

Retired? Travel too expensive?

(ARA) — Given the current economic climate, cutting back has become a way of life for many Americans. Retirees, in particular, are looking at ways to stretch the shrinking dollars in their portfolios. Common techniques for reducing expenditures include eating out less, incorporating energy-saving devices and routines in the home and eliminating or curtailing such things as club memberships and season tickets.

Exacerbated by increased travel costs, one extra that often falls away when finances are tight is travel. But it is travel that is so often listed as an aspiration of retirees — and not just “some travel” but “more travel.”

A growing number of retirees and pre-retirees have found a more affordable way to satisfy their wanderlust, while making memories and feeling good about themselves. Voluntourism, or “vacation with a purpose,” is gaining greater and greater acceptance amongst people of all ages.

Alison Gardner, in her guidebook, “Travel Unlimited: Uncommon Adventures for the Mature Traveler,” contends that older people generally sign up for volunteer service for at least one of three reasons:

1. A strong interest in a particular cause, project, or subject area, often related to a longtime hobby or an earlier career.

2. A desire to visit a region in a “grassroots” way not easily accomplished by just passing through as a stranger, either on an organized tour or as an independent traveler.

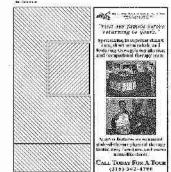
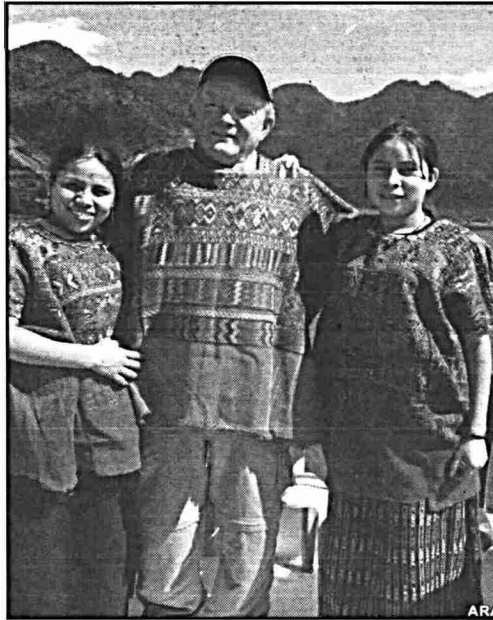
3. A wish to give back something significant to a world that has been, by and large, economically kind and physically comfortable to them in earlier years.

These are, indeed, solid reasons for joining such a volunteer team. But another equally valid reason may be the relative affordability of such trips. And what makes them less expensive?

- Room and board costs are generally low — volunteer teams usually do not stay in fancy resorts and sometimes enjoy meals cooked by area residents.
- Team members can often fundraise among friends and family to help offset costs.
- Air travel is sometimes purchased as a group, with special group rates.
- In-country travel is frequently done as a group, thus cutting costs.
- And while they can no longer look for employer support, retirees can look to organizations to which they belong to help support their trip.

One such organization that offers its nearly 3 million members the opportunity to take a vacation with a purpose at a reduced cost is Minneapolis-based **Thrivent Financial for Lutherans**. The Thrivent Builds Worldwide program, which operates in alliance with Habitat for Humanity’s Global Village program, sends teams of volunteers to locations in the United States and abroad to help build homes for families in need. While non-members can also join these teams, Thrivent members enjoy even lower costs per trip because of their Thrivent membership.

“While each Thrivent Builds Worldwide trip is different, all include work, rest



and free time,” says Alison Jones, a team coordinator with the program. “No one is expected to do more than they are able on the work site and all teams spend a few days touring local historic areas and attractions.”

“It was really a great experience and I would do it again in a heartbeat,” says Wisconsin retiree and **Thrivent** member Fred Ebbesen. “And Thrivent’s support helped so that both my wife and I could go to New Orleans [with Thrivent Builds Worldwide].”

Retirees should definitely study the potential for “vacations with a purpose” before cutting travel completely from their budgets. For those interested in learning more, there are myriad Web sites offering further information, including www.voluntourism.org. Those interested in learning more about the opportunities that Thrivent Builds Worldwide offers can visit www.thriventbuilds.com/worldwide.

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