



# Responsible Volunteering Policy

*Update: 20th March 2023*



## **1. Introduction**

This document provides Think Pacific's thoughts around volunteering abroad. It identifies how Think Pacific strives to follow best practice and be a positive role model and a leader within the sector, especially for the Fijian communities we are fortunate to work alongside. It explains how we take measures to consider our impact, review projects, listen to feedback and discuss and adapt policy as needed so we operate ethically, sustainably and responsibly for local communities. It examines the relationship we see with other forms of experiential travel and how, with the correct approach from organisations and a learning mindset, volunteering abroad can be hugely positive and empowering for rural communities.

## **2. Criticisms of volunteering abroad and 'voluntourism'**

There are many press reports, academic papers and online narratives highlighting poor practice within the volunteer abroad sector. Criticisms often allude to big international travel companies selling volunteer opportunities or 'voluntourism' to serve a market trend, with little thought to local communities' needs, or consideration of their resources, or to the sustainability of projects.

Harmful practices such as orphanage tourism are referenced frequently, with high profile cases in Cambodia and Haiti as examples, being well documented. Hopefully with continued exposure and international campaigns these programs will end for good.

Other reports have highlighted a lack of cultural awareness from the volunteer, a disregard for volunteers' skills and experience for roles, or cite volunteers working in professional capacities and taking away jobs from local people. Much has been written concerning young westerners' desire to 'help the poor' with 'quick fixes' and unethical marketing of poverty by organisations, exasperating distorted and unequal stereotypes.

Think Pacific both acknowledge and deplore the existence of harmful practices within the volunteer abroad sector. We believe that highlighting such issues are vital. Furthermore, constant dialogue, discussion and dissemination of best practice is crucial, for the betterment of the sector as a whole and above all, to ensure positive outcomes for the most vital stakeholder, the local community.

However, it is equally important to acknowledge the dangers in dismissing volunteering abroad and voluntourism outright due to very poor practice by some. Like any sector, at either end of the scale, there are extremely bad and extremely good examples. We consistently see case studies of great practice and programs working at local level, led by local people, that benefit communities tremendously.

Thoughtful and well-planned international volunteering, which incorporates high standards and best practice, can provide extremely positive outcomes for local stakeholders. Such programs can increase cultural exchange, perpetuate equality, heighten respect, support valuable local capacity building, foster empowerment, provide significant financial benefit to local communities and the local economy and fulfill local communities' ambitions.

As The National Geographic comment;

*“The media criticism, though well-intentioned, takes a frustratingly one-dimensional view, portraying volunteers as young, selfie-obsessed do-gooders with savior complexes. If you believe what you read, voluntourism is a neocolonialist activity. Yet most critics have never volunteered abroad. Others were turned off by a single volunteer experience. And though media coverage remains focused on local impact, reporting rarely includes local perspectives, which seems—dare I say—neocolonialistic.”*

In this landscape and in our position as the largest locally led volunteer organisation in Fiji, we feel it is important that Think Pacific share our model for a different version of what international volunteering could and should be.

### **3. How can volunteering abroad be ethical?**

We believe ethical international volunteering comes from a change in mindset and approach, a culture of constant evaluation, local governance and above all, local empowerment.

**Volunteers should ask key questions from providers, some of which may be;**

- *Was the project aim initiated by the local community?*
- *Does the project value sustainability and involve community empowerment?*
- *Does the project address actual needs in the community or has it been created to fulfil a need for a volunteer or outsider?*
- *Is there community ownership?*

- *What is the lifespan of the project, does it create reliance or does it have an exit policy and continue sustainably after volunteers leave?*

**Volunteers should also ask themselves;**

- *Why do I wish to volunteer?*
- *What are my core motivations?*
- *Does Think Pacific (or a different project) align with my beliefs and why?*

We shall address the above questions and many other questions during this document.

## **4. Striving for best practice volunteering**

We believe best practice in volunteering comes from a change in mindset and approach.

***Volunteers with Think Pacific encounter a 6-step process:***

- 1. Learn*** - before anything, learn about the country and gain a local perspective
- 2. Immerse*** - immerse fully into the culture, customs and lifestyle
- 3. Understand*** - local perspectives, local language, local issues, local challenges
- 4. Respect*** - different ways of life, different beliefs, different cultural norms
- 5. Collaborate*** - work with not for communities, be the passenger not the driver
- 6. Reflect*** - on your cultural experience, learning outcomes, contribution and experiences

Through this process, volunteers can **sensitively** contribute a **small amount** to supporting local community initiatives, whilst being the most respectful possible visitor.

## **5. About Think Pacific**

Think Pacific is a UK social enterprise, which funds a Fijian charity. For over a decade, we've partnered with the Fijian Government to support local community initiatives that aim to empower both local communities and volunteers. Together, we believe we can learn from each other, develop new skills and create positive outcomes.

## **6. Fijian registered charity**

The Think Pacific Foundation (FIJI) is a registered Fijian charitable Trust FJ989, which directs our projects and programs in Fiji. Our charity comprises Fijian Trustees, Youth & Sports Development Officers, Community Development Advisors, Health Professionals, Former Fiji Civil Servants, and experienced OSEP practitioners. The Foundation operates year-round, regardless

of volunteers being present and has a budget of approximately 1.5 million dollars annually donated by Think Pacific (UK).

## **7. Local partnerships**

Think Pacific is an organisation built upon collaboration, trust and long-term partnerships, of which we are very proud. Our partnerships mean that we support community driven action plans in line with the national aims. We are respected for working within the framework of the government and adding benefit to long term strategies. This includes supporting Fiji's National Development Plan and being a key facilitator of the Ministry of Health's 'Towards a Healthy Fiji Islands Initiative'.

