

# Utah sanctuary lets you care for those rescued

By Beth D'Addono  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

KANAB, Utah — It was impossible to resist her big brown eyes. Even though we had just met, I invited her back to the room. Before long, she was stretched out on the bed . . . and I was feeding her chicken.

Her name was Haley, a 2-year-old golden Lab-shepherd mix who had been rescued from a Mississippi puppy mill. First sent to a local shelter, Haley's shy disposition got in the way of her being adopted. Her next stop? Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, where caregivers work with animals with all kinds of issues. The goal is to find them a permanent home — 75 percent do — and in the meantime, give them the best life possible.

For me and my animal-obsessed friend Stephanie, Best Friends is a mythic place. The subject of a documentary series on the National Geographic Channel called "Dogtown," it is often in the news: as the new home for the Michael Vick pit bulls (called Victory dogs here); the rescuers of more than 600 hoarded cats in Pah-rump, Nev.; the first shelter on the job after Katrina; and the nonprofit that made it possible for a deceased soldier's beloved dogs to be flown from Iraq to his family's home in Michigan.

The largest no-kill shelter in the nation, Best Friends sprawls over more than 33,000 red rocky acres in Angel Canyon, within easy driving distance of the Grand Canyon, Zion, and Bryce Canyon national parks, and Lake Powell. But the sanctuary itself is a tourist attraction, drawing some 25,000 people a year who tour the facility and volunteer to work with the 2,000 or so dogs, cats, birds, goats, sheep, horses, potbellied pigs, bunnies, and the few raptors in residence.

Walking dogs, scooping litter, playing with kitties — that sounded like heaven to us. The first step to making our pilgrimage, even before we booked airfare, was to reserve one of the limited number of cabins onsite. Because of the sanctuary's popularity, the cabins and larger cottages go fast. There are mom-and-pop hotels five miles up the road in Kanab, but we were



PHOTOS BY BETH D'ADDONO/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Haley stayed overnight with the author in her cabin at Best Friends Animal Society in Kanab, Utah. Residents of Kittyville can go on a tear anytime, and the society is for the birds, too.

lucky to find three nights in May available.

We flew into Las Vegas and made the four-hour drive through breathtaking scenery. It was near sunset when we got to Best Friends, and the canyon walls glowed fiery red and hot pink. Although the natural beauty of the place is stunning, we were eager to see the critters, which wouldn't happen until our tour the next day. Our cabin — more like a little studio, with a microwave, fridge, and doggie door that opened onto a little enclosed pen — was comfy and a good deal for \$86 a night.

A trip into Kanab, population about 5,400, had a few surprises. Who knew that it was called Little Hollywood thanks to the more than 100 films (mostly Westerns) set in Kane County, including "The Lone Ranger," "Stage Coach," "The Outlaw Josey Wales," "Maverick," and "My Friend Flicka." One local outfit, Frontier Movie Town, serves up a cowboy cookout, gun-fights, and an Old West show to get visitors in on the act. You can also visit Frontier Movie Town to see sets from some of the best-known movies.

Just about all of the restaurants

## If you go . . .



**Best Friends Animal Society**  
5001 Angel Canyon Road  
Kanab, Utah  
435-644-2001  
bestfriends.org

are pet friendly and have outdoor seating. We visited during the annual Greyhound Gathering, and hundreds of dogs and their rescuers arrived for the event.

Even though there is a lot to do within a drive of Kanab, some people visit just to volunteer. And some, like our cabin neighbor Joann Abrahamian, a fiftysomething executive assistant from Flemington, N.J., decide not to leave.

"I have nine cats," she said. "I like the idea of living somewhere I feel normal. At home, everybody thinks I'm crazy." Abrahamian met with human resources people at Best Friends about a job and engaged a realtor to help her find a house. "I'm eligible for early retirement — what better way could I spend it?"

It's a story we heard more than once. People visited, then moved to the area to work at Best Friends. Some had plenty of money and didn't mind the relatively low pay. Others figured they could live cheaply in Kanab and pursue their passion for animals.

Our first day of volunteering involved touring the grounds: Dogtown; Kittyville, which includes a kitty motel for cats with feline immunodeficiency virus; Parrot Garden, home to about 100 candy-colored birds; Piggy Paradise, where we met Harley and Sprocket, 6-month-old potbellied pigs; and Wild Friends, a licensed rehabilitation program to help injured wild animals. Then there was a drive by Horse Haven and a stop by the Bunny House, where we met a few resident guinea pigs. After a \$4 vegan lunch with other

volunteers, we got down to business.

At Dogtown we helped socialize a litter of abandoned puppies. We also learned that each dog's collar told a story: yellow, special needs; purple, not good with kids; red, staff only; and green, good to go. Dog walking took up the rest of the afternoon, along with cleaning dog runs and picking up toys.

Most of the animals who find a safe home at Best Friends have special physical or behavioral needs, and the veterinarians, trainers, and caregivers work to get them to a point where they can be adopted. Some dogs, like the Victory dogs, are so traumatized that they're afraid of everything, including leashes and toys, and have to be trained how to be dogs again. Others just need a little extra care.

