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# Volunteer vacations: Contributing, by vacationing

By Jane L. Levere. The New York Times

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2005

Albert Huang, a construction manager from San Francisco, had a memorable vacation last summer, though not for the usual reasons.

Instead of heading for a beach in Hawaii, as many Californians do, Mr. Huang, 32, spent the last two weeks of July building homes in Galle, Sri Lanka, for victims of the December 2004 tsunami, through a program sponsored by Global Crossroad.

"I didn't want to just donate money; anybody can donate money," he said, adding that building the homes made him feel "like I actually contributed."

"I wanted to see the results," he said. "It's not about being rewarded; it's about helping people who are dirt-poor."

Mr. Huang is among many people who are choosing "volunteer vacations" in the United States or overseas. During these trips, they may work on many kinds of projects - from clearing trails in the Sierra National Forest in California, for instance, to teaching English to a hospital staff in Xian, China.

In most cases, the volunteers must pay their own expenses, and sometimes even make a donation to the organization, but these trips are often tax-deductible, lowering the true cost.

Although there is no hard data about the number of volunteer vacations, many specialists say the trips have become more popular in recent years, particularly since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the tsunami. Sherry Schwarz, editor and publisher of Transitions Abroad, a magazine that

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