

# Chapter 3:

## Voluntourism

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### Voluntourism: An Overview

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- **Volunteer Tourism – Introduction**

At the crossroads of volunteering and tourism is volunteer tourism or “voluntourism”. While there is no single accepted definition of what constitutes volunteer tourism, generally it involves the inclusion of a volunteer component to a vacation experience. According to one academic, to be a voluntourist is to “volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that may involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment.”<sup>38</sup>

There is a great deal of variation in the volunteer-to-vacation ratio within a volunteer experience. Some might range from a week-long vacation with an afternoon spent volunteering at a local animal preserve while others might involve five days building a house with only a one-day leisure experience. Of course, everything in between is also possible. The amount of time spent volunteering versus participating in tourism activities varies depending on the desire of the volunteer and the needs of the receiving organization.

- **History of Volunteer Tourism**

Volunteer service and tourism share a long history. Traveling for the purpose of volunteering probably began around 1915.<sup>39</sup> Within the last 50 years, prompted by the creation of such organizations as the Peace Corps, as well as increased awareness of global social and environmental issues, tourism activities that involve a volunteer component have increased tremendously. In the UK and other parts of Europe there is a long history of the “Gap year”



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<sup>38</sup> Stephen Wearing, *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences That Make a Difference*, Wallingford, Oxon: CABI Publishing, 2002, 240 pgs.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

when young people take a year off prior to beginning university studies to participate in a volunteer experience.

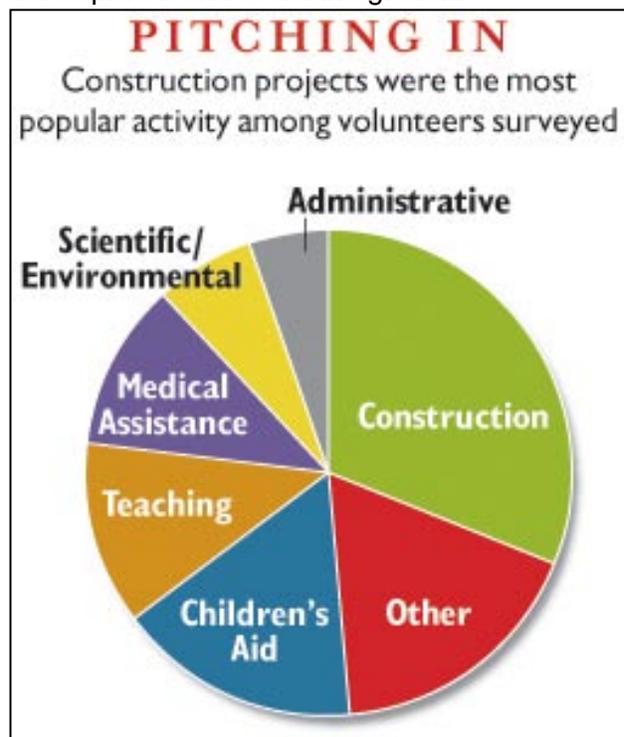
Study abroad trips and international volunteering continue to be significant activities, particularly for college students and recently graduated individuals. What is new is the short-term volunteer experience. Shortened trips that incorporate both tourism and volunteering have developed over the last 10 years in order to accommodate the growing portion of the tourism market that seeks to “give back” as part of their vacation experience. With reduced time and limited resources, tourists are seeking ways to combine these two important activities. While providing many benefits for both travelers and recipient projects, the rapid growth of short-term volunteering also raises a number of questions.

