

How to Give Back Without “Volunteering Abroad”

Not everyone can take a volunteer trip and even those who can will take many other trips that can still be meaningful. Whether you don't have the time or money to sign up for volunteer travel, you're on a business trip, you're traveling with family, or you're on vacation and intend to relax, you can still positively impact your destination and enjoy the journey even more because of it.

Giving back as you go just takes a little research, a little more time, and potentially a slight detour, but it is guaranteed to enhance your itinerary and manifest lasting memories. Simply look into the field you're interested in supporting and find or ask about short term or immediate needs from donating funds or goods to lending a hand on smaller projects. Here are a few examples you're likely to find available.

Conservation

Enjoying a beautiful environment can be compelling to help preserve it and there are quick and painless ways to do so. From beach cleanup to responsible camping to funding preservation programs, you can personally ensure that enchanting setting lives on.

Ask locals about popular one-time volunteer opportunities; many beaches have groups combing the shores for sea turtle eggs in the mornings, state and national parks have clean up or planting expeditions, and zoos have adoption programs or donation needs.

For example you can join a sea turtle project with SEE Turtles for your Costa Rica vacation or simply book your tours through parent organization SEEtheWILD whose proceeds support wildlife conservation and practices are environmentally sustainable.

Most importantly, look for businesses and accommodations with a CST label, which is Certification for Sustainable Tourism, or Green Globe Certification. Both ensure you're supporting companies that support their home's sustainability and community by adhering to guidelines and preferred practices.

Community Development

You can support the community, too, as easily as buying local. Buy from local farmers, craftsmen, artisans, and boutiques to help maintain a destination's charm and distinction. Purchase coffee from a farm with good practices in Costa Rica, wine from a vineyard employing locals in South Africa, or beer from a reputable brewery in China.

Research businesses donating a portion of their proceeds to a good cause as well. Companies as big as Apple and Coca-Cola support RED's fight against AIDS, while

smaller shops may give to the local hospital or homeless shelter. In Brazil you can try on the costumes and masks used in Carnival for a small fee to support local samba schools, for example. Your shopping and souvenirs can make quite the impact.

A destination for medical volunteers in Nicaragua, The Roberto Clemente Health Clinic recently partnered with TOMS Shoes to provide children in need footwear for protection, sanitation, and even the privilege to go to school. You can clothe children overseas as simply as purchasing TOMS or support the nonprofit of your choice while you shop online via iGive for GoodShop.

Children

While most safety and security measures for working with children may be too time consuming or tedious for short-term assistance, facilities working with children can always use goods. Call or look up a daycare, shelter, safe house, or medical center's biggest needs and drop off diapers, clothes, toys, or books when you're passing by.

Malawi's Back to School Foundation tutors orphans in secondary school and while you may not be able to volunteer for weeks at a time, the facility maintains a garden and earns funding from selling the produce at a roadside stand. Buy veggies, support an orphan's education. (You can also sponsor a student for an entire year for about \$187).

Homelessness

Aiding the homeless and less fortunate requires very little lead-time and makes a huge difference, particularly in developing countries. You can feed the hungry by handing your take out box to someone on the street after a meal or serving at a soup kitchen one morning or afternoon. You can clothe or warm the needy by donating clothes you brought for this trip but won't wear at home or an extra jacket or gloves.

The Simon Community in London houses long-term volunteers, but also welcomes short-term help as brief as a few hours or donations of goods. For example, the shelter is currently accepting food, furniture, clothes, or useful products, and can use drivers, street or café workers, or even assistance with PR, marketing, or administration.

Health

Today worldwide destinations host events and activities to fund medical research, many of which promote your own health in the process. Participate in a run, walk, yoga class, cycling tour, or golf scramble that benefits a cause. These are opportunities to exercise, sightsee, meet locals, and make a difference locally.

Find runs and walks supporting global housing project Habitat for Humanity all over the United States, run in the London marathon to benefit dozens of international charities like WellChild, which volunteers in Peru aid, or even dance Zumba. Zumba Love raised funds to support the Heifer International Project in Brazil with a Zumbathon in LA last year and supported breast cancer research at Party in Pink Zumbathon in the UK.

Medical professionals have the unique opportunity to donate medical supplies, tools, vitamins, medications, and even scrubs needed in the region they're traveling. Contact a local hospital or clinic about shortages before you go or work with organizations who collect and redistribute these kinds of donations, like Project CURE, MedShare, or REMEDY.

That's all it takes—buying local produce, attending a fitness concert, dropping off extra clothes, going on a run, serving a meal, shopping intentionally, booking a tour, or cleaning up a beach—to make whatever trip you're on a little more meaningful and consequently more memorable. See where the causes you're passionate about are taking action and join in when you pass through to give back as you go.

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