



Where Is She Heading

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Budget Tight? Try Local Volunteering.

Keep your enthusiasm going by volunteering while you are still at home.

I dream every day about my next international volunteer vacation - what I will do, where I go, and what I will see while I am away. My next international trip is planned for 2010. I keep my interest and excitement alive by volunteering locally. For almost every type of volunteer job I did overseas, I can find a local equivalent. Remember, I did say almost!

As an example of the diversity of volunteer opportunities available in my home town of Denver, in 2007-08 I volunteered at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, Project Cure, assisted at a school play, helped prepare meals for shut ins at Thanksgiving and have recently found a number of one-day-only volunteer activities through Meetup.com.

For the museum, I was a special exhibit facilitator for traveling exhibitions. In 2007, I spent six months with the Titanic exhibit that I adored. In 2008, I was pouring casts of dinosaur fossils with "Dinosaurs - Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries." Now in 2009, I am a special exhibit volunteer in the Genghis Khan – Statesman and Warrior Exhibit. For each of these special exhibits, my team was trained and given lots of support in return for one, four-hour shift every week during the exhibition.

Project Cure, based in Denver, also has sites in seven other states including Texas and Tennessee, and they need volunteers to sort donated medical supplies and equipment. Once sorted, the items are packed into shipping containers and sent to developing nations in great need of clean medical supplies. Even volunteers without medical background can assist and sort. This is a great activity to share with older kids.

I located a group that needed assistance at Thanksgiving by searching a website for Denver-based volunteer projects. While I had tried to find this type of work before, I generally waited until the week before Thanksgiving and by that time; the groups already had enough volunteers. Last year I started my search in October and I was successful.

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Recently, I used Meetup.com, a social networking group, and joined several groups for local volunteers. Two weeks ago, I met other volunteers at a coffee shop and we made cards for kids who would be in Children's Hospital over the holidays. I look forward to using Meetup.com to find other opportunities for local volunteering in the future.

These are just a few of the things you can do as a local volunteer. You might also consider animal shelters/humane societies (walk dogs), historic houses and museums (clerical, tour guides), cultural and arts groups (clerical, ushers, fund raising, special events), food banks, homeless shelters and soup kitchens (food preparation, cooks, stockers), and city or regional parks (gardening, trash collection, clearing trails or assisting visitors).

Don't forget your house of worship, schools or service organizations such as Rotary or Kiwanis. Finally, you probably have in your hometown specific regional agencies plus national agencies with local offices such as Red Cross, Volunteers of America, Meals on Wheels, Habitat for Humanity and Boy and Girl Scouts.

Once you have an idea of the amount of time you have available and what you want to do, you can begin your search. I found my local opportunities through websites many that allowed me to search by zip code.

Sites to begin your local search include:

Habitat for Humanity - www.habitat.org

Idealist - www.idealist.org

National Park Service - www.nps.gov/volunteer

Points of Light Foundation - www.pointsoflight.org

Volunteering in America - www.volunteeringinamerica.gov

Volunteer Match - www.volunteermatch.com

Volunteer Solutions - www.volunteersolutions.com

As you can see there are many different things you can do and I am sure that whatever agency you select, they will be thrilled to have you as a volunteer.

Travel in Safety.

Jane Stanfield