



**Charlotte Parker joined the Costa Rica & Nicaragua expedition in Autumn 2009 after receiving the Raleigh Graduate Bursary Award for volunteering overseas**

I have learnt far more than I ever expected I would learn at Raleigh. With regards to myself I learnt that I am far more capable than I thought I was; I was so nervous before I did the trek yet I did it. I gained a great deal of self confidence from the whole expedition, from making new friends, to living with a family that spoke to English, to leading the group when it was my day to be day leader, and I believe this confidence has stayed with me on return to the UK.

One of the biggest lessons I learnt was not to judge other people before you get to know them. You get to meet such a wide variety of people at Raleigh, many of whom you would not usually mix with at home, and as someone coming from three years of being surrounded just by university students it was so good to talk to others from different backgrounds. I made some fantastic friends whilst on expedition, and many are people that I would perhaps not have taken the time to talk to at home.

With regards to others, I learnt that team work really is invaluable. If you work well together as a team, you can't fail to succeed! Your attitude and mood has a big impact on other people. I also learnt that people can really surprise you, from the shy girl that comes into her own as day leader, to the girl that keep threatening to leave then aces the trek, to the little unexpected conversations you have with people – you really do learn a lot from being with such a wide variation of people.

Whilst living in the community we learnt that people can be from a totally different world to us and live lifestyles so different that it's hard for us to comprehend, yet really aren't that different from us when it comes to family, work, fun, games and laughter. We definitely learnt to not to take things for granted as much, and to grasp every opportunity we can as we are lucky in the UK to have the opportunities to do whatever we want with our lives. Living in a poor community taught me to value small things such as time with your family, being outdoors, and taught me not to take life too seriously as there are so many people in the world worse off than us.

My plans have definitely altered following Raleigh. I have more of an idea of what I want to do with my life; ten weeks at Raleigh gave me much more insight into what career I want to do than three years at university did! Being so far away from home and with different people gave me the chance to decide what I really wanted to do with my life. For example, having picked up a bit of Spanish whilst living with a family in Nicaragua has made me really want to learn Spanish properly.

Raleigh gave me the chance to improve several skills which I feel will be vital with regards to my employability. I learnt a lot about team work from working with different types of people in all three phases. My communication skills improved from living in a community where they

do not speak English, and my leadership skills improved from having the chance to be a day leader on each of the phases.

Raleigh was without a doubt the best ten weeks of my life. I experienced a totally different lifestyle to my life in England, which has given me a much wider view of the world. I met so many new people and some of them I know will be friends for life. I got to see so much, from the jungle in Costa Rica, to amazing wildlife, to how it is like to live in a community that does not have the money we have. I learnt so much about myself, and other people, and had a great time whilst doing so!

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 than the other letters and is positioned to the left of the rest of the word. The word "Raleigh" is written vertically in a smaller font size to the left of the large "R".