

Questions & Answers

Everything you need to know for your voluntary service in Zambia



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Overview








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If any of your questions was not answered, please feel free to contact us.

The best way to get in contact with us is via E-Mail: zambia@iChange.ch



What is iChange about?



iChange is a small nonprofit organization located in Switzerland. The organization was founded in 2009, after three young Swiss had an unforgettable experience volunteering in Zambia in Southern Africa. Currently iChange is only active in Zambia.

One of the founding goals of iChange was not only to support the underprivileged in developing countries, but also to enable voluntary service for interested people. From their own experience the three founders knew how difficult and expensive it could be to get such an opportunity. iChange helps by providing information and mediating between volunteers and projects.

These goals of supporting the poor and enabling voluntary services are both represented in the name of the organization. On the one hand iChange means, that I am changing something and on the other hand it means, that I am changed through the experiences I make during my volunteering.

One of iChange's main principle is to use 100% of the donations for projects on site. All board members, helpers and volunteers work without any compensation and carry the costs for travelling and living in Zambia themselves.

Why do I have to apply?



The trust and acceptance of the local population in Zambia is of utmost importance for our projects. Over the years iChange was able to build a strong foundation despite the fact that many locals are skeptical and suspicious towards white people or generally towards non-Africans.

Recent years have clearly shown us that representatives of a country or organization strongly influence the perception of the local people. Each and every representative of iChange not only actively represents their nation but also iChange. By ensuring that volunteers fit to our vision and understand the local situation as well as customs, we want to ensure that future volunteers can also benefit from the good reputation iChange and their volunteers have built over the years.

To ensure this, we need each and every volunteer to agree on some basic conduct rules. Further we want to make sure that your motivation is pure and that you have an attitude that reflects our vision of fruitful collaboration with the locals.

A voluntary service with iChange will not suit everyone. We want to get to know you in order to get a feeling if you will be able to have a successful and enjoyable time in Zambia. We want you to profit from your visit just as much as the local population.

Am I the right person for iChange?



iChange does not have its own office in Zambia and does not have team members from Switzerland constantly there. Therefore we expect our volunteers to be independent and responsible.

We support and accompany each volunteer during the preparation, their stay, and after their return home as much as possible. We suggest and offer different projects that you can choose from and we also provide all necessary infrastructure (e.g. accommodation or transport). Furthermore we provide a competent and trusted local contact person located in Zambia.

However, the success of the projects asks for your initiative. You can join existing projects but also work on your own ideas and projects. If your ideas are in alignment with our vision, we might assist your project financially.

In conclusion a voluntary service with iChange is perfect for people who love a certain amount of freedom and independence when it comes to choosing where to invest their time in. We believe that volunteers should find projects they are best suited for in order to take advantage of their strengths. This freedom, however, comes with a great amount of responsibility.



Which requirements do I have to meet?



Each and every volunteer must meet following requirements:

- 18 years and older
- Good physical and psychological health
- Able to handle a high degree of independence
- Flexibility and adaptability in a new environment under new circumstances
- Being able to handle difficult and unusual occurrences:
such as a unreliable water or electricity supply
- Being able to communicate well in English
- Acceptance and keeping of our conduct rules

What are our conduct rules?



One of our founding goals is to enable voluntary services to people from developed countries. Generally we would like to give each person the opportunity to make such a unforgettable experience.

Compared to many other organizations, iChange does not ask for a certain set of skills. More importantly we look for the right attitude and motivation. We especially want to enable first experiences in humanitarian aid to young individuals. In our opinion each and everyone, no matter what their background is, can contribute through their unique talents.

However, we do ask to follow some conduct rules:

- Respect local customs and follow them as much as possible
- Adapted behavior to local culture and values:
e.g. no drinking or smoking in public and appropriate dressing
- Open and honest communication with your contact persons
- Willingness and openness to learn from each other
- Respectful and careful handling of our volunteer accommodation
- Keep safe: e.g. no excursions by night time, no visiting strangers

How do I get to Ndola, Zambia?



