



**Keen for a career break, luxury Travel specialist Katie Aston joined Raleigh's Spring expedition in Costa Rica as Logistics Coordinator and Project Manager**

At the beginning of 2009 I moved to Jersey from London to live with my boyfriend. My background is in Luxury Travel, however not being able to live on the island for more than 5 years, I was restricted on the jobs I was able to apply for. I ended up juggling three jobs; working in a cafe; waitressing for an upmarket catering company and amusingly making sausages for a local farmer and developing his food products.

I felt that Raleigh may be a way to regain confidence in the workplace, allow me to live and work in Latin America and equip me with new skills. Raleigh was my only consideration I knew of its reputation. I had attended an open evening in London and knew that it operated in Costa Rica and Nicaragua where I had always wanted to visit.

My role on expedition was Logistics Coordinator and Project Manager.

During the induction phase I was pretty busy with tackling the challenges of the logistics role, so I missed out on some of the induction briefings that would have prepared me better for being a Project Manager. Nevertheless we covered an immense amount and only by putting the theory into practice did I really learn.

As Logistics Coordinator I was in charge of designing suitable menus, placing orders with the wholesaler and allocating food to the groups, working within a tight budget. As a member of the fieldbase staff I was also required to assist other members of staff and operate the radio.

I enjoyed the camaraderie at Fieldbase, the variety of the job, the chance to go on roadtrips to see some spectacular projects, working alongside some fabulous Costa Ricans, improving my Spanish and answering the radio (apart from the early starts!) It was also great getting an idea of where the groups were and what they were up to despite being dispersed so far and wide.

The fact that you have to hit the ground running with the job is challenging, as is working to a deadline with last minute changes to the numbers of people in the groups and having to deal with late deliveries.

In the role of Project Manager I was responsible for the welfare, happiness, safety and personal development of a group of 17- 24 year olds. I enjoyed the support that everyone gives each other on trek, the highs that followed the lows everyday, the physical challenge, the breathtaking scenery and the chance to visit communities far off the beaten track.

I have learnt that you have to be yourself no matter what – that venturers are pretty astute. That I cannot tolerate bad manners or litter bugs!

In terms of soft skills I learnt on expedition; I have developed my knowledge of Microsoft Excel as well as learning how to upload posts and messages onto the Raleigh blog. I have practiced my Spanish extensively and despite having lived in Latin America before; this is the most that I have ever been required to use my language. It has improved enormously.

The soft skills used at fieldbase are communication (working on the radio is a newly acquired skill) and teamwork. Out on the project sites I had to solve problems, resolve conflict, give feedback, and work as both a leader and team member. I have found that being thrown in at the deep end is the best way to learn and develop.

A typical day on expedition would go something like this:

As the Logistic Coordinator at fieldbase I am usually up at 06:30, and eating breakfast at my desk by 07:30. For the rest of the morning I could be checking the food allocation spread sheets, inputting invoices, offloading a delivery from the wholesaler or counting packet of Peanuts and Raisins in the Bodega. Hopefully someone will have thrown lunch together, and in the afternoon it could be a visit to the wholesaler, photocopying for the Administrator, updating the Blog or answering the radio. A trip to Maxi Bodega to pick up provisions is a regular occurrence and in the evening I may be cooking a shepherd's pie for the rest of fieldbase staff followed by time checking my email or Facebook, or if I could be persuaded, join in a game of cards.

For me the expedition highlights were successfully distributing the food for the first phase with not too many dramas. Completing the Guanacaste Trek and living in El Terrero in Miraflor, Nicaragua, sharing the house with pigs and chickens!

Raleigh has given me confidence to realise that I can be thrown into a variety of situations and that I can cope even well outside my comfort zone: I previously felt uncomfortable speaking in front of a group and was overly concerned about how I came across to people. In completing the trek I realise that I am mentally and physically stronger than I originally thought. I realise that I am more positive than I thought and that I am able to lead a group of young people. I have enjoyed the teamwork at fieldbase and the variety of tasks that are presented.

It has been the chance of a lifetime, combining living in a region of the world that I have always wanted to visit, working for a worthwhile organisation and being put in challenging situations surrounded by other inspiring volunteer managers – and having a lot of fun in the process.

I would recommend others to join Raleigh as a volunteer manager because it has introduced me to some wonderful, dedicated people and given me experiences that I would never otherwise have been exposed to. Raleigh has given me the confidence I was lacking. The key for me was to take myself out of my comfort zone (by completing a trek that I would never have thought I was capable of, or acting as a translator on a building project in Nicaragua).