



Adventures Less Ordinary

How to Travel and Do Good

Edited by Ethan Gelber

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Adventures Less Ordinary: How to Travel and Do Good

The logo for Horizon Travel Press, featuring the word "horizon" in a lowercase, sans-serif font, positioned below a thin, curved line that arches over the text.

Praise for Adventures Less Ordinary

This collection of pieces about travel philanthropy is long overdue. This guide reflects the key issues which arise when travellers, tourists and holidaymakers engage more closely with local communities, their cultures and environments. The Responsible Tourism movement brings together travellers and tourists, accommodation providers, tour operators, guides and many others who in a wide variety of ways can shape tourism so that it contributes to making better places for people to live in.

There is a proverb, often heard in Asia: Tourism is like a fire - you can cook your food on it or it can burn your house down. Quite so, and as travellers and holidaymakers seek deeper travel experiences, to touch a place and to have been touched by it, the risks increase. This is a collection of stories and reflections from people who have experienced, and thought about, the problems which arise when you take an adventure less ordinary.

Engaging with local people and with communities is a laudable and humane aspiration. But it is an aspiration which must be realised with care. The fundamental principle is to do no harm and never forget that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Travel philanthropy encompasses the giving of money, of goods and services and the giving of time and work: volunteering. Travel with respect, think about the impacts you are having, look out for unintended consequences and remember that we have the opportunity when we travel to contribute to humanity or to detract from it. You can make a difference, you can be a positive force for good – but be careful. Take care.

**- Harold Goodwin, Professor of Responsible Tourism,
Manchester Metropolitan University**

This guide helps people think about the questions they should be asking, the problems they should work to avoid, and how the stories and lessons from others might influence their own decision making. I'm grateful to see this type of publication aiming to help people make smart and high-impact choices when they travel.

- Daniela Papi Thornton, Co-Founder, LearningService.info

A breath of fresh air at time when ill-informed journalists are providing very simplistic and shallow analysis of the travel volunteering and philanthropy sector... I find this guide has captured the complexities found in this growing sector while still being very accessible for the reader.

**- Stephen Wearing, Associate Professor, University of Technology, Australia;
Author, Volunteer tourism: seeking experiences that make a difference**

This book provides tremendous insight into the good, the bad and the ugly of this fascinating, emerging tourism niche.

**- Kristin M. Lamoureux, Ph.D., Executive Director of the International
Institute of Tourism Studies, The George Washington University**

This is, hands down, the most important book on travel ever written – but it's much more than that. Adventures Less Ordinary not only addresses ethical travel, but also ethical living. It teaches us, through example, what to look for when traveling, volunteering, or working overseas. The book is an extraordinary guide to doing good for our planet, and taking care of the people, creatures, and environment in a conscientious, ethical, caring way. It's a way to re-envision the way we live – and travel – for both short-term and long-term change. It offers tips, sage advice, and meaningful examples of how to make a difference in the world. Bravo!

- Dr. Jessica Voigts, Publisher, WanderingEducators.com

An impressive book that I think needs to get into the right hands and before the eyes of readers whose views it can change. With an inspirational tone and positive solutions-oriented stances, it covers each and every angle regarding some very tough issues.

- Gregory Hubbs, Editor-in-Chief, TransitionsAbroad.com

I'm inspired by the stories and examples presented in this book, and ever more motivated to be part of the critical efforts that the book supports; to continue moving conversations about voluntourism and philanthropic travel forward, and to continue asking critical questions and sharing what we learn from our experiences.

- Ayako Ezaki, Managing Partner, TrainingAid.org

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Luwero woman collecting water for her family

FOREWORD

Beyond Voluntourism: Moving from Either-Or to Both-And



By David Clemmons
Founder, VolunTourism.org
@institutevt

“Voluntourism will be bigger than ecotourism ever was.” Dr. Donald Hawkins,

Eisenhower Professor of Tourism Policy at the George Washington University, uttered these words in his opening remarks at the 2005 Educational Travel Conference. The succeeding years have brought fulfillment of his insight. What we call voluntourism – the integration of voluntary service and tourism – and a variety of related travel- and adventure-inspired philanthropic actions have blossomed into a global travel phenomenon.

The experiences they exemplify have, however, forced us all to ponder the profound philosophical conundrums generated by an apparent overlap between a commitment to ideals and values, on the one hand, and the need to earn substantive livings and care for ourselves, on the other. In part because the 21st century has placed a new and heavy emphasis on integrations like this, we can no longer compromise values in order to maximize return on investment. Compartmentalizing consumption and environmentalism – separating travel indulgence from the need to improve our planet – is just not an option anymore, not without backlash.

Simply put, we have reached the end of an “either-or” Earth; from this point forward, it is “both-and” or we may not have a planet. Altruistic travelers can engage in enjoyable holiday activities, *and* must also address the needs of the underserved. They can interact with cultures and environments while also working to preserve them, perhaps even choosing to go somewhere and do something based purely on the knowledge that their actions will have positive and lasting impacts on the people and places they visit. In order to accomplish this, we need to understand, manage and move beyond our polarized perceptions of voluntary service, travel and tourism.

For many people today, however, the challenge of integrating service and indulgence is enough. We have expended so much energy honoring not-for-profit institutions while simultaneously questioning the ethics and motives of the for-profit sector that formalizing a hybrid of the two is, for them, unthinkable. Yet our collective future relies on our capacity to envision a world in which these approaches are integrated.

Fortunately, the desire to give back during travel, especially through giving time (voluntourism) or money, has provided us with the motivation for this journey.

Getting from Negative to Positive

Any analysis of the impact of contemporary voluntourism and other forms of travel philanthropy involves examination of its many forms, some more appealing and effective than others. Presently, there is immense discomfort in any traveler-centered outreach involving children and childcare, for example. Anti-orphanage campaigns exist all across the globe, driving a media and social-media frenzy that is sometimes as much about disdain for mismanaged generosity as it is concern for the welfare of the children. Conversely, environmental conservation efforts and historic and cultural preservation programs are gaining newfound strength, with a growing emphasis on caring for natural habitats and protecting the precarious balance between humankind and endangered species.

Given this, it is very possible we will discover that travel philanthropy is appropriate and sustainable in the case of certain global issues and not in others. And that it should be undertaken by certain people and in certain places, but not everyone and not all the time. Most assuredly, this will be part of our charge moving forward.

Additionally, we need to study and understand the impacts of voluntourism and other forms of travel-inspired generosity – short- and long-term, negative and positive – to determine their effects on stakeholders. What are

communities seeking versus what they are actually experiencing? We simply do not have comprehensive answers to questions like this, not because we do not want to know, but because we have not solidified an all-embracing foundation on which to base our inquiries. Nor have we found a way to give a clear leadership voice to local communities. If we are to move beyond voluntourism, we must agree on methodologies for the qualitative and quantitative measurement of the impacts and outcomes of the integration of voluntary service, travel and tourism. And we must use them and respect the outcomes.

While I believe our desire to move beyond voluntourism is honorable, our current situation is rife with struggles: a lack of global policy and governance, opposition to integration, a lack of quality systems able to support integration, woeful measurement and analysis of impact, and limited stakeholder education and capacity development, to name a few.

As we strive to realign our travel realities with the new world needs, let us be fully aware that it is not global systems that must be first to adjust. Rather, it is ourselves who will need to do the growing, the moving and the changing. The journey may be slow, unsteady and perplexing at times, but when we adapt to the new world order of integrated thinking and systems, we will eventually overcome the obstacles in our path today.



Masidi community in Uganda

It's Time for a Revolution in Travel Philanthropy



**By Matt Fenton,
CEO, Inspired Escapes
@InspiredESC**

In the spring of 2013 during a trip to Tanzania, my co-founder Afzaal Mauthoor passed through the small town of Moshi in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro.

There, he met Yesaya, a local tour guide with a fascinating insight on the pitfalls and problems with Kilimanjaro's status as the world's leading fundraising travel destination. All his life Yesaya had watched a steady stream of people arriving from the West to tackle the famous peak in the name of charity. But, he wondered, where did all the money go? "Tourists use our mountain to fundraise for charities, so why can't some of that money go to our schools and hospital?" he asked.

At the time, Afzaal had no easy answer for Yesaya, but couldn't get the question out of his head. We've had the immense good fortune to see a lot of our world and Yesaya's insight struck a powerful chord, resonating with a deep and uneasy feeling that has grown over the years: a sense that despite all its colossal potential, the travel industry has largely failed to repay people and communities in developing countries for the astonishing wealth and value they provide to travellers from the developed world.

And as Yesaya noted, this problem is especially acute when it comes to the

philanthropic travel industry – the people and organisations that should be doing the most to support the local communities in the countries they visit. Fundraising travel challenges are now a multi-million-pound industry and have become *de rigueur* for adventure travellers with a conscience.

But how much of the money they raise actually makes it back to the communities they visit? Is it right to raise thousands of pounds for big Western charities when barely any of that money stays with the people in the host communities?

That conversation with Yesaya provoked some serious reflection, which turned into new dialogues with other people passionate about social change, people like Afzaal, Pippa Kennard, Leonardo Gubinelli and the rest of the team that would eventually become Inspired Escapes.

In June 2014, just 14 months after Afzaal met Yesaya, we launched our organisation based on Yesaya's big idea: that travel can and should have a lasting, positive impact on the communities it touches, and that travel companies can have a social return on investment in addition to their financial return.

The concept is borne from the idea that genuine travel inspiration cannot be found simply by taking a trip, no matter how adventurous or challenging it may be. *Transformative* travel experiences involve a more profound connection to the people you visit, have a lasting

impact and ultimately bring everyone closer in touch with a sense of humanity.

I see this as the evolution of travel, possibly even a revolution in philanthropic travel. That we can take some of the world's most popular adventure expeditions and use them to drive lasting social change right there in the local communities; that fundraising can be made more worthwhile and impactful for local people; that we can connect travellers directly with their host communities, not only to witness firsthand their impact but to expand and broaden the entire travel experience into one that is truly transformative.

This philosophy has inspired and informed everything we've done over the last 14 months, including the publication

of this very guide. We're excited to play a part in this revolution, and add momentum to the movement that is redefining the entire notion of volunteer travel and philanthropic travel.

We accept and embrace the fact that we don't have all the answers and that this process will depend upon the collaboration and cooperation of all involved.

For that reason, we have called upon a variety of voices and authorities to contribute to this resource, people who have laboured for many years to rebalance the tourism industry in favour of the people, communities and economies that make it all possible in the first place. For all their priceless input, we're forever indebted.



Kevin Smith



Daily life in
Luwero, Uganda

EDITOR'S NOTE

Getting an Accurate Snapshot of Travel Generosity



By Ethan Gelber,
Founder, TheTravelWord.com;
Co-founder, Outbounding.org
[@thetravelword](https://twitter.com/thetravelword)

When photographing an object in motion, you have three principal options: use an incredibly fast shutter speed for a crisp capture of both the moving object and the background, but not a sense of the motion; pan as the object passes to freeze just the object against an artistic blur of background; or, for background clarity and an object blur, simply snap the object without panning.

No matter what you do, though, something is missing: a sense of speed, or pixel-perfect detail of either the object or the background.

That was the challenge I accepted when I agreed to take this guide on: the necessary omission of something essential. Should our snapshots of the ways in which travel generosity can be harnessed provide a clear sense of what's happening today against the broader state of travel and tourism, but without addressing any appreciation of the need for growth and change? Or should it focus on one element (the ways for altruistic travelers to give back, for example) at the expense of another (the tourism context inspiring such responsible behavior) and preserve the impression of progress and development?

Travel-Inspired Community Service

You see, for decades, high-minded, compassionate and generous travelers have understood the virtues of sharing time and money with worthy projects around the world. Students have offered their vigor and energy. Skilled professionals have donated their services. People of all stripes have made good with their time and money to improve the lot of others less fortunate.

Today more than ever before, there's a sweeping sense of travel-inspired community service, with a broad embrace of the whole globe as our community. It has prompted growing numbers of free-spirited, adventure-minded explorers to step out of familiar routines and then interact with the world around them. Increasingly, they do so in ways that make beneficial and enduring impacts on the people and communities they visit and of which they are a part.

But while there's nothing new about the desire to give as much as (or more than) one gets, many of the modern means by which such charitable assistance can be delivered are quite novel. Constantly in flux these days are the knowledge of how best to leverage big-heartedness and the jargonny lexicon used to describe it. More than just a work in progress, the whole complex of thoughts and actions associated with voluntourism, volunteerism, volunteering, service learning, charity

challenges, travel fundraisers, travel philanthropy etc. is constantly shifting its basic shape and its substance.

This is all the more true as volunteering and fundraising topics are no longer as standalone as they once were. The activities with which they are associated have been integrated into the broad and growing pool of commercial but no less authentic travel experiences so appealing to new generations of travelers.

Acknowledging Complexity

So how could all of this be tackled in one guide, knowingly surrendering to an incomplete picture while hoping to provide as broad and as deep a base of understanding as possible? How could this unwieldy topic be introduced without overwhelming the casual traveler or being too jejune? How could this be accomplished without painting with too broad a brush and misrepresenting the work being done – undermining the good or overvaluing the bad? How could it be part of a collaborative effort to #MendNotEnd voluntourism?

The trick, I think, has been to acknowledge the complexity of the topic and tackle it from as many perspectives – and with the input of as many voices – as possible. (For anyone paying close attention, it is also why we did not settle on one spelling or style guide, preferring to let stand our contributors' native forms of expression.)

That is most evident in Part 1 of this guide, *Good Actions: What's Being Done*, which is, in keeping with the photographic analogy used above, the snapshot employing a fast shutter speed, freeze-framing topics and their contexts.

A chorus of authoritative voices weighs in on a selection of typical activities through which service-oriented and philanthropic travelers have been doing good – working with children or wildlife, shoring up infrastructure and contributing to community development. By tapping these deep reserves of knowledge and experience, this guide provides readers with a critical lay of the land.

In an effort to reintegrate a sense of percolating change, one that encourages readers to focus on future developments and how best to leverage them, the second section, *Good Intentions: What to Think About*, encourages review of what to think about before, during and after taking an action.

Woven into both sections are numerous Eyewitness contributions: short, first-person testimonials that ground any broad theory and principle in very real, practical and specific practices. They are also part of our collective effort to celebrate meaningful action.

Three Core Considerations

Throughout this guide, a point was made of assembling information that covers three core considerations:

- the state of the service-oriented travel industry – contributors were asked to hold nothing back when describing what's going on, how things work and how successful they have proven to be;
- a sense of the pitfalls of which travelers should be aware – as nothing's perfect (yet), contributors were asked to explain how to approach service-focused travel planning with

a smart and critical eye, teasing out the areas of concern and finding constructive ways to deal with them;

- the kinds of questions to ask when seeking to meet the needs of local communities and the emotional and philanthropic desires of donors – moving toward improvement helps people root out trouble and then steer well clear of it.

In the interest of full disclosure, I regretfully acknowledge the underrepresentation here of an absolutely critical element: the voices of local recipients of volunteer and economic generosity. Unfortunately, it is the element too often missing from many discussions about how best to

forge ahead, responsibly and sustainably, with service-minded travel and financial largesse. Although this guide has been released without fully developing the equalizing force of this perspective – in particular a glimpse of if, why and how the people being offered help are really interested in being helped at all – I will continue to try and gather opinions for inclusion in later editions.

I remain convinced, though, that for all its failings, this is a definitive resource for compassionate people seeking the ultimate adventure. I thank each and every contributor for sharing in the time and effort needed to develop it, guided as much by the good people give as the good they get.



Boy drinking clean water
in Luwero, Uganda

GOOD ACTIONS: WHAT'S BEING DONE



Boys playing in Zululand, South Africa

Good for Children: Avoiding Harm to Those You Hope to Help



By Sarah Brown,
General Manager,
PEPY Tours - @PEPYTours

Volunteering with “needy” children in distant lands has fast become one of the most sought-after voluntourism options. Whether spending an afternoon in a school teaching ABCs or living and working for months in an orphanage, many of the millions of people who volunteer abroad every year are “giving back” in ways that involve direct contact with children. While this certainly seems like a valuable use of time, unfortunately altruistic intentions don’t automatically equate to positive outcomes, and in many cases ill-researched and/or badly-managed placements actually have a detrimental impact on the children they seek to support.

