



[www.amizade.org](http://www.amizade.org) 304-293-6049 [volunteer@amizade.org](mailto:volunteer@amizade.org)  
PO Box 6894, 343 Stansbury Hall, Morgantown, WV 26506 USA

## **JAMAICA VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

### **Introduction**

This Handbook was written to provide you with useful information regarding your participation in an Amizade sponsored program. It answers many of the frequently asked questions by previous participants. We encourage your feedback on how it can be improved for future participants. Please read this entire handbook carefully and contact our office if you have any questions.

### **Amizade's Mission & Vision**

Amizade encourages intercultural exploration and understanding through community-driven service-learning courses and volunteer programs. Amizade imagines a world in which all people have the opportunity to explore and grow, realize their ability to make change, and embrace their responsibility to build a better world.

### **Amizade's Commitment**

At the heart of Amizade is the sincere belief that intercultural understanding & the development of global citizens is essential to our increasingly connected global world. We are committed to providing you with an intercultural experience that allows you to make concrete contributions to a community resulting in a deeper understanding of your role in the global community.

### **Approach to Service**

#### **Ethic of Service**

Amizade strives to promote an "ethic of service" on all our programs. This means that we envision the entire experience as one of service to our fellow human beings. There will be scheduled time for completing service projects on each program but we also encourage you to carry your ethic of service with you throughout the program. You can do this by volunteering to help with food preparation, cleaning, or various other daily tasks.

As guests in the host community, Amizade volunteers are encouraged to act respectfully in all community interactions. The global service experience provides a unique opportunity to learn from the traditions, beliefs, and customs of a new community. Since most Amizade volunteers come from outside of the community, they are often seen as "ambassadors" representing their countries and are able to use this opportunity to share positively about their culture. At the same time, volunteers have the unique opportunity of experiencing another culture while taking the time to absorb and respect new world views.

#### **Volunteer Opportunities**

Volunteers in Jamaica can help to serve in a variety of areas. During the summer months, volunteers help to work with the AOC Summer Camp. During the school year, volunteers will help to tutor children. It is

possible to arrange construction projects for customized group programs. Please refer to your specific program sheet for more detailed information about your volunteer program.

## **The On-Site Experience**

### **The Amizade Experience**

The time that you spend in Jamaica is sure to be one filled with many new experiences: new outlooks, new cultures, and new situations. Therefore, the Amizade experience is enhanced by looking at some of the things that have been written in relation to the country and the issues over the last several years, getting a rough idea of what's happening, and going with an informed set of questions in mind. The entire experience is about getting in deep enough and starting to dream enough to realize that your time abroad can't possibly be enough to see and understand all of Jamaica or the Caribbean, but it can be enough to get an idea of it, connect with new friends, meet and struggle with some significant challenges, make connections, create difference, and begin to understand an entirely different kind of place. That's really a lot for such a short amount of time, and much of it will happen.

And all of this will take place in the context of a relatively unpredictable environment. Unpredictable does not mean that it is unsafe. Groups of students and volunteers have been to Jamaica many times before. All work through our partner individuals and community organizations. Unpredictable simply describes the “climate” of Jamaica as a developing country. That means it's characterized by something called a “lack of redundancy.” Lack of redundancy refers to an absence of continuously present and reliable systems and products. With electricity, that means it may go out sporadically. With transportation, it means there may be no real bus “schedule.” In stores or restaurants, it may mean the things they sell are not what they advertise outside, but rather whatever they have in stock (or can quickly get from a neighbor) inside. All of this relates to an absolutely essential ongoing Amizade motto, which is:

### **“Okay, Good.”**

“Okay, good” refers to moments when we show up for transit at the right time, yet quickly learn that transit will not be arriving for eight hours. “Okay, good,” we have an opportunity to hang out in Jamaica. “Okay, good” refers to moments when we long for some familiar comfort foods, but we have another helping of the same, exotic local foods. “Okay, good,” we have a great deal more exotic local food than most of those around us. “Okay, good” refers to times when we're crammed into transportation (cars, vans, trains) in a way that we did not previously believe was possible. “Okay, good,” we have transportation and are moving to our desired destination more easily than most people in the area. “Okay, good” is about remembering – even when we feel that we are struggling – that we are fortunate for the opportunities to travel and serve; that we are still in amazing places with incredible people; and that life will go on even though (unlike in our US environment) the day-to-day life is just not all that predictable. Of course, “Okay, good” is also useful when the last leg of the return flight to the US doesn't connect at the right time!

