



Chapter 9

Volunteer Tourism and International Contexts

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This chapter examines the growing trend of volunteer tourism, where individuals travel to volunteer outside their home destination. Volunteer tourism can be described as international volunteering and this chapter examines differences between these two concepts. This chapter reviews the motivation of volunteer tourists, the organisation and impact of their activities and critiques this phenomenon.

Introduction



Volunteer tourism is a term used to describe volunteering that involves travel. It is also known as voluntourism, trans-national, cross-national or international volunteering although volunteer tourism can just involve domestic travel. The term volunteer tourism will be used in this chapter as it has been widely adopted by tourism researchers but readers should be aware that this is a contentious term, which many volunteers and non-profit organisations consider as trivialising the activity (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Various commentators identify volunteer tourism as a key volunteering trend for the 21st century (for example, Davis Smith et al, 2005; Merrill, 2006). Travelling to volunteer is not a new phenomenon and there is a long history of international volunteering through organisations such as the Peace Corps, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and United Nations Volunteers. There has, however, been an unprecedented expansion of international volunteering in recent years (Rochester, 2006; Sherraden et al, 2006). The publication of a Lonely Planet travel guide to volunteering in 2007, now in its third edition, confirms the continued growth in travellers wanting to volunteer – or volunteers wanting to travel.



Academic interest in this topic has also exploded in recent years. One of the first academic publications on volunteer tourism was Stephen Wearing's 2001 book *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences That Make a Difference*, and many researchers adopt Wearing's definition of volunteer tourists:



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