

Trips that make a difference

By **Jerry Soverinsky**
FOR REDEYE

Forget Paris for one year. Find something more meaningful than the poker tables in Las Vegas on your next trip. Volunteer vacations offer opportunities to get involved with charitable, community service projects both domestically and abroad. St. Paul-based

Global Volunteers sends 2,000 Americans to work in 20 countries every year.

Here's a look at Global Volunteers programs in the U.S. and around the world. All program fees are tax deductible and unless noted, include meals, lodging, daily transportation to/from work site and administrative expenses. For more information, call 800-487-1074 or visit globalvolunteers.org.

IN THE U.S.



Helping Appalachian families

Southern West Virginia suffers from severe poverty and unemployment, and this project addresses a number of the area's revitalization programs. As a volunteer, you'll renovate low-income houses, tutor children and young adults pursuing a high school equivalency diploma, or help out at a local community center. No special educational skills or construction background are required.

You'll spend your nights in dorm-style lodging in the mountain hamlet of Beards Fork eating simple, volunteer-prepared meals. You'll have limited free time on weekends and evenings, and if there's time you'll be able to explore the nearby New River Gorge National Park and Monogahela National Forest. Cost is \$795 for one week; students pay \$695.



Work with Blackfeet Nation youth and adults

Montana's Blackfeet Nation, a diminishing American Indian community whose people continue to leave in search of better work opportunities, must increasingly rely on the generosity of outsiders to help repair and sustain its projects. While a volunteer for this assignment, you'll assist with ongoing infrastructure repairs, serve meals at a senior center or pitch in at the local community college. No special skills or background are needed.

You'll live on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Browning, Mont., sleeping in dorm-style rooms at the local childhood center (bring a sleeping bag). Local people will prepare traditional American Indian meals for volunteers. Free time will be spent interacting and participating in pow wows, swimming at a nearby lake or stream, or horseback riding on the reservation. Cost is \$795 for one week; \$696 for students.

WORLD OF OPTIONS

Global Volunteers isn't the only service-based vacation option. Here are a few more options:

>>> **Global Aware** offers weeklong trips around the world, starting from about \$1,100 for a week; globeaware.org or 877-588-4562.

>>> **Cross-Cultural Solutions** has volunteer trips around the globe. Activities range from teaching in a primary school to creating activities for at-risk youth. Trips last from two to 12 weeks; crossculturalsolutions.org or 800-380-4777.

>>> **The American Hiking Society** organizes volunteers to fix up national parks. You may construct or rebuild footpaths, cabins and shelters while exploring beautiful country. Trip costs begin at \$130; americanhiking.org.

[AP, REDEYE]

INTERNATIONAL



Mountain village projects in Jamaica

Despite a tourist image that projects pristine beaches and luxury hotels, much of Jamaica's villages are economically troubled. Working in Jamaica's Blue Mountains, you'll help poverty-stricken communities repair and renovate schools and community centers, public water systems and walking bridges, or perhaps assist health-care professionals with screenings.

You'll spend your nights in dorm-style rooms with very basic facilities (toilets and running water—cold, not hot—are available). Meals prepared by locals will represent the typical Jamaican diet (tropical fruit, vegetables, saltfish, goat). Depending on the time of year and your assignment, you may have a free day in Port Antonio. One-week programs cost \$2,095; \$1,795 for students.

Labor projects in Ireland

In the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland's southeast coast, the non-governmental Glencree Centre for Reconciliation presents ongoing workshops and face-to-face dialogues between citizens of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland, all in an effort to promote peace. Volunteers for this program will help renovate and restore GCR's conference center. You'll help garden, paint, clean and sand, as well as assist plumbers, electricians and carpenters with their work. Depending on your assignment, you may also perform administrative office tasks as well as audit the center's classroom sessions.

Sleeping arrangements are hostel-like rooms with bunk beds (two people per room); traditional Irish meals are included and served in the retreat center's dining room. You'll have optional free time to visit Belfast, where you can participate in workshops that delve into the British-Irish conflict in detail. You also have ample time to visit Dublin on nights and weekends. Cost is \$1,895 for one week; \$1,645 for students.

[JERRY SOVERINSKY IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR.]