### **Amizade Staff**

Amizade programs are staffed by a variety of motivated, trained people. We encourage you to get to know the staff members that will be coordinating your volunteer program. Any concerns or questions during the in-country experience should be directed to the appropriate Amizade staff.

### **Site Director, Matthias Brown**

The site director is the primary program contact responsible for coordinating volunteers. The site director is responsible for coordination of logistics such as greeting volunteers, arranging housing and meals, setting up cultural experiences with local community members, and leading reflection discussions. Coordination also involves setting up the service project, arranging transportation to and from various locations, partnering



with local masons and builders, procuring building supplies, and any other related planning. Matthias will work closely with volunteer placements when they first arrive to help arrange everything. For customized group programs, he will be with the group for the majority of the time.

### **On-Site Orientation**

Upon arrival in Jamaica, Amizade will hold a program orientation for all volunteers. Many issues such as health, safety, and security will be addressed as well as site logistics, standard procedures, and other important information that will benefit each volunteer to know.

### **Group Living**

Amizade programs generally have a strong core element built around group living. For many people, living, volunteering, studying, completing projects, and spending leisure time in a group may be new. Therefore we ask all Amizade volunteers to approach group interaction with flexibility, openness, and constructive communication. We strive to respect each other's space and needs while also supporting each other to achieve personal goals on the program.

### **Flexibility**

Flexibility on behalf of the participants is the most important element on an Amizade program. Itineraries may change at the last minute in order to meet current community needs or participate in unexpected opportunities for recreational, educational, or cultural exploration. Many aspects of traveling are unpredictable and time-consuming, so be prepared to enjoy the unexpected surprises and embrace the opportunities they provide!

### **Housing**

All volunteers will stay in homestays with local Jamaican families. The homestay experience has been rated as one of the best aspects of our Jamaica program as host families provide real insight into the community and Jamaican culture. The selection of host families is arranged through Amizade's on-site staff. Families are chosen through their previous involvement in the community and their demonstration of the appropriate amenities and enthusiasm for hosting a guest in their homes.

### **Transportation on Site**

For Individual placements, volunteers will have the choice of walking, taking the bus or a taxi. Paying the fees for transportation is the responsibility of volunteers. For group programs, transportation will be provided for the duration of the program by Amizade.

### **Meals**

Eating abroad is an adventure of new tastes, smells, and meals! Since you are living as part of the community, you will have the opportunity to try genuine local dishes. You may be eating the same or similar food regularly if that is the local custom. Host families will provide 3 meals a day.

### **Note to Vegetarians**

In Jamaica, an abundance of fresh fruit (such as pineapple, mango, oranges, and bananas), beans & rice, porridge, and other vegetarian dishes are available. Most Jamaicans eat fish, chicken, or some other meat every day. Vegetarians can arrange for vegetarian meals with their host families, but they may need to give specific suggestions. Amizade will make every effort to provide vegetarian options, but sometimes they will need to be supplemented with further protein and vitamins. We encourage vegetarians to bring healthy snacks and vitamins with them. Please indicate your dietary needs and restrictions on your Amizade Medical Form so we can best prepare for you.

### **Laundry**

Host families will help volunteers to do laundry. Most Jamaican families do laundry by hand and hang their clothes on a line to dry. Due to this fact, we encourage volunteers to bring light, easily washable clothing.

### **Climate and Weather**

"Jamaica is a year-round destination thanks to its idyllic tropical maritime climate. Seasons are virtually non-existent and daytime maximum temperatures along the coast hover constantly around 80-86°F (27-30°C).

Even up in the Blue Mountains temperatures are only just under 68°F (20°C) for most of the year. Jamaica's idyllic tropical maritime climate means that dramatic fluctuations in temperature are virtually non-existent. Weather patterns can change quickly, though, especially during rain-prone May to December. Officially, hurricane season lasts from June to November, but relatively few of the hurricanes that sweep the region touch Jamaica.”

Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/caribbean/jamaica/index.htm>.

### **Cultural and Recreational Activities**

Volunteering in rural Jamaica puts volunteers in the heart of a fascinating, beautiful community where recreational and cultural activities abound. Volunteers may visit the local sugar cane factory in Fromm and hear local farmers talk about the current economic situation. Volunteers are often invited to cultural events such as church meetings, weddings, funerals, and other local celebrations. The Association of Clubs, our community partner, holds regular community meetings and youth summer camps. Roaring River, with a natural river, spectacular cave, and towering mountains is near to the community. Blue Fields Beach, a local beach and waterfall, is a popular



destination for community members and volunteers alike. The community is less than an hour from Negril, a popular tourist destination and beach. Please inform the Amizade staff of your interests as well as any physical, religious, or dietary needs and limitations you have and we will work to accommodate you.

Please note that payments for recreational activities, unless indicated on the itinerary, are the responsibility of the individual volunteers. Amizade staff will be happy to provide volunteers with information about possible recreational activities as well as transportation if it is necessary.

### **Culture and History**

Jamaica will stimulate you on all levels. Its stunning beauty, tropical climate, ripe fruit, and warm ocean seas will constantly amaze you. With this beauty also comes a complex history that includes colonization and the slave trade. In recent years, Jamaica has been seriously affected by International Monetary Fund and World Bank policies as it struggles to keep its small economy competitive in the global market. Jamaica's economic legacy lies in the sugar industry but its current economy is based on tourism. Small, rural Jamaican communities still depend on the sugar industry for jobs and growth and they fear the changes that will come as this industry declines.

For more information on Jamaica, please visit the following websites:

Lonely Planet World Guides: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/caribbean/jamaica/>

Encyclopedia.Com: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/J/Jamaica.asp>

GeographyIQ.Com: [http://www.geographyiq.com/countries/jm/Jamaica\\_map\\_flag\\_geography.htm](http://www.geographyiq.com/countries/jm/Jamaica_map_flag_geography.htm)

### **Community Background**

Amizade volunteers serve in rural Jamaican communities near Petersfield, in Westmoreland County. The nearest city is Savannah-la-Mar (about 20 minutes by car). The community is less than 2 hours from Montego Bay (the nearest airport) and Negril. The daily pace is relaxed and community members are very friendly, often calling out to you in the street and joining in with your service projects. The community is fairly spread out with houses peppered among sugarcane fields and winding roads. Travel around the community can be done on foot, with farther distances done by taxis, which run all the time through the town. Members of the community are middle class and work in the tourist industry, farming and



education fields. The standard of living for a typical Jamaican is much lower compared to developed countries around the world. Without sufficient support from the government, support services are often under staffed and facilities are in desperate need of repair and renovation.

## **Preparing for Your Program**

### **Transportation to Site**

You will be flying in and out of the Montego Bay, Jamaica airport. An Amizade staff person will meet you at the airport to transport you to the program site. All volunteers are required to arrive on or before the scheduled program start date and depart on or after the scheduled finish date. If volunteers arrive early or stay late, the individual volunteer will need to make his/her own arrangements for food, lodging, and airport transfer.

### **Travel Documents**

The following information is for US citizens going abroad. If you are a non-US citizen, you must check with the consulate in your country regarding travel documents including passport and visa requirements.

U.S. citizens traveling as tourists may enter Jamaica with a U.S. passport or a certified U.S. birth certificate and current, government issued photo identification. Persons traveling with U.S. passports tend to encounter fewer difficulties upon departure than those who choose to use other documents. Visitors must have a return ticket and be able to show sufficient funds for their visit. U.S. citizens traveling to Jamaica for work or extended stays are required to have a current U.S. passport and visa issued by the Jamaican Embassy or a Jamaican Consulate. Travelers must pay a departure tax when leaving the country. Airport taxes can cost up to US\$25. This is normally paid in the Montego Bay airport and is the volunteer's responsibility. Amizade does not cover the cost of airport taxes.

