well as an assistant who collects fares
- You don’t pay the fare right away; sit down first and wait for the Assistant to motion you to pay. It might take 20 minutes for him to do so.
- Most trotros do not have functioning seat belts

Ground Transportation: City to City

By “city to city” we mean long-distance trips between towns like Accra and Kumasi.

Buses

- Government STC buses are the safest option for city to city travel
- STC buses hold about 50 passengers
- Buses are typically slower traveling than trotros
- There are private, safe bus companies including O&A Travels
- Bus tickets are pre-paid, bought at ticket offices before boarding
- Most buses have assigned seats
- If you have luggage that will not fit under your seat, they will charge you a fee to pack the bag inside the luggage compartment (normally \$1 per bag)
- Buses stop every 2-3 hours for breaks – for bathroom, snacks
- Many passengers will relieve themselves on the side of the road; however some of the scheduled stops have bathrooms (some are even pay-toilets manned by an attendant who collects money)
- There are frequent police check posts throughout Ghana. They usually just check out the bus’ insurance and registration, but sometimes they open the luggage compartment, and occasionally you will see the police subtly demand and accept a bribe from the driver.

- If you decide to get off the bus before your final destination: It is a nice gesture to give the driver your ticket, so he can pick up another passenger for your seat and pocket that person's fare (and still have "proof" of their ticket purchase).

Trotros

- Trotros for city to city travel look the same as the local trotros
- There are trotro stations in each town
- The stations are often crowded and dirty and can seem chaotic
- Trotros have a driver as well as an Assistant who collects fares
- Trotro tickets for city to city travel are pre-paid, bought from the Assistant.
- Trotros will not leave for the trip until all seats are bought. This means that you can buy your ticket then wait around for an hour or more.
- Because the trotro Assistants in Ghana always want passengers to sit in the trotro immediately after buying their tickets, you could be sitting in an extremely hot vehicle for a long time – before it even moves.
- To find the right trotro station: tell the driver the trotros destination. For example, if you are in Kumasi and want to take a trotro to Accra, tell the taxi driver to take you to the "Accra trotro station."
- Drivers often play ear-splitting music the entire ride, even at night
- There are vendors on foot who sell food, drinks, and other items to passengers sitting in the trotro. They usually carry their goods on a tray on their heads, then walk up to the trotro when it stops. Have small change available, and make it quick because the trotro does not stop for long – maybe 30 seconds.
- Vendors sell things like bottled water, roasted plantains, plantain chips, oranges, roasted cassava with hot sauce, cookies ("biscuits"), and peanuts
- The police checks are the same as with buses.
- When you reach your destination and disembark, you will likely be approached by very aggressive touts who want you to take their taxi, assuming you need a ride. They will often grab your bags right out of your hand and start to walk away. Don't panic – just smile and tell them firmly that you do not need a ride and hold on to your bags. If you do need a ride, your bags will be safe with the taxi driver, so follow them to the car then bargain over the fare before you get in the taxi.

Internet

- Internet connections are very slow, usually dial-up speed
- Very few households have Internet access in Ghana
- Internet cafe's are available in most towns, even in rural areas
- Internet access typically costs US\$.50 per hour
- Finding free (or any) wireless access for your laptop is a minor miracle at this point in time in Ghana, so do not count on this at all

- Strongly consider creating a new email address (like Yahoo or Gmail) to be used only during your trip. Before you leave home, forward all emails from your regular email account to this one. The reason is security – because you will be using public computers, you want to avoid password snatchers gaining access to your true personal email account.

Bringing Your Laptop

- Feel free to bring your laptop to Ghana, but understand that – as mentioned in the “Internet” section above – you have almost no chance of finding a wireless connection.
- If you do bring your laptop to take notes or show people photos you have, we urge you to buy a local **surge protector** in Ghana to protect your battery and hard drive.
- Do not keep any **sensitive information** on your laptop in case of theft, such as your bank account information, passwords, etc.
- Ghana is a very **dusty environment** even in large cities, so cover your laptop at all times to protect it from damage.
- Protect the laptop from excessive banging as you travel around Ghana.

News on Ghana

- Ghana Web:
<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive>
- Google:
<http://news.google.com/news?q=ghana&sourceid=navclient-ff&ie=UTF-8&rls=DVFC,DVFC:1970--2,DVFC:en&um=1&sa=N&tab=wn>

Parcels/Letters

You can also send and receive parcels and letters via the post office – please see the mailing address in the Contact Information section. Parcels/letters usually take 7-14 days to reach Ghana. When sending parcels/letters from Ghana, do not use Ghana's postal system – use an international carrier instead like DHL or UPS because it's safer. Also, take the parcel to the office unsealed, as the customs officer may want to inspect the contents. Caution: Your family/friends should NOT send anything valuable by post. Theft is a common problem with Ghana's postal system.

How Your Program Fee Is Used

Our office in the US sends almost 70% of your Program Fee to your Program Coordinator in Ghana and is used for the following:

- Salaries for Program Coordinator and staff
- Your hotel accommodations
- Your airport pickup
- Transportation for you and Coordinator to the volunteer location
- Meals and transport you and Coordinator during your Introduction to Ghana and the Volunteer Work
- Host Family Fee Payments
- Regular donations to local organizations where volunteers work.