### **Our Major partners include:**

- ***Fijian Ministry of Health (Signed MOU)***
- ***Fijian Ministry of Youth & Sports (Signed MO)***
- ***Fiji National Sports Commission (Signed MOU)***
- ***Fiji National University (Signed MOU)***
- ***National Employment Centre of Fiji (Signed MOU)***
- ***Youth Champs 4 Mental Health (Signed MOU)***
- ***NSO's: Inclusive of Fiji Rugby Union, Athletics Fiji, NRL Fiji & Netball Fiji.***

Our partnerships are based on the following principles:

- *Regular communication and feedback mechanisms between all parties*
- *Values alignment between the communities, Ministry, NSO's and Think Pacific*
- *An equal and balanced relationship between Fijian partners, community leaders and Think Pacific staff*
- *Engaging with partners on all matters of design, planning, volunteer recruitment, community preparation, review and monitoring*
- *Clear expectations of all parties*

## **8. Directed by The Fiji National Development Plan**

All Think Pacific's projects, programs and wider initiatives are now guided by the Fiji National Development Plan (FNDP). The FNDP is the outcome of a nationwide consultation process and the new national strategy for growth and development in Fiji, launched in 2018.

FNDP has been written to align with broader global commitments including the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Crucially, The Fijian Government has taken steps to apply UN SDGs to a ***Fiji-specific context***. By delivering the Fiji National Development plan, our projects and programmes work towards achieving the **UN SDGs**, whilst ensuring implementation is tailored to rural Fijian settings and locally directed, managed and monitored by Fiji. Our commitment to understanding just one country's needs and focusing solely upon Fiji is core to Think Pacific's beliefs of thoughtful and purposeful international development and volunteering. Please see the following link for the specific areas of The FNDP that we support:

<https://thinkpacific.com/about-think-pacific/fiji-national-development-plan/>

## **9. Our origin and background to local need**

We believe it's important to share the origin of Think Pacific.

Think Pacific was born out of local ideas and ambition within Fiji. Our visionaries included The National Health Advisor for Fiji, Mr Manasa Seniyasi who is now Trustee of Think Pacific Foundation, Chiefs of Fiji's Lomaiviti Province, including Ratu Komai and Ratu Jolame and Mr Waliki Satakala, former Provincial Officer facilitating the Towards a Healthy Fiji Islands Initiative and former Trustee of Think Pacific foundation.

The co-founders of Think Pacific also include Mr Harry Hunter and Mr Simon Darker from the UK. Through volunteering and working in the Fiji Islands in the early 2000's, both gained tremendous connection and love for Fiji. Harry Hunter is now a permanent resident and has called Fiji his home for 11 years. Simon Darker has worked in Fiji intermittently for 21 years.

It was during the early 2000's that Manasa Seniyasi, Waliki Satakala, Simon Darker and Harry Hunter met whilst working on different projects in Fiji. Through their interactions, a discussion began of concepts to fund and expand an existing 'community development' program being delivered locally:

The important steps to conceiving and creating Think Pacific were

- ***Local ambition:*** Mr Seniyasi and Mr Satakala, alongside their colleagues were working on a programme to improve community infrastructure and health in their rural communities of Fiji's Lomaiviti Province.
- ***Local initiatives:*** The project was called the Towards a Healthy Fiji Islands initiative, overseen by the Wellness Centre, a project of the Ministry of Health (where Mr Seniyasi

was an Advisor) and the Lomaiviti Provincial Council (where Mr Satakala was a Provincial Officer).

- **National assessment:** In his role, Mr Seniyasi had overseen a needs assessment and village profiling for the Fijian government. Projects had been approved and prioritized and there was a waiting list, with community leaders keen for initiatives to begin.
- **The need:** The program lacked funding to continue in the Lomaiviti region, despite efforts by local stakeholders to source funding locally.
- **A funding model:** Discussing possible funding models including outside grants, the concept was born that international students may wish to experience life in rural Fiji and in turn fund the aims.
- **Global understanding:** All parties saw the huge value of cultural understanding, learning and mutual respect that could be created, as well as small contributions the tourists or 'volunteers' may bring to local sport and youth initiatives.
- **A desire for better volunteering programming:** Simon Darker and Harry Hunter had both volunteered previously. They had been left disheartened by poor examples they'd seen, including a lack of sustainability and a lack of preparedness of volunteers. They knew they could add some value to supporting a better program from the volunteers' perspective.

## From concept to realisation. A 5 year process in Fiji and the UK

From this discussion, 'Think Pacific' went through a three-year consultation process in Fiji and a further two-year period of planning. Consultation was conducted with the Lomaiviti Provincial Council, local communities and The Fijian Ministry of Health, this involved the group gaining approval at community, provincial and then national level. This process confirmed areas of responsibility - How all stakeholders would plan, implement and review the projects inline with the action plans and needs assessments conducted, how communities expectations would be set, how volunteers would be briefed and managed, how funding would be distributed, how due diligence would be put in place, how sustainability would be achieved and all other intricacies of programming. Advice was sort from people across Fiji - Government officials, High Chiefs, university academics, NGO's, solicitors, High Commissions, hospitals and prominent local residents.

## Created at the University of Leeds

At the same time, Simon Darker and Harry Hunter went through a program at the University of Leeds Careers' Centre, called SPARK, supporting students and graduates with enterprise concepts. Through extensive support and guidance from university staff, Think Pacific was honoured to be named Leeds University Enterprise Concept of the Year in 2008, Yorkshire Universities Enterprise Concept of the Year in 2008 and be awarded the Sir Peter Thompson

Award in 2009 where the project was commended specifically for its social mission. Think Pacific also gratefully received start up capital from awards granted by The University of Leeds, Leeds Beckett University and the Shell Livewire Award.

