

Volunteers to Otjikondo - advice

Your host is **Gilly Stommel**

Name and full address of project:

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Nearest major town: Outjo, 80km away. Windhoek is about 4hrs away.

Normal transport: By road. Hitch lifts with people from Otjikondo. Hitching is not the taboo it is in Europe. It's the most common way for people to get around and is safe as long as you are sensible. It is still advisable for girls to hitch in pairs. There is also a reliable taxi driver called Mario who is normally available for out weekends or holidays.

Post: Post is collected from Outjo. Letters take 4 weeks to arrive, and about 6 weeks to get back to the UK. Parcels can take from 6 weeks to 2 months to get to you. All not very reliable and tricky with customs. The best way is to ask people coming from UK/Europe to bring things with them.

Phones and email: internet is available at school and in the GAP flat. Mobiles do usually have reception. You will need a Namibian sim card at some stage.

Your Work

Your main work: You will be responsible for teaching Art and Sport to all the children G1 - 7 during the school morning.

Mr Faustinus is music teacher but you can join the school orchestra and teach an instrument if you feel confident. You will also do some remedial work and oral English with the first years and can speak to Junior Primary teachers about assisting in class. In the afternoons you will do some remedial work (reading or maths) and then work 2 sessions with small groups (craft, music, and sport etc - whatever you're good at.) One of the volunteers will also take a library session or individual instrument lessons every afternoon, in place of remedial classes.

Remedial work is great, as you get to work closely with one or two children at a time. Afternoon activities are compulsory but less formal than school lessons and in small groups - you can do anything fun with the kids, as long as it's safe!

If you arrive at the start of the year you can choose your activities. You can also be very flexible so if you do not want to do ball skills, or chess, you can do something different as long as the children are occupied and you have prepared something useful to do. The teachers now usually do remedial sessions.

Other work you will be doing: On Saturdays the volunteers supervise the children while they help clean the Art Room, Library etc. You will also hand out pocket money to the children or perhaps be asked to help in the shop. On either Friday or Saturday night you supervise watching TV. You're welcome to organise anything else, as the children are all resident and like to be kept busy. At the end of the Second Term you will produce a musical with the older children and a Nativity Play with the younger children at the end of the Third Term. We organised a Halloween and a Valentine's disco which the children loved. Sometimes in the evenings we read story books in the small boys or small girls hostel.

There are often other small projects/jobs that can be done so there is never any reason to feel bored.

Other people you will work with: There will be 2 or 3 volunteers and you will share the workload between you. You'll probably double up for most lessons as the classes are big. Gilly or Sara will advise/coordinate most of your work, and Mrs Shilongo, the Principal, will check up on school lessons. Volunteers must provide the Principal with weekly lesson plans.

Normal daily work hours: Lots - be prepared to be dedicated. The volunteers work more hours than the teaching staff, but there are many rewards because of the level of involvement with the children. You'll work a 7 day week, though not all are full days. Generally school starts at 7am, and finishes at 1pm. Afternoons are from 3pm to 6pm. Evenings can be used for play rehearsals etc. Before the play/ craft exhibition you could be working from 7am to 9pm some days - be prepared. It's hard but fun!

Weekends: You will have duties on Saturday mornings. On Sundays there is church, and while it is not compulsory for volunteers or staff to go, it is much appreciated if you do. The atmosphere is very positive and the singing is great. TV supervision one evening, extra drama rehearsals at weekends if needed, farm drives if you are lucky!

Time off: You get about 1 long weekend off every 4 weeks - 1 or 2 each term. There's not much else to do at Otjikondo, so it's no problem being busy while you're there.

Children you will work with: The children range from 6 to 14 years old. They are split into 7 main classes of about 35. You will work with 8 teachers, and 7 hostel staff

(most of whom speak good English). Otjikondo (hostel, and project) is run by Gilly Stommel. She does not work on a day to day basis with the school itself but is still highly involved and motivating force.

Resources: You will have access to virtually all the resources you want for art (paper, paint, colours), music and sport lessons (balls, athletics equipment). Ask for what you need, and if Gilly can get it for you, she will.

