

# Learning and Leading Gap Scholars

## ● Will Allman

Dates	November 2014 – July 2015
Locations	Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia
Activities	Working, volunteering and independent travel



### ***Why did you want to undertake a gap experience?***

I had always wanted to take a gap year but without the boost that the RGS-IBG provided me, I would have never been able to undertake such a trip of a lifetime, especially for such an extended period of time. I felt I had seen little of the world in my life so far so the prospect of visiting a number of different countries, with a variety of cultures, and range of different landscapes was intriguing to me. I also hoped that I would develop as an individual by becoming more confident, outgoing and open-minded during my time away from home.

### ***What did you do on your gap experience?***

I left the UK on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and flew to Sydney, Australia where I quickly found a job and moved into a flat. However, I decided to leave after only six weeks due to the state of the flat I was renting, the kitchen-hand job I was in at the time and the landlord who we had a series of disagreements with. I got a new job in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales on a cattle farm until the end of January 2015. Unfortunately the Hunter Valley is not only famous for its wine-making but also its large amounts of natural gas, and it became apparent that fracking operations potentially threatened the future of the farm due to the contamination of local water sources.



After six amazing weeks on the farm I moved to near Melbourne and worked on a second farm until March when I undertook some independent travel up the east coast of Australia. I volunteered at the James Cook University Rainforest Observatory in the Daintree Rainforest for a month, helping researchers and university students measure and take samples relating to the rainforests levels of biodiversity. In April, I then flew to New Zealand where I spent 2 months travelling independently. Finally, I travelled independently through Vietnam, Laos and Thailand before heading back to the UK in July 2015.



### ***What did you find most easy and challenging?***

Looking back, I am surprised how quickly and easily I found like-minded people in such similar situations to me. For example I met 5



people who are all starting at Newcastle University with me later this month! On a down side, I would say finding a stable job in a large city like Sydney was surprisingly difficult. However, I now feel this was probably due to employers taking advantage of young people on working holiday visas and our naivety, having just moved abroad.

***What impact has your gap experience had?***

I have become more self-reliant, having to look after myself for the best part of a year, and have also become more decisive as well as motivated. Looking back to the person I was before I left, I feel I have matured as an individual, have become more independent and am able to engage with a wider range of people than before.



***What was the highlight of your gap experience?***

I am certain that New Zealand as a whole was my favourite country that I visited in the past year, due to the locals' friendly nature and the beautiful scenery. However, I think the happiest and most content I have felt was when I was living and working on Papanui, the 10,000 acre property in the Hunter Valley for about 6 weeks, seeing the "Real Australia" and finding the perfect escape from Sydney.



***What do you wish you'd know before you left?***

I wish I had researched more into local prices and what to expect before I arrived in some countries. For instance when I first arrived in Vietnam I realised, after paying for an airport shuttle, how much I had been ripped off. I quickly learned from this to question everything I paid for, so it proved a valuable lesson, but one I could have done without!

Generally, I don't think that there's much else I wish I had known, as I made mistakes and didn't keep to my budget or plan as precisely as I had intended, but I think that was what probably made my trip more memorable. And I wouldn't have had half of the experiences I did had I been more prepared!



***What are you planning to do next?***

I am still planning on starting my studies at Newcastle University in the next few weeks. However, since going travelling, I have got a new ambition. Once I have graduated and had a few years graduate experience I would like to try and make a move abroad, possibly to New Zealand or Australia, to see if I could start a life there.

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

1. If you're looking to get settled and work somewhere, is not to do what I did and rush into finding a flat and a job straightaway. I was probably in a bit of a panic and took the first ones that came up, but really I had time and should have been more selective.

2. Watch how much you drink, not just for the obvious reasons but also because it can get expensive and eats away at your budget.

3. Do not be afraid to take certain risks or make some decisions, as I am sure that like many others I did not stick to my itinerary as much as I had envisaged before I left, and my trip was probably better for it.

