

Award winning ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer trav-



Winter newsletter 2014

Editorial



As ever a full newsletter this edition, even though it is nearly Christmas! A great report from Dianne on all of our various projects and nice to see that she survived the rainforest despite her reservations!

“Season`s greetings to all of our partners and volunteers and best wishes from Kate, Sallie, Dianne and Nigel.”

Nigel Pegler

Any comments and volunteer experiences welcome at newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces

volunteers & social media - communication is all at our volunteer get togethers



Everyone who already knows me (Kate) will also know that I have a bit of a reputation for being something of a pedant (!) so I thought I'd start this post with a definition of 'media':

"Communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data, or promotional messages are disseminated."

Well - that certainly explains the buzz at our latest **people and places** social event, when there was plenty of communication among previous and future volunteers, local partners, and us!



Kate's home found room for over 30 volunteers, as well as the full complement of *'people and places'* ...



[Mandip and Anita joined us from India](#), and [Adama was with us from The Gambia](#) (although somewhat delayed) ...

We love hosting our 'at home' social events, whether in Kent or Dorset ... and still, after all these years, tend to refer to them as 'road shows', because they provide us with opportunities to listen, learn and share ... opinions, questions, news and great company! (take a look at the post from Dianne about news from the projects) -

It's inevitable that lots of you aren't able to be with us when we hold these events ... but PLEASE don't let that stop you from getting in touch with us any time, whether by email, phone, comments on the blog, facebook, twitter ... we will ALWAYS be pleased to hear from you ...

Meanwhile, thanks to everyone who was able to come and share time with us this year ... and we look forward to meeting yet more of our wonderful volunteers in the future!

P.S. thanks to all the kind souls who brought us pressies - we were really touched.

The Amazonian rainforest - another exciting place to volunteer



Peru was the only country on our volunteering list that I hadn't visited, so in September I set off to South America to put this right. Our project here is in the Amazonian rainforest and I made no secret of the fact that I was apprehensive about going there – how would I cope with the heat, the humidity and most importantly the huge variety of insects I knew I would find there? Well IT WAS A GREAT TRIP!



The place I was heading for was Manu Learning Centre, a research centre run by our local partners within the World Heritage Site of Manu National Park, which is a major conservation area of rainforest covering a variety of different ecological zones and containing the highest level of biodiversity anywhere in the world. Some parts of the National Park are so remote that they are still home to tribes who have

never had any contact with the modern world. Manu Learning Centre is on the edge of the National Park by the banks of the Alto Madre de Dios River, a tributary of the Amazon, and is an area of regenerating forest, having previously been partially cleared for agricultural use.



The journey to Manu is exciting in itself – a flight across the Atlantic to Lima, then another flight across the Andes to Cusco (just as spectacular as Nigel described it in his blog). Cusco is the ancient capital of the Incas – a really interesting town to explore with its historical sites, Spanish colonial heritage, local markets and tourist shops – if you want to stock up on alpaca jumpers this is the place to shop! Then a two-day journey across the Andes, through the cloud forest and along the river to Manu.

I spent about half my time at the Manu Learning Centre, experiencing the well-developed volunteer programme which our local partners run here and which some of you have previously participated in. I'm not a biologist and wondered what contribution I could make to the scientific research done here, but this was not a problem as the programme is managed by scientific researchers and what they need from volunteers is manpower to help them collect the data necessary for their research, which focuses on the biodiversity of this area of regenerating forest in comparison to the biodiversity to be found in the pristine forest nearby.

So, among other things, I helped to collect, measure and weigh lizards and frogs caught in the pitfall traps, to catch, identify and re-release butterflies (I wasn't very good at catching the butterflies but did manage to catch one that was new to the Reserve – my bit for scientific research!), and to count the parakeets and parrots that come at dawn to feed on the clay cliffs by the river. I enjoyed watching the films triggered by animals passing the camera traps and gained a new appreciation for the amount of time producers of wildlife films have to spend to get just one good shot (the camera traps they checked while I was there were triggered 440 times by humans and just once by a jaguar!)