Orphanage Uncertainty

In Cambodia, for example, recent research has attributed the growing number of orphanages to an increase in demand from foreigners who want to visit and volunteer with children. Though the number of children kept in orphanages has increased, the number of actual orphans in Cambodia is decreasing, with a recent UNICEF study (Alternative Care Report, 2008) showing that approximately 75% of children currently living in Cambodian orphanages actually have at least one living parent.

To populate these “orphanages,” enterprising orphanage owners are convincing poor families to give up their children with promises of foreigners

teaching their children and providing them with a better education, healthcare, and future opportunities. This trend of selling an opportunity to “improve the lives of orphans” is then offering volunteers a carefully constructed version of the experience for which they signed up. However, even more worryingly, it is separating families unnecessarily and exposing the children living in these orphanages to a variety of risks.

Often children living in such “orphanage businesses” are intentionally kept in squalid conditions to encourage donations. They



Child begging for money in Battambang, Cambodia

are also taught to behave meekly, deliver rehearsed lines (e.g. “we’re so hungry”), or even perform dance shows to entertain volunteers and foreign visitors who will hopefully make financial contributions. After all, travellers and volunteers tend to give more generously to the orphanages they deem to be the neediest. Many volunteers are just not around long enough to learn the truths behind these orphanages; they continue to raise and donate money long after their placements are over – a lucrative income stream for those in charge.

In other words, the well-intentioned generosity of visiting travellers and volunteers misdirected to what appear to be the “poorest” orphanages is in fact keeping those children in those impoverished conditions. Meanwhile there are countless reports of shrewd orphanage owners driving expensive cars, mismanaging financial donations, and selling rice and other donated items, despite the children’s desperate living conditions.

Questionable Qualifications

It is also common for a continually changing lineup of unqualified and unvetted volunteers to constitute the bulk of the caregiving staff, which in itself poses a variety of problems. Allowing unvetted volunteers to interact with children – let alone assume a “carer” role – inevitably exposes the children to the risks of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse from individuals exploiting lax (or nonexistent) child-protection policies.

There are good reasons why childcare organisations in most volunteers’ home

countries do not allow unvetted strangers to interact with children in their care. Similarly, such organisations would only employ qualified social workers and carers to work directly with children, and only allow qualified educators to teach them. It is worth remembering that if you are not qualified (or permitted) to work with children in your home country, you should carefully consider the ethics of doing so in another.

Reports show that constant exposure to an endless conveyor belt of volunteers can have a very negative effect on children’s social and emotional development (With the Best Intentions: A study of attitudes towards residential care in Cambodia, 2011). Volunteers often believe that they are helping children to learn and have fun – which indeed they may be – but when children repeatedly bond with and then lose a new caregiver, these children can be left with serious attachment issues that may not be obvious to volunteers who are only around for a short time.

Important Considerations

If you are considering volunteering with children, it’s important to remember that a well-run orphanage should:

- Be a last resort for children. Reintegration with family or extended family should have been tried first, followed by foster care; only in the most extreme cases should children be institutionalized. Even the best-run orphanages have been proven to be problematic for a child’s ability to reintegrate into society in the future. For those reasons, the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child

states that putting a child into an orphanage should be a last resort.

- Be registered with the government and follow the many government stipulations for childcare provisions. The vast majority of orphanages in tourist areas like Siem Reap, Cambodia, are not in compliance with these regulations.
- Not allow a rotating door of visiting volunteers. If the children are already deemed “vulnerable” by the state and put in an institution in which they are meant to be given care and made to feel safe, then welcoming visiting overseas volunteers into these children’s homes puts those children at increased risk of further abuse, feelings of abandonment, and lack of consistency in their learning and everyday lives.

Teaching Reality

Like working in an orphanage, teaching in a school or charity education centre is also a popular voluntourism activity that poses potential problems. Allowing unqualified and unvetted volunteers

to assume teaching roles, and letting volunteer demands trump actual needs, exposes children to potential abusers, and a lack of consistency and quality in teaching styles raises questions about the value of such programs. Some argue that volunteers’ time would be better spent offering English-language training to local teachers, which would likely create a more sustainable and positive impact and reduce the reliance on foreign “teachers.”

From an individual volunteer perspective, it is easy to argue that the negative impact of one poorly-managed volunteer project may not be significant. In cases of the occasional volunteer spending time in a school or orphanage, that may indeed be true. However, in the tourist hot spots where most of these volunteer projects take place, there are thousands (or even tens of thousands) of foreign volunteers arriving every year. This creates a cumulative effect, allowing corrupt or poorly-run organisations to rely on and profit from volunteers’ good intentions, and causes harm to the children that volunteers hope to help.

Editorial Takeaway

Often a financial donation can have a more meaningful impact on youngsters’ lives than a short-term volunteer placement ever could. Forward-thinking travel businesses have established links with reputable, accredited NGOs and community-based projects in their host destinations and allow you to make a small donation as part of a travel purchase. When reasonable,

you may even have the opportunity to visit the project during your trip.

However, all of the above considerations still apply whether you’re donating money or time. Understanding your impact, the nature of the project and its administration is essential. For more on this, see the second section, *Good Intentions: What to Think About*.

Who Is Guessing the “Best Interests” of Children?



By Anna McKeon,
Communications Consultant
@annamck

In 2011, I left a career in digital media in the UK and moved to Kenya to volunteer as a co-director of an orphanage. As I possessed little knowledge of Kenyan cultural and social contexts, the most relevant qualification I had for this position was a weeklong TEFL course I had taken nearly 10 years previously. I made this drastic change in my life because I was disillusioned with the rampant consumerism and apathy toward global issues I felt I was surrounded by in the UK.

However, rather than seeking out different communities and career options in my home country, I decided that moving to the edge of a slum in an East African nation and working with children with whom I could barely communicate was somehow a better option. None of my friends or colleagues questioned what I was doing. People talked a lot about how “brave” I was. It was only my Dad who challenged my decision, asking whether I was really qualified enough. I brushed his question off, not wanting small details like that to get in the way of my life choices. Anyway, the organization I was going to work for didn’t mind, so why should he?

Many volunteer placements these days are relatively short – a month or less, sometimes just a few days. In such short periods, there is really no time for volunteers to think, reflect, or ask questions. I ended up volunteering for six months, so my circumstances were slightly

different. I had enough time to try and understand why these children were in “orphanages” when many of them had families. I had enough time to consider whether I was comfortable that all the children had to call the organization’s founder “Mother”. I was there long enough to realise that having 0% overhead because all the staff are volunteers can mean an organization is so badly run it’s dangerous.

I helped manage the accounts and had to face the fact that there wasn’t enough funding to feed the children properly, let alone finance the kind of professional support they needed. I called the embassy on behalf of my volunteer colleagues to try and get them out of jail when they were arrested and later deported for volunteering on the wrong kind of visa. I was there to witness one child threaten another with a hunting knife following an accusation of sexual assault, and felt the deep panic of being totally out of my depth when dealing with hugely traumatised children. I was there long enough to realise that the best place for all of these children was somewhere very different to the institution that was supposed to be caring for them, and that the best carer for them was very very certainly not me – nor in fact any of the other volunteers who gave up portions of their lives to “help”.

As far as I could tell, the organization for which I was working wasn’t financially corrupt. It was founded on the best of intentions and genuinely wanted to provide a safe place and educational opportunities for the children. However, the organization was poorly run and



Happy kids drinking clean water in Luwero, Uganda

EYEWITNESS

informed by outdated childcare principles. As a result, it put the safety of both the children and the volunteers at risk.

After this experience I moved to Cambodia to work with an educational organization. Due to the prominence of issues relating to orphanage volunteering in Cambodia, I was able to put my experience into some kind of context. I learned a great deal from Friends International, Angkor Hospital for Children, Orphanages.no, and Daniela Papi and PEPY Tours. I began to understand that my experience in Kenya was far from unique, and that general misconceptions around orphanages and the “best interests” of children are creating potentially damaging situations for children



Children in the water slums of Siem Reap, Cambodia

in many countries. In addition, unskilled and naïve do-gooders, such as myself, who blunder into these settings really have no idea what they are walking into. They don't realise that they are contributing to a global perception of how to “help” that is patronising at best and harmful at worst.

Earlier in 2014, I was fortunate to get involved with an interagency initiative to address the problems surrounding orphanage volunteering. Led by the **Better Care Network** and **Save the Children UK**, and with a steering committee including **Better Care Network Netherlands**, **ECPAT**, **Faith to Action Initiative**, **Friends International**, **Hope and Homes for Children**, **SOS Children's Villages**, and **UNICEF**, the project aims to encourage ethical volunteerism and discourage volunteerism that sustains orphanages. We have been heartened to work with a wide range of individuals and organizations passionate about creating change in this area. We hope over the coming months and years to be part of a movement that creates better solutions for children, their families, and volunteers.



Rebuilding homes in Borneo

Editorial Takeaway

A question: What do you consider the best interests of children? How can you use this opinion to make wise decisions about how you interact with them when you consider whether and in what ways to help those in need?

The complex notions of children's rights and best interests are relatively new. The United Nations adopted the

Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, enumerating 10 principles, including, in Principle 2, that “the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.” But, of course, the determination of what constitutes a child's best interests falls to adults. While a general agreement of what this means is slowly emerging, it is still poorly defined.

Good for Animals: How to Work for, Not against, Conservation



By Jeremy Smith,
Founder, Fair Game
@jmcsmith

There are basically three forms of wildlife/conservation volunteering projects, each with its own issues: projects that operate in the wild, monitoring or protecting animal populations in order to guarantee their survival; projects working with animals in captivity with the hope of reintroducing them to the wild; and projects with captive animals that will never be released.

Conservation Projects in the Wild

It may seem paradoxical, but when looking to establish the legitimacy of conservation projects in the wild, a good place to start is with any human communities affected, like coastal villages with livelihoods based on fishing, or rural settlements impacted by poaching. In these and other cases, conservation projects have the most chance of success when a community stands to gain more from animals' survival than it would from the poaching, overfishing or logging of the habitat.

When researching such projects, the first step is to ascertain the level of community involvement. Is it participating in management? Is there a long-term plan for community members to run the scheme in its entirety, without external volunteer support?

There are, of course, still many ways a community can benefit from the presence of volunteer projects. **Blue Ventures** is one of the most reputable conservation volunteer organisations around. Many of its volunteers stay in community-run homestays, creating alternate sources of income within coastal economies and bringing in more than US\$100,000 for local homestays to date in Belize alone.

A second important consideration: If you are working with animals in the wild, then you should not expect to make direct contact with them. If you are working with dolphins or whales and the project advertises that you will swim with them, then you will be corrupting the data by doing so. Most of my time on an **Earthwatch** whale and dolphin project in the Bahamas was spent either building a composting and refuse area, or in the cramped office cataloguing photographs of whale fins. There was no swimming with dolphins. And it was one of the most rewarding weeks of my life.

Projects with Captive Animals

By their very nature, captive-animal programmes ensure the animals will be in immediate proximity. While these programmes might seem to offer what for many is a "life-changing" opportunity for close contact, they should in fact allow no such thing. A simple rule of thumb should be: the closer a programme lets untrained

volunteers get to the animals, whether it is handling or hand-feeding them, the less likely it is to be worth supporting.

According to **Right Tourism**, which campaigns for the ethical and humane treatment of animals affected by tourism: "Working directly with sick, injured or displaced wild animals requires experience and skills the average volunteer doesn't have. Wild animals being prepared for release benefit from the most limited contact with people, both in terms of time and numbers, as possible... Though this might not seem as exciting as working directly with animals, it can often make a much more valuable contribution to their conservation and success in the wild."

While it may not seem as exciting, if you actually want to help, the best you can do is let the professionals get on with the specialist work, while you help out by clearing up, washing up, fixing, cleaning, building, painting, filing and, of course, learning. Often your most useful skills may involve social media and blogging, commonplace to many young people, but far from comfortable to people who devote their lives to working with animals.

Should the programme be seeking to reintroduce animals to the wild, this aim will be extremely compromised by the animals having any more contact with humans than necessary. They may become habituated and thus, through reduced fear of humans, more vulnerable to poaching. We may also pass diseases to animals that end up affecting wild populations. For example, orangutans and chimps are genetically closely related to humans and are therefore particularly

susceptible to many human pathogens. With small, fragmented populations often all that remains in the wild, these animals face even greater risks.

One of the most significant recent issues with captive-breeding programmes has involved lions in Southern Africa. Some organisations purport to be conducting important research, but have been shown only to be rearing trophies used in target practice by the "canned hunting" industry. According to a paper published in 2013 by Luke Hunter, President of **Panthera**, et al, "Even under the best possible circumstances, breeding lions in captivity does little to address the root causes of the species' decline in the wild. Resources and attention would be more productively steered towards securing existing lion habitat and mitigating anthropogenic killing of lions and their prey."

Just as close contact with animals is to be discouraged, so too is participation in any captive programme where the animals are expected to behave in any way they would not in the wild. Certain elephant sanctuaries will say that they raise funds by teaching elephants tricks for a paying public. Don't be taken in by the promotional literature! Instead, check whether the organisation is a member of one of the most respected professional bodies, such as the **Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries**. In the end, respectable organisations will encourage visitors to learn about the animals' natural behaviors and issues.

Two Key Inquiries

Whether a volunteer programme works with wild or captive animals, two inquiries will often provide a good idea of the value of a programme. First, find out *what level of training is given by the programme to ensure you are contributing valuably*. The less you are expected to prepare, the less serious the organisation probably is. By learning new skills and improving your knowledge, you will have a richer experience and be more likely to actually benefit conservation science as a result.

Second, find out *what results have been achieved thus far, and what research has been published*. Then spend time checking whether the research holds much weight. Most organisations will publish any research or findings on their websites, so if there's nothing there, it probably doesn't exist. Whatever the case, it's always worth asking before investing considerable time and money in a project of little or negative value.

Editorial Takeaway

Animals are at their best when they are just being animals, not responding to the expected or forced desires of humans. After centuries of imposing our will on the wild kingdom – and, according to new analysis by the **WWF and Zoological Society of London**, the death of nearly half of all wild animals in the last 40 years (that's a shocking statistic!) – humans are finally coming to the realization that the best support we can provide is to set aside habitats for animals and protect them from us, not the other way around.

This understanding should extend to whether and how humans with a desire to do good engage with animals. More often than not, the best way to offer a helping hand is to fill it with cash. The time and effort required to feed and house volunteers, and train them to behave appropriately around animals, is arguably far greater, less effective and potentially more harmful than how resources could be used by practiced animal-welfare professionals, naturalists and conservationists. Oh, and animals.



Urang Utan
Rehabilitation
Centre in
Sabah, Borneo

Wild Animals in Captivity: Are You Just Being Told What You Want to Hear?



Sophie Dubus,
Director, Evolve Travel
Consulting - @sophiendubus

Popular programmes in the wildlife and conservation sectors often advertise interaction with animals. While this may be appealing to some volunteers, did you know that it can be detrimental to animals? Of course it's tempting to want to bottle-feed tiger cubs, but which are you putting first, the cub's welfare or your own desires? And is the organisation behind it really connected and contributing to protecting endangered species or are the conservation messages just a con? Are you just being told – and are you only hearing – what you want to hear?

Animals in captivity can easily be mistreated and exploited, so it's important to ask questions. As there are numerous rescue centres at which you can volunteer that offer closer contact with wildlife, think about the following: What are the long-term consequences for the animals? Are there any plans to rehabilitate or release them? Where did the animals come from? Where are they going? Are they being fed the correct diet and living in appropriate enclosures with enough enrichment to ensure their physical and mental wellbeing? Is there proof of any contribution to wider conservation efforts?