- **Growth of Volunteerism and Voluntourism**

Volunteerism, either on its own or involving travel, contributes to overall development on a global level. The United Nations has stated that “volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction, sustainable development and social integration.”<sup>40</sup>

Globally, the number of individuals participating in volunteerism continues to rise. In Britain, 73% of adults participated in at least one volunteer activity in 2007.<sup>41</sup> In Australia, 4.5 million individuals reported participating in a volunteer activity in 2006.<sup>42</sup>

In the United States, volunteers provide free or inexpensive labor for more than 40,000 not-for-profit organizations.<sup>43</sup> According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 60.8 million people volunteered for or through an organization during fiscal year 2007.<sup>44</sup> National and local initiatives, such as the U.S. Freedom Corps, continue to grow in popularity. Promoting volunteerism has been a major agenda item for several U.S. Presidents including Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barak Obama. In 2009, the U.S. Congress passed the Serve America Act, which amends the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and is expected to increase funding to Americorps and other volunteer programs within the United States.<sup>45</sup>



<sup>40</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Volunteering and Social Development*, February 21, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Cohesion Research, “Citizenship Survey: 2007-08 (April 2007 – March 2008), England & Wales,” Statistical Release No. 4, United Kingdom National Statistical Bureau, June 2008, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/863680.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2007, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/>.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Kotler, *Strategic Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1982.

<sup>44</sup> US. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Volunteering in the United States, 2007,” News, January 28, 2008, [http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/volun\\_01232008.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/volun_01232008.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/serveamerica/index.asp>.

Voluntourism has emerged from this increase in volunteering, as well as a result of a shift in the needs of today's tourist. New niches such as adventure tourism, ecotourism, volunteer tourism, and humanitarian tourism are examples of consumer demand for more authentic experiences. Today, many travelers seek a more meaningful experience that allows them to interact with the residents of the host destination. Driven by an increasing social awareness of the 'haves and have-nots', tourists are seeking ways to go beyond the confines of their resorts. They are opting for experiential learning activities as part of their vacation. Retired seniors, university students, families, and young professionals are all seeking more meaningful holiday experiences. Whether that means building a local school, tracking sea turtles, or serving meals to the homeless, volunteer tourism is just one more outgrowth of the increased consumer demand for authentic experiences.

The two largest groups participating in voluntourism are college students (including alternative spring break activities) and Baby Boomers who were born between 1946 and 1964 and are now entering their retirement years.



Tourism Cares for America Volunteer Day. Credit: Tourism Cares for America.

Volunteering has begun to be recognized by destinations for the role it might play in development, disaster relief, etc. The 2007 FutureBrand report, *Country Brand Index*, indicated that volunteer tourism is a growth area:

*As a response to disaster aid, growing global village consciousness and a need to contribute to society in ways big and small, more travellers are planning their trips around humanitarian purposes. From building homes and teaching English to working at refugee camps and participating in animal conservation research, the menu of volunteer vacation options is growing.*<sup>46</sup>

Surveys and interviews show that people choose to participate in volunteer activities for a range of reasons. Tourists are motivated because of purely altruistic reasons; social desirability; career enhancement; cultural immersion; comradery; and education or bonding with children, among other reasons.

- **Structure of the Volunteer Tourism Industry**

Volunteer tourism relies heavily on cross-sector collaboration. Volunteer tourism typically involves people traveling from developed countries to developing countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

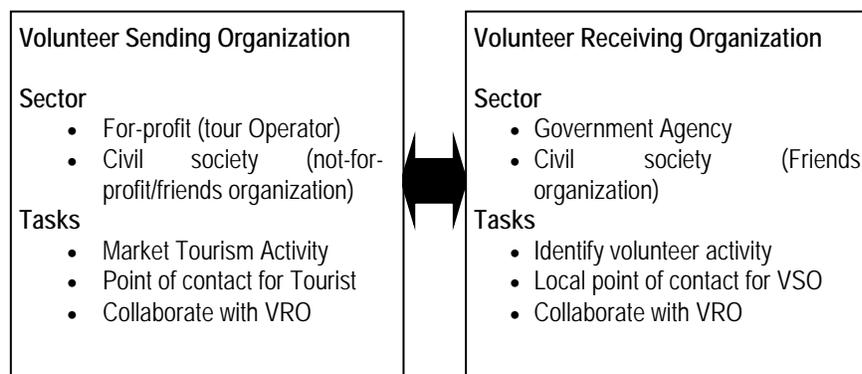
<sup>46</sup> FutureBrand, *Country Brand Index 2007*, p. 16, <http://www.futurebrand.com/think/reports-studies/cbi/2009/overview/>.

