



## Voluntourism

**Voluntourism** is a growing trend nationally and globally. According to the *Volunteering in America 2008* report, in 2007 more than 3.7 million Americans (about 6% of the total volunteer force) volunteered more than 120 miles from their homes.

The effect of efforts to bring volunteers to areas ravaged by Katrina continues to be felt. In 2007, over 140,000 people – about 25 percent of the “total” number of volunteers – traveled more than 120 miles from out of state to volunteer in Mississippi. Over 166,000 long-distance volunteers from other states – about 19 percent of the “total” number of volunteers – traveled to Louisiana to volunteer there.

### Voluntourism Defined

Voluntourism (or VolunTourism) combines the nonprofit sector and tourism sector. The primary purpose is to serve, to learn about the host community and its people. It is not simply to have an alternative to a standard vacation; rather, it is a chance for volunteers to use their skills and interests in an unconventional setting to benefit others (*adapted from [www.VolunTourism.org](http://www.VolunTourism.org) and [www.GlobalVolunteers.org](http://www.GlobalVolunteers.org)*).

The term “voluntourism” was first coined in 1998 by the governor of Nevada, who established a “Voluntourism Award” to recognize Nevada residents who volunteered to make their state a place to visit and enjoy. A few years later, a team of cause marketing professionals adapted the phrase to reflect the importance of both the nonprofit sector and the tourism sector, and VolunTourism was created.

Other terms for voluntourism include:

- “Volunteer vacations”
- “Long-distance volunteering”
- “Working vacations”
- “Eco-voluntourism”
- “Agritourism”
- “Edu-voluntourism”

## **History of Voluntourism**

The roots of voluntourism can be traced to the creation of the Peace Corps in 1961. Subsequent events include:

- Service learning (1960's)
- The boom of study-abroad programs (1970's)
- Ecotourism (1980's)
- Volunteer vacations (1990's)
  - Although the first volunteer vacation was operated by Earthwatch in 1971, the movement was not broadly recognized until the 1990's.
- Corporate social responsibility (1990's)
- Volunteer Tourism research (began early 1990's, expanded for the next 10 years)

## **Advantages of Voluntourism**

For the Volunteer

- Participating in meaningful service and having a deep impact on a community
- Developing new skills through service or using ones you already have in service
- Interacting with locals you would never meet in a hotel or at touristy places
- Seeing and exploring places you would never see on a typical tour or vacation
- Creating friendships that last a lifetime
- Experiencing true satisfaction from your vacation time

For a Corporation

- Team-building
- Employee-retention/morale
- Skills development/training
- Consumer participation/affinity
- Social responsibility
- Promotions
- Public relations

For a Hosting Nonprofit/Community

- Creating ambassadors for your communities' challenges in the wider world
- Providing additional skill sets, renewed energy and new ideas to the community
- Generating revenue/building capacity for other programs and projects
- Building an alumni network

## **Examples of Voluntourism Opportunities**

Environmental Conservation

- Trail Maintenance and Conservation – Appalachian Trail Conservancy
- Wildlife Preservation – Dolphin Research Center

Humanitarian Assistance

- Housing Issues – Habitat for Humanity
- Children and Youth – Ambassadors for Children
- Economic Assistance – World Wide Opportunities for Organic Farmers – USA

## Additional Resources

Additional resources to help your organization maximize the opportunities presented through voluntourism:

- VolunTourism – [www.voluntourism.org](http://www.voluntourism.org)
- Global Volunteers – [www.globalvolunteers.org](http://www.globalvolunteers.org)
- BreakAway – [www.alternativebreaks.org](http://www.alternativebreaks.org)
- *Vacations from the Ordinary* by John Rosenthal on travel.msn.com
- *Volunteer Vacations, Short-term Adventures that Will Benefit You and Others* by Bill McMillon, Doug Cutchins and Anne Geissinger
- Center for Global Volunteer Service at UC San Diego Extension

*Much of the above information is taken from "Engaging the Voluntourist," a workshop presented by Geneva Marney, Associate Director for Hands On New Orleans, at the 2008 National Conference on Volunteering and Service.*