In reality, the chances are that the best impact you can have as an animal-conservation volunteer is through a fairly mundane task such as data

collection. So be cautious of facilities with a strong focus on cuddling baby animals, as there is a chance the animals may have been poached from the wild. Ask about older animals and whether they live the remainder of their lives at the facilities or are sent elsewhere when they are deemed too senior or useless?

As volunteering with elephants in Thailand has grown in popularity, so too has the number of recent revelations about the mistreatment endured by most elephants used in trekking camps. But not all rescue centres are created equal. Look for projects that work in cooperation with local communities and have long-term goals designed to benefit all concerned. For example, **BEES (Burm & Emily's Elephant Sanctuary)**, near Chiang Mai, was established in 2010 by an Australian-Thai couple to rescue old elephants from trekking or street begging. By renting the elephants from their mahouts (keepers), BEES provides the mahouts with alternative income while the elephants are left to roam free and just be elephants. Funds raised from the volunteer programme and visitor donations support the project.

There is also a strong commitment to involving the local community so that everyone is working together to create positive change. This is done by educating the owners, mahouts and locals about elephant conservation, teaching English in the local village and purchasing locally to support local businesses. BEES even grows seasonal produce on the property and is dedicated to protecting the

remaining forest for future generations of both elephants and people.

Unfortunately it's impossible to return all rescued animals to the wild. Natural habitats have been severely reduced in size by deforestation and urbanisation.

A captive animal's environment should therefore be kept as close as possible to its natural habitat and the animal should not be treated like a pet, mothered or played with and photographed, particularly if it is to be released back to the wild.

Editorial Takeaway

A question: If you were sick or injured and out of your element, how comfortable would you be in the care of a volunteer humanitarian with no medical experience?

That may be a blunt assessment of

what animals feel, but it goes to the heart of what to think about when you imagine service in animal conservation. If you are committed to doing something constructive, find a respected organization that guides you to take on the right kinds of responsibilities.



Why Shoveling Elephant Poo Makes a Difference



By Diana Edelman,
Founder, DTravelsRound.com
@dtravelsround

I remember when I first booked my “vacation” to Thailand. My friends thought I was nuts.

“Who takes time off of work to go and work in a foreign country?” they had all asked me when I announced I was spending one week of my 12-day holiday as a volunteer at **Elephant Nature Park (ENP)**.

I’ve never been one to take conventional vacations, so while everyone else questioned what I was doing, it made sense to me. After learning about ENP, **Save Elephant Foundation** and the vital role travelers play in keeping both the foundation and the park alive, I felt it was important to go and give back.

For one week, I shoveled poo, planted grass, hacked at corn stalks with machetes, made banana balls, washed food and hauled it around – all in the name of rescued elephants. At that time, ENP was home to more than 30 elephants, and the main source of funding for the park and the foundation came from people like me on vacations, volunteering or going up to see this sanctuary for elephants rescued from tourism, trekking, illegal logging, street begging and more.

After my week at ENP, I fell so in love with the elephants, so in love with the foundation, so in love with the founder, Lek Chailert, and her mission that I returned to Thailand and now volunteer

long-term for it, spreading the word about responsible elephant tourism.

Voluntourism operations, particularly those that require a fee, come under a lot of scrutiny these days. Unfortunately, some do much more harm than good. Without naming names, though, it is hard to differentiate the “good” from the “bad,” particularly when it comes to animal tourism.

Given that, as not all volunteer programs are created equal, everyone who chooses to volunteer with an animal organization needs to be aware of what they are supporting. So when you choose a volunteer vacation, it is important to keep two main things in mind:

- Do volunteers have access to or the ability to see what really goes on behind the scenes? Organizations and rescue groups with nothing to hide will be transparent. Others, while not all, will not allow volunteers into certain areas if the conditions are not good (be it due to breeding, drugging etc.). So look at the animals being cared for. Are they healthy? Are there vets on staff or on call? Are the animals still being exploited or are they able to just be animals? Volunteers who willingly give their time and money to programs where the animals’ best interests do not come first and foremost are simply contributing to demand for programs like this and giving these places permission to continue their practices without making amends.

- Where is the money going? Does the money for volunteering go back into the care of the animals and the maintenance of the program? Or is it spent frivolously or used for vanity projects? Is it possible to obtain documents showing where the money goes? As a volunteer, are you unknowingly contributing to an illegal animal trade, like the capture of animals to fill a program whose public face is that of a sanctuary?

Editorial Takeaway

A question: When you are considering giving time and money, do you always ask hard questions and get acceptable answers?

Silence can be complicity. If you don’t ask important questions, you may be letting carelessness or, worse, irresponsible recklessness get the upper hand. Pushing for satisfactory answers holds all organizations responsible for their actions.



Diana Edelman sitting under Faa Mai. Faa Mai was born into freedom at the Elephant Nature Park near Chiang Mai, Thailand. Faa Mai today is more than five and enjoys life without having to work. She will never face abuse and will eventually enter the wild with her family. Photo courtesy of Anna Fawcus

Good for Community: Service Offered Abroad Can Be Just as Powerful at Home



By Shannon O'Donnell,
Founder,
GrassrootsVolunteering.org
@shannonrtw

"Community service" is an interesting term.

Technically, it is simply another phrase synonymous with volunteering. The connotation, however, implies a style of volunteering with a much more tangible and direct impact, often on underserved populations and community projects.

Let us therefore look at community-driven volunteering and how it plays out in your *home* communities, as well as during international travel. In a discussion on voluntourism, it may seem out of place to start with an angle of volunteering at home, but often it's through this lens that international travelers are able to find and support community-based projects matching their values and the types of skills they can best offer.

Few Standardized Terms

Currently, the terms "local" and "community-based" are thrown around the volunteering space with little consensus as to what they mean. And while Western volunteer organizations have regulatory restrictions on how they spend funds, that alone is no guarantee of an effective model for working within communities, not to mention in partnership with their ideas and cultures, especially those of underserved populations.

As you move into developing regions of the world, regulatory oversight is less stringent (and non-existent in some places) and the need for an open and clear dialogue with organizations becomes increasingly important. These types of ambiguity are a potential pitfall for volunteers unaware of the absence of standardized terms about volunteering. Many people don't realize that companies can describe their volunteer projects as they see fit.

Look at Home First

Looking at voluntourism through this community-service prism shifts the way volunteers research and choose community-based projects. The media has painted a very specific picture of poverty and aid work, but the reality of what is needed on the ground in underserved communities often looks much like what you have right in your home community. Organizations targeting traditionally underserved populations like youth, women, the disabled, the elderly etc. are present in cities all over the world, including your own hometown.

Think about that for a moment – the same causes you support and issues you find important at home may be the ideal starting point for your volunteer travels.

So take stock of what you're passionate about by looking at the organizations you may already use in your life, many of which have foundations and not-for-profit arms with which you can volunteer as a way to



give back and support their work. Are you part of the green movement and interested in sustainable agriculture? Do you support your local animal shelter? Are you a regular donor to your local food bank?

Finding organizations that match your interests is a powerful way to begin integrating community service into your life. Then, as you look toward addressing those same community-centered issues overseas, you already have an informed understanding of them. Even better, as you look overseas toward international volunteering, your foundational knowledge in your chosen causes or issues gives you invaluable skills and knowledge advantages.

Ask the Right Questions

The key questions and discussion points about community service overseas center on the relationship between the organizations, not-for-profits and NGOs. Think about any organization's funding model and long-term plans. For example, as a way to stimulate dialogue, many organizations require community co-investment when building projects. This ensures that only projects valued by the community will go ahead, ones that local people will be willing to support and of which they will eventually take long-term ownership.

When talking to an organization, it's good to ask questions like "How does your organization choose communities

for this type of project?” and “What is the relationship with the communities?” and “How were you involved in building this volunteer program?” And then “What is your timeline?” or “How long do you plan to work within the community?”

Projects that include a lot of “we” language are often looking for a range of voices on the best course of action and are building long-term solutions. These types of projects are the heart of community service because they are

directly working in tandem with local populations and listening to their needs.

Community service at any level can have its pitfalls. When making the transition from volunteering in your hometown to volunteering abroad, the key is to allow yourself the time to thoroughly research projects and organizations. With the right preparation, volunteers can bring with them unique advantages in the depth of knowledge, experience and passion they bring.

Editorial Takeaway

Travel isn't a prerequisite for doing good in the world. While the notion of “tourism” is unmistakably baked into “voluntourism,” the heated debate about the validity of the latter has called into question the insistence on the former. Instead, there's a renewed focus on the power of volunteerism and good old-fashioned charity.

Basically, you do not have to leave your hometown to make a beneficial change to life on earth. In fact, you do not even have to leave your home (although perhaps you should). Though no one

likes to hear it said, it bears insisting that some people really shouldn't rock their boats too hard; they're much better off serving the productive interests of the global community from the familiar confines of their parlor or a nearby park.

Remember that one thing definitely sexier than celebrating a new health clinic in a remote jungle village of people you may never meet is being celebrated as a guiding force that brought new health and hope to neighbors you just might meet every day.



Rebuilding houses project by Gawad Kalinga in the Philippines

Finding and Taking Responsibility for the One Thing That Matters



By Christine Garde,
 Founder, CouldYou.org
 @CouldYouAfrica

Let me start with some questions and end with a quote.

The questions: Knowing that we all can't do everything, what if each of us did the hard work of discovering our "one thing"? What if we knew what we are passionate about, what we are skilled at and what we love doing? What if we then harnessed that passion, skill and love, and paid attention to one need in the world that makes us mad... and did something about it?

You see, in today's world, opportunities abound for giving time and money to counteract the effects of poverty. In parallel with this, a rise in voluntourism



has highlighted people's desires to do something meaningful.

However, while volunteering at a local soup kitchen, building a school or spending time with orphans can be meaningful, there is often a poor match between skills and needs. When the focus is more on creating experiences for volunteers than on responding to the needs of local communities, serious damage can be done.

I encourage you to watch the TED talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: **The Danger of a Single Story**. In it, she warns about perpetuating the old story of Africa as a "place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, incomprehensible people fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and Aids, unable to speak for themselves, waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner."

This state of affairs will not change if well-meaning foreigners continue to think in terms of providing aid and help to the poor. Instead, what is needed today is for people with generous hearts to partner with local leadership and to fill in any gaps the locals determine. Everyone needs to understand that sustainable change for people living in poverty comes not from the outside in, but from the inside out.

I started **my organization** out of a desire to help people live life at the interface where, as the American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner says, "your deepest gladness and the world's deep need meet." When people find that place, they not only make the world a better place, but they experience abundant



CouldYou? alumna Whynde Kuehn bringing her expertise in Business Transformation to the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Fellows. After many powerful experiences in voluntourism, she recently founded Metanoia Global (www.metanoiaglobal.com).

life, deep joy and satisfaction. Through immersive experiences, we help people unlock their passions and purposes, and leverage their talents, resources and spheres of influence, in partnership with locally-led initiatives that work to find local solutions to local problems, addressing a need that the community requests, not one imposed upon it.

So the answer is not to stop the voluntourism movement, as many people

claim. Rather it is time for everyone to take responsibility for their actions – to do their homework and make wise choices about with whom to travel.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems." How marvelous if those words one day became our reality.

Editorial Takeaway

A question: Why not imagine the best of all possible worlds and work toward it in a constructive manner?

While there is undeniable value in

analyzing and repairing the shortcomings of existing systems, dreaming big and acting in the most positive way possible are perhaps of even greater value.

Beyond Turtles and Tots: Old-School Volunteering



By Amy E. Robertson,
Author, *Moon Volunteer
Vacations in Latin America*
@traveler0603

Sea turtles and school children seem to grab the spotlight in conversations about volunteer vacations, while more traditional service opportunities often get lost in the shadows. No matter where you are in the world, though, the hungry need meals, the elderly need companionship and rescued pets need care. These are meaningful ways to contribute that often don't require special skills.

The first time that I showed up to volunteer at a soup kitchen in Beirut, I wasn't sure what my role would be, but I had volunteered before in soup kitchens in my hometown of Seattle and I knew that I could do everything from cook to clean. As it turned out, the biggest need was for someone simply to put equal portions of rice and stew on plates. I could do that. On the days that cakes were donated, my expertise cutting birthday cakes came in handy. I served lunch at the soup kitchen for four months.

It wasn't earth-shattering work, but it met a need. Thirty elderly Lebanese went home every Thursday afternoon with full stomachs, thanks in part to my efforts.

Sure, a long-term solution for hunger is ideal, but in the meantime, hungry people got fed. I was proud to be a part of that.

As a bonus, I met people that I never would have gotten to know otherwise. As a work-from-home mom living abroad, my social circle is dominated by other moms and expats. Through volunteering, I met local college students and young adults committed to a new Lebanon, elderly people who needed a listening ear as much as they needed the food, and the sturdy-shoed nuns who were the humble hosts of the weekly luncheon. I got to practice my budding Arabic skills to boot.

My educational background is in international development, so I love to see organizations that are "teaching a man [or woman] to fish." But immediate needs don't disappear while long-term solutions are being developed, and ladling meals at a soup kitchen, providing companionship to the elderly, mentoring young adults or reminding hardship survivors that the world hasn't abandoned them all can make great volunteer opportunities while traveling, as well as while at home. No matter where you find yourself, this kind of volunteering can open the door for the kind of authentic person-to-person exchanges that many other forms of volunteering don't foster.

Editorial Takeaway

A question: While thinking big and looking large is great, why not (also) focus on small and inquire locally?

It's a cliché because it's true: beautiful things do come in small packages.

Putting a little time and energy into serving them up – doling out meals, helping create crafts, lending an ear – can make all the difference in the world to someone somewhere, including yourself.



Andean weavers
in Otavalo,
Ecuador

Good for Infrastructure: Focus on Real and Long-Term Community Benefit



By Cole Hoover,
World Economic Forum
"Global Shaper"
@colehoover

As an educator, member of the international development community and previous director of education for one of the world's largest service-learning organizations, I have spent a lot of time studying and thinking about good intentions, especially what happens when students, mostly undergraduates, from the U.S. and Europe go on trips to the "Global South" aspiring to make a positive impact.

Unfortunately, "voluntourism," a word commonly used to describe these well-meaning travel undertakings, has recently come under heavy criticism. Among other things, poorly designed programs, unsustainable projects, cultural insensitivity and ignorance about poor communities have been identified as big problems. However, by branding all service-based volunteering as "voluntourism," we mistakenly criticize programs with a wide range of quality.

I recognize that there are big issues at hand, even with well-designed programs, and that there are still lingering questions, for instance, about whether or not the presence of volunteers is a net positive for some communities. But, as in worst-case scenarios involving the wholesale rejection of the practice, let's not risk throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Instead, let's look at some of

the popular criticisms and some examples of the ways good can overcome them.

Popular Criticisms

Before generalizing that volunteering is bad, most critics seem to focus on the following things:

- Bad program design – replacing local labor, irrelevant projects, making community members feel powerless;
- Bad volunteering program design – good intentions are not enough, and organizations should not assign volunteers tasks for which they are not qualified;
- Bad messaging and framing, especially because of the profit motives of companies that can undermine a community's dignity by engaging in "poverty tourism."

So instead of debating the merits (or obvious lack thereof) of voluntourism as we see it practiced today, why don't we take the word for exactly what it is: a descriptor of an uninformed, unsustainable and damaging approach to poverty alleviation.

Once we do this, is it possible to eliminate or limit the negatives such that the end result is a high-quality volunteer program? Furthermore once the problems described above are no longer part of the discussion, is there also a way for volunteers to add value to economic development that benefits everyone – staff, communities and volunteers?

Let's Talk about Sustainability

The debate about the merits and credibility of volunteerism has mostly focused on the experiences of the volunteers when in a host country. I find this problematic because if volunteering abroad is to remain a legitimate tool in the fight against global poverty, we need to focus less on a volunteer's field experience and more on the local communities once the volunteers leave. We need to assess the outcomes of the work accomplished, including the nature and quality of the infrastructure created and its impact on local communities' abilities to develop sustainably and independently.

