

# GIVING ON THE GO

THIS ISSUE, WE HEAR FROM AARON W. SMITH, FOUNDER OF GOVOLUNTOURING AND HOLIDAYS FOR HUMANITY, TWO ORGANIZATIONS THAT ALLOW CONSUMERS TO PLAN MEANINGFUL VACATIONS, WHETHER IT BE VOLUNTEERING THEIR SERVICES IN ANOTHER COUNTRY OR CHOOSING ECO-FRIENDLY ACCOMMODATIONS.

BY TARA NOLAN



In 2009, Aaron W. Smith travelled to Costa Rica to volunteer with his father, Arthur. They were part of a project consisting of six other travellers who helped build a new concrete home for a single mother. It was during his search for this type of international volunteer program that the seed for GoVoluntouring was firmly planted. Canada has a terrific history of philanthropy and compassion, and there are many short- and long-term opportunities to support on an individual basis, explains Smith, but finding them was a very fragmented process. “I saw a need to help people find the right programs, based on their skills, interests and needs, and to help deliver better-matching candidates to project destinations around the world.”

GoVoluntouring ([govoluntouring.com](http://govoluntouring.com)) is a comprehensive site that gathers all those short- and long-term opportunities and helps to match them with compassionate travellers who want to volunteer somewhere during their vacation. Extensive filters are utilized to present relevant programs based on destination, duration, cost, age and skill, among other factors. In fact, it is likely this in-depth level of personalization that helped the site be named one of the top five travel tools in *Outside* magazine’s Travel Awards in 2012.

One of the bonuses of GoVoluntouring is that volunteers-to-be needn’t take a lengthy sabbatical. Even a one- or two-week vacation can be spent volunteering. Smith says the most popular choices are wildlife conservation programs, and construction/community development programs, such as installing solar panels at an off-grid community, or building a school, library, or transitional home.



Fees to volunteer while on vacation vary widely depending on the opportunity. If you need meals, accommodation, local transport and training, Smith says you could be paying anywhere from \$60 to \$125 per day. A fundraising tool on the site provides a modern way to subsidize a trip via crowdfunding.

Now that GoVolountouring has been around for a few years, Smith says sourcing opportunities is no longer a problem. "Finding long-standing, thorough programs that have a well-designed system that balances their operational legacy with the ability to manage travellers is a bit more work," he says. The company does try to vet as many opportunities in-destination as possible before offering them to the public. However, Smith says anything else is up to the participant to decide if the program is right for their values, needs and interests. "We provide personalized choice and opportunity, and a great place to start."

Smith also founded Holidays for Humanity ([holidaysforhumanity.com](http://holidaysforhumanity.com)), a site designed to provide better "mainstream" travel options. Smith says Holidays for Humanity is about wellness, cultural conservation, low-impact tours, eco-resorts and a little voluntourism, too.



**THE TOP FIVE MOST POPULAR VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY GOVOLUNTOURING ACCORDING TO SMITH ARE:**

1. Helping sea turtles in Central America
2. Elephant conservation in Thailand
3. Building orphanages and youth centres in Guatemala
4. Dolphin conservation and research in Greece, Croatia and Costa Rica
5. Art restoration in Italy

*When you're choosing your volunteer opportunity, keep in mind some destinations that are harder to access don't get as much benevolent attention.*

*"There are some terrific options in Malaysia and the Philippines that are terrific in design – and in destination – and include a trafficked animal rescue centre and rebuilding a library after the tsunami," says Smith.*

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