Please visit the following website for information on the entry requirements for US citizens traveling abroad:  
<http://travel.state.gov/foreignentryreqs.html>

Please be prepared in case of losing your wallet, passport, or other travel documents. Bring copies of all your important travel documents and monetary documents, especially your passport and visa, and store one set of copies in your luggage while leaving another set of copies with your emergency contact at home.

## **Health & Safety**

### **General Notes**

- Traveling often affects one's health so it is imperative that all volunteers are in good physical condition.
- Typical travel ailments include stomach upsets and diarrhea, bug bites, jet lag, minor cuts, scrapes, bruises, and sunburn. Please feel free to bring travel-sized portions of over the counter medicines such as headache medicine, stomach medicines, sun block, bug spray, band-aids, etc.
- An on-site Amizade staff member will have a first aid kit.
- Check with your medical physician regarding further information about healthy travel abroad.

### **Immunizations**

Participants in Amizade programs are solely responsible for receiving immunizations. Amizade defers all recommendations to the current recommendations and requirements from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All participants are expected to consult the CDC for required and recommended immunizations for the country or countries they will be visiting for their Amizade program. See your doctor at least 4–6 weeks before your trip to allow time for immunizations to take effect.

**Current information regarding immunizations can be found on the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).  
Please refer to the website for further information.**

## **For more information:**

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

1600 Clifton Rd.  
Atlanta, GA 30333 USA  
(404) 639-3311 (404) 639-3312 (TTY)

Public Inquiries 1-404-639-3534 and 1-800-311-3435  
National Immunization Hotline (English) 1-800-232-2522  
National Immunization Hotline (Spanish) 1-800-232-0233  
Traveler's Health 1-877-394-8747

Traveler's Health Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm>  
Email form: <http://www.cdc.gov/netinfo.htm>

### **Prescription Medicines**

If you have prescription medicines, bring them in the original prescription bottles with your name on them and bring an ample supply for the duration of your program. In some countries, certain medicines are not as readily available.

### **The Best Medicine is "Preventative Medicine"**

Throughout the program, please rest, drink plenty of water, and take care to avoid overexposure to the sun. While on the program, let the Amizade staff know if you have any concerns about your health and contact them immediately if you experience a health emergency.

### **Amizade Medical and Insurance Form**

All volunteers are required to complete and submit the Amizade Medical and Insurance Form prior to participation. It is imperative that you complete this form as comprehensively as possible so Amizade staff can best address medical situations on site. On this form you will also list your immunization record. Please consult with your physician regarding your healthy participation in the service work and activities for your program and recommended immunizations.

It is the responsibility of every Amizade participant to make sure that they have adequate medical coverage for the duration of any Amizade program.

### **Safety**

As a volunteer in the community you will have local companions and friends. Volunteers should observe and imitate local customs regarding safety. Regardless of where you are it is best to travel in pairs, especially at night. We highly recommend taking a taxi after dark. Be cautious with your money and make sure you store it in a safe place or money belt.

Trust your instincts. If you do not feel safe in a situation or someone's behavior is making you uncomfortable, get out of the situation immediately. Firmly say "no" to any invitation you do not want and turn away. Ignore persistent overtures.

## **Money Matters**

### **Currency Converter**

For the latest conversion rate for your country, please visit [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

### **Spending Money**

Volunteers will not need substantial amounts of spending cash on a regular basis, but will need money for transportation, extra meals, activities, and shopping. The currency in Jamaica is Jamaican Dollars. In tourist areas and sometimes in other areas, Jamaicans will accept U.S. dollars as well but it is best to bring smaller bills such as ones, fives, and tens. Change will usually be given in Jamaican Dollars. There is an ATM machine

in Savannah-la-Mar as well as other big cities such as Negril, where you can take out money in Jamaican Dollars. It is very important to inform your bank that you will be using your card to withdrawal money while in Jamaica. This will help to avoid them from issuing a “hold” on your card which prevents one from withdrawing money.