**Box 1: Scientific, Academic, Volunteer and Educational Tourism (SAVE):**

SAVE Tourism is a relatively new sub-sector of alternative tourism. It is a grouping of four types of tourists who have very similar needs. The **scientific tourist**, such as the doctoral student conducting primate research in Botswana; the **academic tourist** such as a professor teaching a short-term study abroad program in Costa Rica; the **volunteer tourist**, such as the married couple opting to work with local environmental group in beach clean-up, and the **educational tourist** who wants to gain a new skill. These types of tourists represent a compelling niche market for emerging tourism destinations that may not be able to compete with more developed tourism destinations. More information can be found at [www.savetravelalliance.com](http://www.savetravelalliance.com).

Its activities often involve a myriad of players including government, private sector and civil society. Volunteer Managing Organizations<sup>47</sup> (VMO) are those organizations that are involved in managing volunteer tourism activities, either as the organization sending the volunteers (Volunteer Sending Organization, VSO<sup>48</sup>) or the organization receiving the volunteers (Volunteer Receiving Organization, VRO<sup>49</sup>).

**Figure 1: Volunteer Managing Organizations: Relationship between Sending and Receiving Organizations<sup>50</sup>**



• **Voluntourism: Lessons Learned and Best Practices**

As volunteer tourism grows, it is not surprising that so do both the accolades and criticism. Critics claim, for instance, that volunteer tourism is just a guise for rich travelers to feel less guilty when traveling to poor areas, or that it creates a culture of dependency in the local destination. However, supporters see voluntourism as a means of providing much needed resources and expertise to worthy projects while allowing visitors the opportunity to give back to the destination they are visiting and interact more meaningfully with the host community.

<sup>47</sup> Volunteer Managing Organization (VMO) refers to any organization that is involved in either hosting or organizing groups to participate in volunteer tourism activities.

<sup>48</sup> Volunteer Sending Organization (VSO) refers to the organizations (non-profit, government, or for-profit) that are the first point of contact and that assist with travel arrangements for the volunteer.

<sup>49</sup> Volunteer Receiving Organization (VRO) refers to the organizations (non-profit, government, or for-profit) that receive the tourists and that assist in the organization and delivery of the volunteer services.

<sup>50</sup> Kristin Lamoureux, *Critical Success Factors for Public Private Partnerships Involving Volunteer Tourism in US Federal Lands*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Business Administration/Strategic Management George Washington University, 2009.

**Box 2: Volontourism in Meetings and Events**

One of the fastest growing areas within voluntourism is at events and meetings. According to Financial and Insurance Meetings Magazine in 2009, incorporating service projects into meetings is the “next big thing.” Industry organizations like the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) have incorporated “give back” activities into their annual and regional meetings such as “Network for the Needy” which encourages food donations to local charities and a large volunteering activity.

Although this is a relatively new area, practitioners and researchers have already begun to establish best practices for the industry. While there is no agreed upon industry standard or certification program available as yet, there are a number of resources available to guide volunteer tourism practices.

As voluntourism matures, more lessons learned have begun to emerge. Some of the most important ones are described below:

**Partnerships:** Voluntourism is sporadic in nature. Tourists come for a relatively short period of time and then they leave. The needs of the VRO however are not sporadic but rather of an on-going nature. Therefore, it is key that organizations with an established record in the host destination continue the necessary work regardless of whether volunteer tourists come or not. This fosters continuity and maximizes impact for the destination. Failure to develop relationships with partners that understand the needs of the community and have an on-going presence will not only hurt the cause in the long-run, it may also produce a less than satisfactory experience for the guest.

