

# Travel and Volunteer in Peru's Orphanage and School

Volunteer tourism begins on the individual level, with a desire to both explore and positively contribute to the communities visited during a journey abroad. For highly visited countries such as Peru, the financial benefits of traditional tourism are obvious but organizations such as Traveller Not Tourist take the concept a step further by integrating the social, cultural, and economic advantages of travel.



Founders Jay and Luis Chavez aimed to create a non-profit organization that connected foreign visitors with locals in a way that would foster a self-sustaining immersion experience to enrich the lives of all involved. Not only do volunteers assist with the daily operation of the school and orphanage sustained by the program, but they also have the opportunity to help by booking tours through the in-house travel agency, which donates 50% of all profits back to the program. Fundraising efforts have also gone international with the preliminary establishment of a UK based charity called Pachawawas, formed to support the work being done in Peru.

## **Benefiting the Local Community**

Projects available to volunteers include the Casa Hogar Luz Alba orphanage and the Flora Tristan

community school. Finished in 2010, the school was constructed almost exclusively by the hands of volunteers and serves as a place for children in the outlying community to practice and speak English. Because tourism in Arequipa is such a profitable business, speaking English is both a highly-desired and marketable skill. Attendance is free of cost and children from ages three to eighteen find a safe place to learn and play within the walls of this colorful, five classroom building.

Unique from other TESL programs, the teaching here is conducted solely by volunteers who develop their own curriculum and administer all lessons and activities based on the level of comprehension of each class. Small construction projects also arise at the school, allowing for continual growth and expansion and attracting travellers who prefer the challenge of more physically demanding activities.



The Casa Hogar Luz Alba orphanage is a home for about 20 children under the age of twelve. Volunteers assist orphanage staff to provide constant care and attention to each child during formative years of psychological and physical growth. The good work done here is apparent as children who have been abused or abandoned find a comfortable, loving place to live and thrive under the supervision of adults. Besides spending quality time with the children, volunteers help with housework such as cooking and cleaning, homework completion, playing games, and short outings to visit the doctor or enjoy the sunshine. Volunteer Gemma Smiddy adds, “Helping out at the orphanage allowed me to meet other volunteers, create lasting friendships, and participate in a more worthwhile cause as opposed to just being a tourist, which is a bit more self-indulgent. The children at Casa Hogar are so loved, and their safety and well being are our first priority.”

## Meaningful Exploration

Aside from the more venerable aspects of donating time and energy, volunteers also reap the benefits of the Traveller Not Tourist concept of cultural immersion. Many other programs charge significant fees to participate in voluntourism, whereas Traveller Not Tourist keeps costs low through the operation of an in-house travel agency, personal Spanish lessons, and local fundraising.



Living in Arequipa has its perks: the city is not only a culinary treasure with delicacies like cuy chactado (roasted guinea pig) and chicha morada (fermented corn drink), but it is also in the vicinity of excellent hiking and trekking opportunities such as Colca and Cotahuasi Canyons and volcanoes Misti, Ampato, and Chachani. The recent addition of a full-time travel operator at the office allows volunteers to easily plan trips – even at the last minute – knowing that their travel arrangements are booked with reputable local guides at fair prices.

Traveller Not Tourist stands apart by offering programs of varied length, for those travellers who have anywhere from one day to one year to give to the organization. Living arrangements while volunteering will also suit just about any taste, with options to live at a homestay, bed and breakfast, or at the volunteer house in town. With so many choices to tailor the experience of each volunteer, combined with the visible difference that Traveller Not Tourist is making in the lives of those in Arequipa, travellers who are looking to give and receive joy will continue to find their way to the doorstep of the Andes.

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