



Charlotte Parker is joining the Costa Rica and Nicaragua Autumn 2009 expedition after receiving the Raleigh Graduate Bursary Award for volunteering overseas

I first heard about the Bursary Award through the news, and it sounded like the sort of thing I would be interested in. I enjoy outdoor activities and always wanted to participate in voluntary work abroad so the expeditions that Raleigh provide seemed like the perfect balance. However, having just graduated I was not in a financial position to travel at all, let alone participate in a project like this, so the Bursary Award seemed like the perfect opportunity.

I had graduated from Lancaster University with a good degree in History and Politics a few weeks ago. After graduation I considered a whole range of options. Initially I wanted to find a graduate job, but after sending off countless applications I began to consider other options. I thought about travelling, but first I needed to find a part time job to earn some money, and that was also seemingly impossible. I did look into pursuing my studies by doing a Masters degree, but once again cost meant that I would have to delay this plan for at least another year.

So, I was looking for any type of job; from part time to permanent full time, all over the country, but I was having no luck. I was on Jobseekers Allowance to keep me going, and I was applying for several jobs everyday. Despite having a good degree and some work experience on my CV I only heard back from one application. Eventually I got offered some temp work for six weeks, which turned out to be perfect timing as just after starting the work I found out I had received the Raleigh Graduate Bursary Award.

Obviously the fact that Raleigh were offering bursary awards was a big factor in me choosing Raleigh over other organisations, as quite simply I would not have been able to afford to go away without financial aid. However it was also the nature of the expeditions that attracted me, I liked the fact that as well as participating in voluntary work, there was also the opportunity to trek across the country, therefore providing a much more varied experience. One of the factors was that Raleigh has permanent bases out in the countries, so they can establish links with the local communities and ensure that the projects that are being carried out are sustainable, and beneficial to the people of the community. Finally, the fact that Raleigh are well renowned and respected was greatly reassuring, as when considering travel abroad safety is a major issue and both me and my parents felt that Raleigh offer the reassurance needed with regards to safety issues.

I think Raleigh will improve my employability skills because it will give me invaluable life experience. It will give me a wider view of the world and an insight into the differences of people and communities, something that you can't be taught in the classroom. I believe it will give me more character depth and strength; I think the tough times that I experience on expedition will make me into a stronger, more determined person. Overall I think the expedition will turn me into a more patient, determined and hard working person and provide

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me with better communication skills; all vital characteristics with regards to employability.

I want to get an experience that will stay with me for the rest of my life. I want to meet new people, make great friends, and experience what life is like outside of the Western world. Obviously I want to gain new skills that I can use later on in life, and well as learning new things about myself and gaining a wider view of what the world is like; as well as being able to give something back to others that are less fortunate.

Without the Raleigh Graduate Bursary Award, I would not have been able to afford to do any sort of travelling, let alone a ten week expedition. Not only that, but I would probably still be claiming Jobseekers allowance, or stuck in an unsatisfactory job. I fully intend to make the most of this opportunity as well as having the time of my life, and I hope it will help me focus more about what I want from life on my return.

Find out more about the Raleigh Graduate Bursary Award -

<http://www.raleighinternational.org/our-expeditions/aged-17-24/graduate-bursary-award>

The logo for Raleigh International, featuring the word "Raleigh" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The letter "R" is significantly larger and positioned to the left of the rest of the word, with the letters "aleigh" stacked vertically to its right.