**Community Ownership:** Volunteer projects must be “owned” by the local community. Tour operators and non-profit organizations that bring tourists to do projects that they believe to be important for a host community likely face failure. Experience has shown that the community must be a part (or all) of deciding what is needed for a project to continue, be successful, and have an impact. Ideally, the host community would also be involved in the activity in some level.

**Educating the Traveler:** Tourism is an invasive activity. Voluntourism allows guests and hosts to interact on a very personal level. It is important that visitors understand the impact they could potentially have on the host community. At times, even the best intentions can have negative impacts. For example, the donation of clothing is a common practice. However, the adoption of a new style of clothing may have cultural impacts, fostering a transfer of traditions that was an unintended consequence of a simple gesture. Therefore traveler education is imperative to minimizing potential negative impacts, as well as helping the traveler understand what to expect.

**Performance Monitoring:** Continually re-evaluating the volunteer program from the perspective of the VSO and VRO is essential to ensure that real needs are being met for the host population and that the tourist benefit from the experience. Adjusting and changing programs based on this evaluation will improve the long-term viability of the VRO and VSO.

**Business Development:** Although VSOs and VROs may be for-profit, governmental or non-profit, operations should take into account the financial viability of the activities. Benefits will cease to exist if the VSOs and VROs are not able to continue their work due to financial constraints. Therefore, programs must be managed with the goal of creating financial sustainability.

**Avoiding Dependency:** Care must be taken to avoid local dependence on tourists who bring hand-outs for the community. Bringing even seemingly simple things like toothpaste, coca-cola, or used clothing may create demand for products that can only be supplied from outside the community. Additionally, from the work perspective, if residents feel that the volunteers will come and “fix everything”, that may also foster dependency. Some VSOs address this by varying their project locations and types. Other organizations ask that visitors not provide anything to the host that isn’t expressly allowed by the VSO.

Although these lessons learned primarily inform the VSO and VRO, there are lessons learned that can benefit the traveler. They are:

- Seek a well-established VSO.
- Determine if the VSO or VRO has an established history with the destination or if the trip in which you might participate is a “one-off” activity.
- Be honest with yourself about how much tourism and how much volunteering you want to do.
- Carefully assess what living and working conditions would be acceptable to you and make sure that your needs match those offered by the program you choose.
- Determine what you like to do as a volunteer and what skills you can offer and pursue them as a voluntourist.

In addition to the points above, there are several published sources of do and don’ts of voluntourism. Several are included in this *Handbook*, as well as a list of additional sources of information. VolunTourism International has published a “do and don’ts” for the traveler, as well as a detailed personal assessment (reprinted below). PEPY Tours, recipient of the 2010 National Geographic/Ashoka Changemakers Challenge, has produced a set of guidelines for responsible volunteer tourism development or “Voluntourism 101” (See Appendix 2).

## • **Conclusion**

Volunteer tourism is a rapidly growing phenomenon that can provide multiple benefits when the activity is host-driven, financially viable, designed in partnership with credible organizations, and sustainable over the long-term. Creating an activity with those characteristics requires dedication and hard work.

For the traveler, voluntourism provides an opportunity to immerse oneself in a meaningful activity while on vacation. Volunteer tourism allows the traveler to support a local project through a hands-on work experience. The trend is expected to grow. There will be challenges along the way, but for both the travelers and the VMOs, adhering to the suggested best practices and learning from the lessons learned are key to successful, impactful voluntourism.

## Advice for Potential Voluntourists<sup>51</sup>

Adapted from Via International materials

- **Getting Started**

Thinking about being a volunteer in a foreign country? Ready to test the voluntourism waters? Not quite sure whether you want to take the plunge?

The **VolunTourism Survey**, a self assessment tool with questions and advice on how to select a trip – all adapted from Via International materials, will give you a good start.

Whether you are new to voluntourism or a veteran voluntourist, take the survey first to gauge your level of interest and to determine how best to proceed in your quest of taking your first, or next, voluntour.



Volunteer environmental monitoring.  
Credit: Earthwatch Institute.