If you have an instrument, bring it! And if you have a specific skill or passion it is nice to bring the resources to teach the children ... e.g crochet hooks

Text books: There are no text books for the lessons you give. However, the GAP flat has lots of books brought by previous GAPS, which are good for getting you started with ideas. It would be useful if you could bring with some ideas of your own, as you never know what the previous GAPS have been doing. Pinterest and Sara are also full of amazing ideas.

Library facilities: There is a well-stocked library for the children to use - they borrow books weekly. The GAP flat (where you'll live) also has a good selection of books, which other volunteers have left behind.

Equipment available that you may use: Photocopier and laminator, for art work. There is a computer in the staff room, There is a small speaker for you to use during art lessons if everyone is quiet and well behaved.

Special equipment to bring from the UK: Mainly art and craft ideas! Stickers for the kids (to help with behaviour/ for prizes), colouring pencils and glue are all useful. Postcards of where you live can be useful and interesting for the kids. You will produce an end-of-year play/musical and it's good to have an idea of what you could do before you come, or even bring a script with - make sure the English is quite simple.

Special skills: Gilly will exploit/ use (in the nicest way) any skills you have, though she doesn't let you borrow cars!

Accommodation

Type of accommodation: Each volunteer has a room of their own, with an en-suite toilet and shower. The flat has a courtyard area where you can sit out/ have a braai. It has a lot of space, running water and electricity. There is NO TV. The volunteers have a shared kitchen and living room. You have to keep your flat immaculate as donors are often showed around the flat. Other adults will not be impressed if you live in a mess as the people here are very house-proud.

If shared, with whom: Visiting Gaps may share your accommodation if rooms are available, and donors and visitors to the school may overnight in the Guest House.

Some of these will stay days, others may come for a couple of months, so be prepared to have a variety of faces around you. Your parents or family members may also want to visit you and will be welcomed.

Distance from workplace: On site, but the flat is out of the main school grounds, so that you have some privacy. The shop is pretty much next door and has all the toiletries etc you will need. Local people from surrounding farms, as well as Otjikondo's farm workers use the shop, so you'll meet lots of people.

Eating arrangements: Self-catering. Your weekly order is delivered by Spar and other basics you may have forgotten can be purchased from the Otjikondo shop. Meat is a major part of the diet out here, and vegetables are basic, so be prepared to eat simply if you are a vegetarian.

Food shopping: Gilly will order food for you from Outjo. There is a list of food available and you just write down how much you need each week. Pasta, bread, rice and some tinned food are available from Otjikondo shop. Milk, juice, yoghurt, fresh vegetables etc are delivered weekly. The Foundation pays for all of this but chocolate, toiletries, biscuits and other small luxuries must come out of your own budget.

Electricity and water: There is full-time electricity at Otjikondo. Water is not a problem, and you can drink from any tap. Gap flat has its own washing machine.

Cooking facilities: A 2 ring electric hob and small oven. There is a toaster, a microwave, an airfryer and a stick blender.

Places to buy food and staples: Weekly orders from Outjo or more options on outweekends and holidays.

Other comments about accommodation: Mosquito nets are available in the Gap flat. The flat must be kept locked at all times as there are a lot of people around and you don't want to invite trouble. Valuables (laptops, tablets) can be put into Gilly's safe during holidays.

Clothes

While you're not expected to be fully covered, DON'T show lots of flesh - It is not appreciated here at all!

Working clothes: Bring respectable length shorts and t-shirts. Some teaching can be done in sportswear, as you do PE every day. Be aware that children are more likely to treat you like a teacher and member of the staff (i.e., with respect) if you dress smartly in a skirt/ trousers and top. It is better to dress like this when possible - it does make lessons easier.

Off duty clothes: Anything which is respectable. Short skirts/ hot pants are not a great idea. Trousers and jeans are always useful. Light cotton works best, especially as it is very dusty here and your clothes will get very dirty! Shorts and sarongs are useful. In winter it is very cold and you'll need a good fleece, joggers and fluffy socks!

