

THE SAVVY SENIOR

Volunteer Vacations

Dear Savvy Senior,

What can you tell me about volunteer vacations? It sounds like a fun and interesting way to travel but at age 59 I have some concerns.

Adventurous Annie

Dear Annie:

If you yearn to do more on your vacation than relax in the sun or go sightseeing, volunteer service vacations are a great alternative and a popular option among travelers over age 50. Here's what you should know.

Volunteer Vacations

Nowadays, you don't need to join the Peace Corps to travel to exotic destinations and serve others. Numerous organizations now offer short-term volunteer projects in the United States and around the world, lasting anywhere from a few days to a few months.

Common program themes include teaching English, working with children and teens, building and repairing homes and schools and assisting with community projects. In addition, volunteer vacations also give travelers the opportunity to experience a particular culture more fully and connect with the local people—much different than your usual let's-call-room-service type of trip.

Costs

Most volunteer vacation groups accept singles, couples and families and you don't need to speak a foreign language. Costs range from around \$800 to \$1,000 a week, not including transportation to the country your site is in. Fees typically cover pre-trip orientation information, room and board, on-site training, ground transportation once you get there, the services of a project leader, and a contribution to the local community that covers material and services related to the project. If the organization running your trip is a nonprofit, the costs of your trip, including airfare, are tax deductible.

Where to Look

While most volunteer vacation organizations are open to people of all ages, many of them make special efforts to cater to older travelers. Here are some well established and good programs worth a look.

- **Global Volunteers:** Offers a wide variety of two-to-three-week service programs in 19 countries, including the U.S. While open to people of all ages, more than 60 percent of its volunteers are age 50 or older. www.globalvolunteers.org; 800-487-1074.

- **Elderhostel:** In addition to its more traditional learning vacations, they also offer volunteer service programs for travelers ages 50 and up. www.elderhostel.org/programs/service.asp; 800-454-5768.

- **Habitat for Humanity:** Has a variety of house-building trips through its Global Village Program, RV Care-A-Vanners program and more. www.habitat.org; 800-422-4828.

- **i-to-i:** This international volunteer organization has a diverse selection of programs, with

about 500 different projects in 34 countries ranging in length from one to 12 weeks. www.i-to-i.com; 800-985-4852.

- **Cross-Cultural Solutions:** Offers flexible programs one to 12 weeks long in 12 nations. www.crossculturalsolutions.com; 800-380-4777.

How to Choose

With so many different organizations and volunteer options, it can be difficult choosing one. To cut through the clutter, here are some tips to help you find a good fit:

- **Know what you want.** You can whittle down your choices by asking yourself some simple questions like: Where do you want to go and for how long? What types of work are you interested in doing? What kind of living situation and accommodations do you expect? Do you want to volunteer alone or with a group? Do you want a rural or urban placement? Also, consider your age and health. Are you up to the task, or do you have any special needs that must be met?

- **Get the details.** Once you spot a volunteer vacation that interests you, ask the organization for a document that describes the accommodations, the fees and what they cover, including

their refund policy, the work schedule and work details and anything else you have questions about. Also, get a list of previous volunteers and call them. Don't sign up with a group that won't supply you with this information.

Savvy Tips: If you're volunteering outside the U.S., find out if any vaccinations and/or preventative medications are recommended or required at wwwn.cdc.gov/travel.

Also, check to see if your health insurance policy provides coverage outside the U.S. Many policies don't pay for medical expenses

outside the border nor does Medicare. If you're not covered, consider purchasing a policy (see www.insuremytrip.com) that includes emergency evacuation coverage.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit www.savvysenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to "The NBC Today Show" and author of *The Savvy Senior* books.

The Gazette does not endorse the contents of The Savvy Senior. Check with professionals about the contents of this column.

