

Money Matters: Vacationing and volunteering

By Nic Abelow

They could be among the most memorable journeys you take.

Travel with a difference: the essence of the volunteer vacation. You take the trip, you help make the difference for others, and perhaps you see the world differently as a byproduct. If you are thinking about combining travel with some service, there are things you should know.



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Know the various options. If you're traveling solo, you'll commonly work alongside locals on a community-organized project, and live in dorm-style lodging with other participants. If you have a young family, a homestay may be arranged with a host couple or family, or personal accommodations could be scheduled for you; the service aspect can often be tailored to the interests and abilities of the kids. Animal lovers often work in shelters or in conservation management programs.

How can you book a service vacation? Travel agents and tour companies guide the way. You can even book one through groups such as REI, Discover Corps, Global Volunteers, and the Sierra Club. Some hotels and resorts will give you a huge discount if you are part of a volunteer effort. Be sure to ask what

percentage of your fees will go to the local community (and not to organizational overhead).

Some trips emphasize tourism with a bit of volunteering. Often people can only volunteer for a day or two, not a week or month. A new class of vacations responds to that reality. Agencies such as Namu Travel, specializing in trips to the Caribbean and Latin America, structure trips this way; Carnival is even doing this on its cruises to the Dominican Republic.

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