

Combine Adventure and Altruism for a Memorable Experience in Kenya

Paige Stringer

Volunteering during your travels can lead to some special connections with the local people that make your experience at a destination all the more memorable. Because there are so many volunteer vacations to choose from depending on your interests, skills, and desired intensity level, it is important to do your research before committing to any particular one. Here, we save you a bit of time by highlighting three volunteer vacations in Kenya that we like for the unique experience and good mix of volunteer opportunities and sight-seeing adventures that they offer.

Education and Community: Now accepting travel bookings for its July, 2009 inaugural tour, the International Village-Hopewell serves as both a volunteer tourism hub for travelers and a permanent education and job-training center for residents in the impoverished community of Barut. The locally managed and operated eco-lodge offers guests with cultural immersion opportunities and access to an extensive menu of volunteer projects in the area. In addition to volunteering, guests can choose from several expeditions in the area led by trained local tour guides including Big 5 game safaris in Masai Mara National Park, visits with the Maasai people in Amboselli National Park, and hikes up Mt Kenya. All trip bookings, volunteer program management, and tour operations are fully managed by International Village-Hopewell staff. Now accepting bookings for July 6th - July 22nd tour, Land Cost is US \$1499. Includes; airport transfers, 14 nights in Kenya, 3 meals a day, drinking water, 2 day Safari in Masai Mara, Contact: www.Internationalvillages.org , Phill Klamm at wrestlingtheworld@yahoo.com

Dolphin Research: Volunteers will assist local and international researchers in monitoring dolphins while living on an African island of Shimoni, a diver's paradise. Through education, environmental awareness and current wildlife monitoring studies, the project has been helping the local community develop sustainable tourism practices. Full training is provided by the research staff to maximize the volunteer experience and contributions. Guests can explore the coastal forest, mangroves, and rocky shores of the surrounding archipelago, and snorkel or scuba among some of Kenya's finest coral reefs. Some of the most renowned national parks in East Africa are close by, including Tsavo, Serengeti, Amboseli, Maasai Mara and Ngorongoro. The area is home to abundant marine life includes whales, whale sharks and manta rays. Two week excursions, multiple booking dates, Land cost is US \$1,390. Includes: airport transfers; all food, accommodation, training materials and science equipment; comprehensive training. Contact: Global Vision International www.gvi.usa , 888-653-6028.

African Elephant Sanctuary: The Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary (MES) in the Coast Province of Kenya is the first community-owned conservation enterprise dedicated to protecting elephants. The local Duruma and Digo people have leased their privately-owned property to the sanctuary, agreeing not to farm this important elephant habitat. In return, they have become shareholders in MES and receive annual dividends from tourism income. Volunteers will have an interactive home stay with a trained African family and travel to the sanctuary to help with the feeding and general care of the elephants, assist with the sanctuary's forestry program, and engage in development projects with the local community. Guests will trek the Mukurumuji rain forest and experience game drives in Tsavo East National Park, home to some of the largest herds of elephant, lion, leopard, crocodile, and zebra in Kenya. Two week vacations, multiple booking dates, Land cost is US \$2240. Includes: transfers, meals, sightseeing excursions. Contact: Adventure Center www.adventurecenter.com 1-800-228-8747

Paige Stringer is a travel writer and manages Off the Radar, Xola Consulting's adventure travel website (www.travelofftheradar.com). She may be reached at paigestranger@xolaconsulting.com.