

More Vacationers Answer the Call to Help

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Global Service Corps, (415) 788-3666 and www.globalservicecorps.org, a San Francisco-based nonprofit group, runs health and education trips to Tanzania and Thailand. It gives its travelers to Thailand the option of staying in a resort rather than with a local family.

But staying with a local family is often part of the appeal. Molly Last, 47, a teacher from San Francisco, spent three weeks last summer teaching English to Thai high school students and novice monks on a Global Service Corps trip. She lived with a family who worked at two high schools in Kanchanaburi, two hours northwest of Bangkok.

"I had a wonderful experience living with the family," she said. "That was the key piece that bought me from the outside looking in to being a real insider."

In addition to eating breakfast and dinner together, her family took her to the floating markets and to visit Cambodian ruins in the countryside. In fact, Ms. Last hit it off so well with her hosts that she is paying part of their travel expenses to visit the United States this year.

MANY groups, including Global Service Corps, are not offering placements in tsunami areas simply because they don't have programs there....

Some travelers augment trips on their own. Ian and Jen Close booked 10 days on a safari in Kenya and Tanzania and a few days' relaxing on the beaches of Zanzibar, before spending two weeks in Arusha, Tanzania, teaching about AIDS. The teaching portion of the trip was arranged by Global Service Corps.

The couple, from Vancouver, stayed with a family ("My day started at 2 a.m. when the rooster started going," Mr. Close said), and after a week of training, they taught a class of 44, with the help of an interpreter, about preventing H.I.V. transmission.

But even with training there were some unexpected questions thrown at the Closes in that one-room Tanzanian schoolhouse, especially when they talked about monogamy. "The students would ask me: 'You have a wife; how do you know that she has been faithful?' " Mr. Close said.

Beyond their four hours a day of teaching, the Closes explored the local area, played cards with their family (who didn't speak English) and braved the local buses, called dala-dala.

"A ride in a safari truck is exciting," Mr. Close said. "However, a ride in a dala-dala is truly an experience. It's basically a Mazda minivan stuffed with 16 people."

The couple quickly became comfortable roaming around a town where at first they were wary of entering even the heavily protected bank to exchange money. Plus, they said, even in just a week of teaching, they felt as if they reached their students.

"If we only did the safari, we would have only seen half of Africa," Mrs. Close said. "In that short period of time, I didn't feel like we would make those connections, but we did."