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There are a wide range of ways to volunteer on farms abroad, but WWOOFing is perhaps the most popular. WWOOF, an acronym for Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, is a grassroots organization that has been pairing volunteers with host farms since 1971. Typically referred to as WWOOFers, volunteers do approximately four to six hours of work up to six days a week in exchange for room and board. Through this organization, you can apply on a voluntary basis with hosts around the world. WWOOFing is currently available in more than 60 countries. There are thousands of farms to choose from with an array of offerings, anything from working in a vineyard to weaving. Most options tend to involve manual labor, so don't expect WWOOFing to be a relaxing month on bucolic pasture. If you want to be a WWOOFer you have to commit to working and living in potentially basic conditions that you are not used to. If you follow through with this educational, character-building experience, you will probably leave with a new perspective on culture and lifestyle that might feel completely foreign. WWOOFing can be a life-changing experience, but it can also come with serious problems, so it's important to know exactly what you're getting yourself into. This article should give you a better idea of what to expect and how to go about making sure your experience is positive and fulfilling. The benefits of living and working on an organic farm are really amazing. How WWOOFer you get. Meet the new people. This is by far the most wonderful part of WWOOFing. Not only will you form meaningful relationships with the hosts, but you will also often be friends with other volunteers working on the farm or locals in the community. On all three farms I worked on, I developed close friendships with all the hosts, exchange of recipes, language practice, travel stories and lots of laughter. And I was also lucky enough to overlap with other volunteers who became lifelong friends and companions. Not all farms will take a few WWOOFers at a time, but if the social aspect is important to you, it may be something to look for. Explore the wilderness: While you may be located within commuting distance from a major city, you are likely to be based pretty rural, giving you a unique cultural experience in a new location. One of the farms I worked for was a vineyard in Argentina. I happened to be there during the annual harvest, which was a massive regional holiday, complete with parades, parties, and even a beauty contest! I felt so fortunate to be in such a small, rural town for time, otherwise I would never have had such an interesting experience with Argentine culture. Eat amazing food: What's the best part of the part and work on an organic farm? Eating fresh food, of course! While this is not given to all farms, many hosts will allow volunteers full access to all homegrown fruits and vegetables, which means you will eat fresh, healthy and sustainable. In addition, many hosts will want to share culinary responsibilities, so you can get the chance to learn how to make local dishes and even cook some of your favorite dishes from home for your new friends. Learn new skills: I never thought I'd know everything and all of Argentine wine production, but after a few months at the vineyard I learned more than I ever could have imagined about farming, growing, harvesting cycles, and sustainable water use. While I don't use these skills in my life day in and day out, I find that a better understanding of how food is grown and where it comes from has given me a more holistic understanding of agriculture and how I can be a conscious consumer. Practice a new language: Depending on where you go and what your language abilities are, you may be able to learn a new language or practice one you have already studied. I was already fluent in Spanish when I spent time on farms in Argentina and Uruguay, but I took the opportunity to connect with my hosts by exchanging English help for some basic indigenous language textbooks, Guarani, although a free room and board is a big draw for many volunteers (myself included), an experience that you may end up with much more than that. Not only is it a very financially practical way to travel, but it is a unique way to have a truly immersive experience abroad. THIS is possible WWOOF in almost every country on earth, but here are a few countries with a wide range of interesting opportunities. Ireland sheep, vegetables, and green hills are all around. In addition, there are about 200 hosts to choose from. Ireland is an expensive country for budget travelers, but WWOOFing can make the trip financially affordable. As An English-speaking country, this is a great choice for all and all native English speakers, although strong accents in rural areas can be a little difficult to develop from time to time, especially for non-native speakers. The whole country is covered with lush greenery and mild weather, usually pleasant all year round, so you can WWOOF for any season without much hassle. Italy is another hot spot for vineyards as well as olive and beekeeping opportunities. The country is incredibly popular with tourists and newlyweds, but WWOOFing here will give you a completely different view of authentic Italian culture, language and lifestyle rather than the typical beaten path. You can immerse yourself in winemaking, collecting olives, or any of the other offerings in this Mediterranean nation. Costa Rica is a country known for its organic farming practices in southern