However I'm really happier working with people than with wild-life, so for me the most interesting part of my trip was spent not in the rainforest but in the nearby small town of

Salvacion. Salvacion is a frontier rainforest town of about 3000 people, which has come into existence in the last 35 or so years as people moved here from the Andes looking for work in the logging and mining industries. These destructive industries, along with slash and burn agriculture, have made the land bare and infertile, and the lack of resources force many people to live on as little as \$2 a day, with 25% of children suffering from malnutrition and almost 30% of homes having no water or electricity. However the town is a friendly and safe place to stay, and I enjoyed getting to know some of the local people. I don't speak Spanish and regretted not taking lessons before I came as few local people speak any English, but I still managed to chat to people using a combination of mime, words from various languages and a lot of guesswork on both sides – all good fun!



Our local partners have started two initiatives to help the local community, planting bio-gardens and agroforestry plots. The gardens are used to encourage people to grow fresh vegetables; in the five years this project has been running 58 gardens have been built on wasteland and training has been provided on aspects such as healthy eating, leading to a measurable increase in healthy BMI statistics for those families who have gardens and an annual increase in income of about 35%. Women who have gardens were keen to show me the crops they had grown – this was clearly a really good year for tomatoes! The agroforestry plots are planted to encourage farmers to grow a variety of species of trees on their land, hardwood, softwood and bananas, which provides them with a sustainable income even if one crop fails, as well as encouraging biodiversity. One lady I met had just inherited some land and had many tree seedlings in small pots in her garden – she explained to me that she is experimenting with different soil types in an attempt to make her plantation as productive as possible. These initiatives are run by a local man called Reynaldo, whose own garden is a real model for others to follow – it is certainly the most productive garden I have ever seen, with a good variety of vegetables growing in covered raised beds, trees for fruit and for shade, grass to feed his animals, and fish, chickens and guinea pigs, bred both for sale and for the pot. All the compost used on the garden is home-produced, and Reynaldo and his wife even cook with gas piped to the stove from the compost heap.



There is a further education Institute in Salvacion teaching courses in Agriculture and Tourism, as well as a school, a hospital and a number of small shops and restaurants, but none of them are currently working to their full potential. With the help of our volunteers our local partners would like to expand the work they do in the community, so I spent a lot of time meeting and talking with local people to identify what their needs are and what kind of support they would like. The

people I met are all really keen to improve their standard of living, but feel frustrated by the difficulties they have to face, including extreme weather conditions and the remoteness of the area. It is clear that there is a lot of potential for us to help here, in the areas of both education and business – the town is on the edge of one of the most important ecological sites in the world, an area often visited by tourists, and there must be scope to help the people here improve their standard of living, as they are so keen to do.

Maybe some of you have the skills and experience to help. Why not give it a try?

NEWS FROM THE PROJECTS from [Dianne - volunteer programme advisor](#)

We hope to include a regular slot in our newsletters giving updates on things that have been happening at the projects where you volunteer.

This time we have news from five countries – Morocco, India, Swaziland, The Gambia and Peru. We hope to be able to include news from the other countries where we volunteer in future newsletters.

If you have news from the project you have worked with that you haven't shared with us - please do - we would love to share it with other volunteers!



MOROCCO



The girls' boarding houses have now been running for seven years, and have enabled 128 girls to attend secondary school. The pass rate for these girls in the last academic year was 93%, well above the national average, showing that they are really making the most of the opportunity to be able to continue their education. Three girls from Dar Asni went on to university this year, making eight so far who have been able to progress to higher education. This initiative to provide the

opportunity for girls from the Berber tribes to continue their education has been so successful that a fifth boarding house is now under construction.

[Learn more about the volunteer programme here.](#)

INDIA

The school at Chitardai has recently been recognised by the government of Rajasthan as a model school - the Principal Secretary for Education in India visited the school in September and reported that he loved the school. The head-teacher reports that the students are continuing to do well, with two students last year going on to college, two working for multi-national companies and four in heritage hotels; they also continue to achieve well in sport, with one girl winning the 400m race in the state championships. One ex-student, Tilok Singh, got top marks last year in the secondary school exams (this will be no surprise to those of us who have volunteered at Chitardai). The school has recently appointed two new members of staff to teach maths and social studies, and a new classroom for class 5 has been constructed. A pump has been installed to pump water to the water tank on the roof, providing safe, filtered water for the children to drink.