First things first. Voluntourism is a special kind of travel and not everyone is suited to it. The experience starts before it even begins - - with Y-O-U! "Know Thyself" is the first step in the process of determining if this is the right kind of travel for you. If you feel like you are in tune with yourself, then you have covered more than 50% of what is required to decide if you will enjoy being a volunteer and to select the best voluntourism journey. The exercises that follow will help you get in tune with yourself, if you are not already, and will be useful even if you understand yourself well, pay particular attention to what follows:

This is a **BIG DECISION**. It involves many aspects of who you are as a person - your personal preferences and aversions, your emotional well-being, your attitude, and, very likely, a sizeable financial investment.

Most significant of all, your decision impacts other people - destination residents, fellow voluntourists, the coordinators of your trip, and your friends and family. (This last group is especially important because these folks are the individuals who will hear any post-trip griping if you did not come away with what you expected.) So, make a sincere effort and realize that your service starts NOW, with your self-evaluation!

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<sup>51</sup> This section, edited by Sandra Tassel, combines two useful documents by Via International entitled "VolunTourism.org: Getting Started" and "Trip Selection." The original documents are available at: <http://www.voluntourism.org/traveler-start.html> and <http://www.voluntourism.org/traveler-select.html>. Via International is a California based nonprofit service organization with over 35 years of experience addressing community development. Via International also sponsors the VolunTourism.org website.

We recommend that you do three things to determine whether voluntourism is appropriate for you. This essay will guide you through the following three steps:

- First, you must establish the purpose of your voluntourism experience. Why, exactly, are you planning to engage in this type of travel?
- Second, you must assess your capabilities. What service(s) can you provide? How do your capabilities fit within the context of programs that you are considering?
- Third, you must ask yourself some very difficult questions and be willing to answer them - - HONESTLY!

When you have completed these three tasks, you are ready to move to the Trip Selection phase, which this essay also covers.

Start this exercise by asking yourself a question similar to one of the following:

- "Why do I want to be a voluntourist?"
- "Why am I doing this, really?" (Am I trying to get school credit? Am I trying to find the "fountain of middle age"?)

Answering this important question is the beginning of discovering the purpose behind your desire to travel to another destination. And, no, it will not work to simply say that someone else told you to do so.

To be an effective and happy voluntourist you have to discover the fundamental reason for departing your homestead and transporting your body to another place on the globe. Understanding your motivation will help you honestly assess whether another activity might better fulfill the purpose for which you are selecting a voluntourism itinerary.

For example, you want to build your resume perhaps you would be better served by a summer job that focuses specifically on the practical applications that you need to learn in order to be more easily employed? Or, do you need service hours in order to graduate? You will spend less money by providing service in your hometown. On the other hand, if you have always wanted to travel to a foreign country, maybe you will be happiest if you volunteer at another time?

In other words, make sure that your decision to combine travel and volunteering reflects your purpose and manifests sound judgment. Be sure you have examined the practical elements and analyzed whether voluntourism is truly the best option for honoring the purpose you have established.

#### • **Inventory of Your Service Assets (A)**

Likely at some point in your life, you compiled a resume or curriculum vitae. What you will do in crafting the inventory of your service assets (ISA) will be a slightly different exercise.



Courtesy of Volunteers Without Borders.  
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Your ISA should include personal qualities and characteristics that you would not include in your resume. For example, you may have done babysitting as a teenager and found you really liked it and got along well with children. This would be an excellent item to include in your (ISA), especially if you plan to work with children during your voluntourism journey.

Take your time to review anything you have done as a volunteer, especially if you liked the activity and found it rewarding. You may have been an usher at your church or temple. You may have coached your daughter's soccer team. These fit well within the framework of voluntourism experiences because they represent tasks that you conducted as a volunteer.

You do not want to include every detail of every activity that you did only once or twice in your life. Your ISA should credit you with service that you have rendered and feel comfortable rendering again.

