

howto...



gro

Celebrate
firecrack
top to
bles a s
flowers
and are
10 feet
stay bu

Tip:
fence, s
To o
four for
the cou

plan a volunteer vacation

Busy schedules leave little time for volunteer work. Thankfully, you can cram a year's worth of help into a volunteer vacation. The options vary from a weekend spent working at a local animal shelter to a week of helping to plant gardens in villages thousands of miles away. In general, you're responsible for your own airfare and are charged a low price for lodging and food.

To make your own volunteer experience a positive one, follow this advice from Amy Bannon, outgoing placement officer for Volunteers For Peace, a nonprofit organization that places volunteers in work camps in more than 80 different countries.

It's important to have realistic expectations. Volunteers For Peace guests spend about 30 hours each week working, which doesn't leave much time for sightseeing. Also, since time schedules, living arrangements and food can be very different in a volunteer setting, prepare to be flexible. "You don't want to travel all that way, get to the location and be disappointed," says Bannon.

Plan for the worst. Many volunteer trips, especially those in developing nations, are no-frills at best, with limited access to bathrooms and medical treatment. Make sure you're up-to-date on any vaccinations and bring extras of any daily medications you take. Travel insurance is also advisable.

Ask for references. Any reputable volunteer organization or travel agent will have a list of past volunteers. Take the time to make a few calls. Most importantly, ask these folks if they enjoyed their time away and if they'd do it again.

Karen J. Bannon