Almost all of our projects are located in Ndola, the third largest city in Zambia. The accommodation for the volunteers is located just outside the city. Each volunteer is responsible for the booking, organizing, and financing of their own travel.

A small international airport is located just outside of Ndola. Flights from Nairobi (Kenia), Johannesburg (South Africa) or Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) are different options to travel to Ndola.

We suggest to book your flight well in advance as the prices tend to increase towards your departure date. This is one reason why we suggest you to start on time with your application process.

The team usually books their flights over the Internet. There are various websites that help you compare different offers. We can suggest www.kayak.com or www.momondo.com. Both services compare flights from many different online booking platforms. Visiting your local travel agency might also be a good option, especially if you prefer a face-to-face contact person.




What should I pack?



We suggest to carry old cloths, as the roads are often muddy during the rainy season and very dusty during the dry season. During the day Zambia is quite warm, however in the evening the temperature usually drops a lot. If you travel during the rainy season you should definitely carry a good rain coat.

Generally everything can be bought in Zambia. Local super markets import their stock directly from South Africa. However, items seldom used by locals are often quite pricy (such as sunscreen or shampoo) and should therefore be better carried in your language. Good mosquito nets are also not too easy to find in Zambia.

If you are planning to carry some gifts, we suggest to bring typical souvenirs from your country (such as chocolate or pocket knives for Swiss) or electronics (such as an old mobile phone). Paper, pens or other stationary equipment is quite heavy and can easily be bought in Zambia at a cheaper price.



Which medical preparations are necessary?




Each volunteer is responsible for their own medical preparations. We strongly advise you to visit your doctor in advance in order to get the most current information on local requirements. You might also want to check the Internet for information. Most recently a yellow fever vaccination is mandatory when traveling through certain countries to Zambia.

We suggest to visit your doctor about two months before your planned departure. He will prescribe all necessary medication, give you missing vaccinations, and give you other important insights about Zambia. Especially malaria medication often needs to be taken well in advance of your departure.

Most basic medication is available in Zambia. Nevertheless we suggest to carry your own basic stock of medication, such as Aspirin or medication against diarrhea. You should also speak with your health insurance to find out how well you are covered in foreign countries. You might need to look for an additional insurance for the time of your stay. In case of serious emergencies patients are usually transferred to South Africa, where much better hospitals are located.

Each volunteer carries the responsibility to make sure that he or she is adequately ensured.



What should I know about crossing the boarder?



Immigration in Zambia might quickly turn into a hustle. You should plan this part of your journey well in order to avoid any inconvenience.

If you plan to stay for less than 90 days we suggest to get a tourist VISA. This VISA can be directly attained at the airport and is valid for 30 days after entering the country. This VISA can be extended twice for totally additional 60 days. The extension after 30 days is very important and must not be forgotten as you will be seen as an illegal immigrant otherwise. It is also important to state that your are in Zambia for tourism and not for work as you will only get a 30 day business VISA. Business VISAs cannot be extended. The tourist VISA costs about \$50, depending on your country of origin. If you plan to leave and re-enter Zambia you can also apply for a multi-entry VISA which costs about \$80.

If you plan to stay longer than 90 days the whole process will be more complicated. These VISAs need to be applied for in advance at a Zambian embassy. We usually suggest staying less than 90 days but are willing to help if you plan to stay longer.

Please make sure you are well informed about the most current regulations and requirements. These might change or be different for your country of origin. Best is you get the information for the official Immigration Homepage of the Zambian Government:

<http://www.zambiaimmigration.gov.zm/>

How is the weather in Zambia?



The best time to travel to Zambia for voluntary work is between **March and October**. During these months Zambia has its dry season and it hardly rains. During the day it is quite warm. Due to the low humidity the heat is often pleasant. As soon as the sun sets, however, the temperature drops drastically and can reach temperatures of about 3°C. Therefore it is advisable to carry some warm cloths.