[Learn more about the volunteer programme here.](#)

SWAZILAND



Two of the neighbourhood care points have had new playgrounds this year, and at all the care points the classrooms have been painted and new vegetable gardens built. In October a fieldtrip was arranged for children from one of the care points – these children are from very poor families and this was a unique experience for them. Our local partners report 'For many children and teachers this was their first game drive in the heart of the world's best safari country. We were lucky enough to spot giraffes, elephants and rhinos and, the lucky spot of the afternoon, a lion enjoying his feast in the shade of a tree under the savannah sun'.

[Learn more about the volunteer programme here](#)

THE GAMBIA

Lisong's nursery school is now in its second year and is doing well, providing education for 23 children and employing four staff.

ITTOG (the Institute for Travel and Tourism in the Gambia) has just held its seventh graduation ceremony (you may have seen the photos on our Facebook page), and the college continues to promote various initiatives to promote responsible tourism. Fundraising continues to build a purpose-built building for the college.



PERU



The conservation research project in Manu National Park continues to go well – the wildlife spot of last month was a jaguar!

There are exciting plans to expand our volunteering programme in Peru into the nearby community of Salvacion – see my separate report for more details of this.

If you volunteer abroad with people and places you will be part of a plan!

Here at *people and places* we constantly try to raise the bar to ensure volunteering is the best it can be for the projects we work with and you the volunteer.

Our latest initiative is to publish on our site the goals and achievements for our volunteer programmes. Each project on our site has a link to what we call, grandly, the development plan. Dianne has worked closely with the projects to design these - they outline the goals (as set by the projects) of the volunteer programme and how volunteers can and do contribute.

We believe we are the first volunteer organisation to do this - are we wrong?

Here is an example [Schools Support South Africa](#)



Social networks can provide lots of really useful information for potential volunteers

Here are our 5 favourites:

[***outbounding***](#) not just important discussions on volunteer travel -great travel articles and advise too.

[***pearltrees***](#) this is where Sallie stores all the links she finds about volunteer travel

[***better volunteering***](#) a page created by us but lots of great contributions from others

[***@VickySmith***](#) a masters in responsible travel - specialising in volunteer travel but lots of insight into travel generally

[***passenger shaming***](#) its funny and cringe rendering at the same time - we all travel ... are we guilty?



We read lots of blogs during the course of our work - we encourage volunteers to do as much research as they can before they travel.

Here are our top 5 FAVS (*as they say*)

[**Kick Start Ghana**](#) Ruth's posts are an important read for all of us - whatever our age

[**Lessons I learned**](#) Daniela shares her journey - from volunteering to development work - and what she has learnt along the way

[**How matters**](#) written by an international aid worker that has worked with many grass roots organisations -

[**Go Overseas**](#) varied and interesting post on travel and often volunteer travel

[**Globalsl.org**](#) passionate about community-driven development

Do you have favourites that we should add to our list



Volunteer publication is a must read and not just because.....

.....Sallie contributed.

This publication - ***Adventures Less Ordinary: How to Travel and Do Good*** - is due out in January promises to be an important read, drawing on the combined expertise of two dozen leading voices advocating for travel that makes a difference. It's for travelers, volunteers, volunteer sending and receiving organisations and academics. The list of contributors is impressive - people who have a wealth of knowledge about volunteer travel. [Register for a copy on publication here](#)



Here is Sallie's contribution -

While You Act: Make Bullied Communities and Disappointed Volunteers Things of the Past

By Sallie Grayson

While many have celebrated the merging of community service with tourism, others are highly critical and correctly so. Three particular issues need close investigation:

- (1) Where does the money go?
- (2) Do the negative impacts outweigh the positives for local communities?
- (3) How much do the local communities know?

In search of clarity about these issues and more, potential volunteers and fundraising motivators need to ask questions. But they need to be the right questions!

Where Does the Money Go?

