

Gen Z is Loving Tourism with a Twist

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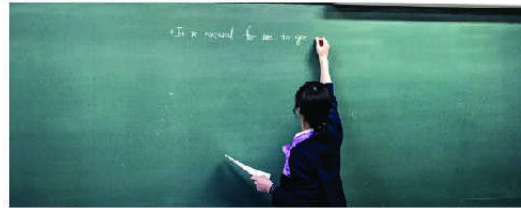
Bengaluru: Mayur Shetty, 22, spent two months teaching in a local school in the remote Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir last year, an experience that helped him land a seat in the Development and Environment Masters programme at the prestigious London School of Economics. “While this volunteering experience helped me in my application, my purpose (of teaching) was beyond this motive. These children walk for miles to reach the school, which has no infrastructure, but they are so eager to learn. I’ve travelled quite a bit, but this experience was the most enriching.”

Shetty is not alone. Gen Z—those aged between 16 and 24 years—are embracing volunteer tourism, or voluntourism—as the portmanteau-loving generation calls it—like never before.

A survey by digital travel website Booking.com says 59% Indian travellers from this age group are interested in voluntourism, higher than the global average of 31%. More than 61% of Gen Z travellers who haven’t volunteered before said they would be open to doing it on a future trip, while 69% said they believe it is important

for them to give back to the local community when travelling.

Travel blogger Lakshmi Sharath agrees that meaningful and responsible travel is becoming popular, with Himalayan hamlets and war-torn areas being the most preferred destinations. “Youngsters want a taste of the local perspective. However, it’s still in a na-



Voluntourism involves activities like teaching, aimed at giving back to a community when travelling

VOLUNTEER TOURISM

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scent stage in India and not very well formalised,” she says.

There are different models for such types of travel. Some organisations work on a barter system, where volunteering tourists help in villages in exchange for accommodation and food, while some require travellers to bear their own expenses. For those not keen to travel far, there is local turtle conservation, lake clean-ups and reforestation trips.

Spiti Ecosphere, a voluntourism organisation in Spiti Valley, has seen a sharp rise in the number of domestic travellers signing up for its two-week greenhouse building programme, which was otherwise packed with tourists from the UK, Middle East and Europe, founder Ishita Khanna says. The temperatures in the valley drops to -30 degree Celsius in winter and these greenhouses help vegetables grow and thrive in the harsh climate. “We have built over 150 greenhouses so far, of which 50% have been built by tourists. Most are solo travellers in their 20s to mid-30s,” Khanna says. Another popular programme is called ‘Live like a local’ where travellers live in villages and help with civic and social needs, from public health care and education to water and food.