

## The Voluntourism Buzz

Written by Mike Morellato

Saturday, 28 November 2009 10:03 - Last Updated Sunday, 29 November 2009 17:06

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While not a new idea, a rising trend in the global tourism industry is the rewarding experience of volunteering overseas, as the sole purpose of one's trip or as one component of their next adventure. Whether it is helping with turtle conservation in Costa Rica, a teaching and community development project in Zambia or lending a hand on an organic farm in Argentina, there are countless voluntourism opportunities that allow you to contribute more away from home while capturing real and unique interactions with the destination and its people.

{readmorelink}  Read More...

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**So what's in it for you?** All the enjoyment of a normal vacation with rewarding social and environmental experiences thrown in the mix. You also gain the satisfaction that comes with promoting and contributing to a worthwhile cause. While all of this can certainly ring true, it is important to do your research and ask questions before choosing your volunteer experience, or before selecting the organization to help you facilitate the voluntourism trip.

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**What are some issues to consider?** This [article](#) at the World Volunteer Web provides a good breakdown of the pros and cons of voluntourism, which can help you to choose the right project and ask useful questions when organizing your first or next voluntourism experience. In my opinion, some of the negative press that voluntourism receives is simply perspective. I often hear the argument that very little impact can be made by an individual over the span of a week or more, and that a holiday that combines too much "play" with a little work negates the experience altogether. I don't see this message as a useful one - with a well managed project, every individual effort has the potential to contribute to a long-term goal and the intangible benefits can speak volumes. These subtle benefits can include relationship building between global residents, the bridging of ideological or religious divides and the cultural insight you as a tourist can obtain during your visit and interaction with locals. This is in addition to the established goal of the volunteer experience which is rewarding and useful in itself.

**You would like to volunteer on your next trip?** If you haven't tried it before, I am sure you will find it an experience you will never forget, and when planned properly will be very rewarding for everyone involved. Looking for ideas and opportunities? Below I've included some project examples coordinated by organizations large and small that span various social and environmental realms.



**Teaching and community-based volunteering in Vilanculos, Mozambique.** With a diverse set of responsibilities, this African Impact project allows you to get involved in assisting local pre-school teacher, volunteering at an orphanage, contributing to language club learning, or helping Mozambique residents with rural home-building projects. Following Cyclone Favio in 2007, African Impact was on the ground in Mozambique helping with relief work and supporting aid agencies. Their work continues today for unfortunate residents that are not able to construct their own shelter or do not have the means to do so. You can be a part of these worthwhile activities, while experiencing a new culture and truly local experience. For more information on these project initiatives, click

[HERE](#)

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**Dive-based coral reef conservation project in Cayos Cochinos, Honduras.** While this volunteer opportunity isn't open to everyone, if you have your PADI Open Water certification (or equivalent) you have the opportunity to take part in a underwater surveying program to check on the status of protected species and reefs within this marine protected area in Honduras. Your efforts follow an accepted data standard and will contribute towards educated decision-making for the long-term conservation of the reef and the encompassing marine life, while giving you training as a [Reef Check EcoDiver](#)

[Reef Check EcoDiver](#)

. Visit paradise, soak in the sun and contribute to a very worthwhile cause. This is a two-week expedition with Biosphere Expeditions - for full details visit the project website

[HERE](#)



Get involved with coral reef conservation efforts and assist with data collection.  
(Photo from Flickr [website](#) , Creative Commons [license](#) .)



**Project Nepal - Community projects in the Kathmandu Valley.** Beneath the backdrop of many amazing peaks, this project combines one of the most scenic hikes in the world with a trip to Chiwan National Park and the role in a variety of community projects in the Kathmandu Valley including reforestation, planting and educational initiatives. Agricultural endeavours are a major part of life in the Kathmandu Valley, and with flash mudslides wiping out crops more regularly, a pillar of the community is severed. This trip also allows you to get involved in the construction of a community centre to foster education and long term positive impact in the community.

**Do I need to book this experience through an adventure travel company? Why not cut out the middle man?** These are fair questions, as some people do not like to travel with a tour group prior to volunteering, but they are still interested in voluntourism. Personally I prefer to travel independently with a loose schedule but I have found there are benefits to tour group travel in some circumstances.

In this case, companies such as GAP Adventures have become directly involved with many of the communities they are facilitating access to, and can give you a very informed look of the country you are visiting. You can also cover a lot of ground and worry less about logistics, making it possible to experience events that you would have otherwise had to do a lot of research to discover. That being said, there are many companies to choose from, and some are dedicated to maintaining small tour group sizes... so be picky and choose the one that can fit into your travel style. For additional tips when considering voluntourism, visit this [useful link](#) at Planeterra - which brings up some engaging issues even in the comments section (between Joyce Major and Kelly).

With more and more options available every year, it is important to expect a sustainable business model in these tour companies. The more questions you ask about their operations and how they are promoting a sustainable legacy in the communities they work, the more they will find it economically feasible to address your concerns for years to come.