## Memorandum of Understanding

The process within Fiji and the UK culminated in the signing of Memorandum of Understandings with Fiji's Lomaiviti Provincial Council in 2009 and following successful pilot projects, with Fijian Ministry itself.

## Depth of local planning

We're often asked why Think Pacific is different. We're sometimes compared freely to travel companies who launch 'voluntourism' quickly and at the whim of a market trend.

The answer is our **local process** - The depth of time investment, consideration, planning, commitment, discussion and collaboration from all stakeholders, and especially those at local level, that have culminated to achieve what we now see as Think Pacific and Think Pacific Foundation (FIJI).

## The core mission and aims all stakeholders adopted at inception were:

To Provide the funding, planning and logistical support to enable local communities, provincial councils, government partners and other stakeholders to achieve specific development aims. The aims are guided by the holistic development concepts of the National Wellness Centre (Ministry of Health Fiji) and the Towards a Healthy Fiji islands Initiative, which focus upon holistic development across 7 target areas: Physical, Mental, Social, Financial, Spiritual, Environment and Policy. These target areas of development are focused within the 7 target settings: Villages, Settlements, Cities & Towns, Schools, Churches, Workplaces and Sports. Through "Community Development" and "Youth & Sports" volunteer programmes Think Pacific is able to support and promote the core policy of Government partners and other stakeholders, whilst also providing development assistance in communities, schools, sports and other settings through our aims.

## Core principles

- 1. To make a positive contribution to the immediate needs and holistic developments targets, and improve local resources and infrastructure, in rural Fijian communities through financial support from Think Pacific and hands on assistance from international students and skilled local professionals.*



2. *To support a locally directed and sustainable model of development aimed at increasing local empowerment and providing long term solutions to development issues via skills sharing, community specific support, critical analysis and long term financial assistance by Think Pacific.*
3. *To invest in Fiji's youth; increasing opportunities for future generations by facilitating access to improved infrastructure, education, training and support.*
4. *To enable international students to experience and appreciate remote areas of the South Pacific Islands in a safe and responsible manner.*
5. *To promote Fijian culture, customs and traditional skills and encourage understanding and respectful behaviour from tourists.*
6. *To create a multiracial, international programme which values the sharing of ideas, experiences and differences.*
7. *To enable volunteers to challenge themselves and develop initiative, teamwork and leadership skills through remote living and cultural interaction.*

### **Since 2009:**

The past decade has seen Think Pacific achieve hundreds of programs, learn much about best practice and also evolve to meet the changing needs and priorities of the Fijian Ministry. Key milestones during this time have been:

- Delivering projects in 189 village communities across 9 Provinces of Fiji.
- Completing the infrastructure aims of the Towards a Healthy Fiji Islands initiative needs assessments on 3 islands - Moturiki, Batiki and Nairai.
- Investing over 7.5 million dollars into Fiji's rural communities and local tourism economy
- Creating a local body (Charitable Trust) within the Fiji Islands, employing local staff to work year round with community and government partners to ensure sustainability of local initiatives.
- Signing further partnerships and diversifying programs to include aims of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth and Sports and national sporting organisations.
- Please download Think Pacific's 'Progress Report' for full data and also visit the following link for some statistics: <https://thinkpacific.com/our-impact/>

## 10. Are our participants volunteers?

We commonly describe our participants as 'volunteers' but the term may not always be the best fit. At least in a traditional sense of what westerners may associate with 'volunteering abroad'.

Our participants do support locally led initiatives *alongside* local people and we do live within rural communities. However;

- Our volunteers **do not** deliver projects primarily to 'serve'.
- Our volunteers **do not** work with people who are suffering humanitarian crises
- Our volunteers **do not** work with communities who are 'desperate', require 'help' from an outsider, or live in 'poverty'.
- We **do not** work with 'vulnerable communities'; for example;
- Our psychology volunteers **do not** work with the mentally ill,
- Our health volunteers **do not** work with the sick or those in hospital settings.
- Our volunteers **do** work with children, but **never** in a care giving capacity and **only** when asked to assist with sports or extracurricular activities, where children are in the company of their parents and teachers. Our volunteers work in the same capacity as they may do so within their home countries.
- Our volunteers **do not** work in specific professional / career roles, which could replace or take away jobs from local people (such as teaching, primary care-givers, social workers, health professionals, conservationists or engineers) although **we do** often shadow, work with and learn from talented Fijian professionals in these sectors.
- The act of 'volunteers alleviating the poor' was **not** a driver for our inception;

The above are common media connotations of voluntourism or volunteering abroad and also the makeup of many criticised programs, where unqualified volunteers/ voluntourists may partake in areas outside of their skill level, qualification and appropriateness.

***Think Pacific projects are primarily a cultural exchange which adds value to the local economy, and fosters learning, understanding, equality and respect. Secondly, our volunteers make small contributions to existing local initiatives, guided by local people in a structure of collaboration.***

Think Pacific does ‘make a difference’, but the positive outcomes are small in scale, come predominantly from the bigger picture of local capacity building and are reciprocal to all.

## 11. Definitions of our participants

If we may not believe we fit a volunteering stereotype, then what could Think Pacific be defined as? Are we experiential learning? Service learning? Work integrated learning or an internship?

We view our projects as an amalgamation of all of the above. Depending on the nature of the project aims we’re asked to collaborate with, different Think Pacific projects may steer closer to one of the above terminologies. What is consistent is that all our projects focus on ***cultural immersion, learning from Fiji and significant reflection for the ‘volunteer’***.

We expose students to different ideas, beliefs, cultures and challenges that can broaden minds, expand cultural intelligence and develop soft skills. Reflection is always central and Experiential Learning is therefore intrinsic to our core values. We’ve created an award to reflect the skills that derive from living, working and learning in Fiji.

