

Mulanje Mission Guidelines

Ethical Visiting and Volunteering

Many hundreds of visitors come to Mulanje Mission every year, some as volunteers in the short or medium term, and we appreciate the wide range of contributions to our work and worship that they bring. We offer our guests and volunteers a warm welcome and generous hospitality. In return, before you decide to visit, please consider the following points:

1. Reflect on your motivations and expectations for your time here.

Few visitors come to MMH for purely unselfish reasons – it may be an exciting way to take a break, a holiday, a chance to meet new people and perhaps a chance to share skills or learn new ones. We also enjoy meeting new people and the fresh perspectives that they bring, but please remember that this is our home and our workplace, and there are often good reasons why things are as they are. Change takes time and needs to take into consideration the best interests of the whole community.

Don't overlook the contributions that the knowledge, skills and experience of local people who live and work here are making every day. They are easy to underestimate, but will continue long after visitors come and go. We want to work together towards social justice, equality and human rights but our timescales may not be the same as yours.

Be realistic - it is unlikely that you will change very much here in a short visit. The balance between what you will learn and what you can contribute will undoubtedly be in favour of your own development.

2. Educate yourself about Malawi before your visit

Learn as much as you can about the history, economy, politics, environment and other issues which affect our community before you come. Visiting or volunteering here will help you to appreciate different cultural perspectives and make you more sensitive to poverty and disadvantage in the world. You will also learn how much can be achieved with minimal resources.

Research and respect local culture and customs such as dress code and be prepared to be flexible - you will then be in a better position to understand and learn from those who will be working with you. If you learn some Chichewa before you visit it will be hugely appreciated here.

3. Sustainability

It is important that your role or project is planned in partnership with the local community so that it responds to real needs and contributes to longer term change. You must consult with those in leadership roles in the church, hospital, school or college before you come. Projects that simply reflect your own wishes or the views and aspirations of the funders or organisation you

come from, are unlikely to become sustainable. Involving the community will strengthen local priority setting and increase local ownership of development projects. Don't seek to take on a job which displaces a local person – this defeats the point of volunteering.

Bear in mind that it is easy for an outsider in a position of power, even if unskilled, to unduly influence the confidence and motivation of local workers, leaving them less rather than more competent. Your aim should be to empower your local colleagues to continue when you leave.

4. Consider the suitability of your skills for the role you wish to take on

If, for example, you are a website designer, think about how those skills may be usefully applied here – it may not be so helpful for you to choose to build a house or to dig a well. You may speak English – but this does not necessarily qualify you to teach it. If you want to teach, take a course eg Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or volunteer as a teaching assistant in a school in your home country before you leave.

When considering your skills, also think about any tools or equipment that you might require, find out what is available locally, and be prepared to bring essential items with you if they are difficult to source here.

5. Be professional

Once you have agreed a volunteer role for a short or longer term placement at Mulanje Mission you are making a commitment to those who host you, as well as those who have assisted you to come. Placements at Mulanje Mission are very popular, and it is likely that in accepting your application, someone else has been turned down. Remember that we will rely on you, and other staff will watch your example. It may seem reasonable as a volunteer to come to work late, leave early or take long weekends and holidays at short notice - but this can be very disruptive.

Please make sure that you abide by the conditions of your Malawi visa, student permit or Temporary Employment Permit, as well as any professional registration necessary to the role you hope to take on. We can usually help to obtain these permissions for you, but the future of volunteering at Mulanje Mission can be undermined for everyone if some individuals accepted for volunteer placements disregard the law.

Consider how you might behave as a visitor in a hospital, school or community setting in your home country. It should go without saying that hospital or clinic patients, or children attending school in Malawi deserve the same respect, dignity and privacy as you would expect for your own family at home. The hospital does not allow photographs of patients to be taken without their consent, which should usually be obtained in Chichewa. If you are not sure whether photographs are appropriate, please ask before you start to shoot.