Between **November and February** Zambia has its rain season. During these months longer rain periods are not unusual. This makes the transportation difficult, as many roads are not tarred and therefore turn into rivers. On the other hand the nature during these months is extremely beautiful. A voluntary service during these months is possible but it will slow you down and ask for a lot more flexibility.



How can I communicate in Zambia and how can people reach me?



Communicating in English is a basic requirement for a voluntary service in Zambia. Most people are able to speak English and communication should generally not be a problem. However, especially less educated people often only speak one of the local languages. If needed you will usually be able to find a translator during the projects.

We strongly suggest to carry a (old) mobile phone and to buy a SIM card after your arrival. This helps you to communicate with the local contacts and also lets you send text messages to reasonable prices home. Furthermore your family or friends can call you on this number. This is usually cheaper than you calling home from your Zambian number.

Since 2010 iChange offers pre-paid Internet in the accommodation of the volunteers. You can use the same SIM card from your mobile phone and load data bundles on it. The Internet is not extremely fast but you will definitely be able to surf the Internet and send E-Mails. Furthermore there are different Internet cafés located in the city. You should however be careful not to avoid catching a virus when using a memory stick or other external storage.



How safe is Zambia?



Since many years Zambia is politically stable and quite peaceful. The violence level of the local population is low. Nevertheless, we suggest women to travel in groups if possible.

We recommend not to carry too many valuables and too much money around. Money should generally not be carried in well accessible pockets or bags. Pickpockets are not uncommon, especially in crowded areas of the city.

You should avoid traveling alone after sunset or before sunrise, as the chances of being robbed are usually higher.

How can I get money in Zambia?



Zambia uses the currency Kwacha (ZMW). Currently one US Dollar is valued at about 6 ZMW. At the beginning of 2013 Zambia devalued their currency by removing three zeroes (one US Dollar used to be 6'000 Kwacha). Local traders might try to take advantage of tourists and hand out the old currency. In general the currency is not very stable leading to fluctuating exchange rates.

Ideally you should not carry too much cash. We suggest to carry some US Dollars that can easily be exchanged at one of the numerous exchange offices in town. You will also need some US Dollars to pay for your VISA when entering the country. You should make sure that the US Dollars you carry are not dated before 2000. Due to forgery these bills are not accepted.

Money can easily be withdrawn from one of the ATMs in town. This is a safer alternative to carrying a lot of US Dollars with you. In our experience it is cheapest to use a Maestro card. However, you should consult with your local bank to see which option is cheapest for you.



What does it mean to be a “Musungu”?



Locals call white people «Musungu». This means «white man» in their local language. Being one of these «white man», or more generally speaking, being non-African carries some particularities.

Zambia and especially Ndola are not very touristic. You will not see many white people on the streets. Especially when you decide traveling by bicycle you will stand out. You will have to learn to constantly be at the center of attention. This might not always be easy.

In general people in Zambia are very helpful, friendly, and peaceful. However, there are also a number of locals that are less friendly towards white people. You might be attacked verbally once in a while. It is very important to stay calm and not look for confrontation. You will usually have other locals that will come and support you.

Being white often means being rich. Therefore people will often ask for money or help. Even if you help, they will keep asking for more. This can be misunderstood as a ungrateful behavior. Some volunteers struggle with this at the beginning. You have to know that you can always say no. Sometimes it is important to say no. If you have some struggling experiences or do not know how to handle certain situations we advice you to talk with your local contact. He always has a listening ear and great advice!

What about transportation?



iChange provides a number of bicycles which can be used by the volunteers. With these most projects can be reached within 30-40 minutes. The center of Ndola is about 20 minutes from the accommodation. During rainy season cycling can be quite difficult. Most volunteers travel by bike.

Alternately public transportation can be used. Small minibuses drive to the city center. From there a second bus can be boarded that takes you to the project sites. Traveling with these buses is time consuming and adventurous. There is no time schedule and you will hardly ever see other white people taking the bus. For women we do not advise travelling by public on their own.

The most comfortable and convenient but also most expensive alternative is the taxi. You can be picked up at home directly driven to the project site. This mode of transportation is seldom used on a regular basis by the volunteers.



