

11 WAYS TO SEE THE WORLD AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

JUNE 2016: After what may feel like a lifetime of studying and revising for exams, many new graduates are keen to take a well-earned break before setting foot on the career ladder or embarking on a quest to acquire more skills and qualifications. Travelling overseas on a volunteer project provides a great opportunity to be more than just a tourist. There's a real chance to do good for others who are less fortunate, to help break the cycle of poverty through education, to re-build shattered communities, conserve endangered animals and protect corners of our planet that were previously being abused.

According to gap year expert, BUNAC, participants on its volunteer projects abroad are making a real difference in countries throughout the world, helping local communities and having a positive impact on the lives of the underprivileged and the environment in which they live, while creating a lasting legacy for generations to come.

Projects range from volunteer teaching and sports coaching, to wildlife and marine conservation, to re-building, renovating and restoring basic facilities and infrastructure following a major disaster, such as an earthquake.

The projects are both rewarding and humbling in equal measure. They add an extra dimension to your CV, give you a fresh perspective on life and take you to far-reaching corners of the world, often to remote locations, where you'll meet fascinating people from different cultures and backgrounds.

Here is just a selection of the many schemes available, and what's being achieved . . .

WILDLIFE AND CONSERVATION

1. VOLUNTEER KRUGER NATIONAL PARK: Camera trapping work carried out by volunteers in the Kruger National Park, which showed a potential decline in leopard numbers, resulted in the South African Department of Environmental Affairs placing a freeze on leopard hunting permits in the Limpopo province. Volunteer efforts have contributed directly to **saving at least 150 leopards** in South Africa this year alone!

2. VOLUNTEER AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND: With environmental projects in every Australian state, plus two locations in New Zealand, there is a wide variety of choice Down Under for volunteer conservationists. In the past 12 months, volunteers have planted **399,905 trees**, completed **1,720 environmental surveys**, cleared **5,974,967 m² of weeds**, built **164,834 m of tracks and trails** and completed **39,444 days' work** to maintain and improve the antipodean landscape.

3. MEXICO MARINE CONSERVATION: Volunteers are helping to conserve the Meso-American Barrier Reef by monitoring and collecting data on marine species and the reef and raising environmental awareness amongst fishermen and other locals. During the first three months of 2015, **21 coral dives** were undertaken and a total of **420 corals** were monitored in 14 hours of diving. The data collected as part of the "CoralWatch" project has contributed to over **40 scientific papers** and articles worldwide. The regular presence of volunteers on

the beach also helps to protect the local population of endangered nesting turtles by keeping poachers at bay.

4. VOLUNTEER THAILAND COASTAL CONSERVATION: Volunteers are helping to protect green turtles at the Sea Turtle Conservation Centre at Phang Nga naval base, where they assist with feeding, cleaning, treating minor infections, maintaining turtle enclosures and collecting natural seaweed to supplement their diet. In the Thai Muang and Similian National Parks, around **100 refuse bags of rubbish** have been collected from forest trails and beaches. **46 species** have been identified on the Similian islands, so the project can provide the national park with a species guide. Weekly forest visits to the Tonprai and Lampi waterfalls have uncovered a total of **266 species** in the project's first year alone, and resulted in rangers apprehending poachers for killing a binturong (a primitive nocturnal animal).

5. VOLUNTEER SEYCHELLES MARINE CONSERVATION: Over the past decade, volunteers have worked directly with the Seychelles National Park Authority to collect data on marine species as well as the state of the health of various reefs. Marine volunteers also work closely with the local community to deliver conservation workshops designed to educate children and adults on the importance of conserving their natural heritage.

MULTI-PROJECT VOLUNTEERING

6. VOLUNTEER CAMBODIA: For the past seven years, volunteers have helped local children to receive daily schooling. Not only have they taught **English, art and computer classes to thousands of underprivileged children**, they have also built **hundreds of wells** for families who previously had no access to clean drinking water.

7. VOLUNTEER COSTA RICA: Volunteers are playing a part in helping to conserve two endangered species: the elusive jaguar and their prey - nesting green, leatherback and hawksbill sea turtles. Working together with Tortuguero National Park, they recorded more than **800 species** in 2015, **300 of which are on the IUCN's threatened list**. Globally, volunteers have helped support the management and conservation of **over 3 million hectares of protected areas**.

8. VOLUNTEER NEPAL: Since the 2015 Nepal Earthquake, BUNAC volunteers have been instrumental in providing on-the-ground support in Pokhara, including helping to rebuild **schools**, provide **disaster aid relief packs**, replace **school books and stationery**. This year alone, the project has funded the **construction of an animal shelter**, provided **daily meals to street children** and paid for **new pairs of shoes** for school children.

TEACHING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

9. SPORTS COACHING SOUTH AFRICA: Over the past three years dozens of self-motivated, adventurous volunteers who enjoy playing or coaching sports, have worked in the challenging environment of Nelson Mandela Bay primary schools, helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds with sports and life skills. More than **37,000 children** from **107 schools** have completed an **18-hour curriculum**, resulting in **89%** reporting that they felt **more positive about life**, and **93% performing better in fitness tests** after three months. In addition, **9,011 children completed a special HIV and AIDS awareness curriculum** and went on to score an average of **96% in HIV and AIDS general knowledge tests**, representing an **improvement in knowledge and attitudes of 31%**.

10. VOLUNTEER THAILAND TEACHING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: Projects involve healthcare volunteers working with children and adults who have learning and physical disabilities to help enhance their emotional, social, psychological and physical wellbeing. To help children to express themselves, volunteers created a **visual communication book, communications board and emotions board**. Volunteers also took part in a charity bike ride which raised over 13,000 Thai Baht (around £250) for the Camillian Social Centre. The project also offers **free English classes** with the aim of helping residents to find employment in the tourism industry. Popular with all age groups, the classes have been crucial in allowing locals to get better employment and begin to move out of the poverty trap.

11. VOLUNTEER INDIA: This educational enhancement project for local communities in the Himalayas, Goa and Jaipur has enabled international volunteers to support government schools and assist with teaching English and maths, games and sports activities to young children. The input of international volunteers has had a positive impact on over **1,300 children**, plus at least **5,500 family members** and local project staff.

This is just a taster of the volunteer programmes offered by BUNAC. There are opportunities currently available to work in the areas of wildlife, conservation, construction, teaching, healthcare, community development and sports coaching.

For those who are keen to travel and earn money along the way, BUNAC also offers working holiday programmes in Australia and New Zealand, including one-to-one job-finding support, help with securing long-term accommodation, social events and optional group flights with a Hong Kong stopover.

For further information, visit <http://www.bunac.org/uk/volunteer-abroad> or telephone 033 3999 7516.

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