A Special Invitation to Rarotonga, Cook Islands

“Rarotonga is a ‘dream island’ of white sands, clear Pacific waters, a reef teeming with fish, lush green forests, and seemingly limitless flowers and fresh fruits. Its greatest asset, though, is its people, who can only be experienced to be believed.”

- Patrick Scanlan,
  Cook Islands volunteer

The Cook Islands – a place where barefoot children arrive at school with toothy smiles dominating their faces; a place where shoes are unimportant, but happiness is.

Cook Islands leaders profess that to ensure children’s continued happiness and development, they must supply significant outside assistance to strengthen their educational foundation – and provide opportunities for those educated children to earn a lifelong living within their nation. Over years of close partnership with our island friends, Global Volunteers has been helping provide essential services in varied areas – engaging volunteers’ unique skills in the broad areas of literacy, public health, and specialized care. Your help is needed in these ways:

- Make learning fun through reading games, skits, music – there’s no limit!
- Provide one-on-one attention to children with special education needs.
- Inspire young adults to develop life skills by offering personal lessons or case studies.
- Serve as a classroom resource by simply sharing your personal knowledge.
- Encourage and support islanders of all ages living with disabilities.
- Invest in island conservation projects.

The current government is seeking to minimize the “brain drain” from the islands over two decades, and to encourage people to return by improving educational, cultural, medical, and environmental services in the Cook Islands. We are committed to helping them.

High truancy rates and emphasis on chores over homework play a part in many children
lagging behind in their education. Cook Islands children are generally educated in two very different languages (Cook Islands Maori and English). There is also a tradition of oral culture, so reading is not a common hobby with few homes having books for children to read. These factors contribute to difficulties with reading and comprehension and this is where you can help by providing that one-on-one attention the students need.

We hope you will seize this unique opportunity to be of genuine service to the people of the Cook Islands while enjoying their beautiful tropical home. As a volunteer instead of a tourist, you will get to know and learn from the Cook Islanders and you will leave behind the gifts of hope, service, and friendship – impressions that will last far longer than footprints in the sand.

**Host Organization & Community Partners**

Global Volunteers has been invited by the Cook Islands Civil Society Organization (CICSO) to lend a hand in a variety of ways. This organization is led by an elected president, currently Ngara Katuke, who also works with the Ministry of Education. The role of this organization is to represent the needs and desires of all of the non-governmental organizations in the Cook Islands. They facilitate support and voice the concerns of community organizations throughout the Cook Islands. CICSO is, therefore, an important vehicle for advocating for change in the country and trying to have government and outside agencies meet the needs of the people living in the Cook Islands.

**Community Work Projects**

The following is a description of some of the service projects available. While we ask all our volunteers to be flexible, this is especially important in the Cook Islands due to the wide breadth of potential work projects that depend on the community’s needs at any given time. These needs change throughout the year based on the season or the availability of local people.

**Reading Tutoring:** The priority project as requested by our hosts in the Cook Islands is in the area of literacy. Volunteers are needed to tutor students in reading from the elementary to high school level. Because the Cook Islands honor their strong oral Maori tradition, some students do not formally learn English until the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Once in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the emphasis switches to English. Students often struggle with phonetics, comprehension, and reading. Teachers, parents, employers, and the students themselves have identified tutoring in reading as vital to advancement in high school and later in the workforce. Elementary schools must put every child through a reading program as part of the regular curriculum. Volunteers are needed to fill in the gap, especially for students with learning disabilities or students who are simply struggling and need extra help. Once the students reach high school, there is no reading program, so without volunteers they do not get any further tutoring in reading; however, you may be asked to help students who are still struggling with English writing and reading. Depending on the school, volunteers can spend anywhere from five minutes to an hour tutoring an individual student or small groups of students.
**Tutoring Numeracy, Literacy, Math Testing, and Computer Literacy:** One-on-one and group assistance is needed in numeracy and math comprehension and mastery. Anyone with math skills can be of tremendous value. The school year begins in late January and ends in early December. The high school needs volunteers to help with baseline testing in the beginning of each year and progress testing at the end of the final term. Volunteers with an academic background can be especially helpful in meeting this important need. The ability to effectively use computer programs and search the Internet is essential for every successful student. Volunteers help high school students learn the basics and improve their proficiency.