<https://thinkpacific.com/about-think-pacific/the-tp-award/>

The depth of project partners such as the Fijian Ministry Departments and influential local NGOs, means our projects are often seen as ‘work placements’, ‘work integrated learning’, ‘credit based modules’ or an ‘internship’, as students work collaboratively and learn applicable career skills or apply theoretical knowledge in supporting specific areas of Fiji’s National Development Plan at a community level. We bolster this by employing lecturers from Fiji’s two universities, guest speakers from local NGO or NSOs, and professionals from the medical and health sectors as well as our government partners to engage within our direct delivery.

The nature of projects being short term, means we can sometimes be referred to as voluntourism. Although we do not view that our projects contain the negative associations, which this term has come to represent.

Furthermore, voluntourism has been defined as: *the act or practice of doing volunteer work as needed in the community where one is **vacationing*** (Merriam Webster) or by the Cambridge Dictionary as a *type of **holiday** in which you work as a volunteer*.

Whilst Think Pacific does involve a (**our**) version of volunteering, and our projects are unquestionably a form of tourism, we deter from promoting Think Pacific as a *holiday*. In our

marketing, we expressly state our projects ***'are not a holiday'***. This helps participants come with the right mindset as 'holidays abroad' may come with connotations of recreation, leisure, or frivolity. In contrast, a Think Pacific project takes participants out of their comfort zone, is a highly structured learning and cultural immersion and is not something to partake in lightly, frivolously or for immediate gratification. The rewards gained from a project come from taking on a challenging program respectfully and responsibly and reflecting afterwards.

We must always distance ourselves from a holiday for the betterment of the outcomes, in much the same way a university would not wish to see their field trips regarded as a 'vacation'. In reality, our core projects also include less than 5% of travel within Fiji as we focus upon local immersion and integration into one community setting.

Despite distancing ourselves as a *holiday provider*, our projects are a form of tourism. A core aim of Think Pacific is to invest heavily into Fiji's economy and micro-economy. One of our proudest contributions has been investing over 7.5 million dollars into Fiji since 2009.

Finally, from a Fijian perspective at least, the name Think Pacific is best known as a Fijian charity. A locally registered non-for-profit organisation with over 50 + local staff and Fijian university interns employed annually, led by Fijian Trustees, collaborating with a network of other local Fijian organisations, bodies and ministries. In this context our 'international volunteer projects' are just one small component in the bigger picture of what our foundation has grown to represent for rural communities. A foundation, which acts year-round, in a country, where our staff are permanent residents.

Think Pacific Foundation (FIJI) is known locally for funding community development programmes, delivering workshops, skills training, 'educate the educator' programs, running sports and youth development courses, funding youth conferences at regional and national level and collaborating with local businesses, universities, government and NGO's on a range of health promotion, sports development and community development initiatives. As a local Fijian organisation, we are also known for providing donations and grants to grassroots community groups, schools, early years education centres and youth groups to achieve projects that would not be funded by other means.

## **12. Fostering mutual respect**

### ***Think Pacific's core projects***

Our core project has been designed with the Fijian Ministry of Youth and Sports and The Fijian Ministry of Health. It involves students living and working within remote, traditional and subsistence Fijian communities, usually for a time frame of 1 month. We work predominantly with Fijian **Youth Groups**, which are made up of local Fijian men and women aged 18-35.

During the project the international students and Fijian youths (and wider community members if they wish to partake) discuss, share, debate and work together to achieve learning outcomes and small scale actionables. The aim is for ‘volunteers’ and Fijian Youths and community members to discuss different topics and **learn from each other**.

Depending on the project and needs and wishes of the local stakeholders we work on a mix of thematic areas, or focus more specifically on one area of **public health, mental health promotion, life skills & leadership, sports development, environment, enterprise or engineering and built environment**.

Through daily workshops, action projects, cultural and group activities we aim for the following outcomes on each program:

- **International students** learn about Fijian culture, customs, traditions, history, community and subsistence village life and gain understanding and appreciation of local and national issues. Students learn from Fijian youths, local leaders, community health professionals, local educators, women’s groups and elders.
- **Both international students and Fijian youths** discuss and learn about thematic areas decided by the community and ministry, such as public health promotion, mental health, sports development, life skills and leadership, environmental issues and micro enterprises or the built environment.
- **Both international students and Fijian youths** gain a global perspective and an international experience.
- **Both international students and Fijian youths** learn about their cultural differences and similarities.
- **Both international students and Fijian youths** learn about global issues in a Fijian and western context.
- **Both international students and Fijian youths** pass their skills to younger generations by leading sports, extra-curricular and advocacy through structured games and activities within village settings.

- **Both international students and Fijian youths** further their skills in personal development, time management, communication, reasoning, leadership, team-work skills and reflection.
- **Fijian youths** further their employability, learn about local training and education opportunities, become local ambassadors for the Fiji National Development Plan and continue advocacy with their peers and younger generations within rural areas of Fiji.

### 13. Why engage volunteers in the first place?

We engage international volunteers at the request of local Fijian partners and for the following reasons:

- 1) **Local Funding:** A central aim of our project is to fund local initiatives. Think Pacific Foundation is 100% funded by the project fees of volunteers. Every participant can be very proud that through their project, they have invested into the running of a local Fijian charity, which among other initiatives, provides long term training, job creation and scholarships for Fijian youth, as well as investing heavily into the local economy in Fiji.
- 2) **international collaboration:** Our project provides the chance for Fijian youths to work with students from across the global. This fosters global understanding, a celebration of Fijian culture, an exchange ideas, a sharing of knowledge, skills and beliefs and in so doing, contributes to the personal development, confidence and self esteem of Fijian youth through peer-to-peer learning. The Fijian Government believes that young people in rural areas can feel part of a global community. This is Fijian youth gaining their own version of global mobility.

