

INSIDE

FIRST PERSON

SECRET OF SUCCESS



>> The men behind the V8 Supercars E4, E5

INSIDE ZIMBABWE



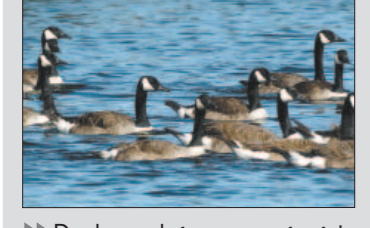
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EAT UP: Lunch time at the orphanage.



THREE'S A CROWD: Two infants get some sleep while one stays awake.

PICTURES: Bev Wood

Volunteering: a new way of travel

Hamilton woman Bev Wood took on travel with a difference when she spent a month as a volunteer in Vietnam.

TRAVEL has long been a passion of mine. I love the preparation, reading about new places, when to go, where and for how long. I love the sights, the sounds, the smells, the people, the food, getting a glimpse of an unfamiliar way of life and the excitement of new experiences. It seems there is a revolution in travel circles – responsible travel, or ethical travel appears to be the new way to go – and I wanted a part of it. So, when I saw an advertisement for a different way of travel I decided to investigate further. Five months later I was in Vietnam.



BEV WOOD

GVN, or Global Volunteer Network, is a New Zealand-based organisation which gives people an opportunity to live and work in a foreign country. GVN is an NGO, it's not affiliated to any church and it provides plenty of support. It is one of a growing number of organisations whose philosophy is to help those less fortunate than us. What appealed to me was the chance to try a stint of volunteer work for a short time, in my case all of March, to see whether I had anything to offer and whether I could cope with the demands of the task.

After I retired four years ago I trained as a home tutor with the Refugee and Migrant Centre in Hamilton. This stimulated my interest in helping people of different ethnic backgrounds. But to work with new babies and toddlers in an orphanage in a foreign country, helping in centres for the disabled and doing a bit of English teaching seemed a real challenge.

The age limit given for volunteers was from 18 to 65, but when I queried the upper limit the helpful GVN staff suggested I provide a medical certificate to prove that I was fit and able. The day after I supplied the magical piece of paper, my application was accepted. Gay Main, another semi-retired Hamiltonian, was interested in joining me. We didn't know each other well, but after six weeks of sharing a room, sharing experiences and travelling together in weekends we became more than colleagues, we became good friends – as we did with the other volunteers regardless of age. Volunteers came from New Zealand, Australia, the UK,

America, Austria and Canada and were predominantly female and young. We had an 18-year-old male in our house who was a real asset to the group. Among the other newcomers were a young married couple from Wellington with a three-year-old daughter, and an older American man. They were placed in other centres.

A month before we left home, we were advised which city we'd be living and working in. We were given email addresses of volunteers already there so we could contact them to get first-hand information of what to expect and what to take.

We met in Da Nang, the third biggest city in Vietnam, at the GVN house which is both the office for the Vietnamese partner and the home for the volunteers who remain in the city for the duration of their time. Other volunteers, after a day of orientation, were taken to their placements in nearby cities. Little formal contact was made with them during the period of volunteering although with all weekends free we arranged to meet from time to time. We went sightseeing, swam at China Beach (made famous as an R&R spot for American troops during the war), dined out together and compared notes.

It is over 30 years since the end of the Vietnam War, or American War, as the Vietnamese call it, but its legacy remains. Disabilities are common, but whether as a direct result of the war or not it is hard to establish. Many people still live in poverty, although there is an upturn in the standard of living in a growing section of the population. With no social welfare system in the country there is little co-ordinated support for those in need.

Education plays an important part in the lives of the young people. Speaking English is seen as necessary to advance, and with tourism playing an increasing part in the economy it is becoming even more desirable. For that reason, GVN stipulates that English-speaking people are required.

We worked to a timetable and volunteers were assigned different tasks in different locations. Some volunteers were there for just a month, but others were there for a longer period which gave

a sense of continuity, and the "old hands" were helpful in initiating us newcomers into the routine.

In Da Nang, we had a driver who ferried us to the different venues. In other centres the volunteers got around on pushbikes.

A typical day meant time spent in an orphanage where our task was mainly to play with the children and babies. We were there to give them love and attention, but we became used to changing nappies, feeding them and soothing them when needed – and of course we chatted and sang to them in English.

The orphanages are run by "mothers" who do everything from preparing the food to washing the clothes and generally caring for the children. Many of the babies are in the process of being adopted, mostly by American families. Some of them have been abandoned and some have parents who through poverty or illness can no longer care for them.

At other times we worked with disabled children and young people in residential homes or day care centres. Some were given basic English lessons, and others, under the supervision of a physiotherapist, were helped with simple exercises to strengthen weak muscles. It was wonderful to witness their progress even in the short time I was there.

One of the highlights for me was teaching English at a local university. Initially I thought it would be too much of a challenge, but as the students wanted conversational English (and I'm very experienced in that, my family and friends will tell you) it worked really well. Their knowledge of the wider world seemed very limited, but they were eager to learn. Gay and I discovered that we taught better as a twosome, a "comic double-act" someone called us, so that is what we did. When the students told us they loved us we knew we had succeeded.

I spent two sessions a week in a technical college where I was told I would be working with groups of tourism students and to prepare lessons about



HELPING HAND: Tinh, who has cerebral palsy, gets encouragement from the physiotherapist.

service in restaurants, hotels, how to greet an English speaking person, how to give directions, how to ask what type of room required and so on. One day I explained the difference between twin rooms and double rooms, about en suites, tariffs, services available etc. only to learn that I was speaking to an economics class! It didn't matter – they were just as interested in talking and asking questions as the tourism classes I had dealt with previously.

