

Choosing a Travel Provider

There are a ton of fantastic travel organizations out there. There are also some pretty sketchy ones. It is getting increasingly difficult to see the difference based on a web page. Some of the smaller organizations don't have the funds to update their website because they are investing in participant safety while some other organizations with flashy sites are using it to draw in travelers regardless of the quality of the on-the-ground product.

Here are a few of our general tips when speaking with a travel provider.

General Things:

- Why should I work with Provider X rather than another provider? (You are looking for them to highlight safety and client support available).
- How old are the other volunteers in this program? Where are they mostly from? How many are there at a time? (Would they be people you want to hang out with?)
- How do you screen your homestays/accommodations? What happens if my homestay/accommodation is not a good match for me? (you want to know that they screen the homestays in some way and that they will move you immediately for any reason if you request it)

Safety Things:

- How many full-time staff do you have on the ground in my destination? (You are looking to make sure that they have support for you in country. If they don't have any full-time staff, ask them who is available in the case of emergency)
- How far is the closest hospital? How is health care paid for in this country? (Safety first! Are you comfortable with these answers?)
- Walk me through what would happen if I had an emergency in country (ex. I broke my leg, natural disaster). (You want to hear the process and see if you are comfortable with that)

Background Checks:

- Ask if you can speak to a former client who did this program. They should be able to connect you to someone who did the program. Ask a lot of the same questions above to them.
- Check to see if there are reviews of the program that are NOT on their own website. Remember that you will only get the ones who LOVED it and those who HATED it. Read them with a grain of salt and be prepared to address any concerns mentioned in your phone call with the organization

If you are doing volunteer work as part of your trip:

- Why is this community in **Destination** in need of volunteers? How do I know that I am making a positive difference? (You are looking to see that this isn't a "make work" project that is negatively affecting the community)

MOST OF ALL: Trust your gut.

Give us a call to learn if we have former gappers who have traveled with the organization.