To this aim, we ask international students to view our project as a **global classroom** in which they are participating with peers from Fiji and to be proud that they have contributed financially to local community development.

### 14. Prioritising local empowerment

***Ensuring the local community drives their own projects is fundamental.***

### ***How we facilitate community empowerment:***

- In any project, the community is prioritised above all other stakeholders. We believe to achieve best practice, projects must have local direction, local management and local leadership.
- Every project supports existing government initiatives and provides specific support where it has been identified as needed by the Fiji National Development Plan and host community.
- We only work on projects where the local government and communities have requested a project and they have conducted and approved a formal needs assessment.
- We work with the Fijian Ministry, local partners and community leaders through committee meetings and they take the lead upon direction and delivery.
- The rural Community and government always initiates the request for projects, which then must be approved and consulted by all parties.
- Projects are designed so that volunteers only ever work alongside locals for very short periods of collaboration and exchange and never to replace local jobs.
- All projects incorporate personal development for Fijian youths, job creation, work placement opportunities or training for local people to ensure a net gain for local employment (the core priority of our charity).
- The core objectives of the projects address the needs and priorities of local people and their environments.
- The community is actively involved in the running of volunteer projects and the benefits, including financial, derived from them.
- There is a high level of community engagement and input throughout the project; for example, the organisation of daily activities, pastoral support, training of volunteers, cultural teachings and organisation of weekend and evening activities by community members, local government and other local stakeholders.
- There is total ownership over projects by the communities or local government and there must always be local leadership of the project.

- The operations of the project never jeopardise the fundamental needs of the local community such as access to local resources, land rights or intellectual property protection.
- Over 75% of funds by volunteers is invested into Fiji, such as supporting local training, local business and local tourism.
- Our Charity focuses long term upon advocacy and training, which empowers rural communities to develop sustainably by providing much needed assistance to build local capacity rather than creating an ongoing dependence on international volunteering. The core focus of our assistance as a charity in Fiji is facilitating access to information, opportunity and advice to people in rural areas, so they may have the same life chances as young people living in urban areas of Fiji.

## **15. How do projects address genuine need?**

We work on projects and initiatives, which have genuine need. We do this by:

- Only supporting existing locally led initiatives that are directed at government and provincial council level.
- All initiatives must align with the Fiji National Development Plan
- All projects have a strategic plan and Community needs assessment compiled by or approved by the Fijian Government.
- Ensuring that any project has the complete support and full engagement of the local community leaders and that the wider community has been consulted throughout the planning, delivery and review of any project.
- Ensuring projects meet local needs and have measures of sustainability from start to finish.
- Please see our 'Bespoke Approach' on our website for more information on our processes <https://thinkpacific.com/about-think-pacific/bespoke-approach>

## **16. Local employment opportunities**



Central to our mission as a charity in Fiji is creating jobs and training opportunities for local people through our projects and wider aims and under our government MOU's and contribution to the Fiji National Development Plan. ***Think Pacific volunteers never have and never will take jobs from local people.*** In contrast, we add to the economy, expand the local job market and foster local employment aspiration. This is core to our charities' objectives and one of our proudest contributions within Fiji. We achieve this by:

- We provide Internships for over 40 young Fijians annually, supporting the professional development and skills of mainly unemployed youth through our partnership with Fiji National Employment Centre.
- We provide work experience and placement opportunities annually for Fijians from Fiji National University and The University of the South Pacific.
- We fund local apprenticeships, scholarships and short courses for unemployed youth.
- We fund and support training schemes in partnership with local stakeholders to enable Fijian youth to act as Ambassadors for Public Health, Mental Health, Sports Development and Engineering in their community and continue the local delivery of the Fiji National Development Plan.
- As a core aim of our projects, we provide advocacy of adult learning, training schemes, local job training and government programmes available across Fiji.
- Through millions of dollars of investment into the local tourism industry through use of resorts for briefings and debrief, transport providers, food outlets and shops, we support employment in the hospitality industry and add to the local economy.
- We invest in a local staff team to ensure that those who know the country and the culture best are directing projects, consulting with community and government officials and implementing our wider charitable initiatives.
- We actively facilitate our Fijian staff to develop their personal and professional skills, advance their career development and progress through Think Pacific, or transition to other external opportunities.

## **17. Promoting sustainability**

Volunteering must advance sustainable community development, without damaging the present. To practice sustainable projects, we work to ensure:

- There are always sufficient resources to support the project activities and the volunteers and they will never be a burden, but only a financial benefit to rural communities we collaborate with and support.
- The project must empower communities by providing support to advance a longer-term community goal or address an identified problem. Our core aim is facilitating unemployed youth to gain employment, training and skills.
- We do not create our own initiatives. We only support existing local initiatives that are in need of resources to start, continue or expand and would not be funded by other means locally.
- We ensure our programs provide sustainability by being interconnected to the local economy. We have invested millions of dollars since 2009, supporting sustainable business development; This is achieved through making traditional village homestays our primary accommodation offering, supporting local tourism suppliers, using only local accommodation providers, local transport providers and local shops and suppliers for all project resources, food and materials. Through our charity, we also have facilitated the start-up of two community businesses, which are now run by local communities.
- There must always be a definite outcome and exit. Our projects are predominately 'advocacy based' and the culmination of each project is confirmation that the information and learning has been delivered and feedback has been attained. For other initiatives such as supporting youth and community to assist in the creation of sports development, youth clubs or kindergarten programs, we focus upon projects running wholly by the community/ local youths/ local person as the exit. To this end we have contributed to over 70 kindergarten schools being established, which now run locally. And over 200 sports clubs and after school clubs, which now run locally and without any volunteer or external charity support.
- Built environment and engineering projects must always have local planning, design consultation, be led by Fijian builders and have wholly local ownership. They must involve community training to ensure skills capacity to repair projects. They must have a clear outcome of community wide use and they must be needs assessed by the Ministry of Health and reviewed and monitored by the local government.