Fact: Volunteer programs and charity causes [cost money](#). But working out whether everyone is being rewarded fairly is not easy! Some organizations peddle smoke-and-mirrors volunteer placements and fundraising challenges, explaining in vague terms about how funds received are turned toward project development, but without disclosing the full details. They also make it difficult and uncomfortable for participants to ask pointed questions. Well-intentioned generosity is often informed that money is directed into the community, only to discover that 75% of what gets paid remained with the sending organization.

The most important information to gather is: *WHERE is the money spent?*

Do the Negative Impacts Outweigh the Positives for Local Communities?

For host communities, there are a number of issues that need to be considered in order to minimize negative impacts.

One common occurrence is exploitation by service providers of vulnerable communities eager for assistance. All too often, a project receiving volunteers or financial assistance has little say about the volume or experience of volunteers placed with them, or the quantity and nature of funds raised. Many do not know anything about donations (time or money) until the day it arrives.

For example, a volunteer's skills must be matched to community need. For volunteers, these may be life skills, not professional qualifications, but they should be appropriate. I have serious doubts about projects that require no skill, but only labour. Most countries that attract volunteers have high unemployment rates, so cheap labour is not needed.

The most important question to ask yourself about what a perfect match: *Do I have the skills to do the work?* This is particularly important when considering volunteering in orphanages.

How Much Do the Local Communities Know?

The [Cape Town Declaration](#) states that tourism in general should “actively involve the local community in planning and decision-making, and provide capacity-building to make this a reality.” This approach should also be applied to volunteering and fundraising drives, as the most effective projects originate in the local community, NOT with international organizations!

If programs do not actively involve local communities from the very start, there is little chance that the programs will be meaningful for the communities. Instead it's simply voyeurism – one of the most negative aspects of “poverty tourism” – using poverty to attract tourists and philanthropy, rather than using tourism to fight poverty.

The important questions to ask are:

When volunteering: What will the local projects know about me before I arrive?

Before accepting you, if the organization with which you are coordinating does not want to know about you, your skills, experience or motivations, then seriously reconsider.

When donating: How will my money help?

If the organization is unable to explain exactly where and how your donation will be distributed, what the operating and administration costs are, and what local impact your funds will have, look for another scheme.

Who decides what work I or my money will be doing and how do they decide?

A responsible organization will have consulted with local projects and learned about their goals and needs, as well as how people or financial support can help. They will have documented all needs and review them regularly. These reports will not all be good news – they should be critical assessments, not marketing documents! The best organizations will share such information freely and at all times, including long before travel or wire transfers are required. They will be able to demonstrate regular updates to that information.

If no such documentation is available, it is likely that no such process has been undertaken.

Always remember that despite the potential negative impacts, a carefully placed financial contribution or well-prepared, screened, skilled volunteer can make a positive impact. Well-run efforts can absolutely develop a level of social interaction and understanding that is profound. The whole process can give a real face to poverty and vulnerability, and shift consciousness toward the understanding of a shared humanity. It can and does lead to an understanding of our interconnectedness as people.



our local partner in The Gambia talks about why he works with our volunteer programme

Watch a very short video (less than a minute!) - where our local partner Adama Bah talks about why he chose to work with us on the volunteer programme. Click the image to watch



our local partner in South Africa talks about why he chose to work with our volunteer programme

Watch a very short video (just one minute) from Paul Miedema - our local partner in Port Elizabeth South Africa - click on the image to watch

If you haven't already spotted our YouTube channel it's worth a look. There are video interviews from volunteers and if you have videos of your time volunteering or one of the talks you have done - we know many of you talk to groups on your return from volunteering - please send them to us so we can share them.

click the logo



meet the *people and places* team [here](#)



[Take a look here at slideshare for slide shows from volunteers](#) – if you have a slide show to share please do send it to us, thanks so much to all the volunteers who have contributed to date.

Remember we are on facebook too - [follow us here](#) – in the blog and on facebook are where we tend to post our latest news.

If you like beautiful pictures and funny visuals we are also on [pinterest – follow us here](#)

and finally we are tweeting too – [follow us here](#)

phew – so there's lots of info out there from us – please follow us where ever you choose. Remember if you want notifications when a new story is posted on the blog you will need