To their credit, many experts mention sustainability as a major concern when evaluating the work of volunteers abroad. This leads me – and should prompt you – to ask important questions:

- Can we establish what meaningful outcomes of volunteerism look like so we can recognize them when we see them?
- How do we ensure that the projects implemented by volunteers lead to anything meaningful?
- What does sustainability really mean in the context of volunteerism?
- Even more importantly, what does sustainability mean to the communities where volunteers work?
- How do we ensure that once volunteers go home, community members can continue working to end poverty in the places they live?

I don't think anyone can provide conclusive answers to these questions,

but, stemming from my personal and professional experiences, I can offer insight into what I believe sustainability looks like – and how it is beneficial – when it is an integrated goal of volunteer service work.

Impactful, Meaningful, Holistic and Sustainable

Through my previous work for **Global Brigades**, the world's largest student-led sustainable development organization, I now better understand the intersection of sustainability and volunteerism. I've seen firsthand that when community members become part of the solution, the volunteers' work becomes impactful and meaningful, and the projects become more sustainable.

One of Global Brigade's programs involves the creation of seven- to 10-day collaborations between university students, community members and local staff to build a community's infrastructure and capacity for sustainable development. Students pay for the opportunity to take part, and the majority of their financial contributions go directly to fund the infrastructure and programs, all of which are maintained by staff and community leaders, who remain constant while students come and go.

Using the complex feedback of community members over time, Global Brigades uses a holistic development model that requires, first and foremost, collaboration with community members to identify what contributions are meaningful. Once established, there is strategic work to implement a variety of sustainable health, economic and educational initiatives and projects that leave room

for growth and evolution under the management of the local community:

- a rural clinic to get a baseline of the community's basic needs and to train community health workers for year-round support;
- a community bank that empowers local leaders and entrepreneurs

with startup funds, as well as training (delivered by local staff) to operate the bank and kick-start investment in community projects;


- health infrastructure like pit latrines, hand-washing stations and concrete floors, built during collaborations between volunteers and locals

who contribute time, material and funds (the latter borrowed from the community bank, so that they take ownership of the projects);

- a local water council to identify water sources and create low-cost purification and distribution systems;
- long-term environmental, human rights and business programs aimed at ending poverty.

All this is done with a view to meeting a community's own development goals.

This commitment to holistic year-round work illustrates what happens when volunteers are seen not as disconnected visitors on the ground, but rather as meaningful parts of a system that creates sustainable solutions.



Cole Hoover (standing), former Director of Education at Global Brigades, with a group of public health interns in Ghana in between classes taught by local doctors to help the interns become more thoughtful volunteers in the field.

Editorial Takeaway

There's no getting around good intentions. The problem, as has repeatedly been made clear by our long human history of shortsighted good-heartedness, is that the focus of good intentions is usually on the intender, not the intensee.

That being said, in pondering this, let's not get too caught up in the words used to describe high concepts, or even the high concepts themselves. Let's not feel obliged to avoid reference to "voluntourism," in spite of the black mark that some place on it. Let's not seek to shoehorn "sustainability" into

every project, as valuable as the vision it represents may be. Sometimes a clean-water cistern is just a cistern, especially when it has been requested by a community and fits into a reasonable plan about how to improve health.

The biggest takeaway here is the value that anyone engaging with sustainable infrastructure development through charitable and service-learning organizations should place on community leadership. Any form of support shared with a community – whether it be money or muscle – should have been invited by that community.

The Power of Education: We All Have as Much to Learn as We Have to Teach



By Sonal Kadchha,
Co-founder,
Educating The Children
@ETCeducation

When I went into investment banking in 2004, I was very excited by its fast-paced nature and the unlimited jet-setting. Nothing could beat the adrenaline rush of closing a multi-million-pound deal. Gradually, however, the rush started wearing off and I couldn't help thinking "there has to be more to life than this."

I was grateful for everything I had, but this feeling just kept getting stronger. The years went by, the air miles built up, and then I got an invitation from Virgin Atlantic to help build dormitories at a local primary school in the Masai Mara in Kenya. I nervously decided to accept this invitation. I say "nervously" since plastered all over the UK press at the time were riots in Kenya that looked pretty scary.

However, when I got there, I was instantly blown away by the beauty of the Masai Mara. There is no forgetting that landscape scattered with thousands of zebra, Thomson's gazelle and wildebeest. And a sky so vast and bright blue. Our everyday commute to the school certainly beat the London Underground!

Even with the breathtaking landscapes, the thing that *really* inspired me the most was the children at the school where I worked. They were so happy and full of energy, despite all the hardships they faced in their lives, such as the struggle to make the four-hour hike to school in the blazing sun with

no water. The girls also had to deal with childhood marriages and female genital mutilation. But they seemed happy despite all that. Happy simply because they were in school, and even if, at that age, they didn't fully grasp how education could help them and the wider Masai community.

The ability to read is the ability to choose how to vote instead of being told where to put a thumbprint. Improved options mean families are not desperate to marry off their daughters for cows, or living in fear of starving during a drought. Education is all about knowing how to solve one's own problems rather than relying on answers from others.

When I got back to the United Kingdom, the impact of my time in Kenya stayed with me. I think it really resonated with me because, from my own experience of growing up as a girl in a traditional Indian family, I realised that education was the key to choosing my own destiny.

When I received an offer to read chemical engineering at Cambridge University, I became the first person from my family to go to university and there is *no doubt* in my mind that education opened up opportunities for me. The more I looked around, the more obvious it became that I wasn't the only one. In the city I noticed aristocrats and immigrants working alongside each other because they had been educated to the same level. I realised just how lucky we are because in the UK we have a decent and accessible education system, which means we don't have to be rich to reach our full potential.

I wanted the same things for the youngsters I had seen in Kenya, so I set up a UK-based charity, **Educating The Children**, which focuses on providing primary and secondary education in the Masai Mara. We have set up two projects so far. First, UK primary school teachers volunteer in local classrooms in Kenya, where there are typically 100 pupils to one teacher. As well as alleviating the teacher shortage, our teachers teach the children to THINK rather than use rote-learning methods common in Africa. To date we have worked with more than 1,000 African children.

Second, we are building the first secondary school in the Masai Mara region, where there are 47 primary schools and no secondary schools. It has been a long journey, but we have raised over £150,000 and work well with the

heavily-involved community. The school will start operating in January 2015.

As you can imagine, since my initial trip I have been back to the Masai Mara many, many times. My team and I have had very close encounters with wild animals – from listening to the very loud rumblings of an elephant's belly to almost being savaged by a very angry white rhino – but for me the most memorable moments have involved interacting with the community. Over the years, we have really come to know our local Masai counterparts and they are fascinating people. They teach us about the importance of teamwork, strong community spirit, and respect for elders. Most importantly, their nomadic lifestyle reminds us that we don't need excessive material possessions to be happy. We learn from them as much as they learn from us.

Editorial Takeaway

A question: How can you too turn inspiration into action?

Don't ponder all the obstacles that must be overcome. Look instead at the

beneficial outcomes to be had upon final completion, and the friendships to be built with the people, especially locals, who will lead alongside you.



Good for Building Skills: The Powerful Impact of Professionals Sharing Knowledge



By Alice Gugelev,
Founder, DoGoodAsYouGo.org
@DoGoodAsYouGo

Open any travel book or website, and you are bound to find a section on “adding meaning to your trip” or volunteering while abroad. With thousands of organizations around the world offering everything from multi-year religious missions to day trips to an orphanage, you are right to believe that the travel-volunteer path is well trodden.

But while that may be true for backpackers, overlanders, digital nomads and gap-year crowds, the reality is quite different for skilled professionals with a set itinerary and limited time, whether traveling on business or holiday. The latter can be hard pressed to find volunteer opportunities that take full advantage of the value they can offer in the time available. However, it is these highly skilled potential volunteers who can have the greatest impact.

Traveling professionals have unique abilities that make them perfectly suited to offering communities a hand up, rather than a hand out, during their trips. These travelers include doctors, business executives, photographers, architects, sports professionals etc. What they share is a depth of knowledge in a transferable skill that could make a practical impact on a visited community. The volunteer opportunities they seek are typically long-term placements or short extensions of existing fixed and time-poor itineraries.

The Challenges

Almost anyone can paint a school fence or load bags of rice on a truck. But when it comes to teaching how to write a business plan, use a digital camera or improve computer skills, the importance of language skills and productive communications increases substantially.

Similarly, while it may be relatively simple for a construction project or agricultural organization to transition from one volunteer to another, shifting gears between independent travelers hoping to teach hard skills could have unintended negative consequences, especially if lessons are interrupted due to a volunteer’s limited time in a community. It is also difficult for a volunteer to drop into a community and understand locals’ detailed needs and build upon previous work.

Lastly, maximizing the positive impact of a volunteering opportunity can be tricky. A newly-installed water pump may serve a thousand people from miles around, but a workshop on financial management will typically have a smaller audience. To deal with this last challenge, it is best to take a “train-the-trainer” approach, where a volunteer works with a local group of teachers, coaches and mentors equipped to share their learnings throughout the community.

The Opportunity

When travelers and community leaders work together, even for just an afternoon,

new skills and knowledge are brought into a community. This can propel progress or open new pathways for the entire community. For this to happen, though, a volunteer offering his/her knowledge must be ready to value the *uniqueness* of a local situation – the local leaders and organizations – and approach it with great respect and curiosity. In turn, local organizations need to be open to the importance of skills transfer, rather than slotting travelers into the usual English-teacher and latrine-builder molds.

The first step must always be an open and respectful dialogue with community leaders and directors of organizations and schools. This is critical to assessing and understanding actual needs and existing efforts, especially those affecting any at-risk populations and/or the community at large. However, organizing these initial conversations in a productive and trusting manner can be difficult and inefficient for both communities and travelers.

These efforts and, consequentially, the means of overcoming the challenges listed above, are greatly aided by skilled volunteer-aggregating intermediary organizations with existing relationships in the communities. They serve many purposes, including helping to pair volunteers with the most appropriate opportunities and coordinating the flow of volunteers working with communities to ease the “passing of the torch.”

The Questions to Ask

There are five main questions that people should ask prior to signing up for a volunteering experience, especially one focused on professional skills transfer.

How long do I have? A key difference amongst skill-based volunteering is the minimum duration of time required. For example, a **VSO** opportunity is typically for a minimum of six months, whereas **MovingWorlds** requires a minimum of three months, **Technoserve** asks for a one- to two-week commitment at specific times of year and **Do Good As You Go** is set up for experiences as short as two to three days, but has some volunteers staying for months. Certainly a longer time in the field is better, but understanding your time availability is the first step.

Do I want to volunteer alone or in a group? If you volunteer alone, you can typically travel at times aligned with your own schedule. If it is with a group, it will certainly be fun to meet others of the same mindset, but it will happen at set times of year and be subject to the schedule and activities of the group. Furthermore, understanding who the group might be and if it is aligned with your interests (e.g. young and boisterous versus older professionals with limited time) is a key part of this process.

What skills do I have or can I learn? All too often, even skilled volunteers will be relegated to teaching English. However, working with an intermediary organization to identify your professional skills, as well as your hobbies and other abilities gained earlier in your career, is critical in finding the right training opportunity. Some organizations, such as **Do Good As You Go** and **Team 5**, will even share curricula and materials that you can use for your experience.



Mercy Malaysia
project in the
Philippines

How much will I pay for the experience?

Most voluntourism organizations charge exorbitant fees, but in general, the skill-based organizations have a different model. VSO and MovingWorlds usually identify opportunities where room and board are covered, while Do Good As You Go does not charge any fees, choosing instead to work with travelers savvy enough to get around on their own without an airport pickup. If you are new to the voluntourism world and a relatively inexperienced traveler, paying an organization to look after your transport and accommodation might still be good to consider.

Is the organization I'm working with dedicated to local empowerment? Most importantly, finding an organization that cares about the development of local communities is essential. This ethos of local empowerment and training should be evident in the organization's

communication materials and a core part of how local network partners are vetted. All too often, volunteering builds dependencies on external providers and funds, but skill-based volunteering aims to break this cycle and build local abilities that continue to grow over time.

Overall, speaking with other volunteers and people in any organization is a key first step in determining which opportunity is ideal for you. By taking a considered approach to ensuring that any skills-transfer volunteering opportunity (and its lasting impact) is appropriate to the local community – from an ethical, practical and professional perspective – and by working through an established network that has lasting ties to local communities, the potential for the traveling professionals with powerful depth of knowledge (and sometimes limited time) to truly make a difference can be significant.

Editorial Takeaway

Skill-building is about giving away something intangible yet invaluable: knowledge. While most communities are probably made better by the construction of a school, health clinic, bank or row of stores, they are left staring at empty buildings if there are no properly trained teachers, doctors or nurses, financial advisers and entrepreneurs to occupy them.

When business professionals with

important skills take the time to share with communities in need, or to find a way to fund training in those communities, they're laying the foundation for the kind of success a physical structure often can't, no matter how solid its cornerstones are. Many are the tales of classrooms, clinics, credit unions and commerce conducted successfully under the shelter of a central tree.

If You Want to Help, Shut up and Listen (to Yourself and Others)



By Mark Horoszowski,
Co-founder, MovingWorlds.org
@Experteering

I spent a year traveling and volunteering my skills around the world, only to learn what others already knew:

“If you want to help, shut up and listen.”

The great irony of voluntourism is that we tend to overemphasize our willingness to help – and “selflessness” – but in doing so, we forget to be honest with ourselves and others that it is a selfish endeavor.

The truth is that we all want unique and story-worthy international experiences. We want them so badly we’ve created an industry where it’s OK to pay for these “voluntourism experiences.” Yet that simple act of paying erodes our own experiences for three reasons:

1. **We create a customer-client relationship, not a partnership, with our hosts.** By paying a hosting organization, it “owes” you and will conform to your needs, often at the expense of its own best interests.
2. **We erode sustainability.** In order to survive, social-impact organizations are encouraged to pivot their business models away from serving their beneficiaries, and instead work to host as many volunteers as possible.
3. **We engage in work that is not needed.** When we look to do specific things in specific areas, and are willing to pay for it, organizations are financially rewarded for doing what you want, not what is needed.

In order to avoid these pitfalls, we don’t need better programs or services. Rather, we need to ask better questions. Instead of asking **yourself** “*What countries do I want to go to?*” and “*What types of experiences do I want to have?*” you should be asking **others** “*What are your biggest needs?*” and “*How do you want to host me?*”

During my year spent volunteering around the world, I followed the advice of those that went before me to be cautious of places where you have to pay to volunteer. Instead, I conducted extensive research about social-impact organizations in different geographies and inquired from hundreds of them if any needed my specific skills.

This took a lot of effort, but it led me to hosts that were eager to put me to work in meaningful ways. This also inspired me to start **MovingWorlds**. Since then, we’ve helped people volunteer over 7,500 hours of professional skills and we have found that the most important contributors to meaningful experiences are:

1. **Emotional readiness.** It’s easier for volunteers to step into an established relationship. This helps volunteers steer away from the common pitfall of being so driven by a need to do something meaningful that they prioritize their own desires over the needs of the community.
2. **Being open.** The most unique and immersive experiences are the ones for which you haven’t thought to look.
3. **Real needs from real organizations.** If a hosting organization has a real



Mark Horoszowski “experteering” in Nepal with the Nepal Wireless Village, a locally-led initiative where he spent time supporting teachers on internet-related questions so they could utilize it more effectively for education and after-school programs.

need that you can address, it will invest the resources and time to host you. In doing so, a real partnership is created that is better for the hosting organization and for you.

I believe that the biggest innovation in the travel industry is not a new service or technology, it’s a change in mindset. Instead of dictating how we want to experience other places and cultures, let’s ask our hosts to dictate

how they want to experience us.

So if you choose to move beyond voluntourism, don’t ask how you can help, but ask what organizations need. Keep asking until one needs the very skills that you provide. In that match lies a partnership that will create the richest experience possible. In this case, you’ll be warmly received for who you are and what you know, not accommodated for what’s in your bank account.

