

“Voluntourism” – the wrong people in the wrong places – it must stop!

“The volunteer industry has come in for a lot of criticism recently – much of it from us! We believe that volunteer travel often does more harm than good. As campaigners who encourage people to share their experiences with us, we have plenty of first hand stories about exploited children and traumatised volunteers – not our volunteers or partner projects, I hasten to add!” says Sallie Grayson, co-founder of **people and places** – previous winners of ‘best volunteering organisation’ and finalists in this year’s World Responsible Tourism Awards for their campaigning and child protection actions and policies.

It’s an odd thing for a volunteer travel organisation to declare so boldly, but **people and places** has always campaigned vociferously – since matching their first volunteer to a project’s needs in 2005, they have campaigned by example. In the last couple of years, **people and places** has been very active in campaigns to raise awareness about the perils and pitfalls of “orphanage tourism”: orphans, who are not orphans, kept under terrible conditions to attract volunteer donations; unskilled and unvetted volunteers being allowed to engage with vulnerable children for short periods of time – exacerbating abandonment syndrome and inappropriate attachment to strangers issues for the children. **people and places** has worked closely with specialist child protection NGOs as well as with responsibletravel.com on their new code of practice – and is very active on social media drawing bad and good practise to the attention of would be volunteers.

“We firmly believe that the right people in the right places can – and do – generate mutual benefit for volunteers and communities! BUT – how do the right people find the right places? That’s our next campaign!” says Sallie Grayson

There are now many websites that provide advice on how to look for responsible volunteer opportunities and there are many websites listing volunteer opportunities – BUT – rarely, if ever, do such websites focus their directory listings on organisations that are operating ethically and responsibly, rather than those with a significant budget for advertising and promotion.

people and places’ latest move to make volunteer travel better is in building just such a directory, with clearly detailed criteria and how those criteria are checked.

*“There are many great projects doing great work – they need and value volunteers. **people and places** would love to work with them all – and although we can’t, what we can do is try to promote their work. These organisations are almost invariably cash-strapped with no marketing budgets, so they rarely get a presence on other volunteer directories. If they are accepted onto a directory, they are normally way at the end of the listings and also find it very difficult to differentiate themselves from the large organisations with marketing skills and loads of dosh!”*

Sallie will be at WTM speaker’s corner on 5th November:

<http://www.wtmresponsibletourism.com/Content/WTM-WRTD-Speakers-Corner>

and she is on the responsible volunteering debate panel:

<http://www.wtmresponsibletourism.com/Content/Thursday-7th-Nov-2013>

Better volunteering directory: <http://bettervolunteering.wordpress.com/>

www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/BetterVolunteering>

<https://www.facebook.com/BetterChildProtection>

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