

## Coming and Going: Volunteering While Traveling

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### DEPT. OF SPADE-READY A Working Vacation

"We stand at a unique moment in the history of our nation." So began President Obama's recent speech calling on Americans to spend part of their summers devoted to *community service* and volunteering. Always ready to do its part, CoGo went looking for *voluntourism* opportunities, immediately bumping into Sheryl Kayne, who, wouldn't you know it, is just out with "[Volunteer Vacations Across America](#)" (Countryman Press). Still, we couldn't help casting a gimlet-eyed gaze on the whole enterprise, at least initially.

"You must get this question all the time," CoGo said to her. "But we can't resist: Why would anyone want to work during their vacation?"

"Actually," Kayne replied, "the only people who ask me that question are journalists, not the people I meet on the street. The people I'm meeting say they don't want to be spending gobs and gobs of money on luxury and being observers. They want to set an example for themselves and others."

Ouch. Clearly, CoGo is traveling in the wrong circles. Anyway, it's certainly true that voluntourism is a worthy pursuit, and interest in it appears to be growing. Kayne's book does a fine job of detailing more than 200 service/travel opportunities, including rescuing loggerhead turtles and learning to surf in North Carolina, reinstating the Mexican gray wolf to its natural habitat while visiting the *Grand Canyon* (<http://www.gcwolfrecovery.org>) and biking from coast to coast to raise money for low-income housing in the *Bike & Build* program (<http://www.bikeandbuild.org>).

"To have the president of our country ask us to give back at a grass-roots level is such a perfect match with the actual programs that are going on," said Maui resident Kirsten Whatley, an expert on volunteer opportunities in *Obama's birth state* and, yes, the author of a book on the subject, "[Preserving Paradise](#)" (Island Heritage Publishing, 2008).

"Most people know Hawaii through hotels and luaus and water sports," she said. "Interacting with the people of Hawaii gives you a completely different understanding of the deeper issues."

Whatley's book highlights more than 60 organizations on all the islands tourists typically visit. They "run the gamut of desires and strengths, and sometimes you don't have to give up any more of your vacation than four hours on a Saturday afternoon," she said.

Since it's Hawaii, there are lots of *beach-oriented* volunteer opportunities, such as performing surveys of reef and other underwater life. ("You go in with a waterproof fish card and record the types of fish that you see, as well as the numbers.") For her part, Whatley is "more a mountain goat than a fish" and fondly recalled a Saturday last fall when she was one of 30 volunteers on the leeward side of Maui's spectacular Haleakala crater. In a single day the group planted nearly 1,300 native trees and shrubs.

"It's as much about the people as it is the environment," Whatley said. "You start off as a group of strangers, but by the end of the day there is such a feeling of family and camaraderie."

**Reporting: Scott Vogel**

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