Editorial Takeaway

A question: How will you shift your travel mindset toward a focus on how others experience you?

There’s been plenty of ink spilled on how the Millennial generation is changing travel. An emphasis

on the desire for “authentic” and “transformative” experiences is one of the biggest priorities. But transformative authenticity is a two-way street: are you ready to honor your hosts’ desires to receive bullion from you as pure as that you wish to collect in return?

Good for Philanthropy: See, Consult and Fulfill a Need



By Chris Mackay,
Co-founder, Crooked Trails
@crooked_trails

Volunteer tourism has been on the rise for years, bringing much-needed support to communities around the world and fulfilling the desires of hundreds of thousands of travelers eager to give back.

I got started in 1998 when I was in northern Thailand leading a 10-day tour to visit hill tribes. In the Lisu village of Pang Sa, my group sat crammed into the home of Ahsut, the village headman. I asked him what the village needed and he quickly replied, "A community center where we can all meet, because right now we all gather in my house, and, as you can see, there is not enough room." Looking through the darkness of the tiny bamboo hut, I could make out the dirt floors and thatched roof pierced by feeble shafts of light. It was evident how little space there was. I was determined to return with a group of philanthropic travelers who could help build the community center. The following year, 10 of us arrived with funds and hands at the ready!

I realized a lot during that first volunteer trip. And I have learned even more over the following 16 years during which my organization, **Crooked Trails**, has raised tens of thousands of dollars and helped build or facilitate the building of schools, a clinic, an orphanage and dozens of smokeless ovens in countries around the world.

Research, Question and Connect

I understand why there is a surge in philanthropic travel and charity fundraising, the words we use today to describe generosity expressed as a result of, and through, travel. I have seen first hand the incredible satisfaction that arises when travelers see a need and can fulfill it, be it medical, educational or nutritional. This has given rise to all sorts of ways in which travelers can raise funds and give back.

So what questions should a do-gooding traveler ask to make sure that everything's on the level?

After all, we have all heard of the terrible scams out there. The market today is full of books and websites focusing on volunteer travel because it's a booming business. Many opportunities are simply ways to make money off would-be donors and volunteers. And that is why I always advise: "buyer beware!"

To steer clear of this – to establish a project's legitimacy and project promoter's credentials – necessarily takes research on the traveler's part. This can best be accomplished by asking the following questions:

- How long has the organization been in business? Is it a not-for-profit?
- What is its connection with the community benefiting from the project?
- Is the project ongoing or temporary?
- What percentage of donated funds goes to the project or community?

- What will be the nature of the traveler's connection to the local people while working on the project?
- And most importantly, did the project idea come from the community and does it include a continued commitment to maintain it?

Equally as important is for each volunteer/participant to ask him- or herself the question: "Why am I doing this?" If, for example, the driving impulse is simply to volunteer, then why not volunteer in your own hometown where there is probably plenty of need? But if the desire is for a moment of true cultural exchange, then the next step is to identify opportunities for meeting and sharing with local people in a different land.

I have always felt that the true benefits of volunteer tours rarely come from the labor offered. Instead, it's the joy of working side by side with community members, laughing in the dirt, sharing the sweat equity and just being in the village. Through extensive meaningful efforts like this, locals have come to understand that travelers do care and want to learn from them. Over the many years we have organized and led these kinds of trips, almost all the feedback about the best part of a trip zeroes in on the homestays. Travelers want to share, to have that experiential time in a village or town getting to know what life is like for people whose ways of eating, praying and dancing are so different from their own. They return home fuller, richer and happier. Why else travel?

Donate, Learn and Share

Lately, I have seen a new kind of philanthropic traveler: one with a strong

yearning to help address a need, but less interest in or ability to offer labor. In Nepal, for instance, I am involved in the fight against human trafficking. I have therefore partnered with **Maiti Nepal**, a Nepal-based NGO and leader in the battle to eliminate sexual slavery from humanity.

Last year, I visited Maiti Nepal with 11 people who agreed to raise an extra \$500 over trip costs that went directly to the NGO. I set up a website where my clients designed their own fundraising pages. We collected over \$7,000 for the organization. When we were in Nepal, the clients did not work, but instead witnessed the inspiring work being done in the field by Maiti Nepal. In addition, they all returned home committed to spreading the word about what they learned, including through an awareness-raising event.

This brings up an interesting point about volunteer tourism: not all things that need to be addressed in a country can (or should!) be done by volunteers. The clients I brought to Nepal did not possess any of the necessary skills, medically or linguistically, to make a difference in the fight against sexual slavery. None was an expert in the areas that the young rescued survivors need. However, they could donate, learn and share.

This is a growing segment of the industry. Many people recognize that their labor is a drop in the bucket or could be misapplied, but that a financial donation could make the world of difference between a project that gets off the ground and one that doesn't.

Of course, even when no physical work is offered, the donors/travelers should be able to feel a connection to the people

the program benefits. The way to do this is, again, through community homestays and or visits. In Nepal, my clients spend two nights and three days living in a rural Nepali village before heading into the field with Maiti Nepal. This helps them better understand the types of places from which the trafficked girls come. They learn more about the population being directly affected by slavery and the importance of the prevention work in which Maiti Nepal is engaged. The time in the village is a highlight for my clients, because it offers them a deep connection to the culture and people.

Community Consultation Is Critical

Whatever philanthropic efforts are considered, first and foremost there must be direct local involvement and commitment. For example, a few years back in remote Peru, I met a village headman. We talked about the need to improve nutrition in his village. We discussed **Heifer International**, an organization committed to ending world hunger and poverty. We exchanged concrete ideas about what it would take to bring cows to his village. This was a dream for him, as the milk would provide badly needed protein to a carbohydrate-heavy diet.

When word of the discussion was shared with my group, they volunteered on the spot to donate money for the purchase of two cows. Upon returning home, I raised funds for another five cows and we sent the money directly to the community, which had meanwhile secured government support to help care for the cows. Each year that I returned, the herd had grown and now consists of more than 40 cows. Even better, the community is looking at producing its first product ever: cheese. This happened because we saw first hand what was needed and we discussed it with the locals face to face. Then they took over. They are completely responsible for the project now.

Whether travelers wish to offer support through sweat equity or a straight financial donations (or both), they should determine the validity of the project. They must also determine what the desired outcome is for themselves as travelers. In my experience, time with locals is always the most memorable and transformative part of any trip abroad. I don't know anyone who was changed by a sunset on a beautiful beach (gorgeous though it may be) or by having built a school (something of which to be proud), but I know countless people who were forever transformed by the gratitude and friendship they received from a person whose evident need was met through the generosity of strangers.



Editorial Takeaway

One critical concept here is that “the true benefits of volunteer tours rarely come from the labor offered.” In context, the reference is to the value of human contact, something encouraged by immersive and conscientious travel along the lines covered in this guide. However, a later qualification that “not all things that need to be addressed in a country can (or should!) be done by volunteers” is the real kernel.

Your financial goodwill can reach every corner of the planet, guided by able and honorable locals and noble local support networks. It can go places you can't and, importantly, probably shouldn't. That is its power, one not to be diminished, especially as long as you practice all of the self-education and due diligence described above about how best to identify a meaningful cause and virtuous agency for supporting it, no matter where on earth it is.

Choose the Right Path: Help Make a Better World



By Stephen Partridge,
Sandblasters, Team Member
@SandstormSteve

Like many people, I decided I wanted to help make a change in the world – a real change for the better. So when I was asked to create a vision that could **raise £1 million for a charity** that supports kids with cerebral palsy and other sensory or motor impairments, my decision was to run six marathons in six days in each of the following settings: the hottest, windiest, coldest and driest parts of the planet. I would also complete the Marathon des Sables, a multi-stage adventure through the Sahara Desert.

What attracted me and three teammates – together we are the Sandblasters Team – to this challenge was the opportunity to give something back, as well as a responsibility to ensure that we were successful. It felt a bit like a sham because, as an experienced extreme marathon runner, I would essentially be doing something I really enjoy. However, I was comfortable with that as it would be incredibly inspiring to do. Of course, others saw it as much more demanding... and perhaps it is.

This charity challenge has become the most important part of my life. Business is great and I work just as hard as I always have (and probably better, as I am definitely fitter), but I have added a new dimension. Now I also go out to wild and barren parts of the world, where men and women have no place and no control, and I pit myself against the elements, whether they be hot or cold.

In taking on these challenges, I have come to realize that:

- Nature can and will kill you if you are not careful.
- Everyday things that we take for granted, such as water, become the most precious things on earth, whilst other things, such as mobile phones and other consumer goods, become absolutely useless and even a burden, sometimes to the point of being left in the desert or given to locals as presents.

Unless you are a stone, you won't be left unchanged.

Thankfully, the Sandblasters campaign has enabled us to bring positive change to at least one great thing: the **Small Steps** charity. As a small charity, they had never received a donation larger than £20,000. To date, we have raised nearly £500,000, and also helped the charity to gain a further £300,000 from **BBC Children in Need**.

To have been a part of a process that has fundamentally supported the charity over a five-year period is enormously satisfying for everyone involved. Generally speaking, the events in which I take part and the donations they inspire are achievements that easily rank alongside the best thing that I've ever done in business.

You can do all of this for yourself too! Pick your journey, make the first step and in return:

- You will receive lifelong memories, whereas you may completely forget what you did at your normal work.

- You will develop nurturing and long-lasting relationships, whereas the people you work with may disappear from memory.
- You will feel like you had a worthwhile life. You will always

know where your money went, whereas you won't remember what you spent during a night out.

The choice is yours.

Editorial Takeaway

A question: What special abilities do you have that can be turned to others' advantage?

It can take initiative and driving resolve to imagine how your unique set of skills can be leveraged to the financial advantage of a charity, not-for-profit, NGO or local community.

This is notwithstanding the concerns raised in the preface to this guide about

the ways in which fundraising actions benefiting Western charities sometimes do little to the advantage of the local communities through which the actions pass. The more charity challenges can give back internationally as well as at home, the better, but that should not be at the expense of campaigns making a huge difference to a community of people somewhere in the world.





Diverting Tactics: Being Honest About Where the Money Goes



**By Cheryl Chapman,
Director, City Philanthropy
@Philanthrocity**

When taking part in a charity challenge, what happens if you are suddenly asked to divert funds from the

project you have championed to another one? Where do your loyalties lie – with your donors or with the recipients?

This was the dilemma I faced after raising £750 through the **Just Giving** online platform to finance a volunteer project in South Africa. My objective was to provide and install a water pump to pipe fresh water and new prosperity to a Zulu community in Maputaland.

In keeping with charity challenges, our plan was to spend two days living with and experiencing the life of a Zulu family, and help install the pump.

However, a week before leaving for South Africa, we were informed by organisers that the water pump was no longer required. Instead, our funds were needed to pay for a Livestock for Livelihood project.

We learned that rural Zulu communities in Maputaland rely on cattle as their currency. Without healthy cows, the Zulu can't survive. If a cow dies, it represents a major loss of wealth and threatens livelihoods.

Our money was therefore earmarked to buy battery-operated spray pumps and parasiticide that would rid the

community's cattle of life-threatening ticks and parasites. It would prolong the lives of cattle, which would deliver more milk and calves, effectively increasing the wealth of the community.

The project was chosen by the villagers themselves. We could hardly question the need for it. The difficulty for us was that our donors had thought they were sponsoring a clean-water project. We were not sure what our legal duties, if any, were to them. Would it have been in any way fraudulent to divert funds raised to another project?

I approached my learned colleague, Howard Lake, for advice. Lake, who is a fundraising guru and founder of **Fundraising UK**, provided a way forward by encouraging complete transparency. "It shows the flexible approach needed when working with projects like this," he said. We informed our donors of the change, offered them information about the new project, and promised to return donations to anyone not happy to support it.

Of course, all our donors agreed to the change, many commenting that the community's needs were paramount. Other comments proved that much of what underpins fundraising is a desire to support friends. Many reported



that they were supporting us as volunteers as much as the project.

In actual fact, what neither we nor our donors realised at the outset is that this project is about much more than spraying cattle. It is a far-reaching cultural change project with the long-term aim of encouraging villagers to move away from poaching and toward animal conservation in Somkhanda Game Reserve.

Editorial Takeaway

A question: Are you wary of your responsibilities in fundraising processes that seem to come with few assurances?

In a world often troubled by cost-heavy and opaque bureaucracy – systems into which donated goods and funds

sometimes disappear without a trace – the value of transparency at all levels of engagement cannot be overstated. Nor can the importance of beneficiaries guiding the collaborative process through which generosity is awarded.



Understanding and Respecting Roles



By Kakuta Maimai Hamisi, Founder, Maasai Association

More and more people from the western world are traveling to Africa. They are going not only for vacation, but as they are increasingly conscious of their vacation choices, they are also going to help out local communities.

We have been fortunate to receive well-to-do visitors in our village for exclusive cultural experiences and safaris in nearby Amboseli National Park at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro. In and around our village, our clients have been able to fund and participate in activities that include teaching at the local schools

and working side by side with nurses at our village health center. Other travelers have helped us plant trees, make bricks and build classrooms.

We only welcome a few volunteers and donors every year, and only in small groups, which allows us to give more attention to them. So hosting them in our community has been a simple thing for us to do. In fact, we haven't faced many hosting challenges because we prepare our visitors in advance for what to expect and see. We even have a set of rules and guidelines that volunteers must follow, so volunteers and villagers alike understand and respect each other's roles. For example, we ask that volunteers always leave things as they found them in the host community.

All of the projects in our village were initiated by the community, not volunteers or donors. The donors' roles are to help us fund community initiatives. Volunteers are welcome to help us implement our projects as per the wishes of the villagers, so they come with an identified job and know what to do. We give them an orientation

and they basically get straight to work.

I think the hardest challenge our visitors face is how hard it can be to leave. Many have developed deep personal connections with the village and the projects. We believe that we offer the most rewarding experience to visitors in the world.

Editorial Takeaway

The more directly involved all partners in a project are, the better. For a local community, the sense of ownership is direct, as are the pathways between donor generosity and beneficiary-determined need. For visitors and

benefactors, the impact is immediately evident. For all parties, guidelines and roles are clear, expectations are set and plenty of room is made for the crucial power of a personal, honest and human touch.

Anticipating and Coping with Cultural Differences



**By Jorge Sandoval,
Volunteers Coordinator,
Fundación Bolívar Education
@VolunteerEcuadr**

Over the course of many years, our organization has faced a variety of situations that demonstrate the differences between cultures, especially when they manifest themselves as the differences between the volunteers who visit Ecuador and the local people who work with them, like host families, Spanish teachers and project participants.

In order to deal with these differences, our communities have to know how to cope with visitors' culture shock around food, behavior, language and perhaps even clothing. Sometimes it's hard for locals to realize that people from other countries are open minded, as there are some things that can be taken as impolite behavior. But the host families get used to them, while teaching and learning at the same time.

Of course, our organization sits between the two, working both to teach the communities how to deal with these situations and to ask volunteers to be careful about reacting to issues that might be different from those in their own countries, and to do so without causing any bad feelings.

There will always be people who apply to be volunteers in our country, and some of the reasons why can be illogical, like assuming that Ecuadorians live in very sad and poor situations. Sometimes volunteers

come to Ecuador with the idea of saving the world, but once they arrive in big cities like Quito or Guayaquil they realize that we are a developing country and therefore not everything is poor or sad.

In order to make this clear, we always try to provide as much encouragement as possible to our potential volunteers by using as many emails as it takes to



Jorge Sandoval at Fundación Bolívar Education. Quito, Ecuador, has a population of about 2 million people. Many come from families with financial problems, obliging both the father and mother to work. As a result, daycare centers are a huge help for them as safe places to leave their children and good places where the kids can play. They get three meals a days and enjoy dynamic learning activities, instead of wasting their time or spending it on the streets.



Daily life at Quilotoa market, Ecuador. Photo: Matthew Barker

help them feel confident. They also get pre-arrival information so that they can prepare for all of the potential situations they might have to go through once in the country. We want them to trust themselves and the people from the local organization that are supporting them.

