

Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Emily Hargreaves

Dates	January 2011 to April 2011
Locations	Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand
Activities	Independent travel



Why did you want to do a gap experience?

I wanted to take a gap year to experience cultural and environmental diversity and to prepare me for university.

What did you do on your gap experience?

Firstly I travelled to Hong Kong where I saw the cultural diversity where English meets Chinese which was very interesting. I also visited a kindergarten in Hong Kong, called Kindermusic where children are taught to read, speak and write through the help of music.



China has to be one of the most eye-opening countries I have experienced, travelling to some of the places which have seen huge political unrest such as Tiananmen Square. We also travelled to iconic places such as the Forbidden City which unearthed the history and dynasties of China as well as the Great Wall of China. I then travelled to Australia where I witnessed the aftermath of the Brisbane floods and also witnessed the development of a cyclone.

When the time came to leave for New Zealand, the Christchurch earthquake hit so our flight was delayed. When we reached our first stop Kiahora on our second day we experienced our own earthquake which measured 4.8 on the Richter scale which allowed me to see the responses to a minor earthquake which included the air-raid like siren. The skydive over Lake Wanaka in New Zealand gave me a birds-eye view of geological landforms mostly created by the on-going tectonic activity. My skydive partner pointed out the mountainous areas which are minor fault lines in New Zealand as well as the 'Alpine Fault line'.



Next I travelled to the Fijian Islands, which are mostly volcanic in origin and mountainous. I found the cultural differences most dramatic here. In Thailand I travelled out to Koh Tao on the east coast where I snorkelled on the coral reefs and swam with reef sharks.

What did you find easy and challenging

My gap year had some challenging parts. I went into hospital with glandular fever and had a reaction to insect bites in South East Asia. I wouldn't be able to say anything was easy as such but lots of it was enjoyable, new and exciting.



What did you learn?

I learnt so much geographical knowledge while I was away both physical and also the human social side.

What skills did you develop?

I have improved my confidence, organisation and decision making skills.

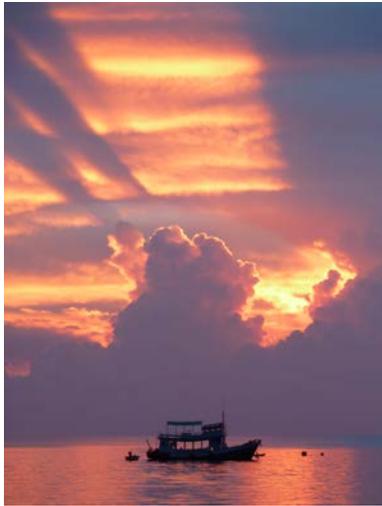
What impact has your gap experience had?

The impact of my gap year has been phenomenal, from the knowledge of the current condition of the seas when scuba diving on the Great Barrier Reef, the Christchurch earthquake, the cyclone in Australia my physical geography knowledge has grown dramatically and all because I have seen it first-hand and means my passion for this subject has grown.



What were the highlights of your gap experience?

The highlights of my gap year are the scuba dive off the Great Barrier Reef and snorkelling. The scuba dive allowed me to see the effect of the coral bleaching caused my CO2 levels rising in the ocean. I got to see a giant clam and lots of clown fish and the divers taught us a lot about the reef.



What do you plan to do next?

I am attending Exeter University to study BS Geography. After my studies I hope to complete a PGCE in teaching geography. I aspire to enthuse children to study geography and consider taking a gap year to broaden their knowledge of the subject.