

Peace and Tourism – Key Organizations

There are quite a few people who believe that one of the key aspects to promoting increased peace and understanding in the world is through facilitating positive interaction between individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds. The assumption is by learning about each other's cultures, languages, lives, that people can discover what they have in common, as well as explore their differences and possibly build long-term friendships that can have a positive impact on the world.



In recent years, there has been increasing discussion about the role of peace tourism, as well as voluntourism (where individuals visit other countries and engage in community service projects in addition to seeing the sights), and eco-tourism (trying to minimize the impact on the environment).

As with any activity, travel has both potentially negative and positive impacts. The negative impacts include significant environmental impacts through plane and other high-carbon forms of travel, destruction of local environments, sometimes contributing to exploitation of locals who are not treated fairly in the service economy, lack of respect for local traditions and cultures and more.

On the other hand tourism conducted in partnership, that seeks to develop a sustainable form of economic development, minimizes negative environmental impacts and facilitates true learning and exchange between cultures can have a life-long impact.

There are a number of organizations and initiatives that are working on the issues of peace and tourism, ranging from policy focused institutions, organizations focused on the environment and others on connecting travelers around the world. Here are a few key organizations.

COUCHSURFING is an international non-profit network that connects travelers with locals in over 230 countries and territories around the world. Since 2004, members have been using the system to come together for cultural exchange, friendship, and learning experiences. Today, over a million people who might otherwise never meet are able to share hospitality and cultural understanding. The mission of the organization is to create inspiring experiences: cross-cultural encounters that are fun, engaging, and illuminating. These experiences take many forms. CouchSurfing's initial focus was on hosting and 'surfing' (staying with a local as a guest in their home). Alongside these core experiences, the organization now also facilitates a growing array of activities and events.



Their vision is of a world where everyone can explore and create meaningful connections with the people and places they encounter. Each CouchSurfing experience shared by the members brings us closer to that vision.

SERVAS is an international, non-governmental, multicultural peace association run by volunteers in over 100 countries. Founded in 1949 as a peace movement, Servas International works to build understanding, tolerance and world peace. They operate through a network of Servas hosts around the world who are interested in opening their doors to travellers, and of Servas travellers who want to get to know the heart of the countries they visit.

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PEACE THROUGH TOURISM (IIPT) is a not for profit organization dedicated to fostering and facilitating tourism initiatives which contribute to international understanding and cooperation, an improved quality of environment, the preservation of heritage, and through these initiatives, helping to bring about a peaceful and sustainable world. It is based on a vision of the world's largest industry, travel and tourism – becoming the world's first global peace industry; and the belief that every traveler is potentially an “Ambassador for Peace”. A primary goal of IIPT is to mobilize the travel and tourism industry as a leading force for poverty reduction.

VOLUNTEERS FOR PEACE – Their goal is to work toward a more peaceful world through the promotion of International Voluntary Service (IVS) projects, historically known as International Workcamps, and the exchange of volunteers. Through their international alliances, they work together to help communities meet local needs and some of the goals of the United Nation's Millennium Declaration. The organization's projects provide intercultural education through community service. They offer placement in over 3000 IVS projects in more than 100 countries each year, including over 40 in the USA. At each project, volunteers from diverse backgrounds, typically from four or more countries, work and live together like a family. The sharing of everyday life, both with the local community and among the international volunteers, is an integral part of the learning and serving experience. Most projects are open to volunteers with any type of background and do not require any specific professional or language skills.



GLOBAL EXCHANGE – REALITY TOURS – They envision a people centered globalization that values the rights of workers and the health of the planet; that prioritizes international collaboration as central to ensuring peace; and that aims to create a local, green economy designed to embrace the diversity of our communities. The idea that travel can be educational, fun, and positively influence international affairs motivated the first Global Exchange Reality Tours. The tours provide individuals the opportunity to understand issues beyond what is communicated by the mass media and gain a new vantage point from which to view and affect US foreign policy. Travelers are linked with activists and organizations from around the globe who are working toward positive change. They also hope to prompt participants to examine related issues in their own communities.

By Craig Zelizer

internationalpeaceandconflict.org

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