## **Packing List**

### **PLEASE PACK LIGHTLY!**

You should bring a maximum of two bags. Ideally, this includes one medium-sized suitcase/duffel bag and a smaller daypack for daily activities. You should be able to carry your luggage comfortably by yourself. Rolling luggage does not always work effectively in developing countries. Please use your best judgment regarding valuables. Amizade does not recommend that volunteers bring expensive jewelry, electronics, laptops, etc. Amizade is not reliable for lost or stolen articles.

**Recommended Packing List:** (Please keep in mind that if you are on an individual placement, you will not need to bring work clothes for the construction site)

- Documents: passport, airline tickets, personal health insurance information, and ATM/credit cards (and copies of each in a separate place)
- Cash or traveler’s checks and money belt or wallet
- Family photos to share with the community
- Postcards of your hometown to share with the community
- Water bottle
- Notebook or journal and pens
- Travel alarm clock
- Watch
- Camera and film
- Knapsack or book bag
- Towel and Wash cloth
- Toiletries – just the basics such as toothbrush, toothpaste, travel-sized shampoo, and soap
- Prescriptions in original bottles
- Over-the-counter medications (headache, stomach, band-aids, anti-itch cream)
- Clothing
  - T-shirts
  - Two pair of pants (one pair for working)
  - One nice outfit
  - Socks and underwear
  - Pajamas
  - One long sleeve shirt, sweatshirt, or jacket
- Shower shoes or flip-flops
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Work boots if applicable (a sturdy hiking boot will work well)
- Work gloves if applicable
- Flashlight & batteries
- Bathing suit
- Sun protection: bandanas, hat, sunglasses and sun block
- Bug spray
- Shorts and comfortable clothes for warm weather

### **Gifts**

You may choose to bring small gifts or thank you cards for community members. Photographs are generally appreciated around the world so feel free to collect addresses and mail pictures back if possible.

## While You Are Away

### **Culture Shock**

Culture shock is a term used to describe the emotional upset that may occur when a person travels to a new culture. When experiencing culture shock, people sometimes feel unsure about what is appropriate in the new culture, confused about how to manage daily tasks (such as banking or telephoning), frustrated with managing language and cultural barriers and generally vulnerable. This experience is normal and affects people at different times throughout a cultural immersion program. Remember to rest, eat and take care of your physical and emotional needs in order to function at your best!

### **Drug Use**

For many, as thoughts of Jamaica arise, so does the stereotype that many Jamaicans smoke marijuana. Although this may be true among the minority, this does not account for the majority. Some volunteers may feel as though smoking marijuana is just another part of the “cultural experience”. This by no means is the case. Amizade does not encourage the use of, or purchase of marijuana or any other drugs while visiting Jamaica or any of our sites. As an organization, our primary concern is that of safety for our volunteers. For this reason, we adhere to a drug-free policy for all of our programs. We ask that all volunteers please respect this as a rule of Amizade. Failure to comply with this rule is grounds for removal from the program.

### **Contacting Home**

In Jamaica, telephone communication with the U.S. can be done through regular phone lines or over a cell phone by using a phone card purchased in Jamaica. Internet access is available in bigger cities and for a small fee at the Petersfield Library in the community but it is often slower than in the U.S. In tourist locations such as Negril, internet cafes are available.

## **AMIZADE CONTACT INFORMATION**

If someone from home needs to contact a volunteer with an emergency message, they can phone the Amizade US office to relay a message.

- **Amizade US Office Phone:** 304-293-6049. This phone line is staffed 8 am – 4:30 pm EST from Monday - Friday.
  - Have the person leave:
    - Their name
    - Your name
    - Their phone number
    - The message to be relayed
- **Amizade Emergency Phone #:** 412-444-5166. This phone line is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during volunteer programs.

To call the United States from Jamaica, dial 00-1-area code-local number. For instance, if you were to call Amizade from Jamaica, you would dial 00-1-304-293-6049.

## Returning Home

### **Reverse Culture Shock**

Many participants find that they encounter difficulties when transitioning home. Volunteers will be happy to return home and visit with family and friends but after the initial reunions take place, they often find that they experience problems when trying to communicate the experience they had abroad. Many people feel alienated, knowing that they have grown while many of those around them remain the same. It may help to connect with others who have had similar travel experiences, as they understand the need to talk about the experience in greater detail.