Volunteering is getting more and more popular in this country, and many local people who previously didn't understand why volunteers wanted to help are beginning to understand why

it matters. They see that volunteers want to get to know different cultures by living and working as part of them, while also enjoying tourist hotspots.

Given all of this, if we had the chance to speak to leaders in the field of voluntourism, we would request one thing: help creating a platform through which we can be reached by communities and local organizations that need help and would benefit from the placement of volunteers with them, but can't find us.

Editorial Takeaway

Culture shock is a real thing. Visitors with no understanding of a new country can be easily upset and also inadvertently cause it. Hosts with little experience of a visitor's country can also be the source of bruised sensibilities.

The remedy: knowledge. It truly is power, whether used to set a general

baseline for far-reaching travels or concentrated around deep involvement in one country. Just as responsible local hosting organizations do their best to prepare visitors and volunteers for what is to come, so too must all travelers, whether volunteers or not, take it upon themselves to fit into a kinder and more cultured world order.

Addressing the Expectations of Communities and Donors



By **Samantha Wattson**,
Managing Director,
Fundación En Vía
 @fundacionenvia

How an organization presents a community and introduces community members to volunteers and donors, and visa versa, sets the tone for all interactions and expectations. Clear communication that lays out an organization's mission leads to better-managed expectations on both sides.

At **Fundación En Vía**, we communicate with our volunteers and donors through email, our website, social media etc. Just as importantly, we give careful consideration to how we communicate with our community partners.

For instance, by removing the words "help" and "need" from our outreach – they are words perpetuating the idea that only one side is actually benefiting – we can focus on the exchange of culture, ideas and resources. Through words like "provide," "impart," "encourage," "support," "share," "learn" etc., we can speak to all of our partners in the same tone, whether it involves a volunteer who provides a business class, some community member who share a custom, a donor who funds a new loan or a woman borrower who teaches cheese-making.

Throughout our communications, we focus on highlighting the opportunities for learning and growth that take place on both sides. We emphasize the exchange of information, customs and experiences,

and make sure everyone understands the reciprocity underpinning our programs.

By creating this space, partners can develop equal, mutually beneficial relationships. Naturally, through the building of these relationships and a better understanding of one another, expectations become more realistic, accurate and more likely to be reached by everyone.

Another important issue is the way in which we manage the comings and goings of volunteers/donors so that they aren't a disruption to life in your community or at odds with local development work.

A set process for hiring, training and managing volunteers decreases the disruption of a constant revolving door. For us that means having meaningful and relevant conversations and providing detailed information from the initial exchange.

We utilize volunteers' time prior to their arrival by providing them with as much information as possible regarding the organization, the community and the programs. We also speak with every volunteer prior to his or her arrival to address and better understand goals, objectives and expectations.

The goal is for volunteers to have a clear idea of everything from the workplace environment to living costs and local customs before they even arrive at their final destination. Well-informed volunteers assimilate more quickly into local cultures and have shorter learning curves, leaving more time to

focus on the tasks at hand. Upon their arrival, before being assigned any task, volunteers spend the first week becoming oriented to the project on the ground. By having a clear, well-defined process, we can successfully manage volunteer expectations, while creating a productive and meaningful volunteer program.

Editorial Takeaway

Communication between visitor and host is clearly very important, but taking care with language is much more important than you may realize. Your words – both spoken and written – set the clear and constructive tone for everything that follows, including realistic expectations.



Samantha Wattson, at Fundación En Vía in Oaxaca, Mexico



GOOD INTENTIONS: WHAT TO THINK ABOUT



Before You Act: What to Think about and the Questions to Ask



By Sarah Vandenberg,
Volunteer-Travel Researcher
and Consultant
@SarahFromDC

As responsible travel gains in popularity, travelers often find themselves looking to volunteer opportunities and charitable projects as a way to support the communities they visit. But while new volunteer-abroad and fundraising programs are created every day around the world, it's up to the travelers themselves to find sustainable, ethical programs that make the best use of their skills and networks while actively engaging local populations.

Why Do You Want to Help?

Before choosing a program – or indeed choosing to commit time and resources at all – think through your motivations. What drives you to want to help a community you may never have visited and to which you might not have any ties?

For example, if you would like to visit an exotic location, but feel a commendable urge to “give back” to a community that may have welcomed you as a tourist, volunteering may not actually be the best choice. Shopping locally, staying in a family-owned ecolodge or even donating to a community NGO may go further and do more good for more people than volunteer hours.

How Can You Help?

Let's say you decide to volunteer. If you search online for opportunities, you will find there is no shortage of organizations offering short- and long-term placements for travelers of all backgrounds and abilities. Narrow down your choices by zeroing in on programs that will make best use of your abilities. You don't have to be an expert in your field, but you should find a program that uses your skills appropriately to benefit sustainable projects within a community.

If you find a suitable volunteer project, you will quickly learn how to make a greater impact, including staying longer, engaging in active skills exchange with your hosts, and being flexible and understanding about using local solutions to tackle local issues. You might wish to think about applying for volunteer projects in the same field as you would look for a job: the more realistic you are about what you can do and what you can learn (particularly in a location that might not have a language or culture similar to your own), the better your experience will be.

Having considered the not-insignificant requirements for ethical volunteering, many travelers decide they can make a more meaningful impact with a financial donation instead of giving their time. Thankfully, there are numerous well-established charity travel organizations that can be highly effective at raising significant sums for NGOs both large and small. Keep in mind, though, that when

choosing an organization with which to work and a cause to support, the same rules of thumb about making regular charitable donations apply: investigate and understand the local impact.

Whatever you choose to do, take time to gather information by asking important questions before you decide how you want to help. Find out what proportion of donated funds make it to projects on the ground. What are the operating costs and overheads? Do your donations support work efforts and communities in a country to which you may travel?

Choosing an Ethical Program

There are numerous considerations when ensuring that you work with an ethical program. Here are three ways to be certain that it's one doing great work for the community:

1: Community First

The organization you sign up with should put community first – again, it should provide local solutions to local issues. For example, if you sign up with an organization that recruits and places volunteers abroad – like an NGO that is headquartered in the United States and that sends volunteers to Africa and South America – make sure it has host-country counterparts that actively operate the programs. The recruitment agency's job is to find volunteers able to further the mission of existing, community-based organizations.

Putting community first also applies when you support programs financially. Know where your money is going and how it's distributed. A meaningful donation will

target specific projects where local needs have been established and assessed in-country through collaborative efforts involving community representatives and experts. The added benefit of knowing where and how you have helped is that one day you might be able to visit and see for yourself how your generosity is making a difference.

2: Selection Criteria

Any organization that places volunteers, that accepts them directly into local programs or that identifies local organizations worthy of financial support from the outside should have a set of participation criteria. Be wary of any groups that don't have an application or interview process. If they don't put much emphasis on finding the right people to contribute, then they might just treat their own projects the same way. This is important for any scheme, but particularly for those where you might come into contact with vulnerable populations (HIV/AIDS patients or young children, for example) or where some background experience might be necessary.



Helping with the construction of a water tank in Luwero, Uganda

3: Participant and Project Evaluation

As with any application and interview process, be sure you know how to define, evaluate and improve upon what the visiting labor force and donors are asked to accomplish, not only during the time spent experiencing something, but also over a long period. You can have a life-changing experience, but remember to

put your experience in perspective. Others may be or have been working in the same place as well. What impact are they making over time, and how will you contribute to that effort? You may be able to find this information in an annual report, or, if you can't find it readily available, then by asking for it. Look for concrete, quantifiable answers – and walk away if they're too vague or not forthcoming.

Editorial Takeaway

Don't expect others to do any heavy lifting for you. Assume full responsibility for the actions you wish to take.

While there are many honorable and responsible organizations do their best to model ethical practices, finding them

can be a challenge. And finding the agency that best matches your needs and desires with a community in search of your skills can be even more demanding. Don't be in a hurry. Take the time to ensure you're getting what you desire.



Learning about local development plans in Kerala, India

How to Distinguish between Responsible Organizations and Those Using “Greenwashing”



By Victoria Smith,
Long Run Initiative
@vickysmith

I first volunteered abroad in the mid 2000s. After extensive independent travel, and work in tourism for a decade, I had decided I wanted to “do something different” and make a difference. So I embarked on a life-changing six months in Southern Africa during which I found my life purpose and began a decade-long career transition full of immense experiences. I moved from web-strategy development, e-commerce and marketing for big brands involved in mass tourism to a focus on specialists in responsible tourism. Along the way, I qualified as a field guide (ranger) in South Africa to better understand conservation, worked at home and abroad for a voluntourism and charity-challenge tour operator, and gained a master’s degree in responsible tourism management, all the while keeping tabs on the burgeoning volunteer-tourism market.

For my master’s thesis ([published here](#)) I addressed the online marketing of volunteer tourism and the increasingly problematic issue of *if* – and *how* – a volunteer can distinguish between truly responsible organisations and those using “greenwashing,” all based solely on web communications in a market with hundreds, if not now thousands, of charity and commercial options.

The somewhat controversial conclusion from my cross-sector research and

thousands of data points was yes, it is possible, but you really have to do your homework. More importantly, you have to be honest with yourself about what you really want in order to find it. My findings, based entirely on publicly available information, included the following key concerns:

- Ethics in volunteer tourism are inconsistently communicated by organisations.
- Inconsistency between policies and projects can highlight “greenwashing” and other PR “spin” on ethics.
- Conservation sustainability tends to be better communicated due to supporting scientific evidence.
- Responsibility was least well communicated in childcare; few organisations do this well.
- Ethical practices and operations are not guaranteed by the status of an organisation, regardless of whether it is an NGO, social enterprise or commercial entity.
- Program prices and the level of responsibility often display an *inverse* relationship on comparable trips: the more expensive the per-day prices are, the less responsible the organisation often was; the most responsible organisations price responsibly too.

Lots of organisations make unsubstantiated claims about the ethics and sustainability of their operations. That the public publishing of my paper prompted one well-known

organisation to threaten legal action hopefully demonstrates that this industry is not all “nicey-nicey” charity. While I acknowledge that every organisation needs to strive for financial sustainability, for many, the profit motive is preeminent.

Some organisations really are great. They are, however, too few and far between.

As it is difficult to reach any industry consensus given the different requirements of places, projects and purposes, there are no agreed-upon industry standards. It is, therefore, up to the volunteers themselves to step up and make **smarter** choices. (For more about how to do this, see Make SMARTER Choices.)

Editorial Takeaway

A question: Can you tell the difference between boastful self-promotion and meaningful marketing?

A clever wordsmith can make the former look a lot like the latter, but any search for accountability will help separate conscious care from baseless bragging.



At the top of Mt Kilimanjaro with a local guide during the Different Travel Open Challenge, 2009

Make SMARTER Choices



By Victoria Smith,
Long Run Initiative
@vickysmith

To be a great volunteer, be **SMARTER** with your **Search, Motivations, Assessing, Relationship-building, Transparency, Evidence** and **Reviews**.

Think about it. If you're not skilled, qualified or legally allowed to do something at home, what makes you think communities abroad should accept you doing it there? If it was the other way round, what would you think? Would your parents, or you as a parent, be happy welcoming a teacher with no skills, no qualifications, no experience and no ability to speak your language, let alone no police checks?

Be SMARTER about volunteer tourism and you'll truly have a much more valuable experience. If the process is more like booking a holiday than applying for a job, do you really think you're going to be using or contributing any skills?

S – Search specifics

If you search the web with vague undifferentiated phrases like "volunteer projects abroad," don't be surprised when you get vague undifferentiated organisations or projects, or those that can buy their way to the top of search engine results. Specialist volunteer tourism organisations that do not take financial advantage of their clients are unlikely to have enough budget to compete. It's easy for big organisations to be found for the right phrases, but if ethics are

not completely integral to operations, it will show through. You have a personal responsibility to be objective and discerning about exactly what you want to achieve.

M – Motivations

Be honest about recognising what your motivations are. If you really want to help, as most volunteers do, then look for concrete information about what it means to help, what has helped and what will help. If you wish to be part of a sociable group of volunteers, let it be known so that the right organisation can match you to the right opportunity, or your expectations will not be met.

A – Assessing

Appraise any stated project objectives against your aims. To find an appropriate match, assess the skills required against those you can honestly offer. Also assess the project information against the organisation's responsible tourism policy. Make a quick audit of what's included and what's not. Do price comparisons between organisations and look for value. Ask about anything that's not clearly stated and then make organisations answerable to gaps and hold them accountable to their claims.

R – Relationships

Build relationships. They are the foundation of volunteer tourism. Get to know the sending organisations (so they can help match you well), reach out to previous volunteers (so you know what you are going to be doing) and, preferably in advance, make contact with the community or the project you are going to support. Nurturing

relationships connects stakeholders in the interest of mutually beneficial and longer-term positive results, which is especially important when people are coming together in a place with different motivations and needs. Remember that relationships require communication and respect, and that every communication has the ability to cultivate or damage.

T – Transparency

Transparency is about open and honest communication, something around which all good relationships are built. A sending organization should issue clear, specific, unquestionable, factual, consistent, congruent, aligned information that enables all involved to set realistic expectations about what each party brings to the table and what the outcomes will be. Transparency builds trust, creates expectations that can be delivered and differences that can be made. No one should feel let down, and longer-term reputations for the organisations and communities are built.

E – Evidence

If an operator makes a claim, ask for evidence. There should be no hesitation to offer supporting materials and explanations of needs, skills, objectives, cost breakdowns etc. If there's nothing to support a claim about positive impacts achieved, the need for supporting project work to be done, or where your money goes, then you are right to question whether those claims are true.

R – Reviews

Read reviews when planning. Write reviews when you return. Write a blog post, add comments to the **Better Volunteering** and **Negative Volunteer Reviews** Facebook groups, send Tweets, contribute to operator and review sites. Shout about the great organisations that deliver positive impacts. And shout about the ones that don't. Hopefully you won't have to do the latter if you've done your research properly. Keep in mind that all organisations have a hiccup once in a while. Let them address it. The good ones will try to do so, as any ethical business' ethos is to truly make things better. The questionable ones may try to shut you up, but don't let them.



Playing gongs with locals in Pituru Village on the South China Sea during the Isabel Hospice Borneo Challenge, 2010



Andean community
in Machu Picchu, Peru

Build Better Programs



By Cole Hoover,
World Economic Forum
"Global Shaper"
@colehoover

One big problem with our understanding of "voluntourism" is the way we frame the issues – trying to determine if programs are an overall good or an overall bad. Generally speaking, this is typical of an unwillingness to address the inevitable.

You see, we live in an extremely interconnected and globalized world that is full of inequality and poverty. So solving the problem of poverty will not be accomplished unless there is a shift in our global consciousness enabled by greater amounts of cross-cultural collaboration that will increase empathy, make clear a greater understanding of communities'

needs and assets, and hopefully lead to a global recognition that it is our duty to work toward a more equal world.

To do this, we need better programs that engage people from privileged backgrounds who wish to contribute money, goods, time or skills. These need to be established alongside improved means of engaging locals and understanding their perspectives on the problems they face and the skills they already possess to help solve them.

Such well-designed programs can create a net positive for communities, volunteers, philanthropists and, by extension, contribute to a more globalized world.

To make this possible, I think we need to focus on three important indicators of positive programs:

1. Education

We need programs and curricula that, on the one hand, help volunteers, fundraisers and donors understand not only the historical context of the places they are targeting, but the need to respect local knowledge as well. We also need systems that, on the other hand, can manage local expectations about outside impacts on communities, especially during short visits. This allows for visitors to be placed where they can actually make an impact (many times just as donors) and helps everyone better understand their roles.

2. Sustainability

We need to develop a model that can continue to improve the lives of people living in poverty even when external actors are not present. This requires local people to lead social change programs and visitors to learn how to pitch in when possible to support local efforts.

3. Collaboration

We need true partnerships with community members to create mutually clear understandings of the roles of, for example, volunteers (both foreign and local) in helping communities reach development goals. Programs like this should be appropriately framed to maintain the dignity of beneficiaries and to recognize their skills and assets. More thoughts via a TEDx presentation I gave on the subject: **Rethinking Collaboration**.