The remaining portion of your Program Fee is used by our US office for:

- Salaries for staff
- Recruiting volunteers
- Answering phone calls and emails during normal business hours
- Preparing volunteers for their trips
- Providing 24/7 support
- Developing and maintaining our website
- Legal and accounting services
- Office expenses like Internet access and phone bills
- Travel expenses for our staff to visit project sites

Solicitations

The information in this section is an addendum to the “Gifts and Donations” section above.

We do not include the information in this section on our website, because this information may portray Ghanaians and their culture in a negative light. Keep in mind though that the information below does not apply to the vast majority of Ghanaians you will meet. However we **strongly** feel that a huge part of our job is to provide you the volunteer with as much cultural expertise as possible so that you can have a great experience there.

You will probably be approached by locals for donations

The fact is that foreigners in Ghana are assumed to be “rich,” and as such are often seen as resources for donations of cash and/or materials – both while you are in Ghana and even after you return home. Requests for assistance might come from, say, an orphanage director, a neighbor of your host family, or even a local government official. Some might approach you subtly, perhaps feeling you out for several weeks and dropping hints about a donation; while others will be very direct and outright ask you for money, straight away and without any reservations.

Do not feel obligated to donate

This is much easier said than done! There are so many obvious needs in many of the communities where you will live and volunteer, and many of those who will solicit you are indeed very persuasive. In fact, many volunteers tell us that they often feel overwhelmed because they want to help out so badly, yet there is much need that they often do not know where to even start. Should they buy medical supplies for a clinic, buy books for a library, or buy rice for an orphanage? All of these are noble deeds, and it is wonderful if you want to do things like this.

Cosmic Volunteers does not expect you to make any donation above and beyond your program fee and your time volunteering.

At the End of Your Program

At the end of their programs, our volunteers sometimes take time to travel around Ghana for extra sightseeing. Otherwise, they travel back to Accra for their departing flight.

You as the volunteer are responsible for the cost of your return transport to Accra, your accommodations there, and your taxi to the airport. However, your Program Coordinator will be happy to give you advice on arranging the above, as well as accompany you to Accra and the airport.

If you wish to extend your stay with your host family, please discuss this directly with your host family. You must offer to pay them for housing you.

Returning Home

When you return home from your trip, the “reverse culture shock” can be just as significant as the culture shock when you arrived in Ghana.

- Returning home is often not a predictable process and can be more stressful than you anticipate.
- You might find yourself different than you were before you left home.
- You might feel like a “stranger” even among friends and family.
- You might get frustrated because it is difficult for others to know what your experiences have meant to you and how you might have changed.
- You may need significant time to return to your old roles and relationships.
- Be aware that things at home may have changed while you were away, both in the society and among friends and family. Even if you have heard about these events, the impact at home may not have been obvious.
- Your friends and family might notice that you have different patterns of behavior, speech, or new attitudes.
- Strange as it may seem to others, returnees often grieve for what they have left behind. You might be missing overseas friends, a stimulating environment, the feeling of being special, experiencing greater freedoms or responsibilities, or special privileges.

Some strategies for coping with returning home:

- Make contact with other volunteers who have successfully gone through the experience of returning home from abroad. This can help you through a difficult period of re-adaptation.
- Maintain personal and professional contacts with friends and institutions in Ghana.

- Write and reflect about your experiences in a journal. This can be private or can be shared with friends, family, or the world (via a blog).
- Tell others your stories, show them your photos and videos.
- On a medical note: If you become ill with a fever or flu-like illness up to one year after returning from Ghana, seek immediate medical care and tell them you were in Ghana. You could have malaria.

AND FINALLY . . .

Make the most of every moment. Explore side streets. Take miracle walks. Perform random acts of kindness: buy fruit and share it, give flowers, pass out pens, coins and other useful and interesting things. Say hello. Smile. Take pictures. Share them. Learn about the depth of poverty. Count your blessings. Refuse to take things for granted. Give presents carefully. Play with everything. Share your toys. Blow bubbles. Spread laughter. Be kind to animals. Offer to help. Clean up your own mess without being asked. Clean up someone else's mess too. Ask questions. Answer questions. Collect addresses of people you meet. Send them postcards and email from home. Be aware that you are foreign and exotic. Hold babies. Giggle with children. Listen to old people. Be brave. Invite a dangerous stranger to dinner. Pay the bill. Learn to say thank you in the local language. Sing out loud, songs you sang as a child and songs children will teach you. Try something totally new. Don't just sight-see, sight-think. Donate energy. Spend time. Give hugs. Be thoughtful about donating, spending, and giving money. Support good work done by local people, buy a man a bike, pay a child's school tuition, offer a mother seed money and supplies to start a small business out of her home. Teach. Learn. Explore your own cultural perspective. Be subjectively aware. Touch the world. Allow the world to touch you. Come home safely . . . And remember, a true gift of seeing the world is to return where you started and see your place for the first time.