

Vacation Destination: Organic Farm

By Aubrie Wolff

I recently wrote an article for this newsletter about tips for taking green vacations. It inspired me to walk the walk and put some of my own advice to good use. My *vacation* was a work opportunity and a chance for me to do something different in my everyday life. I was so used to sitting in an office answering phones and inputting data all day, that I finally decided I needed to get out and participate in something that was of real interest to me. I searched online for volunteer opportunities that would allow me to get out in nature and help out in some way. There were many choices for working in other countries, but for now I decided I needed to stay in the U.S. I did find a different setting and lifestyle! I decided to go to Vermont and help out at an organic vegetable farm.

The World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (www.wwof.org) organization is dedicated to linking up organic farmers around the world with volunteers. The volunteers work on the farms for various lengths of time in exchange for food and a place to stay. I chose to do this simply because eating organic is something that has recently become important to me, and I wanted the chance to work outdoors. The small farm in Vermont sounded like a good fit for what I was looking for and since I had never been up to that region of the country, I decided to go. The greenest way for me to get from Dallas to Vermont? By train. It took a good two and a half days and was an adventure in itself, as you definitely get the chance to get to know all kinds of people while on an extended train trip. After arriving at the farm and getting settled in, I met the other volunteers and we prepared to get to work. Since there were no animals to take care of we did not have to wake up at the crack of dawn. However, there was still plenty to be done, and for a few days, we went to work at the local community garden, which was just getting underway. These were long full days of work preparing the soil by clearing the rocks and adding compost, laying mulch, putting up fencing, digging, planting all in hopes of getting this garden started. While not working there, our time was spent tending to the on-site farm at the house where I was staying and harvesting vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, rhubarb and kale as well as herbs like fennel, dill and mint for the various farmers' markets in the area. I have to say that going to the market was my favorite time there. I hadn't actually been to a real farmers market before, and I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the neighborly scene and the camaraderie.

I only stayed for a week and that time quickly came to an end. I tried to ask as many questions as I could since I was there to work and learn. I can say that staying in someone else's home with people I did not know took some adjustments for me and I am sure for my host as well. I learned this is not the easiest of lifestyles and I definitely have a new appreciation of not only hard work, but where my food comes from and how important it is to buy local whenever possible. Overall, I am glad I did this and am grateful for the experience and for all of the people I met along the way.