

Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Annys Mackintosh

Dates	January – June 2009
Locations	Spain and New Zealand
Activities	Work, conservation volunteer and independent travel



What did you do on your gap experience?

I spent my first three and a half months in Seville, with a Government funded programme called “ECTARC, Leonardo da Vinci programme”. On this programme accommodation, flights and a monthly allowance were provided, as well as an intern job. I spent six weeks in New Zealand working in Wellington, doing conservation work in the surrounding area with Global Volunteer Network. On the programme we travelled to numerous local national parks and wildlife areas to help with projects restoring the native vegetation or controlling introduced species to help the native wildlife.



What did you find easy and challenging?

The difficult aspects of your gap year trip are the finer details of planning, and making sure you have backups – if anything goes wrong, you are on your own in the country unless travelling with people, and so have to deal with any difficult situations on your own. The easiest part of your gap trip is having fun – you never have a dull moment when you’re travelling, and even if you’re travelling on your own you never get lonely because you always meet fellow travellers in the same position to travel with.



What impact has your gap experience had?

The biggest impact this trip has had on me is confidence, independence and the urge to travel much more extensively to see more of the world. My confidence grew as I met new people to travel with and made new friends- every day you are meeting new people and having new experiences.

What were the highlights of your gap experience?

In New Zealand, bush hiking, to trap and monitor the local wildlife in a protected area with the Moehau environmental group. In Spain the job gave me enough flexibility to be able to explore the surrounding province of Andalucía.

Were there any unexpected outcomes?

I was originally only going to stay in New Zealand for 6 weeks, but I decided to stay for an extra 5 weeks, bringing my total trip to 11



weeks, and it was the best decision I ever made.

How has this experience helped you?

The first-hand experience I gained from travelling I have been able to apply in my lectures. This has enhanced my interest in my course and helped me to decide which modules I would like to study further. The gap year has motivated me to work harder in my degree so I get as much experience and the best opportunities possible.

What are you intending to do as result of this gap experience?

It has encouraged me to travel much more in the future, and take part in any exchange opportunities. I have decided to go to Madagascar in the summer to take part in environmental research. The voluntary work I took part in in New Zealand has influenced me to apply for this.

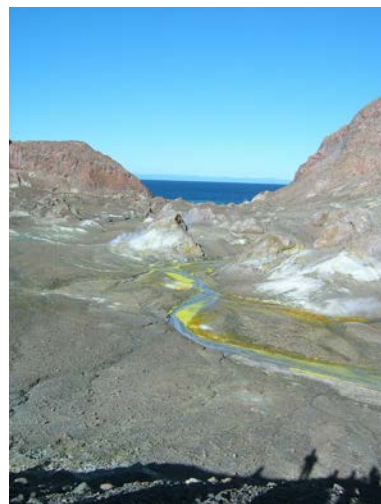


What do you plan to do next?

I intend on completing my geography degree at Southampton University. I would like to become a geography teacher in the future, to encourage more people to travel and experience what I did.

What do you wish you had known before your gap experience?

Before departing on my gap experience I wished I had known how hard it would be coming home, as when you arrive home you realise how different it is and you have normally changed completely as a person – it takes a few days to settle back in and regain normality after travelling, no matter how long for.



What is your advice for anyone thinking of taking a gap experience?

1. Be prepared for whatever you have planned; plan for every eventuality, as you never know what might happen. Take photocopies of everything, spare cards, spare money, medical kits, insurance, even though it probably won't happen to you, you don't really want to risk it.
2. Stay as long as you can and want in a country – if you want to stay longer, do it. You will only have this opportunity once.
3. Enjoy yourself – especially if it's your first time away from home and you get homesick, try not to think about it; go out and find an activity to do to take your mind off it and meet people. You won't feel homesick for long if you're having an amazing time!!