**Early Childhood Education:** Local people understand the long-term benefits of enrolling their children in preschools, and there are several on the island. Volunteers work with children one to five years old in a variety of early childhood learning activities including reading to the children, playing with age appropriate toys, nurturing children, teaching handwashing with soap and water, offering a global perspective, and engaging in arts and crafts.

**Repair and Maintenance:** The Cook Islands enticing allure and majestic beauty are in large part due to the spectacular views of the crystal blue water of the South Pacific and the clear sunny skies. But the ocean salt and the sun’s energy take a tremendous toll on all kinds of structures - classrooms, playgrounds, fences. Volunteers help protect and maintain school facilities by painting, repairing, and reconstructing buildings, and meeting plumbing, carpentry, and electrical needs.

**Special Needs Care:** If you have experience with special needs, counseling, psychology, psychiatry, art, teaching, or physical therapy, there may be opportunity for you to work in a number of projects. The Creative Center is a local center that provides care for adults who are physically and mentally challenged. The center was set up to teach these students life skills and to give their parents respite from caring for them. The aim is to increase their employability and independence. Te Kainga is a mental health clinic in need of licensed and experienced counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists to assist their clients. Te Vaerua rehabilitative services also provide an occasional opportunity for trained professionals to assist their clients with rehabilitation. Integration and participation in the community are the common objectives with these organizations.

**Takitumu Conservation Area:** Established in 1996, this area provides safe breeding ground for the endangered Rarotongan fly-catcher or kakerori. Global Volunteers assist local staff to repair existing trails, blaze new trails, clear fallen trees, and do light construction. At certain times of the year you may assist with a bird census or rat baiting activities. Because this project involves strenuous labor in rough terrain and often the use of a machete, it inherently poses far greater safety risks than any other project in the Cook Islands. This project requires high levels of mobility and fitness. This project is intermittent and dependent on community personnel being available to work alongside volunteers.
**Administration:** Both the Cook Islands Civil Society Organizations (CICSO) members and several schools need assistance in a variety of administrative functions, including drafting organizational constitutions (by laws) and funding proposals (there is money available from international organizations to help schools and NGOs in developing countries, but the proposal process requires expertise that is not widely available on the island). Accounting and bookkeeping are other skill areas where volunteers help set up sustainable systems and teach local people how to effectively use those systems.

**Library and Museum:** Volunteers are sometimes needed to work in the Cook Islands Library and Museum Society. Projects range from routine cleaning and straightening of shelves to protecting and filing archival documents. You could also carry out data entry, general library duties, carpentry, and repairs of museum exhibits. The salty humid conditions on Rarotonga are not paper-friendly, and consequently, books and documents need to be covered in plastic and monitored for deterioration. For history buffs, this place provides a fascinating look into local life and history.

**The Essential Services**

At the center of community projects is The Essential Services Triangle. These are the 12 essential services, prescribed by the United Nations, which every child needs to realize the fullness of their potential. Global Volunteers organizes these services into three major categories – Eradicating Hunger, Improving Health, and Enhancing IQ.

**HUNGER**
- School and household gardens
- Child nutrition
- Micronutrient supplementation
- Improved stoves

**HEALTH**
- Health, nutrition, and hygiene education
- Malaria and dengue fever prevention
- Deworming
- HIV/AIDS education

**COGNITION**
- General education
- Promoting girls’ education
- Potable water and sanitation facilities
- Psychosocial support

Global Volunteers is committed to supporting our community partners in these twelve areas through the sustained, comprehensive assistance of short-term volunteers and direct project donations from volunteers and supporters worldwide. Depending upon the needs of the host community and the community-based projects requested by local people, Global Volunteers helps deliver some or all of the twelve services. Every volunteer can help in one or more of these twelve interventions. As a short term volunteer, you’re a vital component in helping families and local community organizations deliver these essential services.
Meals, Lodging & Transportation

Global Volunteers Cook Islands Country Managers, James and Debi Puati, lead all teams in the Cook Islands. In cooperation with our community partners, James and Debi will facilitate your team’s orientation, assist you in being fully engaged in your assigned work project(s), and manage all project-related logistical issues. James is a former teacher and currently a local entrepreneur and Debi is currently completing her doctoral studies regarding youth in the Cook Islands. As Cook Islanders, James and Debi will introduce you to the community, help acclimate you to the local culture, invite you to community events, and engage you in the day-to-day life of the community.

