

Voluntourism - The Ultimate Twofer

By Barbara Schreibman

Love to travel? Want to put your time, skills, and energy into making a difference?

Voluntourism may be the adventurous and meaningful opportunity you're looking for.



That's what a full house of TTNers learned on April 26that a lively evening produced by the Program Committee and the Travel Mates SIG at the Norwegian Seaman's Church. The event showcased a panel of experts, breakout groups, time to mingle - even a packing demonstration that earned a standing ovation! If you missed it, you missed a winner.

See the World Differently

Moderated by Travel Mates coordinator **Phyllis Meissel**, the program led with John Dwyer, who founded <u>Over50andOverseas.com</u> after more than 25 years of volunteer experience in 56 countries. Beginning as an over-50 enlistee in the Peace Corps, he became a UN volunteer monitoring elections abroad, managed camps for displaced persons, and continues to work with FEMA on most major U.S. natural disasters.

For a fulfilling voluntour experience, John suggests choosing a well-regarded placement organization offering opportunities aligned with what you'd like to do. The range of placement options is broad, including teaching, conservation, environment, faith-based, health, human rights, and business development programs.

Be prepared to commit a minimum of one week of your time, with a greater range of opportunities beginning at two weeks. And don't worry about not knowing the language of the country — for almost all programs, English and a resourceful use of gestures will do just fine.



Panelist Kathleen M. McShane talked about voluntourism from a new participant's point of view. Although she was an accomplished motivational speaker and the CEO/Founder of <u>Ladies Launch Club</u> for entrepreneurs, she had no professional expertise to draw on when she signed on to teach English in South America.

The experience — so gratifying that she keeps repeating it — taught her more than how to teach. She bonded with a diverse group of international volunteers. She learned the practicalities of life in a bunkhouse, sharing hygiene facilities, and living with limited can't-live-without "stuff". She enjoyed the rhythm of teaching part of the day, then touring with fellow volunteers. And, of course, she fell in love with her students.

Panelist Carly Ruberti began her association with <u>Projects Abroad</u> as a teaching volunteer in Thailand. Now she's a Program Advisor with the organization, one of the world's largest, which sends 10,000 people a year to service projects and internships in 30 destinations across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

One of the organization's strengths is designing customized projects for groups of five or more — which occasioned interest from TTNers in the audience.

In answer to "Why am I paying to volunteer?" Carly described both the expertise and organization needed to provide a safe and worthwhile experience for volunteers, as well as the need to fund long-term humanitarian projects internationally.

Project Abroad's two-week programs are generally within the \$2,500 to \$2,800 range, a

fee that covers accommodations, food, medical and travel insurance, airport pickup and drop-off, work-related transportation, pre-departure advisor support by email and phone, in-country staff support, and 24-hour backup from North American staff.

Never Travel with Empty Shoes

With our travel appetites whetted, we were treated to an entertaining "How to Pack" demonstration by Tommy Schwartz of <u>Innovation Luggage</u>, a sponsor of the event.



Using an expandable Briggs & Riley suitcase, he emphasized filling every inch of space —including the interior of shoes and handbags. To keep organization up and baggage weight down, he suggested keeping like-with-like clothing items together in lightweight fabric cases, and showed a broad selection designed for tops, pants, lingerie, nightwear, workout gear, and more. As a TTN perk, attendees received a discount card good at the company's 2001 Broadway store.

Our Own Voluntourists

To round out the evening, each of five breakout groups featured an experienced TTN member who shared her enthusiasm for her own voluntour travel.

Nancy Adelman told us of her experiences with <u>Habitat For Humanity</u> and <u>International Medical Relief</u>, while **Grace Bernstein** recalled teaching English through <u>Global Volunteers</u> in partnership with Road Scholar.

Elizabeth Gamburg shared her non-combat civilian support on an Israeli military base through <u>Volunteers for Israel</u>, **Joan Riegel** talked about teaching English in Spain through Vaughntown, and **Pam Roderick** described her environment-related expeditions with <u>Earthwatch Institute</u>, including archaeological digs and climate-related projects.

Thanks to each of these citizens of the world for inspiring us to try the Ultimate Travel Twofer — voluntourism.



Page **3** of **4**Voluntourism - The Ultimate Twofer