and Central America, as well as tropical beaches, mountains and waterfalls in tropical climates. You can ecotourism in his best place. Costa Rica is the perfect winter place for WWOOFing. Lots of vineyards for all you wine lovers out there! There are over 1000 hosts in France, making it one of the best countries for WWOOFing. Learn how to bake French bread in a bun, or work on a lavender field in the south. Imagine bringing your new French baking skills home to share. Nepal Nepal is the perfect destination for the adventures of WWOOFers who hope to combine agriculture with adventure travel. On weekends away from gathering local cultures, considering exploring Kathmandu or immersing yourself in the Himalayas and trekking to one of the many spectacular mountains across the country. Treks can be expensive, but otherwise Nepal is usually an affordable destination for most travelers. New Zealand is another English-speaking nation with a dramatic landscape and unique farming options. Adventurers flock to New Zealand for a variety of outdoor activities. You can bungee jump, hike, swim, kayak, climb, surf, scuba dive, raft, and skydiving. In addition, fans of the Lord of the Rings can visit the hobbits' homes. If you are particularly interested in working with livestock and don't mind a long flight, New Zealand is an idyllic place to volunteer. A thriving aquaculture industry for those of you who have a passion for fishing. Located in the southern hemisphere, the seasons are changing, so if you want WWOOF summers without sweltering temperatures, South Africa provides a mild climate during our summer months. Going on a safari on a day off sounds pretty neat too. The United States whether you are from the U.S. or not, the States is a great place for WWOOFing because of the diverse climate, landscapes and agricultural products. Hawaii alone has almost 400 hosts! In addition, WWOOFing inland (if you live in the U.S.) is a great way to cut down on living expenses (yet, rent) when exploring your own yard and sharpening different skills. You don't have to pay for this expensive international flight, making domestic WWOOFing an incredibly affordable option. Before you grab a plane ticket and take off on a WWOOFing adventure, there are a few logistics to keep in mind. If you consider each of these important criteria when viewing directions and WWOOFing opportunities, you are much more likely to have a positive experience during your time abroad. 1. Where to go first, consider the language. If you can't verbally communicate with your hosts, it will be difficult to learn from them. You better volunteer on a farm where at least one of the owners can speak the language in which you speak. If you're an English speaker dead set at WWOOFing in Chile but can't find an English-speaking host, start learning Spanish now! Language immersion is incredibly useful to acquire. You can learn more from than just agriculture. If you have a country in mind or travel plans are already booked, subscribe to this WWOOF organization and see what is available. Decide what type of environment you prefer: near or in the city, suburban, rural or remote. Check the location of each farm before exchanging messages with the host. 2. What type of work do you want to do what are your core agricultural interests? Do you want to work with animals? Want to know about organic produce, cheesemaking, bread baking, permaculture? Solid your goals before you start posting hosts. There are so many farms offering unique learning experiences such as fermentation, woodworking, baking, or animal rescue. See what's out there before you make a decision. This is where communication is key. WWOOF does not have a standard set of rules for living conditions, so you have to be careful, inquisitive, and advocate for yourself. It is important to know what to expect before you arrive, so you are not blindsided by very basic rooms. Communicate with the owner. Find out where you will sleep and live. Will they have a bike for you to borrow? Is there a bed? Do you need a tent? Is there any heat? Electricity? Running water? Can you walk to a grocery store, restaurant, bar or cafe? Go with low expectations. You may have to share a room and bathroom with other volunteers. You won't be spoiled, but you don't have to suffer either. Since you will live with strangers, privacy is also a key issue. On one of the farms I briefly worked on, I ended up sharing sleeping areas with an old, male master. While he turned out to be a very nice and hospitable person, you can understand that I was initially uncomfortable with the location. Sometimes, these kinds of situations are true cultural misunderstandings in terms of what is acceptable, so an open conversation with the host about your needs is important. I expressed that I needed a personal space as a solo woman travels, and he did his best to accommodate this by setting up a small barrier and leaving space when I needed privacy. It wasn't perfect, but it worked. My advice will be to ask as many questions as you may think before you arrive, especially if it will be one of your first time traveling or traveling solo. It's nerve-racking to go live abroad with strangers, so it's important that you and your host are on the same page about your dietary needs, sleeping and living quarters, and shared amenities. 