What about food and accommodation?



Accommodation:

Thanks to generous donations iChange could manage to build an accommodation dedicated to volunteers a few years ago. It is a humble little house that fulfills its basic needs. The “Malaika Home” is located outside Ndola on the property of the Chisha family, who will also be your direct contact as soon as you are in Zambia.

Food:

You will almost find all common groceries you are used to in Zambia as well. Simpler foods such as pasta or rice are not too expensive. We usually calculate about 100 Swiss Francs per month for food. However, this strongly depends on your eating habits. The accommodation provides a self-contained kitchen. You can even use a gas stove in case of electricity shortages. Shopping can be done in the city center at a big supermarket.

Costs:

To cover running costs and pay for the infrastructure volunteers need to pay 4.5 Swiss Francs per day. This includes the costs for water, electricity, cleaning agents and the use of bicycles. Furthermore an application of 50 CHF is charged. This fee includes the transportation costs from and to the Ndola Airport or the Ndola bus station. This contribution needs to be transferred to iChange before the departure.

How is the infrastructure?



The accommodation for volunteers is located in a wealthier area of Ndola. Nevertheless regular water or electricity outages are common. This can slow down your daily activities and requires patients as well as flexibility. The Infrastructure that we often take as granted will be much more appreciated during your stay in Zambia.

Doing your housework will take more time as back home. A lot of activities are done manually. For example laundry is done by hand.

The streets in Zambia are often, especially outside the central city, not paved and in bad conditions. Traveling is therefore not as convenient as back home especially during the rain season. You will have to be careful when using the bicycle as the streets are overcrowded and many drivers drive recklessly.



What about the projects in general?



Generally speaking we expect a proactive mindset from our volunteers. Even though there is a lot to do you will have to look for your work. No one will approach you and give you a schedule. You need to find activities that suit you and that you can enjoy.

It is important to talk with people. Especially our contact person (Nicholas Chisha) and the teachers of the Community School always have great inputs and might even have concrete ideas. However, it is your responsibility to approach the people.

What can I do in Mackenzie?



Most projects of iChange take place in the Mackenzie slum located next to the Ndola International Airport just outside the city. One of our central project is the Mackenzie Community School where you will be able to support in various ways. You might simply support the teachers during the classes, tutor kids, come up with your own ideas for sport or creative activities and possibly other ideas. Some volunteers started their own projects at the school. To coordinate your activities you should speak with the teachers who will help you look for a timeslot and also support you with your preparations. Your contact Nicholas Chisha will introduce you to the teacher's team.

The teachers know the Mackenzie Community very well. They will be able to give you feedback on ideas and give you tips how to best implement them. You might also have to first buy supplies. The school is not equipped very well. Only the most important utensils are available at the school. Most products can easily be bought in town.

Coming up with new ideas is usually not a big challenge. You will see that the implementation of a project will be a much bigger challenge. Communication is very important. You should also not be discouraged if projects do not take off immediately. Be prepared to invest a lot of time into a project and also show a big amount of flexibility. Changes and cancelations in the last minute are not unusual. To ensure a smooth activity we also advice to always have one of the teachers joining your activity. They will be able to translate and keep the children in line.

What can I do at the orphanage?



The orphanage «St. Anthony's» is run by a catholic sister who gets funds from Irish churches. About 150 orphans are located at the orphanage. Many of them were dumped by their parents or suffer from AIDS.

As a volunteer you are able to help in many of the daily work activities. You can either help in the nursery, spend time with the children, help with housekeeping or feeding the babies. Our contact person (Nicholas Chisha) will happily introduce you to the local staff of the orphanage. They will then let you know where you can assist them best.

Working in an orphanage can be much more challenging and difficult as you would imagine. Children are often treated very differently compared to what we are used to. A main reason for the rough handling of the children is the lack of caretakers. It can be helpful if you share your experiences with Nicholas, as he might be able to give you more background information. The staff at the orphanage is usually also open for discussion and happy to help.