



June 2020

Black Lives Matter.

In this space, we usually talk about the world's greatest landscapes, or biodiversity, or cultural heritage, and how we volunteer to make the world better. Today we are not showing pictures of animals or scenery which capture the imagination and take us on a mental holiday, because we need to focus on racial injustice. People who care about the environment care about people. The two cannot be separated.

We volunteer in places where the past does not seem so long ago. When we volunteer in Virgin Islands National Park, we work among the ruins of sugar plantations that were built by Black enslaved people. When we volunteer in Yosemite National Park, we work on trails sacred to indigenous people, and where Buffalo Soldiers worked as protectors of Yosemite. These are parts of our history and we see the heritage from the past exposed in our world today. The injustices of the past are still here, and we still have not lived up to our highest ideals. Justice is not equal for all people – here in America and around the world.

The violence and racial injustice experienced by the Black community is wrong. Black Lives Matter. Every single one. Countless Black lives have been senselessly lost and the trend continues, even after the flash point of George Floyd's horrible murder at the hands of police. The collective voices of anger and sadness across the country, and indeed across the globe, need to be heard and amplified. We feel angry, sick, sad, and outraged.

As a small organization with a big heart, ConservationVIP® believes that many people making incremental contributions can indeed change the world. We proudly lead international volunteer trips around the world. To our hosts, although we are white, black, brown, male and female, young and old, we are American volunteers. We all come together as a community with a common purpose to make a difference: give back, to help, to do something special, and to do the right thing. And today the right thing to do is to raise our voice in support of those who protest racial injustice.

Many of us at ConservationVIP®, as individuals, have been soul searching and confronting the difficult questions of our own intrinsic biases and how to address them. We have been conversing on how our small organization can contribute to the larger solution to assure justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) into all areas of our program. We don't have all the answers yet, but we are exploring ways to make intentional choices to be more inclusive and welcoming to the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) community.

We continue to welcome all people. And welcome your thoughts on how we can do better.

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