

Growing Trend: Volunteer Tourism



Tourism is the world's fastest developing industry. It gives tourists many opportunities how to spend their money and time.

A traveler can go sightseeing, visit a spa or enjoy an adrenalin sport in most unusual places of the planet. Some people choose to help others instead of just lying on a seaside when on holiday. They choose to travel to developing countries and work there as volunteers.

There are many companies whose sole interest is in organizing volunteer tourists. Often, they offer a volunteer full service that includes 24-hour support and back-up by an in-country agent, full board and accommodation, in- country transfers and in-country orientation.

With various organizations a volunteer can work in Africa, South America as well as Asia. Placements are usually available for two to 12 weeks and volunteers can work teaching English in impoverished schools, on construction and building projects, doing social work in orphanages and street-kid centers, or become involved in environmental conservation.

However, business is business and therefore a customer has to pay. A volunteer has to pay the mediating company around US\$1,650 to go help abroad. This money will pay their accommodation and full board as well as the other services mentioned above. It is also said that the money go towards a host family and project.

Nevertheless, there are people who oppose this practice. Richard Hawkes, Director of Voluntary Service Overseas's (VSO) International Programs said: "The ethos of VSO is that we get the volunteers to where they are needed, but with the rise of consumer driven volunteer tourism, increasingly people are coming to us with a clear idea of where they'd like to go, as if it's a holiday. We're concerned this attitude is not good for development. If people are encouraged to pick and choose where they give help, instead of making the choice based on the community's need for their skills, some countries will inevitably suffer." VSO is an international development charity.

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