- Whatever the project, from mental health advocacy to enterprise projects, sustainability always needs to be incorporated from the outset. We ask ourselves, at what point will the project run without volunteers. And we work towards this aim and defined date.
- As a Fijian charity, our role is to continue to provide support, feedback and consultation with all stakeholders to ensure aims flourish locally or learning outcomes are derived for future best practice.
- We advocate a shift within international volunteer projects from ‘helping’ towards ‘learning’ from one another. By ensuring a learning mindset from international students, we foster a culture of communities being empowered and respected, rather than pitied or seen as a demographic to help. International volunteers gain skills from Fijians, are asked to reflect on what they have learnt and Importantly, the interaction between participants and communities is equal – it is about having a connection and doing things together. Through this we readdress any powershift or potential implication that international students may travel to Fiji to find ‘solutions’ to Fijian development. It is up to local communities, local decision makers and local youth to be the leaders of projects and initiatives and for our charity to support and integrate international volunteer interaction as local communities, partners and government would see best to achieve their goals (such as cross cultural experience for their youth and income generation)

## **18. Protection of vulnerable people and children**

We take full responsibility for ensuring that vulnerable people and children do not come to harm as a result of volunteering activities. In addition to following National and International Child Protection Guidelines, Think Pacific has a Safeguarding policy and has put together rules to ensure that our volunteers never cause distress to any beneficiary that we work with:

To mitigate risk, we ensure the following:

- We do not and have never volunteered in care institutions or with vulnerable adults
- We do not and have never allowed unskilled and short-term volunteers to work in residential care.
- We do not and have never volunteered with or supported orphanages

- We do not and have never had any roles where volunteers are a primary caregiver to children.
- We ensure volunteers and staff are appropriately vetted in line with Fijian Government Guidelines, regarding police checks, references or meeting other formal requirements for working or coming into contact with children.
- We have an updated and accessible Safeguarding and Child protection policies, which we disseminate to all stakeholders including volunteers, staff and partners and provide briefing and training to staff and volunteers,
- Volunteers are never to be alone with a child and this is communicated and enacted by all.
- Volunteers are trained how to manage sports or youth programs without discipline.
- Volunteers are educated in appropriate touching and how to discourage children from engaging with them in an overly tactile manner.
- Volunteers are instructed in how to deal with a situation and the process to follow if they suspect that someone's human rights are being violated.
- Volunteers may only ever work with children in a support role, for example coaching sports or assisting with extra-curricular activities and this is always done with parents, teachers or staff present.
- Think Pacific has registration at government level to adhere to child protection laws.
- We partner with Save the Children Fiji for their consultation, advice and training.
- We apply a zero-tolerance policy to exploitation, including physical, sexual and emotional violence and have specific PSEAH policy in line with latest DFAT guidelines.
- We have a clear code of conduct for responsible volunteer behaviour and acting as a role model.
- We train staff on all policies and how to recognise and report abuse
- We prevent any attachment issues by ensuring volunteers always undertake roles alongside Fijian leaders/ parents/ young adults / teachers and never as primary instructor or care figure.
- The structure of our projects reduces potential issues of attachment as we never provide long term or continuous roles working with the same children or adults. The project is planned and delivered in line with local government objectives to only visit the same

community for 1 x short programme (maximum 7 weeks) and never more than once per year.

- We have been a contributor to the Australian Government Funded a Child Safe Volunteering Hub in the Pacific region to work in partnership and collaboration with local organisations, the tourism sector and governments to provide a central resource of best practice and expertise in volunteering and tourism.

## **19. How do we safeguard the dignity of local people?**

We have the highest regard and respect for the communities and people we work with. We ensure measures are in place to safeguard the dignity of local people. We create a culture of mutual respect. This is achieved by ensuring the following steps are instigated:

- We do not 'market' poverty. We do not portray local people being in helpless situations needing to be 'saved' by outsiders; instead we use language and imagery to reflect authentic pictures of community life and scenery taken from past projects.
- We stress the ideals of mutual respect and partnership in training and preparation and live these ideals during the project.
- We foster cultural immersion as central to our projects and require volunteers learn about local life, customs and different world views.
- We Consider what is an appropriate level of volunteer time spent within rural communities , working with specific groups and in different contexts and activities.
- We provide mechanisms for the volunteers, community and staff to reflect on and evaluate what they have learnt.
- We put the priorities of the community first and activities are always conducted on local terms.
- We Involve local community leadership and employ collaborative planning from start to finish.
- We will not market our projects as though they are holidays and we demand volunteers go through a selection process to take part.

- Volunteers are always required to conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner. Inappropriate behaviour will be addressed immediately and disciplinary action, including expulsion from the project, will be taken.