6. Be prepared to take responsibility for your own health and safety.

You may be planning to travel a long way from home. In doing this you need to take responsibility for your own health, mental and physical. Your sending organisation may not know Malawi well, and you may be given out of date or incorrect advice about matters such as malaria prophylaxis or PEP for health workers. Take advice from local partners and make yourself aware of local health issues such as HIV, malaria and bilhazia. Ensure you have adequate insurance if you would wish to return home if you become unwell.

Bring sufficient quantities of any medications you require – they may not be available here. You should be self-sufficient for minor complaints. Of course Mission staff will always try to help in the case of an accident or emergency, so make sure you keep key phone numbers handy.

Be sensible with phones, iPads, laptops and cameras – these things stand out in our community and can make you vulnerable to theft. In general it is not safe to be out at night alone, especially if you have had a few alcoholic drinks. Visitors who ignore this advice, walk or take minibuses late at night, cause much concern.

Hiking on Mulanje mountain can be a great experience - please follow the advice of local porters and guides and make sure someone at the Mission knows when you go up the mountain, and when you expect to be back.

7. Research

Research can be particularly demanding of staff time. All researchers from institutions outside Malawi are required:

- To make appointments in advance and stick to the times agreed for their visits
- To provide a copy of ethics committee approval from within Malawi for your research
- To consider compensating the institution involved in some way (cash or kind) for the valuable staff time taken for interviews, questionnaires etc
- To provide a copy of their completed research findings to the Head of the Mulanje Mission institution where the research was carried out

8. Think about the wise use of financial resources

Be aware of the balance between what you spend on your own travel, accommodation and entertainment and your contribution to alleviating poverty and disadvantage in Mulanje.

It is a common misperception that living in a poor country is cheap. In fact, food, fuel, and utilities such as water, electricity and internet use are all relatively expensive here. The Mulanje community is unfailingly generous in its support of volunteers, but bear in mind that salaries here are low. In a wish to show hospitality, you may be offered more than can comfortably be afforded by local families. Try not to take advantage of this.

9. If having considered the above you have second thoughts about volunteering, there are other ways to help:

- Be an ethical tourist and contribute to the local economy while you enjoy a holiday in this beautiful country
- Fundraise for existing projects at Mulanje Mission, or sponsor training for a local person to take on a new role

Two final points, wherever you may decide to visit:

10. Do not visit or volunteer in 'orphanages'

Unfortunately, there is a great deal of money to be made from kind foreigners who wish to help by volunteering in orphanages. The demand for such experiences and placements fuels the setting up of profit making enterprises, with children readily available from poor uneducated families.

Rather, try to support projects that encourage families to support their own children, including orphans, and help poor and rural communities to improve their livelihoods so that they become economically thriving places where people want to stay and orphans are not perceived as an additional burden.

11. Donations

Every year we receive many donations – some of these are invaluable to our work, but some we are unfortunately not able to use. Please bear in mind that these guidelines are intended to improve the relevance and quality of donations to Mulanje Mission, not to hinder them.

Donations, whether in cash or kind, should always be discussed with the organisation you visit or send to beforehand. If you wish to give cash, be clear about your expectations for its use, and always get an official receipt.

Some donations will attract tax and customs duty, as well as being expensive to transport from overseas and within Malawi. Consider the transport costs of your donation – sometimes sending the transport costs as a cash donation would be of more value than the goods that are sent. Do not expect that your partner organisation will be able to meet the costs of customs clearance, taxes and transport within Malawi of unplanned donations. Unwanted donations have to be transported to organisations that can use them, or stored and disposed of.

Expired medications and clinical items cannot be used in Malawi. The Malawi Pharmacy and Poisons Board has strict guidelines on this which the hospital must adhere to.

Most small organisations have a wish list of items they urgently need – if you find out what is needed and meet the costs of transport we will be truly grateful for your assistance.

Commitment

Name

Organisation /self-sponsored

Dates of visit

Purpose of visit

This visit /volunteering role has been discussed and agreed with:

I have read the Mulanje Mission guidelines on ethical visits and volunteering and have considered the balance between what I will gain as a visitor and what I will contribute/leave behind

Signed

Date