- **The Difficult Questions (Q)**

Answering the following questions honestly and completely may be the toughest assignment of any that you will have to do before, during, or after your voluntourism trip. You must look at yourself squarely in the mirror when you ask these questions. Honesty is an absolute necessity for this exercise; without it, you are wasting your time and effort and, quite possibly, other people's time and effort as well.

We will assume that you have already determined where you want to go.

As for the rest, remember, you are asking yourself the following questions while looking in the mirror:

**Question #1:** What is my personal minimum requirement for accommodations? (For example: Do I need running water? My own bed? My own room?)

**Question #2:** How much money can I truly spend to pay for a voluntourism trip? (In other words, what can I afford to pay without being anxious during my entire trip because I spent more money than I should have?)

**Question #3:** How much time/percentage of my trip do I want to dedicate to volunteering and how much to regular tourism?

**Question #4:** How sensitive am I to deprivation, poverty, starvation, health issues, etc.? (For example, can I mentally and emotionally handle being with children who have no arms or legs, or cleft palates, or bloated stomachs from malnutrition?)

**Question #5:** What tolerance do I have for extremes in climate? (For example, is desert heat an issue for me? Arctic cold? Rainforest humidity?)



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**Question #6:** What food preferences and aversions do I have? (For example, can I eat anything that is placed in front of me? Vegetarian only? Food allergies?)

**Question #7:** How are my people skills? (For example, do I feel comfortable speaking with anyone, anywhere, regardless of who it may be? Only people I know? Do I like to travel alone?)

**Question #8:** What travel experience do I have? (Domestic? International? None?)

**Question #9:** What volunteer experience do I have? (Helping your brother or sister with his/her homework does not count!)

**Question #10:** What voluntary service would I like to perform? (You may not have a preference, but by asking this question, you will know if you do.)

- **Conclusion**

Once you have determined where you want to travel and have answered the above 10 Questions, you should be able to combine these with your Purpose and your Assets and be ready to move to the next step in this process – Trip Selection.

- **Trip Selection**

- **Introduction**

Once you have determined your **Purpose**, taken an inventory of your service **Assets**, and answered the tough **Questions**, (**PAQs**) you are ready to select a program. How exactly will you make a decision with tens of thousands of options around the world from which to choose? (And you thought we had already asked the tough questions.)

Well, this will be much easier than you think.

In this section, we will touch on the following topics:

- Step #1: Developing a voluntourism (VT) Matrix
- Step #2: Research & Mapping of voluntourism opportunities onto your VT Matrix
- Step #3: Reviewing Options that fit your VT Matrix
- Step #4: Interviewing Potential Options
- Step #5: Making a Final Selection
  
- **Step #1: Crafting the Voluntourism Matrix**

Set up a spreadsheet similar to the example below. The items that you identified for the "Getting Started" exercise can now be used to place into your Voluntourism Matrix. The cells in the left-hand column represent your **Purpose**, your service **Assets**, and your answers to the hard **Questions** as individual elements or (**PAQs**). The remaining columns are for organizations that you will "map" against the criteria you have established via your (**PAQs**)

PAQs	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
PAQ 1					
PAQ 2					
PAQ 3					
PAQ 4					
PAQ 5					
PAQ 6					
PAQ 7					
PAQ 8					
PAQ 9					
PAQ 10					

Let's look at an example using "your purpose" only:

**My Purpose:** To learn more about the U.S./Mexican Border Region, practice my Spanish, and help the people of the area in whatever way possible.

For this example we will use a smaller matrix, but for the one that you put together use the above dimensions. Let's take key words from the purpose statement and put them into our matrix:

PAQs	Option 1	Option 2
Learn		
U.S./Mexico Border Region		
Practice Spanish		
Help People		
No Preference/Help Type		

You will add in the other elements of your **PAQs** in a similar fashion to build out your VT Matrix. Once you have done so, you are ready for Step #2.

