

Volunteering in Morocco 2016 with Original Volunteers

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1. Introduction – a bit about myself and my expectations before volunteering

As a BSc Geography student I have always had a keen interest in not only travelling, but also exploring new culture, food, traditions and languages. I am also someone who enjoys meeting new people and helping others. Through talking to older students throughout the year and hearing their experiences during previous summers, I came to the conclusion I wanted to volunteer this summer.

I knew I wanted to volunteer abroad, however the high registration fee for most volunteering abroad put me off. I started researching for cheap volunteering options and came across Original Volunteers (one of UK's leading independent volunteer provider). It is Original Volunteers who helped me organise my trip to Marrakech in Morocco to volunteer. I travelled there with 2 friends who study BA Geography at QMUL, all 3 of us stayed for 9 nights in Morocco in an accommodation which was owned by the Original Volunteers organisation.

Before going to Morocco I thought the country was quite developed, however going there made me realise the country's main source of income was from tourism, without this it was clear the economy would collapse. Most workers there earn very little and many live on streets. I was particularly sparked by the number of children living on the streets. I didn't know how volunteers can help in Morocco as not many people go there to volunteer (rather go there on holiday)- but volunteering gave me a good insight into life in Morocco and I can tell you – it's not what it looks like when you go as a tourist/on a holiday! Yes, there is great tourist attractions but poverty still exists.

2. Volunteering – my experience in Morocco

Every day I did something new with a group of other volunteers from the UK. For example on one day we visited the Bani nursery where we helped set up an end of school party for children aged 5-6. This was extremely fun as we volunteers taught the children British nursery

rhymes and did face painting on them. On other days we visited the street kids centre where I and other volunteers played skipping, board games and did some arts & crafts with children from the local area. It was nice that everywhere we went, all the children respected us so much and appreciated our help. From the UK, I took some colouring activity books, glitter pens and skipping ropes which I gave out to the children to play with.



I didn't realise before going there how much difference I as an individual can make to another individual. For example: volunteering in an orphanage home – I was told many of the orphans do not get cuddled or have anyone to play with – however, when I played with them, many of them were so cheerful and constantly smiling. Making these orphans smile felt so rewarding. Similarly, I donated some money every day towards feeding the homeless programme. The money was used to purchase the food that was cooked in the evening. In the evening, I would help prepare the meals, set out the tables and at the end wash the dishes with other volunteers. (It was not easy washing up because there was no sink so we used massive bowls, some soap and washed on the floor!) Again, this was such a rewarding act, knowing that only a few of my dirhams (Moroccan currency) can help someone eat a meal for the night.

Aside from volunteering, in my free time I went to the Ouzoud waterfall and on a Sahara trek outside of Marrakech with other volunteers. It was my first time riding a camel and the experience was amazing! We also visited the famous Jemaa el-Fnaa market where I purchased cute vintage items and ate traditional Moroccan cuisines such as a chicken Tajine.



3. How did the expedition fund help me? and what have I gained?

With the fund from QMUL I was able to pay for my registration fee for volunteering of £125 and pay for the accommodation I was staying in. I highly appreciate the small amount of money given to me as it would have costed me overall so much just to volunteer (in a country that's only a 3-hour flight away from London).

Overall, the whole volunteering has given me a good insight into life in Marrakech in Morocco and has made me appreciate my own life more. I believe I have also developed great skills such as communication and leadership through leading on group activities with the children. As someone aspiring to be a teacher, I certainly believe this experience has boosted my confidence to follow the teaching career pathway. The skills I have developed, the experiences I've encountered and the memories I've made will stay with me for a very long time. I had an amazing time volunteering and I would urge anyone who wants to volunteer abroad to just GO FOR IT! 😊