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Arnhem Land Marine Rescue Community Project participants following a day of collecting marine debris and fishing nets from the Northeast Arnhem Land coastline (this image may contain Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island people who are deceased).

# COMMUNITY PROJECT TRAVEL

A unique and positive blend of volunteering and travel.

BY DONNA LAWRENCE



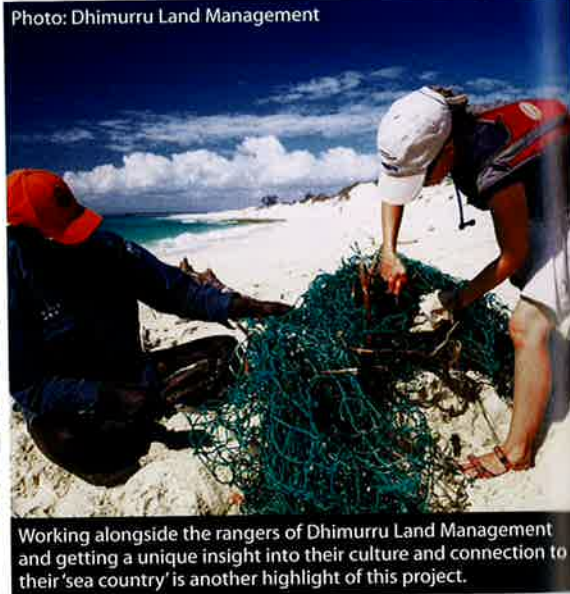
TRAVEL

Photo: Stephen Trudgeon



The participants' physical efforts are rewarded with pure satisfaction as they watch huge fishing nets being taken away by 4WD from the beach ... another turtle's life saved!

Photo: Dhimurru Land Management



Working alongside the rangers of Dhimurru Land Management and getting a unique insight into their culture and connection to their 'sea country' is another highlight of this project.

The concept of combining travel with service isn't new. In fact the blending of leisure and service has taken many forms throughout the decades, from experts in their fields like medical and engineering specialists offering their services in developing nations; to young adults assisting on conservation projects around the globe during their gap year. Today, this travel/service concept is commonly referred to as "voluntourism" and it's gaining momentum at a considerable rate.

Based in Australia, World Expeditions (WE) has been arranging adventure travel for decades and has seen a surge in interest in voluntourism-type of holidays in recent years. Following the devastating Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004, World Expeditions' travelers urged the company to respond in a more tangible way than pledging money. The reality is that during a natural disaster, well-meaning travel companies often only get in the way of the work being done by the NGOs. And so, in response to the 2004 tsunami, WE thought the best help it could offer

was financial assistance. However, a year later, with this traveler sentiment and goodwill in mind, the company set about developing its first range of not-for-profit Community Project Travel trips.

**HOW IT WORKS**

The concept is simple, ground-up and allows for great impact. WE's local operators in countries like Australia, India, Nepal, Tanzania, Kenya, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Peru identify villages that are underprivileged, often receiving very little Government funding. The company's local operator then approaches the leaders of the village and in a consultative process determines a project that the village needs and that with which WE assists and completes over the course of three to four days. WE develops an itinerary around the project so that travelers can also experience some of the highlights of the country.

Up to 16 travelers can sign up for the experience and approximately 20 percent of each person's

participation fee goes towards the costs of the project (such as the purchase of materials, wages of local project manager and transport of the materials into the village, which is often in a remote location). When participants arrive at the village, the materials required for the project are on-site, WE's local project manager is prepared to start work and, more importantly, local community members are ready to work alongside them to see the project completed. No particular skill set is required to join these projects. Participants just need to bring a willingness to join a team of like-minded people to complete three to four days of physical work.

**COMPLETED PROJECTS**

Since its inception in 2005, WE's Community Project Travel program has completed 37 humanitarian and conservation projects across many countries, including 11 in Nepal, 10 in Australia, five in Peru, three each in both Vietnam and Tanzania, two in India, and one each in Kenya, Cambodia and Laos. The completion of these projects was

Photo: Pam Drummond



Over a period of 12 months, a number of groups of Community Project Travel participants have contributed to the complete renovation of the Sanjiwani Public Health Clinic in Nepal.

Photo: Vicki Potts



One of the tasks included in the renovation of the Magara School in Tanzania was building new desks for the students, which resulted in the school being able to take on more students.

Photo: Pam Drummond



A group of participants stop work momentarily at the Sanjiwani Public Health Clinic to take a group photo.

made possible by the combined effort of over 450 travelers from across the globe.

Below are examples of two of the projects and how they are having an ongoing positive impact on the cultural, social and environmental aspects of the host communities:

**• Nepal: Sanjiwani Public Health Mission Project**

The Sanjiwani Public Health Mission, located near the Hindu village of Ghandruk in the Annapurna region of Nepal, offers free medical services to approximately 5,000 villagers. The mission employs a doctor, a nurse and a lab assistant to conduct blood testing and pathology. Since 2011, WE's Community Project Travel program has undertaken three projects at the Health Mission to improve the facilities in which the medical service operates. The original clinic was in disrepair. The Mission moved its clinic to an

existing smaller building that was in need of an extension and upgrade.