Once we are able to do this, we can create a more meaningful dialogue that will hopefully lead to a better classification of what it looks like to volunteer and provide financial support abroad that is meaningful, culturally sensitive and sustainable.

By doing this we not only create better programs for today, but begin educating the international development leaders of tomorrow, leaders that come from many different backgrounds and work together to create a future of greater equality.

While You Act: Make Bullied Communities and Disappointed Volunteers Things of the Past



By Sallie Grayson,
Co-founder, people and places
@pandpvolunteer

While many have celebrated the merging of community service with tourism, others are **highly critical** and correctly so. Three particular issues need close investigation:

- (1) Where does the money go?
- (2) Do the negative impacts outweigh the positives for local communities?
- (3) How much do the local communities know?

In search of clarity about these issues and more, potential volunteers and fundraising motivators need to ask questions. But they need to be the right questions!

Where Does the Money Go?

Fact: Volunteer programs and charity causes **cost money**. But working out whether everyone is being rewarded fairly is not easy. Some organizations peddle smoke-and-mirrors volunteer placements and fundraising challenges, explaining in vague terms about how funds received are turned toward project development, but without disclosing the full details. They also make it difficult and uncomfortable for participants to ask pointed questions. Well-intentioned generosity is often informed that money is directed into the community, only to discover that 75% of what gets paid remained with the sending organization.

The most important information to gather is: *where is the money spent?*

Do the Negative Impacts Outweigh the Positives for Local Communities?

For host communities, there are a number of issues that need to be considered to minimize negative impacts.

One common occurrence is exploitation by service providers of vulnerable communities eager for assistance. All too often, a project receiving volunteers or financial assistance has little say about the volume or experience of volunteers placed with them, or the quantity and nature of funds raised. Many do not know anything about donations (time or money) until the day it arrives.

In a perfect system, a volunteer's skills are matched to community need. For volunteers, these may be life skills, not professional qualifications, but they should be appropriate. I have serious doubts about projects that require no skill, but only labor. Most countries that attract volunteers have high unemployment rates, so cheap labor is not needed.



The most important question to ask yourself about what a perfect match is: *Do I have the skills to do the work?* This is particularly important when considering volunteering in orphanages.

How Much Do the Local Communities Know?

The **Cape Town Declaration** states that tourism in general should "actively involve the local community in planning and decision-making, and provide capacity-building to make this a reality." This approach should also be applied to volunteering and fundraising drives, as the most effective projects originate in the local community, *not* with international organizations.

If programs do not actively involve local communities from the very start, there is little chance that the programs will be meaningful for the communities. Instead it's simply voyeurism – one of the most negative aspects of "poverty tourism" – using poverty to attract tourists and philanthropy, rather than using tourism to fight poverty.

The important questions to ask are:

When volunteering: What will the local projects know about me before I arrive?

Before accepting you, if the organization with which you are coordinating does not want to know about you, your skills, experience or motivations, then seriously reconsider.



When donating: How will my money help?

If the organization is unable to explain exactly where and how your donation will be distributed, what the operating and administration costs are, and what local impact your funds will have, look for another scheme.

Who decides what work I or my money will be doing and how do they decide?

A responsible organization will have consulted with local projects and learned about their goals and needs, as well as how people or financial support can help. They will have documented all needs and review them regularly. These reports will not all be good news

– they should be critical assessments, not marketing documents. The best organizations will share such information freely and at all times, including long before travel or wire transfers are required. They will be able to demonstrate regular updates to that information.

If no such documentation is available, it is likely that no such process has been undertaken.

Always remember that despite the potential negative impacts, a carefully placed financial contribution or well-prepared, screened, skilled volunteer can make a positive impact. Well-run efforts can absolutely develop a level of social interaction and understanding that is profound. The whole process can give a real face to poverty and vulnerability, and shift consciousness toward the understanding of a shared humanity. It can and does lead to an understanding of our interconnectedness as people.

Editorial Takeaway

Your vigilance should not be relaxed once you have made a decision about how and where you will direct your energies. As you move through your experiences - hands-on volunteering or project-specific fundraising - make certain that the

actions taken remain in line with what you have been promised by intermediary organizations. In all cases, the practice should live up to the principle.



Sallie Grayson (right) and the school principal in Shermethang, Nepal, where people and places work with a community school and health centre.

The Transformative Power of Travel



By Anna Pollock,
Founder, Conscious Travel
@ConsciousHost

The mainstream is slowly accepting that humanity faces a convergence of crises – environmental, economic, social and political – that threaten the survival, let alone prosperity, of later generations. Nothing short of a radical, transformative shift in mindset is called for in response. The writer-activist-economist-social-theorist Jeremy Rifkin goes so far as to say “We have just one generation in which to shift human consciousness.”

I believe that the secret to rejuvenation and rethinking is to ask two critical questions: What is the nature of this transformative shift? How can *tourism* help accelerate its completion?

The shift entails restoring a respectful relationship with nature and learning to function as part of a community of living entities on a living planet of finite resources. It’s about re-imagining what it means to be fully human, to be fully alive and to flourish.

Tourism is the business most critical to connecting people face to face and creating the conditions required for personal transformation. Conscious travel “enlightens and enlivens,” sending guests home changed and seeing their beautiful world through fresh eyes. Conscious hosts help their guests learn to love nature and

see the planet as a source of inspiration and life, not as a problem to be solved.

Mass tourism is ill suited to the levels of personal service, engagement and scrutiny required by this emerging form of travel. Transformation is not a product that can be packaged or delivered on a plate. It is a highly subjective, meaningful and personal outcome that emerges from experiencing a set of unique conditions and, as such, occurs at unpredictable times, catching the person transformed by surprise.

My transformative experience occurred in the velvety soft blackness of a Balinese evening, to the mesmerizing clash of a gamelan, under a huge Banyan tree glittering with a hundred soft tea-lights. All my senses were charged – the aroma and smoke of clove cigarettes combined with piquant spices emanating from a roadside stall. With not a sign of Western civilization in sight, I felt far, far away from the familiar, yet strangely at home. After being spellbound by the swaying masks of Barong and Rangda engaged in a drama of Wagnerian proportions, I watched 50 men in trance pierce their bodies with sharp kris swords and experience no pain. I realized then that despite having experienced the finest education available at that time, I knew so little. A reality existed beyond my five senses. My sense of who I am was transformed in an instant. It’s been a long journey of discovery with many detours since, but the seeds of **Conscious Travel** were sown that night in April 1973.



Working on community projects in the Peruvian Andes

Editorial Takeaway

A question: Are you ready to lower your guard enough to allow for a transformative experience?

If you’ve done your research, found your match and feel certain that your labors

are making a real difference in a place that values them, why not finally live in the moment? Take the full and final plunge by opening yourself to the kind of life-changing revelations that contribute to making the world a better place?

A Five-Point Checklist for Inspiration While You Act



By Mark Horoszowski,
Co-founder, MovingWorlds.org
@Experteering

1. Be honest about your intentions and desires.
2. Be selfish in creating a powerful experience, but understand this means you need to let go.
3. Understand that the best experience will come from a real need, so be open to opportunities.
4. Build an effective partnership with your hosting organization.
5. Measure success as something that happens one year after you leave.

Remember:

*“Learn from the people
Plan with the people
Begin with what they have
Build on what they know
Of the best leaders
When the task is accomplished
The people will remark
We have done it ourselves.”*

- Lao Tzu

Steve Partridge pushing
his limits in the desert



After You Act: Channel Knowledge and Drive toward Productive Ends



By Ethan Gelber,
Founder, TheTravelWord.com; Co-founder,
Outbouding.org
[@thetravelword](https://twitter.com/thetravelword)

If you've immersed yourself in places with emerging economies, especially as a volunteer or financial/material benefactor, you've confronted the challenges of reentry when you return home.

Staring at a store-bought sandwich costing \$10 – a sum you had never thought twice about before – you might have recalled how 48 hours earlier you were internally conflicted about purchasing a beautiful locally-made handicraft for the same amount in local currency, believing the price to be extortionate. Or you might have been sharing one last modest meal with the representatives of a rural community whose development projects are fueled by \$10 bursts of hard-won donations. Or you might simply have been wishing you had an outlet for recounting your how-my-\$10-made-a-difference saga and sharing pictures of a life-changing experience. Anything to rattle the privileged complacency of the people around you.

Yes, time abroad has proven again and again that it expands our horizons, especially when it involves engagement and productive exchange between visitors and hosts. The question for this section therefore is: What do you when you get home? How do you channel your new knowledge and drive toward productive

ends? Or, in the face of inexperience, indifference and even antipathy, should returned travelers like you stifle all that you've learned and attempt just to ease back into the churning grind?

No, that latter path doesn't seem right, of course. After all, you're not the same people you were when you left. You have new desires and new motivations. And you often feel like you're gazing at a new world, or at least an old world through new eyes. So with no acceptable beaten path to follow, it's time to try something as different as the adventures that just changed you.

Stay Connected

First and foremost, once you return to your nest, although distance has dropped a hefty barrier between you and the place you temporarily called home, the digital tools of today make it easy to stay in touch with the people you met, the associations you supported and the organizations that facilitated your actions. Whether you worked as a volunteer or delivered donations, don't let physical removal dampen your passion.

This is especially important if the intensity of your connection has inspired you to do more. As described throughout this guide, communication and consultation are critical when working with local communities. Your commitment to continued action should be in the same vein – a process guided by beneficiary priorities, not yours.

Share News of What You Did

It's only human to want to share the great story of your eye-opening discoveries. Don't hesitate to do so. But do think about turning your enthusiasm into an awareness-building exercise that doesn't ruffle friends' feathers or test their patience. The last thing you want to be is the tireless talkaholic out of touch with people who, for a whole host of reasons, don't have time to hear about your epiphanies. That may sound crass, but I'm sure you know it's true, perhaps from having been on the tried-patience end of things.

So instead of monopolizing discussion at your dinner table or cornering work colleagues by the water cooler, here are a few alternative ways to satisfy your fancy to testify about your travel experiences *and* develop a sense of purpose around possible future actions.

- **Use social media.** As opt-in platforms, social media are not bludgeons. You can be as ardent and loquacious as you like and anyone who doesn't wish to listen in can tune it out. However, anyone who shares your zeal, including casual acquaintances and even like-minded strangers, will let their interests be known. And the more time you spend pushing information out, the more you will take in, helping you to become familiar with other existing efforts, campaigns and organizations in line with your compulsions.
- **Send an email update.** In our post-snail mail world, people still love to read postcards and letters, even if they're delivered by digital means. Take time to craft a description of your travel experiences, complete with pictures and video, and send it far and wide.

- **Develop a slideshow and presentation.** If you took evocative pictures during your service-oriented travels, pull them together as a slideshow or presentation. Schedule a time – at home, at work, in a cafe – for a image-backed lecture and let everyone know about it. If the response is enthusiastic, reach out to schools, networking groups, cause-specific associations and more to ask if you can present your message to or through them.
- **Write a blog post or article.** If you have access to a website or blog (your own or one maintained by a friend), post something there. Include a link to it via your email and through social media. If you have more ambitious or professional scribal desires, pitch an article to a blog or website with the right kind of content and audience.

Act on Your Newfound Desires

While there are many ways to give concrete form to broadcasting your good-leaning longings, especially should they involve fundraising and awareness-building, why stop at sharing word? Why not put some money where your mouthpiece is and then incite others to do the same?

- **Change begins at home.** Don't find yourself asking people to "Do as I say, not as I do." Embody the cause you support by doing for your own home and community what you helped do for someone else's. If that means changing your consumption habits, shifting your actions and spearheading new efforts in your community, there's no better time to do so than while you're most inspired.

- **Motivate your family, friends and colleagues.** Everyone is energized by fervor and anyone intrigued by your travels may be moved to contribute to a meaningful cause you champion. So why not rally others to act? Just remember to set concrete and attainable objectives through which they can demonstrate their support.
- **Start a fundraiser.** The logical extension of gatherings planned around a slideshow presentation is an appeal for the support of causes or projects described during the show. Depending on your degree of dedication, you may choose to set lofty goals, best aligned with those of a charitable organization or other established entity, and begin an involved campaign. Some of the contributors to this guide, like Sonal Kadchha and Stephen Partridge, have changed their lives through the charity challenges they set for themselves.
- **Join a larger action group.** There's no reason for you to act alone,

especially if you start ramping up your efforts and your goals. Look for local, regional or even national and international groups fighting the good fight in the sector in which you wish to establish yourself. Combine your energies, as this really is a space in which the actions of the whole are greater than the sum of its parts.

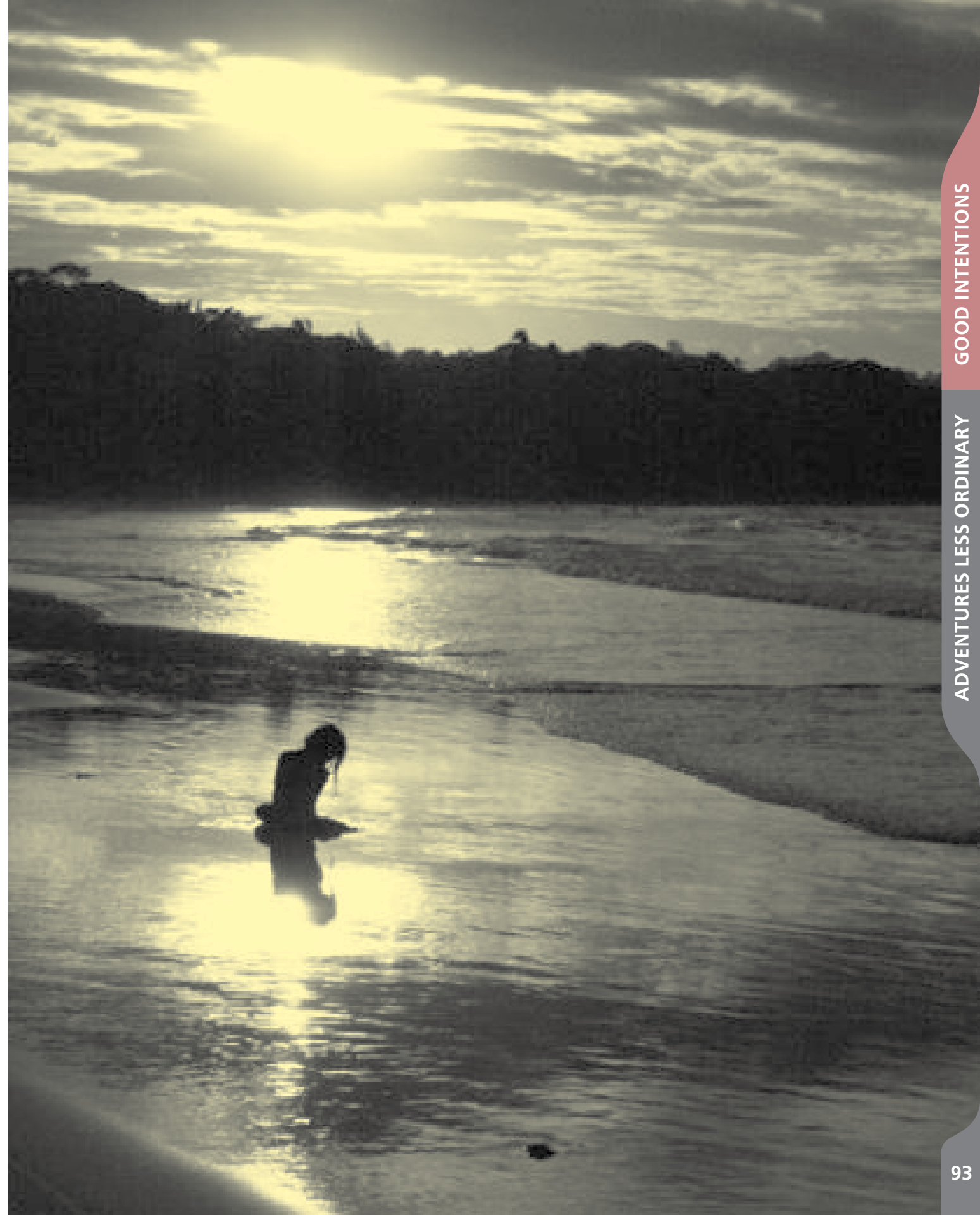
- **Follow your heart.** Just as you may be asking those around you to dig deep, be sure to do so yourself too. Don't give beyond your means, of course, but if you are privileged enough to have access to significant resources, why not commit them in ways that you know will make a real impact?
- **Make sure your work is on target.** Always remember to be as diligent with your ongoing altruistic endeavors as you were in identifying the volunteer or charity causes that inspired your first actions. As mentioned above, this primarily means ensuring that you are pursuing ends identified as priorities by the communities and organizations you choose to support.

