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& shortcuts
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SPECIAL SECTION!
 101 WAYS TO PARTY ALL HOLIDAY LONG

take a volunteer vacation

Forget what you've heard. **The new breed of do-good trips** are rewarding and affordable—and some even involve white-sand beaches.

BY DAVID LAHUTA

MYTH All work and no play!

BUSTED

Most weeklong trips include one to two entire days off. On service trips with Habitat for Humanity (*habitat.org*), participants have used their free time to visit Buddhist temples in Thailand, trek across the Milford Track in New Zealand and canoe in Alaska. Consider arriving a few days early or sticking around once the project is complete.



MYTH Service trips are for hippies and college students.

BUSTED

Everyone's getting in on the action. On a recent trip run by the American Hiking Society (AHS) to restore trails near Knoxville, Tennessee, volunteers included a young married couple, an EMT in his early 30s, a middle school principal in his 40s and a retiree in his 70s. Kids can pitch in, too: AHS offers family-friendly projects, like restoring trails in Arizona's Saguaro National Park, open to children 12 and older.

MYTH I'll be eating baked beans from a can every night.

BUSTED

Meals are healthy, tasty and often locally sourced, with fresh fruits and vegetables from neighborhood farms, fish caught in nearby streams and meat from regional ranches. If traveling internationally, expect to eat as the locals do (read: curries in India, gumbo in New Orleans). If you've got dietary restrictions, let your tour operator know. Most requests will be honored if made in advance.

MYTH Volunteers need lots of experience.

BUSTED

Prior experience is usually not required, though you should assess your physical ability before signing up. Read task descriptions carefully, call the organization and ask questions, and then decide whether you can do the work. That being said, **there are many levels of participation,** and no one's going to put a chain saw in your hands if you're not prepared to use it.

MYTH I'll pay an arm and a leg to work all week.

BUSTED

Remember that your contribution covers the food, lodging and local transportation. If you're still concerned, volunteer at nonprofit 501(c)3 organizations, which offer partially tax-deductible programs, like those from the AHS or Common Ground Relief in New Orleans (*commongroundrelief.org*). And purchase flights on flyforgood.com, a booking engine that offers discounts to volunteers.

MYTH A few days won't make a difference.

BUSTED

If you're short on time, contact your local trail club for **single-day volunteering**—like repairing hiking trails in the Appalachian Mountains with the Atlanta-based Benton MacKaye Trail Association (*bmta.org*)—or try short trips run by the Sierra Club. In one weekend, volunteers removed beach grass that was choking native species in California's Point Reyes National Seashore and dunes.

MYTH I'll sleep on a cot or, worse, the ground.

BUSTED

Most accommodations are in local homes, dormitories or campgrounds, but not all trips are created equal. Expeditions from Earthwatch Institute (*earthwatch.org*)—which specializes in environmental issues—sometimes stay in comfortable hotels or apartments. During an excavation of an 11th-century Italian castle, volunteers were housed in a country hotel with a backyard pool under the Tuscan sun.

now sign up!

But first, **find the trip** that's right for you.



IF YOU WANT TO...	HELP SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT	PITCH IN AT A LOCAL FARM	BLAZE A TRAIL	OPERATE A LIGHTHOUSE
CHECK OUT	SIERRA CLUB IN BOCA GRANDE, FLORIDA	WORLDWIDE OPPORTUNITIES ON ORGANIC FARMS-USA	AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY IN ST. JOHN, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS	UNITED STATES LIGHTHOUSE SOCIETY IN LAKE HURON, MICHIGAN
WHAT YOU'LL DO	Protect the ecosystem of Cayo Costa State Park by volunteering with the Sierra Club, one of the country's oldest grassroots environmental organizations. With the help of state park rangers (and a machete) you'll hack and dig up invasive weeds that threaten the growth of the barrier island's native plants. The eight-day trip begins in April and includes two free days, which you can spend hunting for shells along Cayo Costa's white-sand beaches. You'll sleep soundly in your beachfront cabin knowing you've lent a hand.	Sign up with this nonprofit and you'll be given access to more than 1,200 organic farms, all of which offer free room and board in exchange for part-time volunteer help. In California, try Lake County's Little Dipper Farms, a 20-acre goat ranch where you'll feed chickens, bail hay and, of course, milk goats. Another (more spirited) option is Northern California's Maboroshi Wine Estates, a 12-acre pinot noir vineyard where you'll care for the vines during a three- to seven-day trip. <i>To learn more about farming abroad, turn to page 156.</i>	The AHS, which protects and restores hiking trails, offers hundreds of trips annually. This December, team up with the Virgin Islands National Park Service to help improve its footpaths. You'll clear overgrown plants, plus reverse water damage from this past rainy season by digging ditches along the trail and filling them with gravel. It sounds backbreaking, but workdays only last five hours, leaving you plenty of time to enjoy Cinnamon Bay, a crescent beach and campground where you'll pitch a tent within earshot of the surf.	Thanks to nonprofit organizations like the United States Lighthouse Society, lighthouses across the country are being restored to their original glory. Now they just need someone to care for them. As a short-term lighthouse keeper, you'll bunk inside a piece of maritime history. At Lake Huron's DeTour Reef Lighthouse, a recently restored beacon from the 1930s, you'll keep a log, help with tours and climb a 20-foot ladder to the top—where you'll see stunning sunrises each morning and sweeping sunsets each night.
COST	\$535 A WEEK*	\$20 MEMBERSHIP FEE	\$245 A WEEK	\$200 FOR A WEEKEND
FOR MORE INFO	<i>sierraclub.org</i> 415-977-5522	<i>woofusa.org</i> 831-425-3276	<i>americanhiking.org</i> 800-972-8608	<i>uslhs.org</i> 415-362-7255

*Usually includes accommodations, food and local transportation; never includes airfare.

no time? no problem

Help save the world by patronizing these **charitable Web sites**.

tenthousandvillages.com

Made in Vietnam by Craft Link, a nonprofit that generates income for street children, this ceramic lotus flower bowl (\$48) is great for serving pasta. To make this hot mat (\$14), the Women's Multipurpose Cooperative in the Philippines coils recycled newspaper around broom bristles.



worldofgood.com

These filigreed earrings (\$25) are handmade at Noah's Ark, an organization in India that works to free children from poverty. This cotton tote (\$35) is made in Coimbatore, India, at Shiva Shakthi Trust, which teaches women tailoring and embroidery so they can safely earn a fair wage.