| | | |
|--|----------|---|
| MTA New York City Transit MetroCard buses and vans will make scheduled stops in Queens during the month of July. | •Jul. 24 | 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. SNAP of Eastern Queens 80-45 Winchester Blvd. Bldg. No. 4 |
| Senior citizens and persons with disabilities may apply for the Reduced Fare MetroCard on MetroCard buses or can obtain an application from the vans. Seniors must present photo identification proving that they are at least 65 years old. | •Jul. 25 | 10 to 12:00 p.m. Bayside Senior Center 221-15 Horace Harding Expressway |
| Persons with disabilities must have a valid U.S. Medicare Card (Red, White and Blue) along with a valid federal/state issued photo identification card in order to be immediately processed. Disabled persons without Medicare cards must ensure that their doctors complete the physician's section of the application. After a review process, permanent Reduced Fare MetroCards are mailed to qualified applicants. | •Jul. 28 | 7:30 to 10 a.m. 31st St. at Ditmars Blvd. |
| Anyone can add value to their MetroCards or purchase pre-encoded MetroCards, including 1-Day Fun Pass, 7-Day, 14-Day or 30-Day cards, and 7-Day Express Bus Plus. In addition, our staff is available to answer any MetroCard-related questions. | •Jul. 28 | 9 to 11 a.m. Bay Terrace Shopping Center Bell Blvd. & 24th Ave. |
| For more information or to find out other locations with scheduled MetroCard bus/van visits, visit www.mta.info or call 212-METROCARD. | •Jul. 28 | noon to 2:30 p.m. Fresh Meadows Shopping Center 188th St. & Horace Harding Expressway |
| | •Jul. 29 | 10 a.m. to noon Queens Borough Pres. Office 120-55 Queens Blvd. |

Free Home Sharing For Older Guests Throughout Queens

Seventeen "younger" New Yorkers have responded to the New York Foundation for Senior Citizens' Home Sharing Program. The younger hosts, under the age of 60, with extra bedrooms in their homes, are ready to be matched with guests over the age of 60. One match has already been made. Of the younger hosts, seven are in Queens; three are in Rosedale; one in Flushing; one in Far Rockaway, one in East Elmhurst, and one in Flushing. Their ages range from 42 to 57 years old.

"Now that we are welcoming the participation of younger hosts living within New York City's five boroughs, we find that many do indeed want to share their homes with independent, self-sufficient older persons who will contribute toward household expenses and also provide social benefits," says Linda Hoffman, president, New York Foundation for Senior Citizens. "For older guests, there are similar advantages to sharing with a younger person, couple or family."

In addition to the financial benefit of shared living, some potential younger hosts express a desire to help seniors who need affordable housing as a reason for applying for home sharing. "There are people in need and I want to help," said Mary Crony, a 54-year-old retired nurse's aide who resides in Far Rockaway with her husband.

Another potential host, Anita Lipscomb, a 45-

year-old divorced teacher, who owns her own home in Rosedale, is about to become an "empty nester". Her daughter will leave for college soon and her son is in the military. "Besides looking forward to the companionship of an older guest, I believe there are older people who need affordable, safe homes. It's a humanitarian issue with me," she said.

Ditmas Park, Brooklyn resident, Carol Smith, a 50-year-old part-time insurance saleswoman who owns a large four-unit home, said, "I think older people are respectful and can also be fun."

Recently the home sharing staff made its first match between a younger host and older guest. They matched a 43-year-old woman who had three extra bedrooms in her Brooklyn home, with a 70-year-old man, a former host, who was forced to give up his Harlem apartment because the apartment building was sold.

New York Foundation for Senior Citizens' Home Sharing Program helps adult hosts in all five boroughs who have extra bedrooms in their homes or apartments locate appropriate adult guests to share their space. One of the matches must be age 60 or over. Professional social workers carefully screen applicants and conduct in-depth interviews to determine compatibility of potential hosts and guests and help to facilitate and implement matches.

Prior to moving in, the program offers a

license agreement to help hosts and guests clarify the terms of their shared living arrangements. Once the match is made, the staff continues to provide follow-up services. Guests contribute toward hosts' monthly household expenses and, in some cases, provide household help or other services in exchange for reduced payment. Benefits to both hosts and guests include easing financial burdens, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness and providing companionship and a sense of security.

The Home Sharing Program is administered by the New York Foundation for Senior Citizens through funding from New York state and New York City legislators, New York State Office for the Aging, New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, New York City Department for the Aging and private contributions.

To learn more about New York Foundation for Senior Citizens' free home sharing service, call 212-962-7559, e-mail aleven@nyfscitcop.org or go to www.nyfsc.org.

Established in 1968, New York Foundation for Senior Citizens is the only non-profit, non-sectarian organization serving New York's seniors in all five boroughs. New York Foundation for Senior Citizens is dedicated to helping New York's seniors enjoy healthier, safer, and more productive and dignified lives