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THE ART OF GIVING BACK

No matter the style in which you travel, to visit the world's most far-flung and exotic corners is a luxury in itself. A wonderful trend among affluent travelers is to take the opportunity—among the lavish dinners and VIP shopping sprees—to give back to local communities and leave a mark for the better in the destinations they visit.

Cathy Reavis of World Travel Mates participated in a project last year with three other women to facilitate a business development seminar for 50 women who are part of a micro-finance group in Rwanda. “The seminar was held at a conference center where the ladies, and two gentlemen who had inherited businesses from their wives who had passed away, attended for four days from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., including lunch,” she tells *Luxury Travel*

Advisor. “Topics included business plans, marketing, book-keeping and developing mission statements.”

The results, she says, were overwhelming. The women were eager and interested to learn. The majority of the women were involved in farming and selling their vegetables in the marketplace. There were also five or six seamstresses, a restaurant owner, several hair dressers and many who had purchased retail items for resale in the market. “We also had the opportunity to visit a few of their homes and were overwhelmed with how proud they were to have us visit them. We met with several ladies about developing products, such as jewelry and clothing, that are now being sold in the U.S. through the non-profit entity of **Fashion and Compassion** [www.fashion

andcompassion.com]. The entire experience was very gratifying and felt like a perfect expression of ‘giving back,’” she says.

Today, Reavis’ own travel business is about 50 percent voluntourism and short-term missions based. The company works with many volunteers including churches and nonprofits. They work with the American Belarusian Relief Organization, which brings children from Belarus orphanages over in the summer, and sends volunteers over to Belarus at Christmas. Another organization is Samaritan’s Feet, which distributes shoes all over the world. Samaritan’s Feet has done work with NCAA basketball teams, as well as the NFL.

Her next venture will be in India, where she will visit projects that are already in production, and look for new partnerships

where volunteers may be needed.

Elaine Carey of Travel Experts uses her relationship with Crystal Cruises’ volunteer programs to help foster change in the community. “Crystal provides an excellent way of giving back,” she says. Recently, Carey was on a 14-day sailing from Athens to Venice, where there were two stops in Israel. “The project on that particular day was picking oranges to feed the hungry of Leket,” she says. “We were picked up in a van as there were only five of us plus a photographer with Crystal.” The group then spent the day in the orange groves gathering food to serve to the community.

In her own efforts, Carey has spent the last three years at Virtuoso Travel Week volunteering with the Viceroy Group with a project in Las Vegas. “In



CRYSTAL CRUISES includes a complimentary “You Care. We Care” Voluntourism Adventure on every itinerary, where possible. The program, (opposite, below left) works with the Granitos de Paz Foundation in Colombia’s Cartagena barrio. In Marigot Bay, St. Maarten, “You Care. We Care,” works with the Pride Foundation to clean up hurricane wreckage. And in Alaska (right), the program includes a stop at the Sitka Sound Science Center.

2012 and this year, our project has been the homeless shelter for women, children and pets that are displaced,” she says. “It breaks my heart to know that many women and children are without a roof but for this shelter and have nothing to eat.”

Carey is constantly looking for ways to volunteer her time, from putting strollers together, painting walls in a shelter or picking oranges for the hungry. “I tell clients that seem interested in voluntourism about my adventures with Crystal Cruises and at Virtuoso Travel Week each year, but I haven’t actually sold anyone on a real voluntourism vacation...yet,” she says. “I look forward to making it happen soon as I think it is very rewarding to give of yourself.”

—Meagan Drillinger

