

## **Why Travel**

*by Amy Holste, World Savvy volunteer and donor*

Over the past ten months many people have asked me, "How can you afford to travel?", "don't you get lonely?"; "aren't you scared?" After some combined reply of "sometimes", "not really", and "never!" my internal response has always been: "Actually, how can you afford not too?"

In an age of globalization, with new emerging markets, such as china and India - poised to change the economic (and with it - cultural) balance of trade and international relations, and with a widening gap between rich and poor, a world view seems to become even more crucial. Acknowledging reasonable factors of career, finances and general life responsibilities - wanderlust is not always a viable option. But it is something that, especially as Americans, we should consider putting higher on the priority list.

This year I have gratefully had the opportunity to take a break from the "normal" 9-5 office environment and visit some of the destinations that have been patiently keeping placeholders on my ever lengthening "things to see-places to go" list. if you had told me a year ago at this time, that I would have flown down the "world's most dangerous road" on a rubber wheeled Schwinn bike in Bolivia, watched saffron-robed Buddhist monks during alms offerings at daybreak in Laos, listened to the lone call of the muezzin and watch as loyal Muslim's break their day to honor Allah in the magnificent space of a neighborhood mosque in Dubai, watch the sunrise over the spiritual center of the Inca empire in Peru, or participate in a traditional Balinese religious ceremony to honor the fight between good and evil, I would have been suspect at best.

but the last ten months have included all of these things and more. As the time has passed, i have become cognoscente of my changing attitude and beliefs. Each new place and experience has challenged my boundaries, introduced me to new friends, enlightened, amazed, and at times also frustrated, and baffled.

but the experience of visiting the gorgeous Savannah's of Africa and seeing firsthand the struggles so many communities and families are faced with, to hear personal stories and viewpoints from Vietnam war veterans (veterans of the "American" war), or to talk openly with a Muslim father and hear his angst, frustration and concern over the world that will welcome his two daughters as they grow up - are experiences that can't be found in books, in the media, or in the confines of one nation. at times dramatically, and at times gently - they have all affected the way that I will think of poverty, war, and religion. Across cultures, borders, languages and religions, there are surprisingly more commonalities than differences in the basic needs one strives for in life - health, love, happiness, safety, opportunity.

There is a popular legend that tells the story about a group of blind men and an elephant. One version of the story describes six blind men who each touch a different part of the elephant and go on to describe how it feels:

*"The blind man who touches a leg says the elephant is like a pillar; the tail-toucher claims it's like a rope; the one who feels the trunk compares it to a tree branch; the man who felt the ear says the elephant is like a hand fan; the belly-toucher asserts it's like a wall; and the tusk feeler insists the elephant feels like a solid pipe"*

*Afterwards, a wise man explains to them: "All of you are right. The reason every one of you is telling it differently is because each one of you touched the different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all those features what you all said."*

I love this simple story for many reasons. Most importantly, it reminds me that 'reality' is so often derived from limited individual experience and perspective. It also alludes to a larger harmony in sharing differences in opinion or knowledge and how each in its own right can be "correct".

Travel, if anything, is a fun and adventurous way to gain a new perspective and lens with which to expand personal experience and become more well-rounded and well-informed.