Cuisine

Three meals a day are included in your service program fee. Each morning, you will eat a catered breakfast in the Vaka Lounge, the Global Volunteers meeting room at the hotel. You will prepare your own lunch to take to your work site; this will likely be a sandwich with fruit and snacks such as a granola bar. Dinner will also be taken in the Vaka Lounge and will be prepared by a local cook trained in safe food handling to prepare typical, nutritious, home-cooked Cook Islands cuisine. Volunteers can expect to dine out at least once or twice a week.

The evening meal usually consists of a range of beef, chicken, or fish dishes served with salads and either pasta or rice along with bread and a variety of local fruit for dessert. You will have the opportunity to try local traditional dishes such as taro (a root crop similar to a potato), ika mata (fish marinated in lemon juice and topped off with a coconut cream sauce), rukau (a spinach and coconut cream dish), and other delicacies which are usually very well received! Desserts, soft drinks, and alcoholic beverages are readily available for an additional charge.

Lodging

The Club Raro is located opposite the beach, between beautiful trails, palm trees and tropical gardens. Guests will enjoy air conditioned rooms with ceiling fans, satellite TV and private bathrooms. We know that you will enjoy staying at Club Raro with the melodic and rhythmic sounds of the waves crashing on the shore - another outstanding benefit of Global Volunteer’s “adventure in service.” Standard accommodations are double occupancy, but single rooms are available for $670 for each week.

And, during your free time, you can enjoy the onsite pool, snorkel in the clear lagoons, go fishing, or hike in the rugged, lush interior of the island. Or you can choose to relax and soak up the sun on one of Rarotonga’s beautiful beaches. All these opportunities are within just a short distance from the Club Raro.

Transportation

All in-country transportation is included in your service program fee. You will be picked up at the airport on the first day of your program by our country manager in our 15-person van with adequate space for luggage and dropped off on the departure date. On orientation day, your team leader will give you important information on your service projects and on the first day of service will take you to the work project sites. The local public bus or the school bus will be your transportation to and from your work sites each day thereafter. Depending on the work site, travel time varies from five to 30 minutes. Note: transportation for free time activities is not included.
**Free Time & Sightseeing Activities**

Free-time options are plentiful in the Cook Islands. They include snorkeling in the clear lagoons, scuba diving (if you are certified), fishing, or hiking the rugged and lush interior island. The Punanganui Market is open on Saturday mornings and is the largest local market in Rarotonga. Here you can expect to see cultural performances as well as what is sold – local produce, fish, and crafts. Volunteers also can enjoy flying to the outer island of Aitutaki for a weekend excursion or day trip. Of course, you may simply choose to relax on a quiet beach or linger at a local restaurant to catch one of the popular island dance shows. Those you have been working alongside may invite you to participate in local events with them or give you advice on local goings on. You also may have the opportunity to listen to talks given by local experts on topics such as pearls, coconuts, or whale conservation.

**Service Program Contribution**

Volunteers’ service program contribution covers all lodging in double accommodation, three meals a day, in-country team transportation, emergency medical evacuation insurance, all preparatory materials, onsite orientation, a full-time team leader, and administration costs. Single rooms are available for an additional fee. The Cook Islands service program fee is $3,095 for one week, $3,295 for two weeks, and $3,495 for three weeks. Please ask your volunteer coordinator about extended stay options and referral credits, as well as discounts for students, companions, alumni, and children under the age of 12 with an accompanying adult. Through Global Volunteers’ online fundraising tool you can create a personalized webpage to request partially tax-deductible donations from family and friends. Airfare and free time activity expenses are your responsibility. The service program contribution and airfare are tax-deductible for U.S. taxpayers.

Reserve your spot today! You CAN make a genuine difference. Call one of our volunteer coordinators at 800-487-1074 to register.