



2024 Volunteer Vacations Host Guide

American Hiking Society's Volunteer Vacations program is designed to send you a crew of eager volunteers, ready to assist with your trail needs. Volunteer Vacations are week-long trail building/maintaining projects organized by American Hiking Society & hosted by BLM, NPS, USDA-FS, USFWS, state parks, trail organizations and other nonprofit partner groups across the country. Most projects are one-week or shorter in length, consist of 6-15 crew members, and involve trail maintenance and building tasks on hiking trails on public lands.

American Hiking provides you the following project assistance:

- Promotion of your trip nationally through our website, printed trip schedule, industry events and through our sponsors and partners
- Logistical support and communication throughout the planning and trip process
- Volunteer food stipend for trips that cannot provide food
- Assistance from a volunteer crew leader (if requested) who will aid with menu planning, food shopping and lodging logistics

Volunteers provide the following:

- Volunteer labor and eager, enthusiastic attitudes
- Camping gear (backpack, sleeping bag, tent, personal items)
- Travel to and from a predetermined pick-up point, generally the closest major airport

Hosts provide the following:

- Project plan and backup plan
- Technical expertise and supervision for the volunteers
- Lodging for volunteers (cabin, lodge, house, improved or primitive campsite)
- Tools & safety equipment including first-aid supplies
- Group cooking supplies including stove, pots, pans, utensils, and fuel
- Transportation to the worksite if hiking is not an option
- Airport Pickup and Drop-off for volunteers (not required but highly recommended)

PRE-TRIP PROJECT PLANNING & DESIGN

Task Selection:

American Hiking is dedicated to protecting foot trails and the public lands that surround them. Therefore, the bulk of your volunteer projects should be focused on building or maintaining foot trails on public land. While you have already indicated a general project on your crew request, goals and specific tasks for the week, should be determined based on your volunteer crew. You will receive information about each crew member in advance of the project. Consider the crew, their trail experience, their fitness level, and their age in selecting the tasks to complete.

You should establish an itinerary for the week, secure necessary tools and materials, and confirm there is enough scheduled work prior to the crew's arrival. Your crew may be very experienced and complete the work in half the time estimated or weather could affect which projects can be accomplished. Always have a backup or additional projects planned and ready to implement.

Project Design:

Detailed planning and design of the project should occur at least a month prior to the scheduled arrival of the crew. As appropriate and needed, the site should be flagged and the design should be drawn. The project plan should include details such as the exact location and length of the trail to be worked; the estimated number of water bars and what kind to be cleaned, removed, added; the clearing width for vegetation; the installation, removal or repainting of signs involved; whether the project involves the construction of features such as puncheon, boardwalk or small bridges; and so forth.

Project Itinerary:

You should be prepared with a basic itinerary for the project based on the number of individuals in the crew, their experience level, and the tasks you aim to complete. Most trips will have volunteers arriving on Sunday evening. Sunday evening is generally used for setting up camp/settling into accommodations and group orientation and introductions. No trail work will be done on this meeting day. Generally, you should plan to have volunteers work Monday-Friday (with at least a half-day off, usually one full day off), so 4 - 4.5 days of actual trail work. Saturday will generally be used for cleaning up/breaking down camp and travel. We advise volunteers to expect to work 6-8 hours on the work days. You will need to discuss the exact hours of work and start/end times with the crew leader and communicate that to the crew. Please also incorporate a couple of hours on Monday morning (or the first work day) to go over tool safety, trail work safety, and to discuss the project in general. Also factor in time to drive or hike to the project, breaks, and lunch (which will be eaten on the trail). This schedule may vary if the group is backpacking into basecamp.

Sustainability:

American Hiking is committed to building and maintaining sustainable trails. We urge you to abide by sustainable principles and to use the best techniques possible to make sure the work our volunteers accomplish lasts for years to come.

PRE-TRIP COMMUNICATIONS

Communication with American Hiking:

When the minimum # of volunteers you indicated on your crew request has been met, AHS will contact you to confirm final project details and provide you with the current volunteer roster. Once we confirm the trip details with you, the project confirmation will be emailed to those registered. AHS will update you of any changes or additional volunteers that register after the confirmation email has been sent and before the project starts.

Once the project confirmation is sent, volunteers have the green light to book their travel, so it is imperative that the details in the project confirmation are accurate. **Trips are generally confirmed 8-10 weeks in advance of their start.** If the trip has not met the minimum number of volunteers that you designated in that timeframe, we will contact you to determine if the project should proceed.

It is very important that the project confirmation goes out to volunteers in a timely manner. Please respond back to us as soon as possible when we contact you. If you are going to be out of the office for an extended period of time, please provide us with an alternate contact that can confirm project details.