## 20. How do we mitigate against dependency?

Local community stakeholders in Fiji lead on and have the casting decision over aspects such as the duration of Think Pacific projects, our locations, our distribution of volunteer teams, size of volunteer teams and scale and detail of volunteer involvement within the local objectives. Through this consultation, our model was created to provide support to local initiatives sensitively, sparingly, and culturally appropriately. It's through these features that we do not create outside dependency or attachment issues within the communities we work

Features of this process:

- Each team of volunteers visits a ***different community***, based on locally directed needs assessment.
- Think Pacific only ever visits the same community ***once*** within a 12 month period and only at both the request of the village and when the needs assessment and local policy dictates.
- Think Pacific can deliver projects in up to 70 different communities annually.
- We **do not** have placements that are longer than 8 weeks within rural settings and our core program is 3.5 weeks within a rural setting.
- Timeframes are devised by local stakeholders and local decision makers
- Time frames are designed to be of maximum benefit to achieve small scale community outcomes, with clear goals of each timeframe
- Shorter timeframes ensure outside influence does not change or alter the culture or structure or daily timetables of the village.
- The time frame ensures volunteers are not a burden upon local resources.
- The timeframes ensure volunteers (or initiatives taking place) do not interrupt the daily lives of Fijians or the core activities of farming, fishing and subsistence life.
- Through community planning workshops and briefings, the community members understand the volunteers' limited role, purpose, responsibilities and remit.

## 21. How do we provide financial transparency?

We keep our prices as low as possible whilst ensuring our team expeditions operate to exceptionally high standards, providing a safe, fully supported and structured experience.

We pride ourselves on our transparency and ethics when it comes to our project fees and we provide a clear **cost breakdown** on our website.

<https://thinkpacific.com/dates-and-costs/costs-breakdown/>

Over 75% of each project fee is spent within Fiji and supports local jobs, communities and local tourism. 30% of each project fee is donated to our charity to provide long term and year round support, training and the achievement of wider initiatives. This includes providing funding for local internships, supporting local education, training and job creation for Fijian youths. We have a team of Fijian Project Managers and Youth Development Officers providing year-round programs, evaluations and implementation for rural communities alongside our NGO and government partners to further the advocacy of public health, mental health, sports development and enterprise at community level.

## **22. What is our view on providing handouts and donations?**

Volunteers are discouraged from distributing donations or giving gifts to the children or youths we work with. It is important to Think Pacific that community members and especially children, do not expect gifts or hand-outs from volunteers. Think Pacific aims to create a position of equality between volunteer and community members.

Volunteers are welcome to bring resources to help them in delivering their sessions, which can then be utilized by future youth groups. Volunteers are also allowed to provide a small and appropriate welcome gift for their families, ideally to be shared by the whole family. In return Fijian families may reciprocate with offerings such as small handicrafts.

As an organisation, Think Pacific Foundation prioritises its funding to provide access to training and skills development for Fijian youths as a core follow up action to programmes.

Our Foundation does also make grants and provide resources annually, but each request is vetted by Fijian trustees, in consultation with stakeholders and in line with our foundations policy of fairness and due diligence. Donations of resources to registered local groups have included medical resources and ultrasound machines to rural medical facilities, stationary and learning resources for Fijian schools and kindergartens, sports equipment for youth groups or support for local communities to complete approved infrastructure projects.

We value the importance of Fijian beneficiaries having awareness that these donations come from and are fully overseen and directed by a registered Fijian charity and not from an outside

source. Although funding does come predominantly from volunteer donations, they are managed and distributed by Fijians locally.

### 23. How do we select participants?

Think Pacific is a challenging program, involves a great deal of personal investment and is not for everyone. This is not a holiday. With this view, we have a policy to only accept volunteers on a selection basis, which includes:

- All volunteers must apply to join our team.
- Volunteers must successfully complete an interview over the phone with one of our team, all of whom have been on placement with us before and are previous staff in Fiji.
- About 40% of all applicants are awarded a place on their preferred team upon successful completion of the initial interview.
- If an applicant does not meet the minimum education and experience criteria or does not adopt the correct learning mindset and cultural interest, we will refuse the applicant until they are able to meet the minimum requirements.
- We require all volunteers to hold relevant DBS check, visa and provide references as relevant and when required by the Fijian Government to participate in their specific project.

### 24. How do we prepare and support participants?

Think Pacific, alongside the community and Fijian partners work collaboratively to guide, teach and support our volunteers so we can have respectful and purposeful engagement. Our training support includes:

**UK Preparation.** We provide thorough guidance needed to be prepared for volunteering in Fiji. Through an online Portal, resources, guides, webinars, live online Q&A sessions and follow up phone calls, we foster a learning mindset of volunteers, a culture of support and guidance for best practice and ensure volunteers have the correct kit, medical supplies, flights, visa, insurance and vaccinations.



**Fiji Briefing.** Each project begins with a minimum 3-day briefing, orientation and training in Fiji. This includes gaining instruction and further understanding by local staff on the project aims, experience, safety and process. It also includes setting learning goals for each volunteer, establishing roles and responsibilities and setting clear objectives for the weeks ahead.

**Cultural Learning.** We prepare volunteers for Fijian culture, village structure, and we engage the community directly to provide cultural lessons and learning. The family unit within Fiji supports volunteers to integrate into the community and we perpetuate a culture of respect, understanding and immersion into Fijian life.

**Clear and Appropriate Volunteer Roles.** Due to the holistic approach and learning mindset of our project, our volunteers may be involved in a range of initiatives as part of each project. We ensure from our planning that roles meet the skill set of volunteers and students have the support needed to be effective in their role. We also ensure there is a clear daily itinerary and volunteers know where they should be and what their outcomes are. We market the roles clearly and honestly and before allowing any person to join as a volunteer they must first be interviewed and briefed fully.

**Health, Safety and Wellbeing.** Throughout the project the health, safety and wellbeing of our volunteers and the community is our number one priority. We have thorough risk assessments for each project, crisis management, fire, first aid, transport policies and 24 hour support throughout as well as additional support for mental health, all of which can be viewed on our Staff Portal. <https://thinkpacific.com/staff-portal/>

## 25. How to foster respect and equality?

### ***No saviours. No heroes. Just equal collaboration.***

We ask volunteers to bring an appropriate mindset and motivation. We take responsibility for supporting students to be respectful volunteers.