In October 2011, the first group of WE's travelers began work at the clinic, helping to build a second level on the existing building. The next group arrived in April 2012 to help build the windows and doors, as well as paint each of the rooms and upgrade the furniture and fixtures. In the meantime, the Ghandruk community constructed a roof. Another group is due to arrive in November 2012 to help build the compound wall, the toilet and bathroom, and connect the water supply to the clinic. The new building will allow the Health Mission to extend the range of services it offers to include dental, X-ray, maternity and ultrasound, and eye-testing.

**• Australia: Arnhem Land Marine Rescue Project**

Since 2005, WE's Community Project Travel program has been involved

in eight marine rescue projects in North East Arnhem Land. This beautiful coastline is under the custodianship of its traditional owners, the Yolngu Aboriginal people and while it is virtually free from development, this coastline faces a real environmental threat from marine debris. Discarded fishing nets, rubber footwear, empty bottles and plastic bags are all carried in by the ocean currents from Asia, killing local wildlife; animals choke on plastic rubbish or are snared in discarded fishing nets. Alongside the local Yolngu Aboriginal rangers of Dhimurru and Laynhapuy Land Management, WE's groups of travelers have traversed the coast on foot and by 4WD to collect, catalog and dispose of this rubbish as well as scout for turtles and other marine wildlife entangled in nets, freeing the animals where possible.

Importantly, once the nets are removed from the beach they are cataloged and recorded



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(position, size and weight) to gather information about where the nets come from, their number and type, and how much marine life are found trapped. Collecting this information is important for developing approaches to stop the 'ghost' nets at their source.

Coastal Aboriginal people have been connected to the sea country for many thousands of years and it remains an intimate part of their everyday existence today. This project enables the local Aboriginal communities to continue to fulfill their aspirations to care for their sea country by building their skills and knowledge to become indigenous rangers. The next group of WE's travelers are scheduled to arrive in Arnhem Land in September 2012.

### THE TOTAL IMPACT

Aside from the permanent benefits

the community derives from the project, there are many other positive outcomes that result from these experiences. Travelers have a unique and intimate insight into the lives of the host community, working alongside them on a common goal. Members of the host community are employed on the project, injecting money into the local economy. Also, there is a transference of skills across the two parties, not to mention the unforgettable moments of cultural exchange.

Many of WE's travelers share that the experience is 'life-changing'. Said Vicki Potts of Sydney, Australia, who helped with the Magara Secondary School upgrade in Tanzania in 2010, "... 20 wonderfully diverse people sharing a unique experience but with a common purpose – to help out in a very small but direct way, to do something practical ... we gained

much more than we gave."

Added another voluntourist, L Southerden of Sydney, Australia, who participated in the Arnhem Land Marine Rescue Project in 2007: "It was such a great trip. Really rewarding to clean up the beautiful beaches up there – we found lots of ghost nets, which made us all feel glad to be there so we could get rid of them ... and to hang out with the Dhimurru rangers and learn a bit about Yolngu culture." 🇺🇸

Donna Lawrence is the responsible travel manager for World Expeditions.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

World Expeditions – [www.worldexpeditions.com](http://www.worldexpeditions.com)

## 2012/13 projects

Photo: Ian Williams



The Masai community at Kakoi village will welcome WE's group of participants when they arrive in November 2012.

### 1) TANZANIA: Kakoi Medical Centre Water Pipeline Project Departs: Arusha ~ November 26, 2012

Located near the Tarangire National Park is the Masai village of Kakoi, which is home to approximately 2,500 people scattered on small plots over an area of a few kilometers. Because of the drought, there is a serious shortage of clean water. The community health center was constructed by Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA) in 2004, but needs more facilities like running water and electricity to make it an effective facility.

Osupuko Lodge has a pump with adequate clean water and it is prepared to pump water to the medical center for free for two hours each day (20,000 litres). In conjunction with the Osupuko Lodge, WE's group of travelers will assist the village in laying 6km of water pipeline from the lodge to the health center. This will be the first step in connecting the larger village to clean water, leading to improved health for its residents. Once the project is complete, it's time to spot some wildlife in the Serengeti National Park and Ngorongoro Crater.

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Photo: Samantha Chen



The community in the remote village of Qelqanqa enthusiastically work alongside WE participants – even the youngest members like to oversee the work!

From 2006 to 2008, WE's community project travelers helped to construct a drinking water system, including a water reservoir that connected the majority of houses in the village to fresh drinking water. Also during this time, WE's Community Project Travel participants helped to construct three footbridges that allow schoolchildren to cross the swollen rivers in safety. In 2012, WE's travelers will return to Qelqanqa to connect the remaining houses to the water system and to do some maintenance work on the footbridges. Following this project work, travelers will set off to explore the remarkable 'lost city' of Machu Picchu.

### 2) PERU: Qelqanqa Water and Footbridges Project

Departs: Lima: ~ October 5, 2012

The Urubamba mountain range stands spectacularly between the great Urubamba River and the vast rainforests to the north of Cuzco. This region is famous for its Inca history and stunning artisan weavings. Beautiful hanging valleys and small patches of polylepis woodland create a magical backdrop for traditional Quechua mountain villages. One of the most remote villages is Qelqanqa, set at the bottom of a glaciated valley, surrounded by steep hills and icy rivers.



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