Communication with AHS Volunteer Crew Leader:

If you have requested an AHS crew leader for your project, we will try to place an experienced volunteer in this role. The main responsibilities of an AHS Crew Leader are to act as liaison between the crew and you, menu preparation, grocery shopping, social leadership, and coordinating camp chores. Each crew leader goes through an orientation to learn program basics, but since every volunteer vacation is different,

we ask that you discuss the specifics of the project, accommodations, week's itinerary, and specific gear needs with the Crew Leader.

Although the Crew Leaders are usually veterans of the program, they are not expected to be experts in trail building and design and are not paid for their leadership role. The Crew Leader will look to you, the project host, for guidance regarding the project design and logistics.

Communication with the Crew:

Your contact information will be listed on the project confirmation, so when the confirmation is sent, you may start to receive inquiries from crew members. As mentioned, you will receive a detailed roster of volunteers when the trip is confirmed, so you can reference the names and backgrounds of those that might contact you.

The Crew Leader is required to make contact with the crew to introduce themselves and provide general trip information. In your initial conversation with the Crew Leader, please let them know of any specific travel or project details that they need to pass along to the crew (i.e. specific clothing they should bring, meeting location, weather update). You are also welcome to contact crew members to welcome the group and provide further details on arrival, the project, etc.

ACCOMMODATIONS & TRANSPORTATION

Accommodations:

Hosts are asked to provide lodging for volunteers (campsite, cabins, dormitory, etc.). You should secure lodging or campsites and determine what the sleeping accommodations, COVID-19 safety guidelines, and provisions are well in advance of the project start. If you are hosting a backpacking trip, also determine where the crew will stay or camp on the day of their arrival and the night before their departure (often at the trailhead or ranger station). This will be communicated to the crew in the project confirmation.

For camping trips, volunteers are required to provide their own tent, sleeping bag, pad, and all personal gear as necessary. If you are providing indoor accommodations, please determine the number of available beds/cots and how they are situated, and what volunteers should bring (sheets, pillows, towels, linens, etc.).

Transportation:

If hosts are able, providing airport pickup and drop off shuttles is highly recommended. If you are able to provide airport transportation, it increases the ability for volunteers to join your project with less of a financial burden for a rental car / rideshare to your project location.

If volunteers must drive to and from the campsite / accommodations to the project location, please let us know in your host application. Most volunteers are fine to carpool with each other, but some volunteers prefer not to drive their personal vehicle down long or rough roads to access remote project sites. If this is the case, please communicate the details with us, and if possible, provide transportation to and from the project worksite.

Permits/Entrance Fees:

Any permits required for volunteer service need to be secured well in advance of the volunteers' arrival. Any visitor entrance fees should be waived for the volunteer crew and communicated to the entry gate attendee in advance of the volunteers' arrival.

ON-SITE

Orientation:

You should be available at the first meeting or group orientation to welcome the group and introduce yourself and staff who will be working with the crew. This meeting usually happens on Sunday late afternoon / early evening shortly after the crew arrives at camp and settles in.

Safety Orientation:

Prior to the project starting, we require you to thoroughly discuss safety issues, emergency plans, and proper tool use with the volunteers. Discuss any safety concerns of the project or region (altitude sickness, poison oak, bears, etc.). Discuss what steps should be taken in case of emergency, especially if there is no or limited cell phone service. Please demonstrate proper and safe use of each of the tools the crew will be using and any precautions they should take on the trail.

Supervision and Training:

Full supervision of the crew while on the project site is required. If you need to be away from the crew for part of the project, you must provide an alternate staff member or quick method for communication should something arise on the trail (radios, satellite phone, etc.). Most crew members are usually experienced, but often there are participants who have never done trail work before and will need to be trained.

Tools/Safety Equipment:

We ask that you provide any necessary tools and safety equipment required for project completion. Volunteers are asked to provide their own work gloves. Please demonstrate proper and safe use of each of the tools the crew will be using and any precautions they should take on the trail.

Group Cooking Gear:

Hosts are required to provide group cooking gear including stove and fuel, pots, pans, utensils as necessary, etc. **A full listing of supplies we ask you to provide is included.** Volunteers are asked to provide their own personal eating utensils including plate/cup/knife/fork (for camping trips).

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS & PROTOCOL

The safety of our volunteers, hosts, and partners is our highest concern. We have established the following safety precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on a Volunteer Vacation. These guidelines will be continuously updated as needed. The most up-to-date version of our protocol can be found [online here](#).