Everyone we met seemed to want to know about New Zealand – and about us. "How old are you?" was a regular query. "You're very fit," or "You're very healthy," we were told on numerous occasions. People were intrigued to see older foreign women living and working in their community. We became used to being referred to as "Mama", or "Ba" (a

term of respect for an older woman), or having some young person grab us by the arm to help us up steps.

Of course we all had our favourite places to work and each volunteer had different skills. Some were better at imparting knowledge. Others preferred to help with the tiny babies. And others like me, enjoyed a bit of everything.

But my heart went out to the toddlers and babies. I could've sneaked a few into my luggage to bring home. Their smiles and trust moved me each time I saw them. To see a small child reach out his arms to be picked up and cuddled gave me so much pleasure. To hear a toddler trying out a few words in English and joining in with games made it all worthwhile. When it came time to leave I found it hard to say goodbye.

It wasn't always easy. I was sicked on, wee-ed on, dribbled on and had food splattered over me. I got used to sitting on a hard floor playing with the children or trying to help a child with cerebral palsy do her exercises. I helped hold down a severely autistic "boy" whose age varied from 14 to 20 depending who you talked to, while a dentist, who refused payment, removed a rotten tooth. The dentist later offered to close his surgery for a day so all seven dentists in the practice could work on the children's teeth.

It took several of us to restrain the same young boy when he was examined by a doctor and given blood tests. And when he was diagnosed with severe anaemia, two volunteers from GVN and the doctor himself provided blood for his transfusion.

If you think you can help – regardless of how little – do it. It mightn't seem much, but donating your time can make a difference. Volunteering is so rewarding – and it's a great way to see the world.

Would I do it again? Yes, yes and yes again!

✉ Email GVN: info@volunteer.org.nz; phone: 04 569 9080; website: www.volunteer.org.nz

YOUR WEEKEND

NETBALL

Today is your first chance to see your Waikato-Bay of Plenty Magic netball team play at home, and after their first loss last week they are desperate for a win. The Magic are one of seven teams tied first after they won their opening two games in Rotorua and need a big win today against the West Coast Fever to keep hold of their favourites tag. For the first time this season, Irene van Dyk will give away a height advantage in the shooting circle, to young Australian Susan Fuhrmann. As well as being 6cm taller, Fuhrmann is also 14 years younger than van Dyk. The West Coast Fever were originally touted as whipping-girls of the ANZ Championship, but a win last week against the Northern Mystics has that theory blown out of the water. At 2.30pm at the Mystery Creek Events Centre, the Fever will be looking for Kiwi scalp number two, while van Dyk and her side need to stop their run and start one of their own.

>> Main side stands: adults \$25, children under 12 \$10. End stands: adults \$20, children \$8



FOOD

There is nothing so nice, drizzled over steamed vegetables, a salad or seafood, as a great olive oil, and New Zealand is producing some real winners. Recently the team at Your Weekend dipped into Newstalk ZB host Paul Holmes' Mana Lodge extra virgin olive oil. The leccino variety won a gold medal in blind taste testing at the 2006 Hawke's Bay Olive Oil awards. At \$32.50 for 500ml, it's not cheap, but we thought it had a lovely intense grassy flavour and green colour, with a clean taste, perfect with a bit of sourdough or ciabatta bread. The veteran broadcaster will be at Hamilton store Vetro Mediterranean Foods today, providing tastings from 9.30 to noon. Holmes bought Mana Lodge in 2000, and originally planned grapes and a winery. The peaty soil soon put an end to that, and now there are 25 acres of Tuscan leccino and frantoio olives on site. Olives are processed at The Village Press, and sold at gourmet stores around New Zealand (including Zinc Deli, Vetro, Cambridge Country Store and Cambridge Specialty Foods). The frantoio variety, which we didn't try, is supposed to be a bit more herbaceous and peppery. It won a silver medal in the Hawke's Bay Olive Oil awards in 2006, so could also be worth a dip.



CAFE

Times food writer Denise Irvine reviewed Grey Street Kitchen in Hamilton East last December, just after it opened, and liked what she saw and ate. The cafe has quickly developed a loyal following, so loyal that on some weekends recently it's been touch-and-go to get a table. Now it's expanded into the shop next door, providing more seating and a spacious atmosphere. With the same stylish decor, same friendly staff, and good coffee and food. On the latter, Your Weekend is mostly there at breakfast, so we're now very familiar with the toasted bagels, roasted peppers, hearty scrambled eggs, homemade muesli, etc. The cabinet food is equally robust and tasty, with fresh, colourful seasonal ingredients used well. Hamilton East village is on a roll, and Grey Street Kitchen adds to its attractions.



CLASSIC

Limelight, first released in Europe in 1952, was Charlie Chaplin's last great film. It was made at a time when his supposed political beliefs were under grave attack in the US. He hence purposely shrank from contemporary issues, constructing a drama set in the theatrical world of his youth. Chaplin plays Calvero, a once popular music hall clown who has fallen on hard times but whose interest in life is rejuvenated when he saves a young ballerina from committing suicide. Less literal autobiography than a speculation on what his career might have been had he not become a movie star, Limelight also draws on the tragic story of Chaplin's parents. It is at times a surprisingly verbose work, with the genius giving full, wordy expression to various personal philosophies. There is of course plenty of masterful pantomime, including a cameo appearance by his rival Buster Keaton, together with a lush, self-penned score and much singing and dancing. For all Chaplin's maligned reputation as a director the dream sequences have the stark power of Bergman at his best and, as always, the sentiment is undercut by a very real sense of poverty and despair.

RICHARD SWAINSON

