

## Volunteer in the Balkans

By Rand Engel

The nightly news presented a steady stream of heart-rending images. What could I do to help in Kosovo? I had no experience in relief work. As a business consultant and manager, I'd worked in stressful situations in Asia. Perhaps, I hoped, my organizational experience would be useful. So I emailed resumes and letters to major relief organizations. No response.

But when I emailed an inquiry to Balkan Sunflowers (BSF), I received a quick reply. Although the details on what I would be doing were sketchy, I was invited to come to Albania.

Balkan Sunflowers was the inspiration of Wam Kat, a Dutch peace activist with long and varied experience in the wars of the former Yugoslavia. His Croatia diary, an almost daily Internet report during the earlier war, had been followed by thousands. It even caught the attention of Al Gore, who cited Kat's efforts as an example of the difference individuals can make in the world.

In late June I flew from Boston to Rome—commercial flights to Tirana were uncertain during NATO operations—and then to the port city of Bari. As prearranged, in Bari I met a Canadian volunteer, Chelsea, to share the overnight ferry ride to Albania. In Durres we were captured by an ener-

getic taxi driver before we'd disembarked and our bags muscled out of port on a large cart before we could protest. An hour later Chelsea and I entered the Balkan Sunflowers Peace Hostel in Tirana.

Though most refugees returned to Kosovo, Balkan Sunflowers continues work in Albania and Macedonia, as well as in Kosovo. Our children's activities include games, sports, drama, music, environmental awareness, video, art, and cinema. We have restored city parks, installed playgrounds, painted a major city mural, helped on a refugee camp newspaper, hosted healers and children's theater troupes, distributed tens of thousands of teddy bears, and much more.

Volunteers pay their own travel and day-to-day expenses and make a one-time contribution of \$120. BSF provides food, housing, and accident insurance. For more information see [www.balkanunflowers.org] and [www.usbsf.org].

*Editor's Note: For more information on volunteering elsewhere in the Balkans see the September/October 1999 issue of Transitions Abroad.*

RAND ENGEL left business consulting behind in response to the Kosovo refugee crisis. He has coordinated Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo activities since July 1999.

renewable resources while you live in a rural Costa Rican community. Receive a general orientation on the subject of bamboo, walk in a botanical garden, participate in the development of a small plantation and assume workshop tasks utilizing bamboos. No special skills required.

Dates: Year-round, 1 month sessions, beginning the 1st of each month. Cost: \$750 for 1st month, \$600 additional months. Includes private sleeping space, shared bath, meals. Airfare and insurance not included. Contact: Patricia Erickson, Apdo. 295-7210 Guapiles, Costa Rica; fax 011-506-710-2264; brier99@yahoo.com.

## ECUADOR

### Ecotracker Network

Ecotracker volunteers work in small towns and villages in various regions of Ecuador to help develop ecotourism, work in clinics, teach English, plant trees, work with kids, or use whatever skills they are most able to provide. Volunteer positions are customized to the needs of the volunteers and the communities. Volunteers must enroll in Spanish classes (at the institute in Quito) if they are not at an intermediate level.

Dates: Ongoing. Volunteers commit 2 or more weeks at a time. Cost: \$55 registration fee in Quito, \$7 a day to host families in communities for room and board. If studying Spanish, students must pay for the cost of classes, and the registration fee will be waived. Volunteers are responsible for their own transportation, and housing before and after the program. Write for current class prices. Contact: Dr. Maximilian Moreno, Ecotracker Network, Av. Amazonas y Roca, Quito, Ecuador; 011-593-2-550-208, fax 011-593-2-561-620; ecotracker\_ecuador@hotmail.com.

## EUROPE

### ¿?don Quijote Spanish Schools

Offers Spanish language courses in our 6 schools in Spain and 5 partner schools in Latin America. Our courses (standard, intensive, business, D.E.L.E., tourism, flight attendant and refresher for teachers) are year round, from 2 weeks on. Students can combine different cities and schools. Academic credit is available.

Dates: Year round—fall, spring, winter, and summer. 2 weeks to a full year of study. Costs: Email or check web site for details. Contact: ¿?don Quijote In-Country Spanish Language Schools, calle/Pascuines n°2, Salamanca 37008, Spain; 011-34-923-268860, fax 011-34-923-268815; amusa@donquijote.org; [www.donquijote.org].

## JAPAN

### Teaching English in Japan

Two-year program to maximize linguistic and cultural integration of participants who work as teachers' assistants. Placements twice yearly in Apr and Aug. Most positions are in junior high schools in urban and rural areas. Bachelor's degree and willingness to learn Japanese required.

Dates: Hiring for positions every Apr and Aug. Applications accepted year round. Cost: No application fees. Contact: Institute for Education in Japan, Earlham College, 801 National Rd. West, D-202, Richmond, IN 47374; 888-685-2726, fax 763-983-1553; [www.earlham.edu/~iiej].

## LATIN AMERICA

### Volunteer Positions

In Costa Rica, Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Argentina, Peru, Bolivia. Various positions in the fields of health care, education, tourism, ESL, business, law, marketing, administrative, environmental, and social work. Additional customized options available. Four weeks to 6 months. Inexpensive lodging in homestays or dorms. Some positions provide free room and board.

Dates: Year round. Flexible start dates. Cost: \$350 placement and application fee. Travel insurance and pre-departure preparation included. Lodging costs depend on location. Contact: AmeriSpan Unlimited, P.O. Box 40007, Philadelphia, PA 19106; 800-879-6640, fax 215-751-1108; info@amerispan.com; [www.amerispan.com].

## MEXICO

### Bicultural Programs IMAC

Spanish in Guadalajara is more than a classroom. Group sizes of 1 to 5. Guadalajara offers the conveniences of a modern city. We are a few hours drive to Puerto Vallarta. Homestays with only 1 student per family. Hotel discounts available. Free Internet and email access. Excursions and extracurricular activities.

Dates: Year round. Group classes start every Monday. Individual tutoring may begin any day. Easter vacation Apr 16-30. Christmas vacation Dec 18, 2000-Jan 1, 2001. Cost: Contact organizations for details. Contact: Leticia Orozco, Instituto Mexicano Americano de Cultura, Donata Guerra 180, Guadalajara, Jalisco, 44100 Mexico; 011-52-3-613-1080, fax 011-52-3-613-4621; ospanish-imac@imac-ac.edu.mx; [www.spanish-school.com.mx].

### Mar de Jade Ocean-Front Resort

Tropical ocean-front retreat center in a small fishing village on a beautiful half-mile beach north of Puerto Vallarta. Surrounded by lush jungle with the warm, clear sea at our door, enjoy swimming, hiking, horseback riding, massage, and meditation. Study Spanish in small groups. Gain insight into local culture by optional volunteer work in community projects, such as rural community clinic, our local library, or a model home garden. Mar de Jade also has meeting facilities and provides a serene and intimate setting for group events.

Dates: Year round. Cost: Twenty-one day volunteer/Spanish program May-Nov 15 \$1,000 (student discount available); Nov 15-Apr \$1,080. Includes room and board in a shared occupancy room and 15 hours per week of volunteer work. Vacation: May-Nov 15 room and board \$50 per night; Nov 16-Apr \$55 per night. Spanish \$80 per week with minimum 1 week (6 nights) stay. Contact: In Mexico: Tel./fax 011-52-322-2-3524. U.S. mailing address: 9051 Siempre Viva Rd., Suite 78-344, San Diego, CA 92173-3628; info@mardejade.com; [www.mardejade.com].