

The Understanding of Volunteer Tourism

K.I. Arbuzova

Language advisor: E.A. Leksina, senior teacher

Abstract: The article considers the notion of volunteer tourism. The author identifies the main meaning of the term, considers the main problems of volunteer tourism and identifies relevant of volunteer tourism.

Keywords: volunteering, volunteer tourism, tourism

An increasingly popular form of tourism is volunteer tourism, estimated to attract 1.6 million volunteer tourists a year with a value between £832 million and £1.3 billion per year. Volunteer tourism, also known as volunTourism or volunteering for development, working alongside community and environmental goals.

Volunteering for development has emerged especially in a response to growing social and environmental issues in developing countries and also as a response to disasters like September 11 and the 2006 Boxing Day tsunami that affected much of South East Asia. As well as humanitarian projects, volunteer organizations design several other types of projects with the intention of serving communities in need. These include but not limited education, business development, environmental regeneration, protection and research, building projects and cultural development. (Callanan, M. and Thomas, S., 2005)

Volunteer tourists have been defined as those who “volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment”. (Wearing, S.L. , 2001)

The volunteer tourist is motivated to volunteer for several reasons. Some of these reasons are altruistic, while others are egoistic. Some researchers developed a frame around volunteer tourist types. They presented three types which differ based on six main criteria: destination, duration of project, focus of experience (altruistic or self-interest), qualifications, participation and level of contribution to locals. The three tourist types are surface, intermediate and deep volunteer tourists. Those at the ‘deep’ end tend to think less about their own personal interest and more about the community, while surface volunteers are interested in self-development and career-enhancement. (Brown, S. and Lehto, X., 2005) Therefore the experience does not need to be necessarily a meaningful one for deep volunteer tourists, but the type of project is highly important.

Many volunteer tourism organizations advertise to potential volunteers the benefits that will be gained by undertaking the experiences they have to offer. These experiences can provide intrinsic and/or extrinsic benefits to the individual. Typically volunteer tourists are not motivated by the extrinsic external rewards in the same way that mainstream tourists might be. Volunteer tourism organizations have realized the value of intrinsic benefits and promote these to attract new volunteers. Below is an example taken from Cactus Volunteers Abroad (2010) which promotes the following benefits to potential volunteer tourists:

- it opens the door to many new and exciting opportunities abroad
- it gives you the chance to help people and communities that really need it
- it gives you a privilege not afforded to the average traveler - the chance to experience local life first-hand
- it provides you with a real sense of personal achievement
- it will broaden your horizons and give you a new perspectives on life

- it will improve your foreign language skills

Although the above studies have provided evidence for an intrinsically motivated volunteer tourist, there are still several researchers, as well as those in the media, who debate whether these motivations are altruistic or egoistic. That is: Is the activity performed to serve the purpose of the community/organization or the individual?

The act of volunteering in developing countries attracts a predominantly young Western traveler. Many of these young travelers are on a quest for self-discovery and are at a time in their life of great discovery and change. (Lepp, A., 2008) Some scientists followed the experiences of gap-year travelers who were in a period of transition between school and tertiary education or work. Although their motives appear to be very self-serving, researchers in the developmental sciences have found that youth are now much more open to diverse cultural beliefs and are more likely to change their values and beliefs. As very impressionable people, they are likely to make well-informed decisions on a path to cultural identity formation which needs to be taken into consideration by the NGOs that target these volunteers. It is not only the people that move but their cultural values and practices also cross spatial boundaries.

It has been found in numerous other studies on tourism motivation, that a niche market, like the volunteer tourist market, is not homogenous. Generally there are overlapping motivations which can change over a given period of time and place. However, there is a distinct difference between the tourism experience and the volunteer tourism experience. The nature of the volunteer tourism experience is such that the volunteers work in collaboration with the community, usually in developing countries, to achieve development goals. In fact it is often argued that the nature of the volunteer tourism experience is such that the interaction between host and guest is more profound than in other forms of tourism. (Zahra, A. and McIntosh, A.J., 2007) These volunteers need to be distinguished from volunTourists who are ‘vacation-minded’ rather than ‘volunteer-minded’, where the volunteering component is often only a small portion of the whole trip. Volunteer tourists instead volunteer for the entire length of the trip.

We can note that “volunteer tourists are ‘new tourists’ in search of an experience which is beyond that offered by mass tourism”. The experiences in volunteer tourism are seen to be more meaningful between the players of different cultural backgrounds. Therefore volunteer tourism is aligned with a wider range of values and behaviors than mainstream tourism. It has degrees of altruism and conservation of community benefits and development and generally attempts to act positively for both the environment and the host community. This makes the host communities that participate in volunteer tourism and their input and interaction an even more essential part of volunteer tourism than for usual mass tourism.

References

1. I to I Volunteering [Интернет- портал] / Режим доступа: <http://www.i-to-i.com/about-volunteer-travel/>, свободный.— Яз. англ.
2. VolunTourism [Интернет- портал] / Режим доступа: <http://www.voluntourism.org/>, свободный.— Яз. англ.
3. Callanan, M. and Thomas, S. (2005), “Volunteer tourism: Deconstructing volunteer activities within a dynamic environment”, *Niche Tourism: Contemporary Issues, Trends and Cases*, Amsterdam, pp. 183-200.
4. Brown, S. and Lehto, X. (2005), “Travelling with a purpose: Understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers”, *Current Issues in Tourism*, no. 6, pp. 479–496
5. Lepp, A. (2008), “Discovering self and discovering others through the Taita Discovery Centre Volunteer Tourism Programme, Kenya”, Wallingford, UK: CABI, pp. 86-100

6. Wearing, S.L. (2001), *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences that Make a Difference*, New York, CABI Publishing.
7. Zahra, A. and McIntosh, A.J. (2007), “Volunteer tourism: Evidence of cathartic tourist experiences”, *Tourism Recreation Research*, no. 1, pp. 115-119.)

Arbuzova Ksenia Igorevna – Student at the Institute of Social and Humanitarian Technologies of TPU.

E-mail: ksenia.arbuzova@gmail.com