Respectable clothes: A couple of pairs of smart clothes would be good. People here dress up for church (maybe a long dress??) so you'll want to make an effort.

Footwear: Sandals/ flip flops. It is very sandy and stony, so flat shoes are best. Trainers are essential for sports lessons.

Hat: A sun hat is a good plan as you spend most of your time outdoors.

Piercings: Ears are fine, and widely accepted. Anything else is not, so either make sure they're removed or covered up before coming out. Children have been known to try and pierce themselves in the latest fashion, a problem we don't want to repeat.

Other: Clothes are expensive here, so don't plan to buy lots when you're here. Also, you'll not get into town for at least a month after you arrive, so bring everything you'll need till then.

Health

Nearest medical service for minor ailments: Basic medicines in the school clinic. There is a doctor in Outjo who will happily see you for any other complaints. He speaks English fluently and is very kind.

Medical services for major problems: There is a hospital in Outjo but you will probably be taken straight down to Otjiwarongo or Windhoek if there is an emergency.

Medical supplies to bring with: Anti-histamine for bites and stings, and plasters. Bring enough mosquito repellent to cover you for the first month or so. Make sure Gilly Stommel knows about any medical problems you are aware of before coming out. You do not need to take anti-malaria tablets while at Otjikondo but may need them if you travel north during the rainy season.

Where to get medicine here: Paracetamol is available in the shop. You don't really need a huge medical kit, but bring any medication you regularly need. There is a well-stocked pharmacy in Outjo.

Insurance: You must have medical insurance to cover you abroad, over the year. Treatment in private hospitals is extremely expensive.

Other: Soft contact lenses are best, because of the wind and dust. Most UK brands are available in Windhoek. Not a great variety in Outjo.

Attitude

Religion: The school is non-denominational but run on Christian principles. There's a Catholic priest who visits for mass on a monthly basis. Church services are held every week.

Help when it's needed: There have been GAPS in Otjikondo every year for the past 35 years so everything is pretty well-organised and defined. You can ask ANYBODY for help, and as long as you're open to suggestions or advice, people will be more than willing to help you. Gilly puts your happiness first and is ready to encourage or offer a shoulder to cry on. Paul (Gilly's son) and Sara (Paul's wife and ex-GAP) are also there for help/ advise and chats. Visitors and ex-GAPs are often around and looking to join in, so don't be ashamed to delegate/ ask for support.

Your attitude: This is a big project, and as you can see, it is pretty intense. However, there's a great opportunity to get really involved with the community so talk and get to know the teachers and hostel staff early on. People will bend over backwards to help you and make friends as long as you're ENTHUSIASTIC and DEDICATED. Lots of energy is needed and you are expected to be reliable when it comes to fulfilling your duties. At the end of the year GAPS are always pretty amazed by what they have achieved.

Difficulties: There's no worry about feeling isolated as there are plenty of nice people, and you're generally too busy to think. Being lazy does not go down well. Don't worry if you're not arty/ musical or sporty. The best GAPS have just been enthusiastic and tried hard. At the end of the day, that's all anyone here is asking from you.

Communicate with the other Gaps if you have had a tough day ... this is the best way to support each other.

Benefits: You really get to know the children and they become a huge part of your life. People are friendly and you fit right into the community. While Otjikondo benefits a great deal from all the work you do (and they really do appreciate it) you'll also get a lot out of being here - a great sense of achievement, a huge confidence boost, and lots of affection from the kids.

Miscellaneous

Things exceptionally expensive locally: books.

Things exceptionally cheap locally: Accommodation for backpackers.

Other useful things to bring: A sleeping bag and tent for when travelling - but only bother if you're going to camp, as they're heavy. A Laptop or tablet.

Local languages: English, German, Afrikaans, Damara, Herero and other Namibian languages.

Useful books: The GAP flat has collected a good selection of books over the last 35 years - so there is plenty to read!

Denise, Sara, Hannah, Mairi, Dulcie and others!
(ex GAPs)