4. Schedule work and responsibilities hosts should not exploit you, but then again, it can fall on you to make sure it doesn't happen. Make sure you clarify your work schedule and responsibilities before you commit to volunteering with them. Ask what kind of work they would like to do for you, how many hours a day, and how many days a week. WWOOFers often complain of overwork or not gaining any skills. Unfortunately, the organization is unlikely to will help you in this case, so you should do your best to set a maximum of 6 hours of work per day. If you are currently in time advantage, leaving early is always an option (I actually left the farm early because there wasn't enough work. 5. Visas If you need a visa depends on the country you are going to and the length of time you plan to stay. Do enough research to better understand visa requirements in the country you choose. For some countries like Japan, you can stay up to 90 days without a visa if you are from the United States. Do your due diligence so you don't get in trouble with immigration. Apply to many hosts, but don't exaggerate your experience to get ahead. WWOOF receives tons of letters from impatient participants. They may not have time to answer everything, much less accommodate them. Satisfy your search with your specific interests and location preferences. Read the hosts' reviews and make sure they're not negative. Even one or two negative reviews are not a good sign. Sometimes the owners will have a dozen positive reviews, but the conditions on their farm will be terrible in real life. On the other hand, there can be a host with no reviews which are really excellent. Go with your gut and hope it plays in your favor. Finally, cement your agreement with the host and pack according to the weather and work environment. Keep in mind that some things will be lost in translation when one end does not correspond in their native language. What would expect from me while WWOOFing? While each WWOOFing experience will vary depending on the type of work you do, there is one common expectation: hosts expect you to honor your commitments. They expect you to work hard and be somewhat flexible. Tell your host what you want to learn from this experience. A good host should help you learn the skills you want to acquire, and in return you have to be involved in the work. Some tasks can be extremely stressful, while others can be quite a sedentary lifestyle. Understand how sooner or later the hosts would like you to work as far as physical work and set a preliminary weekly schedule. Your hosts may also want you to help them table at the market or spend time with their pets or children from time to time. These are tasks that allow you to look into their lives, communities and families. Take advantage of this authentic experience and immerse yourself in the culture. How much does WWOOFing cost? It's subjective where, when and how long you've been WWOOFing. For example, if you're flying from New York to New York, your flight will cost a lot more than someone going to Mexico from California. You are responsible for your own travels. Here are a few costs to consider when budgeting: WWOOF membership/subscription fee (about \$40 per country per year) Flights Ground Transport to the site and beverage costs activities outside of WWOOFing Visa Processing (if you need it) Travel and/or health insurance Phone and/or internet services for most countries WWOOF, WWOOF, must be 18 years of age or older. In Ireland and Portugal, you can WWOOF at 17, but a letter of parental permission may be required. In Turkey, you should be 20 to WWOOF. There is no upper age limit, but you have to be physically able to do potentially hard work all day. During WWOOFing, can I bring my partner with me? Children? Dog? The answers to these questions will be given by individual hosts. Finding a host who will welcome you as a volunteer is much more difficult if you plan to bring a pet or young children. In particular, there may be safety problems for children. The partner should not influence your search much, but the host should be able to accommodate your situation if they want you both to volunteer. While WWOOFing, you're going to get messy, sweaty, and you can be laundering clothes by hand in a bucket, so forget about the extra spin cycle to get dirt! Pack neutral clothing that corresponds to the climate where you volunteer. Cotton becomes smelly when you repeatedly sweat through it and it doesn't wick moisture. Wool and some synthetics require less washing and hide body odor better than cotton. Bring utilitarian shoes, sunglasses, rainwear, hat, buff, sunscreen, lots of underwear and socks. If the sleeping area is unclear, bring a light sleeping bag and a bagged pillow in case. Take your backpack instead of rolling your luggage if possible. Trying to roll a heavy suitcase across the field is no fun. Read more: How to pack for a gap year anywhere in the world WWOOFing can be unpredictable; The best advice I have is to go with an open heart. This can be the most amazing experience of your life, or you may find yourself in an uncomfortable life arrangement working 8 hours a day without paying. You learn something, whether it's agriculture, culture, language or yourself as a person, and you end up benefiting. Even so, you can add WWOOFing to your resume! Also remember that WWOOFing is just one of many ways to volunteer abroad. There are similar companies, such as Workaway, that can offer you more variety, but you can also find free or inexpensive volunteer options with more traditional providers. Explore your options so you can make this next adventure trip of a lifetime. This article was originally published in April 2011 and was updated in May 2018 and August 2020, 2020.

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