- **Step #2: Research & Mapping**

There are key elements of your PAQs that will assist you in concentrating your research efforts. Such elements include: Destination, Type of Service, Duration, Accommodation Requirements, Safety, and Price. Identify these as the "Priority" PAQs for you. (For those who really like to be organized, you may want to place these at the top of your PAQ list or even on a separate 3x5 index card.)

When you review books, magazines, or conduct a web search of voluntourism options, you will be able to determine what does "not" fit your criteria. You may also want to talk to friends and family who may have conducted a similar trip to point you in a certain direction, but remember, friends and family are NOT YOU. Their preferences and aversions are not yours.

When you find an organization that fits your Priority PAQs, then fill in the boxes with either a "Yes" or a "No" as you move down your complete list of PAQs in comparison to what the voluntourism operator provides. When you have filled out the entire VT Matrix, you are ready for Step #3.

- **Step #3: Reviewing VT Options**

You have your VT Matrix in front of you. Now you can begin to look through each VT Option and see where the "No's" are. Can you immediately cast aside any of the VT Options because they have too many "No's?" In most cases you will be able to do so.

With your remaining VT Options, begin to compare and contrast what each one offers. This may take a little bit of time, but it will cause you to really think about your priorities and what you **MUST** have as a part of your VT experience.



Courtesy of Ambassadors for Children.  
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When you have conducted this exercise to a point where you have three (3) to five (5) remaining options, revisit the source from which you originally gathered information about the organization. Copy down all important contact information - specific contact person, corresponding telephone number and/or email address, etc. If you discover through this process that you are not, somehow, satisfied with what they offer in this regard, then you can cross that organization off of your list.

- **Step #4: Interviewing VT Options**

Reflect back on the specific questions that were asked when you interviewed for a job. If you were interviewed by someone you thought was exceptional, try to mimic their methodology. Prepare yourself to thoroughly examine the handful of VT Options you have left by creating a list of questions you want to have answered.

Make sure to schedule an appointment ahead of time to interview the appropriate person at the program so you can have the undivided attention of the person on the other end of the phone. You want to have a great deal of confidence that you understand "the situation" that you will confront when you start your project.

What questions should you ask? Start by "double-checking" that the "Yeses" on your PAQ sheet are correct. If, for example, you wanted to make sure that the organization has liability insurance, you can ask during your phone interview: "Does your organization have liability insurance? What coverage do you provide for someone who may be injured while volunteering?"

If you have really filled out your VT Matrix, you will be able to ask the important questions. Examples could include:

"What is your refund policy in the event that I am unable to make the trip?"

"I have children, will I be able to contact my family during my trip?"

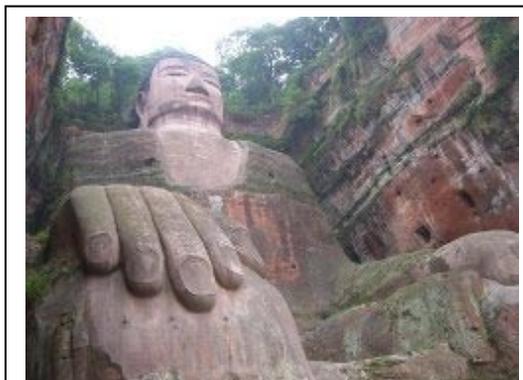
Look for the little things that you may have overlooked in your VT Matrix and ask about these things. Take good notes during your phone interviews and make changes to your VT Matrix based on the information you gather.

- **Step #5: Making a Final Selection**

If you have really conducted your efforts with due diligence, one program should stand out in your mind as "The" VT Program for You!

If, however, you still have some reservations, you may want to have a second phone interview or discuss your findings with a friend or family member. Or you could even give us a call here at VolunTourism International (VTI) and we can provide you with any information that we may have about an organization.

Take the time to reflect on the information that you have. Even if one organization stands out, you may really like an element of another one. Are you, perhaps, willing to take the risk of selecting that VT option over another one? Realize that the trip will represent a major investment of your time, effort, and money. This may be the one and only time that you ever take such a trip. Don't you want to give yourself every opportunity to have the best experience possible? Of course, you do.