Editorial Takeaway

After all that you have achieved, don't think that there is nothing more to be done. The form-fitting embrace of your familiar armchair may give you a feeling of mission accomplished; however, use the moment's pause to think about the road covered. You may discover that it is more of an on-ramp to the road

ahead than the route of a fixed and finite trip. Why not keep up the good effort beyond the prescribed needs?

Of course, you may decide that you have done enough, which is fine. The world is full of appreciation for people with warm smiles, high hopes, strong arms, and a broad and caring embrace.



Further Reading & Resources

These organizations and resources were assembled from contributors' recommendations. Inclusion here is not an endorsement, merely a recognition that the organization or resource was (1) closely associated with a contributor, (2) mentioned within a contributor's text or (3) mentioned by two or more contributors as a source of information. Please consider that there is never a substitute for taking the time to research an organization or resource and determine that it rises to the level of responsibility you seek.

ORGANIZATIONS

Contributor Organizations

City Philanthropy + news (Cheryl Chapman)
Conscious Travel (Anna Pollock)
CouldYou? (Christine Garde)
Crooked Trails + blog (Chris Mackay)
Do Good As You Go + blog (Alice Gugelev)
Educating The Children + news (Sonal Kadchha)
Evolve Travel Consulting (Sophie Dubus)
Family Travel Association (Ethan Gelber)
Fundación Bolivar Education + blog (Jorge Sandoval)
Fundación En Vía + blog (Samantha Wattson)
Global Brigades + blog (Cole Hoover)
Inspired Escapes + blog (Matt Fenton)
Learning Service + blog (Sarah Brown)
Maasai Association (Kakuta Maimai Hamisi)
Maasai Simba Camp (Kakuta Maimai Hamisi)
MovingWorlds.org + blog (Mark Horoszowski)
New York Travel Festival (Ethan Gelber)
People and Places + blog (Sallie Grayson)
PEPY Tours + blog (Sarah Brown)
Sandblasters (Stephen Partridge)
Save Elephant Foundation + blog (Diana Edelman)

Small Steps + news (Stephen Partridge)
The Long Run + news (Victoria Smith)
Unleesh (Cole Hoover)
Vandenberg Digital Communications + blog (Sarah Vandenberg)

Children

Angkor Hospital for Children
ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography & Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes)
Faith to Action Initiative
Friends International
Hope and Homes for Children
Maiti Nepal
Save the Children
SOS Children's Villages
UNICEF

Animals

Biosphere Expeditions
Blue Ventures
Burm & Emily's Elephant Sanctuary
Earthwatch Institute
Elephant Nature Park
Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries
Panthera
Save Elephant Foundation
WWF
Zoological Society of London

Volunteers

Cross-Cultural Solutions
International Volunteer Programs Association
Intrax Global Internships
Performing Arts Abroad
Seed Global Health
Team 5 Medical Foundation
TechnoServe
VSO International
World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF)

RESOURCES

Contributor Resources

D Travels 'Round (Diana Edelman)
Fair Game (Jeremy Smith)
Gardenias in Beirut (Amy E. Robertson)
GrassrootsVolunteering.org (Shannon O'Donnell)
Outbounding.org (Ethan Gelber)
Responsible Travel Twitter Chat (#RTTC) (Diana Edelman)
The Travel Word (Ethan Gelber)
VolunteerTourismViews (Vicky Smith)
VolunTourism Institute (David Clemmons)
VolunTourism.org (David Clemmons)
WTM Responsible Tourism blog (Jeremy Smith)
WTTTC's monthly Tourism for Tomorrow newsletter (Jeremy Smith)

Fundraising Tools

GiveGab
Inspired Escapes
JustGiving
Fundraising UK
Volunteer Forever

General

The International Centre for Responsible Tourism
The International Ecotourism Society
Tourism Concern
responsibletravel.com

Contributor Publications/Video

Ethan Gelber: Google+ Hangout - How Can We Mend, Not End, Voluntourism, Outbounding.org discussion - Can We Mend, Not End, Voluntourism
Amy E. Robertson: Moon Volunteer Vacations in Latin America
Cheryl Chapman: Philanthropy: The City Story
Shannon O'Donnell: The Volunteer Traveler's Handbook
Vicky Smith: "Volunteer tourism, greenwashing and understanding responsible marketing using market signalling theory" in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism

Children

Better Care Network
Better Child Protection
ChildSafe Traveler Tips
Orphanages Not the Solution

Volunteers
 Aware Volunteer
 Better Volunteering
 Fair Trade Tourism voluntourism resources
 FivePointFive
 GoAbroad
 Go Overseas
 International Voluntourism Guidelines for Commercial Tour Operators
 International Voluntourism Guidelines: Feedback from the Industry
 Lessons I Learned
 Negative Volunteer Reviews
 Responsible Tourism Partnership
 Transitions Abroad

BOOKS/VIDEO/ARTICLES

Documents

Cape Town Declaration
 Human Centered Design Toolkit

Videos

TEDx Talk - Live Your Legend
 TED Talk - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story
 TED Talk - David Damberger - What happens when an NGO admits failure
 TED Talk - Cole Hoover: Rethinking Collaboration
 TED Talk - Jacqueline Novogratz: Invest in Africa's own solutions
 TED Talk - Daniela Papi: What's wrong with volunteer travel?
 TED Talk - Ernesto Sirolli: Want to help someone? Shut up and listen!

Animals
 Green Volunteers
 Right Tourism

Newspaper Articles

"Beware the 'voluntourists' doing good" (The Guardian)
 "Cambodia's Orphan Business" (Al Jazeera)
 "Can 'Voluntourism' Make a Difference" (The New York Times)
 "It doesn't take a village: The perverse effects of local aid" (The Economist)
 "Little, Big: Two Ideas About Fighting Global Poverty" (Boston Review)

Contributor Biographies



Sarah Brown

Sarah Brown is originally from the UK, but has spent nearly four years living in Siem Reap, Cambodia. She is currently the General Manager of **PEPY Tours** – a former volunteer travel company that now runs educational adventures – and a member of the **Learning Service** team – an advocacy group promoting responsible international volunteering.



Cheryl Chapman

Cheryl Chapman is Director of **City Philanthropy**, a project that engages and empowers the next generation of givers across the City of London and Canary Wharf. Chapman writes and speaks on philanthropy and giving, including as co-author of the book *Philanthropy: The City Story*.



David Clemmons

David Clemmons is the Founder of **VolunTourism.org** and voice behind the **VolunTourism Institute**. He currently resides in Southern California.



Sophie Dubus

Sophie Dubus is an experienced travel industry professional and a strong advocate of responsible tourism. She has participated in volunteer projects with wildlife and been an advisor for wildlife charities on animal welfare in tourism. Now Director of **Evolve Travel Consulting**, she works to encourage more responsible and authentic approaches with wellness and nature-based resorts.





Diana Edelman

Diana Edelman is a travel writer residing in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where she promotes responsible elephant tourism with **Save Elephant Foundation**. She is a co-founder of **#RTTC**, a weekly responsible tourism Twitter chat, and the pen behind **d travels 'round**, which combines solo-traveler and expat narrative with travel tips, reviews and information about responsible tourism.



Matt Fenton

Matt Fenton is the CEO of **Inspired Escapes**. He has headed numerous travel businesses, including his own startups and as a divisional head at TUI. Matt and his co-founders established Inspired Escapes to wrap life-changing activities into adventures that make a difference to the local communities.



Christine Garde

Christine Garde has over 20 years of experience designing, assessing and implementing community-based social and economic programs. In 2007, she founded **CouldYou?** with a passion to nurture purposeful living in the philanthropic community so as to alleviate poverty in a meaningful way, looking at systemic change through partnership, rather than aid, with African leaders of integrity.



Ethan Gelber

Ethan Gelber is a long-time agitator (writer and editor) for responsible/sustainable travel practices. He is Co-founder of **Outbounding.org**, a travel content curation platform; Founder of **The Travel Word**, a website showcasing responsible, sustainable and local travel; a founding board member of the **New York Travel Festival**; and Director of Digital Media for the **Family Travel Association**.



Sallie Grayson

Sallie Grayson is the Co-founder and Program Director at **People and Places**, an international award-winning social enterprise that matches volunteer skills and experience to local community need all over the world. Recognized for transparency and integrity, people and places actively campaigns for responsible volunteering.



Alice Gugelev

After living and working abroad, as well as on Wall Street, in strategy consulting, and for the World Bank and various non-for-profits, Alice Gugelev finally starting The Muskoka Foundation and the **Do Good As You Go** movement to inspire and equip travelers to "use what you know, to do good as you go."



Kakuta Maimai Hamisi

Kakuta Maimai Hamisi is a Maasai born and raised in a pastoral and semi-nomadic community in southern Kenya. He founded the **Maasai Association**, a small, not-for-profit, community-based organization involved in community-development projects in the Maasai country, and the **Maasai Simba Camp**, an exclusive eco-camp located in the Amboseli ecosystem at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro.



Cole Hoover

Cole Hoover is an entrepreneur, a lecturer at the University of Washington Bothell and a World Economic Forum "Global Shaper" interested in poverty alleviation. Currently the Director of Impact Partnerships at **Unleash**, previously he was the Director of Education at **Global Brigades**, creating meaningful opportunities for students to engage around opportunities in global development.





Mark Horoszowski

Mark Horoszowski is Co-founder of **MovingWorlds.org**, a social enterprise helping people find the best place to volunteer their skills.



Sonal Kadchha

British born with Kenyan-Indian roots, Sonal Kadchha is Co-founder of the UK-based charity **Educating The Children**, which focuses on sending volunteer teachers to primary schools and has finished building the first secondary school in the Masai Mara in Kenya. She has held various positions within financial institutions in the city of London.

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Chris Mackay

Chris Mackay has dedicated her life to working and volunteering in environmental education, outdoor recreation, community development and ecotourism. Her love of international travel and her concern about the negative effects of tourism on culture and environment led her in 1998 to co-found **Crooked Trails**, a not-for-profit community-based travel organization.



Anna McKeon

Anna McKeon is a communications consultant specializing in research and strategy development. With a background in television and digital media, she has worked with NGOs and social enterprises in Cambodia for the past three years. Anna is currently working with a range of international children's organizations to discourage orphanage volunteering and promote ethical alternatives.



Shannon O'Donnell

Shannon O'Donnell is a long-term traveler, on the road since 2008; she travels slowly and supports grassroots tourism along the way. She published *The Volunteer Traveler's Handbook* and founded **GrassrootsVolunteering.org** to help travelers connect with ethical volunteering and travel opportunities.



Stephen Partridge

Stephen Partridge has an IT, construction and business-operations background and currently works with Silicon Roundabout high-tech startups. He has also completed 270 marathons and 18 desert events, including seven Marathon des Sables, a critical skill that helped him raise £1 million for the **Small Steps** charity as part of the **Sandblasters** team.



Anna Pollock

Anna Pollock has 40 years of experience in tourism as a consultant, speaker and change agent in tourism. She is Founder of **Conscious Travel**, a fresh approach to community tourism and a network designed to transform tourism from a sector focused on growth to one that enables all its stakeholders to flourish.



Amy E. Robertson

Amy E. Robertson, author of the *Moon Volunteer Vacations in Latin America*, is passionate about travel. Her overseas volunteer experiences include serving lunch at a soup kitchen in Lebanon, building homes in Honduras, monitoring presidential elections in Ecuador and working with youth in Bolivia on the creation of social documentaries.





Jorge Sandoval

Jorge Sandoval has worked for **Fundación Bolívar Education** for five years. Before that he taught Spanish for the Simon Bolívar Spanish School in Quito for three years. Jorge has a degree in tourism and has worked as a guide for some of his volunteers and students. His mother tongue is Spanish.



Jeremy Smith

Jeremy Smith is a writer and communications consultant specializing in responsible tourism and sustainable business. In 2013, he created **Fair Game** to promote best practices in the safari industry. He is a former editor of The Ecologist, blogs for **WTM's responsible tourism website**, writes WTTC's monthly **Tourism for Tomorrow** newsletter and works with various ethical tourism organizations.



Victoria Smith

Vicky Smith has extensive experience in ecommerce and marketing, from mass tourism and skiing to charity challenges, voluntourism and responsible tourism. She now works for not-for-profit **The Long Run**, a network of destinations focused on sustainability through 4Cs: Conservation, Community, Culture and Commerce. Vicky has a master's degree in responsible tourism management.



Sarah Vandenberg

Since 2005, Sarah Vandenberg has researched, consulted in and written about volunteer travel, with numerous articles having appeared on Go Overseas, Volunteer Forever and Voluntourism Gal. Based in Washington, DC, she enjoys traveling and working with NGOs in Central America.



Samantha Wattson

Samantha Wattson hails from Seattle, Washington, where she directed and developed the marketing strategies of a startup company, bringing it international success and recognition. She traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico, in 2011 to volunteer with **Fundación En Vía**, an experience that was so unforgettable she joined the team that May and is now managing director.



About Inspired Escapes

Extreme adventurers, social entrepreneurs, travel fanatics... call us what you will. But essentially, we are you; a tribe of curious humans looking for new ways to bring purpose to our lives and add value to our experiences.

Travel has always been our way of doing that, but it wasn't until we started rethinking how we travelled that we realised we could reinvent it for others like us. People who want more from their experiences; adventure with grit and strangeness and authenticity. And who want all of that with a healthy dose of rest and relaxation, not instead or in spite of it.

Why us?

Because we get you. And we get where travel is going. Somewhere more curious, more honest and exhilarating. Many travel companies focus on what they can squeeze into an itinerary, but our focus is on what you can take away from it.

Our trips are called inspired escapes because they do more than cross off boxes on a bucket-list. They are designed to engender personal growth, confidence and fulfilment as well. And our belief is that you can't get that without giving something back to the places you visit, leaving behind something more than your unused currency or a flag in the ground.

Every year, millions of us travel to developing countries, gazing in awe at the exoticism of their landscapes, but frequently skirting over the deprivation within it. We want to change that. And we think people want that kind of change. If you decide to fundraise, either before or after your trip, 100% of the

money you raise goes to supporting social change projects on the soil you visited

Who cares?

Based on the injustices and inequalities in the world, it would seem very few. But to draw on something Fred Rogers once said: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" It's those people who inspire us. Not the people in the foreground of the news, but those in the background, trying to write a different narrative, forge a happier ending.


Our projects are focused on long-term empowerment as part of a broader social goal. When you book with us, you are contributing only to local and independent suppliers, accommodation providers, and expert guides. Financial resources are needed to start the process, but once initiated, the local community continues on its own. The money you spend on our tours goes towards building a better, sustainable future.

One of the projects we support in the Philippines trains 20,000 young adults a year to become social entrepreneurs and employ others like them. These are the kinds of initiatives we want you to and get excited about getting involved in.


Come together

Our system is run with the same strategic principle we'd apply to surviving in the wild: we achieve more as a team - hence the broad collaboration behind this guide. The authors of this guide, you our readers, and us at Inspired Escapes are a tribe of like-minded people striving to be inspired, and to work together to inspire others for change.

INSPIRED ESCAPES



horizon



horizon


horizon