

# Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

## ● John Nguyen

Dates	December 2010 to August 2011
Locations	Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru
Activities	Independent travel and volunteering on community project.



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

My aims and objectives for my gap year experience were personal development, e.g. living by myself, financial responsibility, experience new cultures and gain more fieldwork experience. I wanted to accomplish these objectives because it would benefit me when I start attending University. Experiencing new cultures was beneficial as I had not had the opportunity to travel before.

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

I began my gap year in Rio de Janeiro for New Year. I then travelled to Foz du Iguacu to visit the Iguacu Falls. I then crossed the border where I visited the Iguacu Falls from the Argentinian side.

My next stop was Buenos Aires, where I stayed in several different districts, exploring the different architecture and museums. I also learnt some Spanish here by speaking to an Argentinian friend I made. I then travelled to Rosario and Cordoba where I met a local who I climbed up Mount Cerro Uritorco with.

Diverging from my initial plan, I spent a week in Mendoza due to recommendations from other travellers. Here I rented a bike and cycled through vineyard country. I also went horse riding in the mountains, followed by wine tasting.

I travelled to Chile and stayed with a local family for a month, learning their culture and language. I crossed the border to Arequipa in Peru where I met Sean, another gap scholar. Here we visited museums, explored the city, hiked the Colca Canyon, did 2 weeks of voluntary construction work and took Spanish classes whilst staying with a local family.

Afterwards, we spent our remaining time in Peru at the city of Cuzco. I hiked to Machu Picchu and worked for 4 weeks as a bartender. I also took part in the Sun festival.

After Cuzco, we travelled to Puerto Maldonado, where I witnessed the opening ceremony of the new bridge connecting Peru and Brazil. We took a 3 day boat ride to Manaus, where we visited an Amazon reserve and then took a 4 day boat ride to Belem where we visited another Amazon reserve. We ended our journey in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



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



What I found most challenging was trying to make the most of my budget, due to high cost of food and accommodation.

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

The gap experience has allowed me to apply my geographic knowledge in the real world, from coastal defences to how people cope with low incomes. It also developed my confidence and ability to live by myself.

***What were the highlights of your gap experience?***

The highlight of my trip would have to be living with the Chilean family for 1 month, where I only spoke Spanish.

***What do you wish you had known before you went?***

I wish I known how expensive Argentina and Chile really were before I decided to spend time in them. Lonely Planet did give price guidelines, but it was nothing like how it actually was. I also wished I knew about 'Hostelbookers', which would have saved me some more money.



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

Shop around for accommodation, as websites and the Lonely Planet often do not show the cheapest hostels. Learn the language as best as you can. It especially helps when you are lost.

***What do you plan to do next?***

As a result of this gap experience, I intend to travel much more to see other cultures. I am also looking forward to continue learning Spanish. I plan to study geography at Sheffield University, where I will try to get a job as a city planner, specialising in sustainable development.