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So you want to be an Olympic volunteer?



Nadine (Ingersoll) Kincaid '76 volunteered at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in August, her fifth stint as an Olympic volunteer. She assisted in the gymnastics venue helping journalists interview athletes.

Athletes spend years working to make their respective Olympic teams. Behind the scenes, so do volunteer workers hoping for a chance to experience the international spectacle up close – and from the inside.

Nadine (Ingersoll) Kincaid '76 has been a part of five Olympics now, and is already hoping to apply and make the cut for the 2020 summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan.

She assisted in Salt Lake City in 2002, Vancouver in 2010, London in 2012, Sochi in 2014 and Rio de Janeiro last summer. It can be hard work, with no pay and little recognition. But Kincaid said the experience can also be life changing, and worth long hours of work and mind-numbing logistical headaches.

“In London, I was one of around 10 people who saw Gabby Douglas greet her family in private after winning her gold medal and saw the near dog pile – a rare privilege indeed,” said Kincaid, who works in security at George Fox University. “I also saw the British male gymnasts celebrating their first ever Olympic team medal and took photos of them on their phones.”

For others interested in applying for the Olympic Games, Kincaid has some tips:

Step 1: Find the online application and apply as soon as the applications open, two to three years before the Games.

Step 2: Join the host country's official Olympic Facebook group and leap in. THIS is where the true information flows – ultimately where volunteers are announced and celebrated, and cyber-hugs are given to the ones who didn't make the initial cut.

Step 3: Start practicing the host country's native tongue by taking classes and studying the region.

Step 4: Get up at 2 a.m. to prep for the 4 a.m. online group interview with the local organizing committee and other hopefuls. Panic when log-in is changed five minutes before interview. Join interview as they say good-bye. Request another interview. Wait a month. SUCCESS! Smile like a hyena and be enthusiastic online at 4 a.m. Wait. Wait. Wait. Months pass, seasons change. WAIT.

Step 5: Log in to volunteer portal every 10 minutes as job assignments start to trickle out. Rejoice on Thanksgiving Day when the email arrives that you've been chosen along with 50,000 other volunteers.

Step 6: Look for travel mates in the Facebook group and exchange travel plans. Begin networking for housing options. Research airbnbs, hostels and anybody with friends in host country.

Step 7: Gallop to mileage-plan airline website to hit “redeem” and lock in airfare. Splurge and blow all the airline miles for a rare treat – business class – so you can sleep.

Step 8: Research online language learning, community college language classes, immunization requirements, visas, passport expiration dates and travel insurance. Organize everything at work and home to be gone for three weeks.

Step 9: Wait for an official Olympic schedule, then arrange to have your first shift filled by somebody else as you will still be in transit. Purchase tickets to see events on days off.

Step 10: Rise at 2:30 a.m. to depart for airport and begin the Olympic experience.