Haley was one of those; she was our sleeper dog. Volunteers may "check out" a dog overnight to assess her social skills, and track any problems that might occur when the animal is in the real world. Haley did great, although when we took her to town for dinner, she was a bit spooked by the traffic noise. In the cuddling de-

partment, she passed with flying colors. It was tough to give her back in the morning.

We spent the next day in Kittyville, at Casa de Calmar, named for a Best Friends benefactor. (The sanctuary is run with 100 percent private money.) Colonies of cats live in a series of climate-controlled, screened, indoor-outdoor habitats full of towers to climb, wood to scratch, and toys to play with. We were put to work wiping down every surface and changing every litter box in one "neighborhood," something that happens daily. Afterward, we played with, petted, and brushed dozens of cats.

We had booked a cabin at Zion Mountain Ranch about 45 minutes away on our last night, planning to take a hike in the park before heading home. The place was beautiful; through our window we could see bison grazing and the majestic cliffs of Zion on the horizon.

But without a sleepover dog, something was missing. Haley was still in our thoughts.

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# 'Voluntourists' pay their own way to otherworldly rewards

By Lisa Lubin  
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Tired of lying on the beach with nothing to do but get the sand out of your shorts? Sick of traipsing around a new city with a tattered map and waiting in line at

museums full of other sweaty tourists? Now more than ever travelers are looking for a new kind of vacation. A journey with a purpose and volunteering during time off are becoming increasingly popular.

With "voluntourism," you can

travel to beautiful regions of the world, meet and work with locals, and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow volunteers. And with today's economy forcing many to cut back on their vacations, these types of trips are typically a lot more affordable than your routine all-inclusive holiday at the "all-you-can-eat" resorts of the Caribbean.

There are many options out there for the traveler who may shy away from some hard-core volunteer experiences like working with the Peace Corps, pounding nails with Habitat for Humanity, or the ubiquitous English language teaching gigs. Here are some unique experiences that can save you money and give you an amazing adventure, while providing valuable manpower to local communities around the globe.

## Crisis UK, London ([www.crisis.org.uk](http://www.crisis.org.uk))

To give is better than to receive, so why not truly give this holiday season? Travel to London for Crisis Open Christmas. During the weeks around Christmas and New Year's, more than 1,500 "homeless guests" are welcomed at eight empty office buildings around London. The guests are not only provided with warmth, companionship, food, and a safe place to sleep, but also services such as checkups from doctors on site, professional advice, and treats like an arts and crafts center, a computer lab, karaoke, live musical entertainment, and even a mini beauty salon for some pampering. Volunteering here for a few days allows you to get to know some of the guests by name and give them the gift of friendship and human interaction, things they often do without.

## Pueblo Inglés, Spain ([puebloingles.com](http://puebloingles.com))

The most rewarding travel experiences always seem to involve interacting with locals and traveling on a more down-to-earth level. Imagine a week in sunny Spain meeting local professionals with all your lodging and meals free. There is one catch: You must speak English. Pueblo Inglés offers Americans a "different kind of va-



CRISIS (ABOVE); LISA LUBIN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

During Crisis Open Christmas, "homeless guests" are assisted in empty office buildings by the London organization Crisis. Student Alberto Garcia of Spain and volunteer Tes Lapham of Australia practice salsa dancing — speaking English only — in some free time at Pueblo Inglés.

cation" by bringing native English speakers from all over the world together with Spanish business people at a rural four-star resort in a beautiful countryside setting for an intense week of speaking English and all around good times. It is basically a "camp for English," but there is no teaching just talking, and lots of it. This is a unique opportunity, not only for Spaniards to be immersed in the English language, but also for English-speaking travelers to be immersed in the rich culture of Spanish life.

## Sar-El, Israel ([sar-el.org](http://sar-el.org))

Put on your combat boots and volunteer for the Israeli Army. Meals and lodging are paid for during the week and you are free on the weekends to explore this history-rich country. The majority of volunteers are assigned to work on army bases with tasks ranging from kitchen duties to simple mechanical repairs. Volunteers will



work alongside or under the direction of soldiers and perform duties such as packing food rations or medical kits, changing spare parts, gardening, painting, or cleaning.

## Earthwatch Institute ([earthwatch.org](http://earthwatch.org))

Observe fur seals and contrib-

ute to the conservation of the Bering Sea. Help the world's fastest mammal in a race against extinction in Namibia's ranching heartland. These are just two of the amazing volunteer opportunities available at the Earthwatch Institute. This international nonprofit organization brings science to life for people concerned about the planet's future. Founded in 1971, Earthwatch supports scientific field research by offering volunteers the opportunity to join research teams around the world. Earthwatch recruits close to 4,000 volunteers every year to collect field data in the areas of rainforest ecology, wildlife conservation, marine science, archeology, and more. Through this process, they educate, inspire, and involve a diverse array of people, who actively contribute to conserving the earth.

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