Some questions to ask yourself, especially when visiting a rural community that (by your standards) may seem poorer than you have experienced;

- Do you want to volunteer out of **'pity'** or because of **empathy** and **curiosity**?
- Do you want to **help or teach** traditional communities or **learn** from traditional communities?
- Are you wanting to **'save'** Fiji or **celebrate/ experience** Fiji?

Always put context into situations – How would you volunteer at home? We ask volunteers to keep their approach and mindset the same when visiting ‘lower economically developed countries’ - positive, respectful and equal.

*Always keep the following advice in mind; Never force your views, opinions and your own way of life upon your hosts. You will be a much wiser and more respectful volunteer if you take time to understand the local culture. Once you arrive in Fiji, immerse yourself in every aspect of life. Take an active interest in local customs, values, religious beliefs, stories and age old legends and if things work differently than they do at home, give thanks, it's why you have come!*

### Think Pacific Volunteer Preparation Guide

As both a UK organisation and a charity in Fiji, we acknowledge our responsibilities to manage students’ expectations. We aim to raise the standard of students engaging in responsible volunteering abroad by:

- Ensuring our brochure, guides and marketing material reflects a true as possible and honest portrayal of the experience in Fiji and the challenges, expectations, expected contribution and experience.
- Taking a proactive stance on re-defining narratives; for example, from ‘Poor countries need Western help’ to ‘We can all learn about the world and help each other’.
- Refraining from portraying a distorted image of Fiji or creating pity, but rather celebrate Fiji.
- Ensuring our language on the phone or in printed material is empowering towards Fiji.
- Selecting volunteers through application forms and interview and turning volunteers away who do not match the ethos or aims of the project – volunteering in Fiji is a privilege not a rite of passage.
- Ensuring volunteer roles and duties are matched to the volunteers’ level of skill and capability.
- Only engaging volunteers in roles that they would be allowed to undertake in their home country.
- Providing thorough pre-departure support and advice and teaching participants how to be the best example of an international volunteer.
- Encouraging students to be reflective, honest and critique their intentions and motivations behind joining our expedition.

- Advising students to be realistic about what value they can contribute to the project and what limits they should expect.
- Requesting students come to Fiji with a ‘Learning Mindset’.
- Demanding students to show respect at all times to local people, culture, customs and ways of life and to listen and try to understand local ideas.
- Enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards our code of conduct and asking students to be accountable, responsible and the best version of themselves in Fiji

### **A message to our prospective volunteers**

If you’re considering Think Pacific, then with the right mindset, you will have a hugely purposeful, self-developing and rewarding experience. Be prepared for a **great challenge, tremendous learning experience, honest reflection and immense cultural exchange**. Our projects are tough and you will need to fully embrace the program and leave your comfort zone.

We practice volunteering where your ‘contribution’ is best achieved by **small thoughtful interactions** undertaken after first investing in understanding and learning through a Fijian perspective. Through working side-by-side with Fijian youth and embracing village life, you will return a more educated ‘traveller’ who has made a true connection with Fiji. And you’ll encapsulate volunteering ‘the Think Pacific way’.

## **26. Continuous evaluation**

Volunteering can be beneficial for all parties. Yet it is the complex and honest self-reflection and the evaluation and dedication to continually improve, which is needed to achieve best practice. This is required of all stakeholders; the volunteer, Think Pacific, local communities and the government and local partners.

Crucial to success is that we evaluate each project from both the host community and the volunteers’ perspective. Evaluation includes post project interviews, village workshops and discussion, volunteer reflection and discussion and data gathered through anonymous forms. Co-creating the evaluation criteria in conjunction with all stakeholders, especially the host communities, has helped us to ensure that everyone is moving towards the same objectives.

We believe that reflecting on past actions, collaboratively working with local partners to monitor, debate, improve and progress is what constitutes best practice. This is an intrinsic and constant process.

We continually look at useful and relevant ways of how impact can be measured. This includes reporting on outcomes that were planned at the beginning of the project, using surveys, anonymous feedback and hosting honest discussion forums with community members, government partners and volunteers to retrieve critical feedback.

We have started to produce data from our community feedback forms as well as logging the number of objectives achieved (including persons employed, local persons engaged in training, local work placements offered, number of facilities completed, number of local sports and youth clubs that have reached sustainability, impacts upon local business and level of financial investment in areas of the local economy). Looking forward, we wish to link others into this process, such as universities in Fiji and external bodies and this is a process we are consulting upon at present as well as creating more formal and comprehensive joint reports to be produced annually.

## **27. Future considerations**

We're always open to discussion, debate and collaboration on best practice in international volunteering, service learning, internships, study tours and all forms of responsible or experiential travel in Fiji.

We make it our duty to work closely with organisations within Fiji and outside organisations who wish to engage and discuss best practice, including collaborating with governments, universities and NGO's and fellow organisations. We are always looking to strengthen our approach and raise standards. This must involve all parties and especially the host communities and local Fijian partners as the driving force and leaders.

Over the past decade Think Pacific's projects and charitable activities have become more diverse as they align with changing community needs and Fijian Government Policy. From feedback from communities and stakeholders we are constantly making small adaptations to suit the needs of the host communities and ensure decisions are made where their needs are prioritized first and foremost.

We have seen a shift in movement, which has been led by communities and local government, wishing for a greater focus on volunteers connecting at a deeper level with local communities, sharing world views and skills, and exchanging knowledge and ideas collaboratively and equally.

This view, positioning volunteering less as 'helping' and more as 'learning' is being adopted more and more by forward thinking organisations. A concept being supported in academic journals, government departments and highlighted recently as a model of best practise by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (February 2019). It's a vision we believe fosters a more positive and empowering version of sustainable, responsible and ethical 'volunteering'.