

# Learning and Leading Gap Scholars

## ● Comfort Enoch-Moye

Dates	February 6 <sup>th</sup> 2014- 24 <sup>th</sup> April 2014
Locations	Peru
Activities	Community work at the children's refuge of Project Peru



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

After my first year of college it became evident to me that going straight into University was not the route that I wanted to take. Whilst many of my peers were decided about what courses they wanted to do, I knew that although I loved Geography I needed more time to work out if I really wanted to study it at a higher level. I also wanted to gain confidence, both in myself to make decisions and also to be involved in things that I enjoy. I wanted to be more independent and felt that going away and doing something positive would allow me to do this. I also wanted to see the world, having not been to many places before, and I wouldn't have been able to do this without the support of the RGS-IBG.



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

After plenty of enthusiasm and little deliberation about south America, I decided to go to Peru. I had always been interested in the country and from an anthropological point, Peru stood out to me as a nation with much to offer in terms of culture and sites of geographical importance.

I left for Peru in February and stayed in Zapallal on the outskirts of central Lima. I travelled within the country a lot, including to museums in central Lima, Ica, Trujillo, Chimbote, Puerto Maldonado, Cusco and other smaller towns on the outskirts. I stayed in a children's refuge, assisting the children with reading, took them to school, played with them and helped them with everyday tasks. Three times a week I travelled about 40 minutes to Laderas where I worked on the community project of El Comedor, helping to prepare meals. This also helped with my writing as I spoke to many people who offered me their opinions of social conditions in Peru.



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

The easiest thing for me was immersing myself into a foreign culture and finding similarities that would not get lost in translation. One of the most challenging tasks was being stared and sometimes laughed at or talked about by people on the streets or in certain areas



because of the way I looked. I became very self-conscious which was not something I was expecting. Also, at the children's refuge, I did not feel as though things were as good as they could be in regards to the children's diet, or my own, and that brought some challenges.

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

The impact of my gap year has been largely positive. I feel a newfound confidence which allows me to make decisions more easily, and working with children gave me more experience in leadership and listening. In terms of geographical skills: map reading, planning, navigation, analysis and evaluation are all areas in which I feel I have developed. I had to use my initiative, calculate my actions and weigh up solutions independently.



The highlight of my experience was visiting Machu Picchu and working at Laderas. I did not anticipate how amazing Machu Picchu is, despite having seen it in many photos beforehand. When I got there, I was not only stunned but felt a great sense of achievement. Working at Laderas turned out to be a great opportunity to meet people and I was actively helping to make a difference which in turn, gave me more satisfaction than I expected.

***Were there any unexpected outcomes?***



As a result of this experience, I am more interested in the research field and have considered this as a career option. I am also keen to encourage and promote gap year experiences to young people who want to undertake university study but would like to have other experiences first. I feel that this experience has helped me to become a more-rounded person and has given me skills that may have been deferred. Some other unexpected outcomes were resilience, long term relationships with a few of the volunteers and an invitation to return to Laderas.

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



My plan for the future is firstly to study Geography (BSc) at the University of Southampton. Then this will hopefully lead to a Masters degree. I would also like to do more travelling and involve myself in other projects and research if the opportunity arises.

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



1) To go through in detail any conditions of projects that you're interested in joining to avoid later problems. Projects are a large part of gap experiences and it is important to be in the right environment in which you can explore easily without causing problems.

2) Do not be afraid to ask questions and clarify everything before leaving.

3) Pack lightly and don't bring brand new clothes, especially if you are going to an underprivileged area as you will attract attention. T-shirts and cropped trousers are a good idea for day to day life in a tropical climate.

4) Lastly, try to document everything you can using photos, diaries, blogs and other methods as they are great to look over when you get back home and for others to see.