

Verge Magazine Blog Guidelines

Verge magazine, North America's resource for working, studying and volunteering abroad, provides information and perspectives through the lens of voices from the field.

The Verge magazine blog provides readers with a first-person perspective on what volunteering, working, studying or travelling overseas looks like. It covers not only the day-to-day realities, but also the preparation and re-entry experience. In a candid and honest voice, our blog provides readers with well-earned advice and valuable insights.

1. How To Post Your Blog

Login and posting details will be provided.

2. Social Media Responsibility & Best Practices

"In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn't care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular."

– Excerpt from "How to Write About Africa" by Binyavanga Wainaina

Verge aims to educate readers in a way that encourages social responsibility, cross-cultural understanding or sustainable development. In order to ensure that we are meeting these goals, we encourage our bloggers to consider the following guidelines prior to posting their blog:

Avoid perpetuating stereotypes. Instead, aim to educate. It can often be easier to generalize for humour's sake, but consider your choice of words and photos carefully. Avoid overarching generalizations and carefully consider the way you are portraying people, a country or a situation through both visual and written components of your blog post. It's easier to focus on differences, but considering similarities can also provide valuable insights.

Do not plagiarize or duplicate content (including photos). Link source material and give credit where it's due. If possible and appropriate, request permission or for any photos or content used. Whenever possible, use original multi-media content.

Remember that blog content can be viewed around the world. Carefully consider the entry that you were planning to post and view it through the lens of both readers back home, and readers in the location that you're writing about. Be conscious that individuals may not want their photos or information posted on the Internet without prior permission. Also be aware of how what you post may affect individuals—for example, if you volunteered at an HIV/AIDS testing clinic, it is not appropriate to post photos of the waiting room (or to identify individuals). Caption photos appropriately, as well, to avoid confusion.

Above all else, use your best judgment. Be the first to respond to any mistakes (and comments) and recognize that there can be both negative and positive consequences to content that is published online.

3. Format, Length and Audience

Know your readers: Many of our readers are typically young (17-40 years), and want to do something different and make a difference doing it. Some are seasoned travellers who have seen a good part of the world. Many are contemplating overseas travel for the first time and want to do it in a meaningful way.

Consider format and methods of telling your story:

- Verge encourages the submission of videos from the field, photo diaries (provided that they contain a narrative and appropriate contextual information) and other new media methods of conveying your story or message.
- If you choose to write a blog post, you don't necessarily have to use a narrative format. Consider writing a Top 10 List, a Q & A, or creating a posting that lists your personal favourite links and resources. (For more blog topics and ideas, see below.)
- Consider submitting or planning to write a series. For example, you could submit a blog post prior to your departure, upon arrival, at the midway point and upon arrival home.

Be concise: The attention span of an online reader is much shorter than a magazine audience. Aim for word efficiency and cut out any excess.

- Although there is no right or wrong length for a blog post, aim for 400 to 600 words. (Blog posts should be no longer than 1000 words in length.)
- For videos, aim for 30 seconds to two minutes in length.

Use visual cues:

- When appropriate, use subheads or bullet points to make your post easy to scan and read.
- Pictures, video, infographics and multi-media also help to break up a blog post and to provide more information or context without adding extra words.

Include links, check your facts and if necessary, do additional research:

- Remember to include links whenever possible—this also allows you to provide more background in less space.
- Although blog posts are less formal in nature, be sure to link to any source material used. In the case of hard numbers or dates, double-check your facts and figures before posting.

Provide a biography: Include a short author biography. This should be roughly 50 to 150 words in length, include links to any organizations that you're affiliated with, and appear at the bottom of your post in italics. Submission of a small contributor photo is not necessary, but appreciated.

Finally, check out these tips on how to write a great article—they apply to blog posts as well: <http://www.vergemagazine.com/contributing/how-to-write-a-great-article.html>

4. Topic Suggestions

The mandate of the Verge magazine blog is to provide first-person perspectives on the day-to-day realities of volunteering, working or studying overseas. As such, whenever possible blog topics should encourage community response, audience participation and interaction. We encourage our bloggers to be candid and honest (and where appropriate, critical) and to foster a sense of online community.

Not sure what to blog about? Here are some topics to help you get started:

- **Why did you decide to travel overseas?** How did you choose an organization to go overseas with and what values were important to you when you were looking?
- **What are your greatest fantasies, fears and challenges?** If you haven't departed yet, discuss what you anticipate you'll encounter overseas. If you're currently in-country, how did your preconceptions differ from reality? If you're set to return home, what are your greatest fantasies, fears and challenges for the re-entry process?
- **What have you learned?** This may be a lesson, skill or new understanding that you gained through the preparation, in-country or re-entry process. Internet readers want the answer to questions that start with "how do I." How did you fund your travels? How did you deal with culture shock? What did you pack? If appropriate, provide readers with a step-by-step answer to these questions. And remember, what you've learned doesn't have to be complex—it could be as simple as "I learned how to buy phone credit" or "I learned how to set up a foreign bank account." Try to think back to the big, but basic, questions you had prior to departure.

- **Who is someone interesting that you've met?** Consider writing or filming a short profile, Q & A, or interview with someone who you've met overseas or through your experience. Discuss their role or work, how you met, why you find them inspiring, or what lessons they've taught you. This individual could be anyone from a field manager, to a professor, to a fellow student, to a child. (Note: be sure to ask permission. For more information, please read through the social media responsibility policies below.)
- **What does your average day overseas look like?** Using video, photos or text, walk readers through a typical "day in the life" from start to finish.
- **How do different cultures or countries approach every day problem?** Consider basic every day chores or topics such as garbage disposal, recycling, laundry, transportation or education. Explain the approach you're familiar with at home and how it differs in your new location.
- **What are your favourite things or places?** Write a mini-travel guide for your location, including the best places to buy groceries, get a meal, work or socialize. Introduce readers to food or cultural/country practices that they may not be familiar with.
- **What current events are affecting you?** Pick up a local or international newspaper and comment on current events as they pertain to your current situation or location.
- **What are the best links and resources that you've found?** Share these with readers and be sure to link accordingly. These could also include links on pre-departure and re-entry.
- **What has surprised you most? What advice would you pass on to a preparing traveler?** Explain what you wish you would have known (or known to ask) earlier.
- **Have you made any mistakes?** When in doubt, go with humour! Don't be afraid to tell a funny story.
- **Do you have any questions?** This is a great opportunity to foster online community or audience participation. Post your challenge or problem (with context) and encourage readers to respond or reply.