All volunteers will be required to show proof of full CDC approved COVID-19 vaccination to join a Volunteer Vacation. American Hiking Society Staff will collect and confirm all participant vaccination records prior to the group's arrival at the host site.

In addition to AHS' guidelines, volunteers will also be required to abide by all local, state and federal COVID-19 travel and group regulations and any additional safety requirements as required by individual hosts. This may include requiring a negative COVID test, quarantine before and after arrival, wearing masks indoors when not eating, or other requirements upon entering that state.

AHS recommends that all volunteers stay up to date and follow the Center for Disease Control's Domestic Travel Guidelines before, during and after their Volunteer Vacation, which includes wearing a mask when traveling, remaining socially distant from those outside your household, self-isolating and testing prior to and upon return of your trip, and continually monitoring yourself for COVID-19 symptoms.

All trip participants must provide their own health and accident insurance in case of injury or illness while on their trip. AHS or any of its partners can neither be held responsible for potential transmission of nor exposure to COVID-19 on the trip and during travel to and from the trip.

BEFORE THE TRIP:

- Continually monitor your current health and potential exposure to COVID-19
- People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. If you have any symptoms, you may have COVID-19 and we ask that you contact us and remain at home.
- Do not travel or participate in a Volunteer Vacation if you are sick with or tested positive for COVID-19, were recently exposed (within 14 days) to someone with COVID-19 (even if you don't have symptoms), or just don't feel well (see symptoms above).
- While traveling to and from the trip, vaccinated individuals may coordinate ride sharing and carpooling as they choose and according to personal preferences, local, state and federal guidance. We require that all volunteers follow CDC travel requirements including wearing masks while in airports, airplanes, shared cars, public spaces and airport shuttles while traveling to and from the Volunteer Vacation.

DURING THE TRIP:

- All volunteers must carry and wear a face mask when directed by the host, local, state or federal guidance.
- Per the CDC's guidance, unvaccinated volunteers must wear facemasks at all times when traveling, when indoors and when social distancing is not available outdoors.
- AHS requires that all volunteers follow the CDC's guidance on gathering safely with those outside your household. AHS strongly recommends that vaccinated individuals wear a facemask when indoors and when social distancing is not available outdoors and in areas of substantial or high transmission.
- All volunteers are asked to maintain good personal hygiene practices including washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before you eat, after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Volunteers must wear their own work gloves and refrain from sharing throughout the week.

MANAGING SUSPECTED COVID-19 ON THE TRIP:

- Those exhibiting symptoms of illness will also need to self-isolate from others and leave the trip immediately. AHS strongly urges that the individual seek immediate medical attention at the nearest facility.
- AHS cannot provide evacuation services. For cases where a volunteer is ill with suspected COVID-19 and incapacitated such that they cannot get themselves to a medical facility, an ambulance will be called immediately at the expense of the individual. AHS will not cover the cost of any medical or evacuation services.
- Anyone with a fever or exhibiting symptoms of suspected COVID-19 must quarantine themselves (stay completely away from anyone who is not a member of their household and stay away from any surface touched by others) while they are preparing to leave.

DAY-OFF/EVENING ACTIVITIES

Local Activities:

We strive to provide both satisfying work and play on our volunteer trips. To ensure that the crew has a chance to relax and explore the area on the trip, we ask you to give the crew at least a half-day off of trail work for free-activity, and a full day if possible. This can mean scheduled time off the work project for the crew to do their own exploring, hike on their own, or relax in camp. If you would like to be involved

in the free-day activity a guided hike which are often deeply appreciated by our volunteers, a tour of the area, ranger talk, boat/canoe trip or other excursion are all suggested activities.

Special Event:

It is not required, but a final dinner/celebration with the crew is always appreciated at the end of a working vacation. This can be discussed with the crew leader and announced to the crew during orientation. Sometimes the volunteers want to get on the road on Friday evening if they have completed the weeks' work so you might want to schedule the celebration on Thursday evening.

MEAL PLANNING/FOOD

Food Purchasing:

For most Volunteer Vacations, the menu planning and food purchasing is arranged by the Crew Leader. However, if the Crew Leader is flying to the project location, they might need transportation and assistance with shopping on their arrival day. If the Crew Leader is driving to the project site and does not need transportation, please be prepared to provide information regarding local grocery stores.

American Hiking Society will reimburse your organization or the Crew Leader (whoever purchases the food) up to \$13 / per person / per day (with the first and last days counting as ½ days). ALL receipts must be saved and submitted along with the Food Reimbursement Form (provided by AHS staff upon project confirmation) for reimbursement. AHS reimburses via mailed check only. AHS will **not** reimburse for alcoholic beverages.