



Lets Make Every Year,'Year of the Volunteer'

ProWorld Service Corps, January 23, 2006

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UK Government designated 2005 as Year of the Volunteer. Now the profile of volunteering has been raised, will it continue to remain in the public arena, because surely every year should be Year of the Volunteer.

PR9.NET January 23, 2006 - Gainsborough UK - 2005 was publicised as "Year of the Volunteer" but I've always been big on volunteering, and I'm not really sure why. If ever school needed a rep for something, I was there. If a charity needed help for manning a cake stall or collecting in town, I was the girl to call. And Blue Peter Bring&Buy sales were a regular event in our street. Perhaps it was the pleasure I got from helping other people, or maybe I just had too much time on my hands! Nevertheless, things were always going to get bigger and better, so that was how I found myself aged eighteen, kissing my mum goodbye and boarding a plane at Heathrow Airport, to begin a 23 hour flight to Peru.

I had joined up with ProWorld Service Corps, a Sheffield based NGO that worked with local people in Peru, Mexico and Belize to enrich the communities and give the volunteers a decent chance to make a difference. There are several different placements to choose from, ranging from medicine to mircobusiness. I myself had chosen to spend a month on a journalism placement, in the hopes that I would be able to gain valuable experience for my future as well as doing good deeds in the present. Sadly, my Spanish was not up to scratch and I ended up doing Eco-tourism instead, but I didn't mind too much, The project I was working on was to define and promote a trek up a local mountain called Pitusiray, in order to bring more tourists to a small town named Calca in the Urubamba Valley. It was a small project with only 3 volunteers to get it started, but I enjoyed it immensely. Our days were as diverse as they were unusual – one day trekking up Pitusiray to mark out the path, another designing brochures to display in tourist information centres, a third checking out details of local hotels and other tourist hotspots.

One highlight of the trip was driving for 3 hours along a treacherous Peruvian track through the mountains to reach a hot springs spa- it was bizarre to have a snowball fight atop a breathtaking mountain scene, and be relaxing in a hot pool 45 minutes later! We worked five days a week, and had a personal tutor teaching us Spanish according to our abilities each of those days. As I a complete beginner I found this quite hard work, but the interns who were fluent sat around watching DVDs in Spanish most of the time! At the weekends we were free to do as we pleased, although ProWorld organised activities such as tours of historic landmarks or trips into the Incan capital Cuzco. I took the opportunity to hike the four day Inca Trail to Macchu Picchu, a feat that to this day remains my proudest task.

When I think back to that month, a blur of memories spring back to me – eating llama and cuy (guinea pig), building a mud school in 6 hours of pouring rain, a seemingly endless bus trip to Bolivia one weekend, getting bitten by a possibly rabid dog... it goes on and on.

Ultimately though, it is the people that make volunteering worthwhile. It's a terrible cliché, but I would not have had half as much fun if I had not been with a truly wonderful host family, who were very tolerant of my poor Spanish and went out of their way to make me feel comfortable. Every intern was housed with a host family, who were paid to have us, so we were helping the community in more ways than one.

I only spent a month in Peru, and it was all over too quickly, but my love for volunteering continues. I'm currently fundraising for Mind by trekking for 5 days straight in Cuba in February 2006, but after that, who knows? There are plenty more worthy charities out there, and the memories will be with me forever... For me volunteering is for life, not just for 2005!

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About ProWorld Service Corps

ProWorld Service Corps is a company specializing in study abroad and volunteer work service projects in Peru (ProPeru), Belize (ProBelize), Mexico (ProMexico), India (ProIndia), and Thailand (ProThailand). Founded in 1998, ProWorld provides enriching experiences for volunteers while striving to make a difference in cooperative communities.

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