



Community service? Are you telling me to go for a vacation that isn't a vacation, but just a tough job helping other people? I worked hard to earn my sunset years. So, I'm entitled to bask at the shore, toss dice in Vegas, sip vino in Tuscany or dine at an outdoor Paris cafe.

If that's your attitude, please reconsider. A volunteer vacation allows you to do something as satisfying as a fun trip. At the same time you'll experience the great satisfaction of knowing you're doing something to help others.

Remember what John F. Kennedy said many years ago, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country". If you truly believe in that theme, would it be so bad to use some of your vacation time, labor and skills where they're needed? In some cases, desperately needed? Throughout the world, there are community service projects you may find appealing and challenging. They include repairing homes in poverty areas, disaster clean-up, archaeology digs, teaching, medical aid, ecology and protecting endangered species. There are hundreds of places where your enthusiasm and skills make it worth spending free time helping others.

In some programs, transportation and living expenses are provided; in others, volunteers pay a token fee or full charges. While most projects accept both young and senior volunteers, some are geared specifically to the physical capabilities of participating volunteers.

For instance, some senior volunteers wouldn't be comfortable climbing and hammering on Habitat for Humanity home-rebuilding projects. However, they'd be physically able to contribute their experience and wisdom while escorting a class of inner-city preschoolers to the city zoo.

How do you sign up for volunteer vacations? Check the many sites on the internet, and find out if your church, synagogue or professional organization is planning a project that fits in with your schedule.

Contact local branches of community agencies, such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army,

and investigate their ongoing projects geared for senior vacationer time slots. Government agencies, such as the Department of the Interior, Army Corps of Engineers and individual national and state parks welcome volunteers for summer terms of service in some of the most beautiful areas of the country.

Many private, non-profit organizations offer volunteer vacations that range from just a few days on a specific task, to weeks and months on long-term projects. An example is Earthwatch Institute, 3 Clock Tower Place, P.O. Box 75, Maynard, MA 01754-0075; (800) 776-0081, www.earthwatch.org

This worldwide volunteer enterprise has more than 100 projects in 18 states and 44 countries. Some activities include archaeological digs, improving health, preserving rare animal habitats and protecting oceans from pollution.

Another is Global Volunteers, 375 E. Little Canada Road, St. Paul, MN 55117-1628; (800) 487-1074, www.globalvolunteers.org. This non-profit organization also offers more than 100 programs throughout the world, involving volunteer service at schools in poverty areas, as well as help in medical and social services where it is poor or non-existent.

Whatever the choice in making that next vacation a volunteer one, you're sure to return home with pride and satisfaction of having done something meaningful to help others.