



Where Is She Heading

Jane Stanfield, Where Is She Heading
P.O. Box 27482, Lakewood, CO 80227
303-988-1356

wiladyjanes@gmail.com

www.janestanfieldwish.com

What to Do on a Volunteer Vacation? Mine was Baboons. Where Is Your Interest?

When I look back on my year around the world doing volunteer work, my mind keeps going back to South Africa and my time with the baboons at the CARE rehabilitation center.

While at CARE, I lived in a community of 15 volunteers from around the world. Each volunteer usually found several baboons that were very special to them. The baboons also had favorite friends among the volunteers. Occasionally a baboon would break away from their “special volunteer friend” and come and play with me. Here is an excerpt from my chapter in *The Voluntary Traveler* entitled, *The Color of Poo*.

“I was thrilled one day when two-year-old Roxie came over and tried to groom me. She normally was the best friend of another volunteer, Kim from Southern California, but when Kim was absent, Roxie would make the rounds. After sitting by my side for five minutes, Roxie climbed into my lap. She found a mole on the side of my neck and with her lips, like gentle little kisses, she tried to remove it. When that failed, she began checking my scalp for nits. Luckily she didn’t find any. Finally she crawled on to my chest (all 15 pounds of her) and took a nap. She had been taken as an infant to be a pet, but ended up chained around the waist to a pole. Roxie will most likely always carry the discoloration around her waist where the chain restricted not only her movement, but also the blood and nerve supply to her legs. While I was at CARE, she walked with a limp that would be exaggerated if she carried anything, such as a one-year old baboon. As she slept in my arms, I must admit, I teared up a little bit because within 30 minutes of meeting me, she felt safe and comfortable enough to sleep in my presence. I was humbled and honored.”

People often ask me if they will need special training to do volunteer work. The answer is usually no. No special training was required to work with the baboons. Many volunteers at CARE had no previous animal experience but during their stay, they learned a lot about baboons, themselves and had a wonderful time. For me, because I had just completed four placements with wildlife, I arrived warmed up and ready to go. In addition, my background in animal science and working with horses and cats gave me patience and perspective as I began interacting with the baboons. When the staff at CARE found out about the recent volunteering with animals and my background, they increased my responsibilities and asked for my help on special projects.

CARE - the Centre for Animal Rehabilitation and Education is located near Phalaborwa in the northeast part of South Africa. My friend Kim has returned to CARE multiple times since 2006 and keeps me up to date on my baboon friends.

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Returned volunteers from CARE have a group on Facebook called the Great Primate Handshake. They invite everyone who is interested to follow them either on Facebook or you can contact them directly at info@primatehandshake.org or www.primatelandshake.org

If you are inspired to work with baboons, I can highly recommend and hope you will consider CARE. They can be contacted at <http://www.primatelandshake.org.za>

So... what are your volunteer interests? One important thing to consider when you choose a volunteer worksite is AM I REALLY INTERESTED OR PASSIONATE ABOUT THIS SUBJECT?

I saw that when volunteers picked a project for some reason other than a true passion or interest in the work, they tended to end up disappointed. For example, if they selected a project because a friend suggested it or if they had not read the literature completely, the experience and the reality of the situation did not match. Volunteer work in a foreign country has the potential of multiple challenges. The challenges can appear insurmountable if the volunteer isn't that excited about what they are doing. I had a bit of this experience myself. During my year away, I had planned to work with elephants in Sri Lanka. Before I arrived however, I was told I would not be able to work with the elephants due to political upheaval in the area. I was at first a little disappointed. Instead of going to Sri Lanka, I stayed in Australia and worked at a wildlife rehabilitation hospital in Australia. It was not what I had intended, but when I turned my brain around, it ended up being fun and taught me many things that I had not expected.

As you long as you pick volunteer work you can't wait to do, in places that excite you and you are eager to meet the other people that will be with you, you are bound to have an amazing adventure.

Travel in Safety.

Jane Stanfield