Courtesy of Tibetan Village Project.  
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## PEPY Tours and Voluntourism

By Daniela Ruby Papi

PEPY Tours (<http://pepytours.com/>) offers educational adventures in Cambodia with an aim to change the way participants give, travel, and live once they return home. PEPY Tours started out by offering “voluntourism” opportunities, giving people the chance to “improve the world” in a very short period of time. What we learned when starting PEPY was that we were doing two major disservices by offering trips which were focused on giving rather than learning: 1) by rushing to help, we were encouraging people to take action before they fully understood a problem or a goal, which can often lead to unnecessary mistakes and 2) we were creating volunteer experiences to match with the needs of travelers, as the nature of using visitors means adjusting timing and offerings to the availability and skills of the guests. We realized through mistakes that we have to learn before we can help, and that sustainable change takes a long time.



PEPY Tours at Angkor Wat, Cambodia. Credit: PEPY Tours

By encouraging travelers to use their vacation time to learn about a new place and the issues faced, to use their time to get angry, get interested, and get educated, we are now helping to empower them to do the real world changing once they leave. We might not be able to improve the world greatly in a 10 day travel experience, but we surely can during the 355 other days of the year with new found interests and a better understanding of the barriers faced by development initiatives around the world.

At PEPY Tours, we believe that by connecting people to educational opportunities in rural Cambodia, we are able to create a space for travelers to open up to their own potential to be agents of positive change both in themselves and in the communities around them.

See Appendix 2 for PEPY Tours’ PEPY Tours “Voluntourism: Operator Self Check Guide”.

# Consumer Interest in Voluntourism

Compiled by Martha Honey



A number of recent surveys in the United States confirm the growing popularity of voluntourism.

## A *Condé Nast Traveler/MSNBC* poll (spring 2008):

- Number of regular volunteer vacationers has doubled since 2002.
- Number of those who have volunteered at least once has tripled.
- 98% were satisfied with their experience.
- Less than 25% of those surveyed have no interest in taking a volunteer vacation.
- 55% of those surveyed would like to take a volunteer vacation.
- 75% of those who have volunteered are “very likely” to do so again.
- 91% of the volunteers believe their efforts were at least as worthwhile as donating money.
- 86% believe that voluntourism benefits both the traveler and the destination.

## A *Condé Nast Traveler Readers’ Poll* (February 2009):

- 47% interested in volunteer vacations.
- 3% regularly take volunteer vacations.
- 98% satisfied with their experience.
- 95% of those who have volunteered would do so again.

**USTA Voice of the Traveler Study (November 2006):**

- 24% interested in taking a volunteer or service-based vacation.
- Up 11% from 5 years ago.
- 47% of those from the 35-54 age range.

**Travelocity's Annual Forecast (2007)**

- Volunteer vacations 38% (up from 11% from prior year).

**Cheaptickets.com (2007)**

- 68% of travelers would likely use a travel website to learn more about volunteer vacations.
- 50% would consider taking a vacation for the sole purpose of volunteering.

**Peter Yesawich, CEO of Ypartnership, "Taking the Kids: Family Voluntourism" (2007):**

- In 2006 over 5 million households took a volunteer vacation.

**CMIGreen survey on voluntourism (2009):**

- 59.1% of those surveyed said they were interested in volunteering during a future trip.
- 74.4% have volunteered while traveling.
- 37.6% of respondents claimed that the availability of volunteer activity encouraged their selection of a vacation destination.
- 46.4% said they would dedicate several days to volunteering during a trip, as opposed to a day or less or an entire trip.
- 69.9% say that the most important outcome or goal of a volunteer travel experience is to "give back."
- 7.9% are willing to spend \$51 or more a day on their vacation if it meant they could also volunteer.
- 58% continued to be involved with the project they volunteered with after they returned home.