

Bridging the gap

August 2007

Gone is the time when taking a gap year meant bumming about on a beach for 365 days, with nothing more to worry about than catching the eye of the opposite sex and wondering where the next beer is coming from. Today's savvy students, with their crumpled set of A' Level results in their back pocket, are looking to get more from their year out than a suntan and a suspicious itch before heading off to university.

With rising student debt and fiercely competitive careers looming in the not too distant future, British teenagers are demanding a worthwhile, CV-enhancing year out that doesn't cost the earth, not to mention an off-the-beaten-track adventure, which is exactly what youth charity Raleigh International has given more than 30,000 young people over the past 22 years.

After finishing his A' Levels last summer, 19-year-old Rob Curran said: 'I wanted to do something more significant with my gap year than just travelling around and getting drunk. I wanted to be productive and achieve something worthwhile, not just for myself but to help others too. Raleigh International was the obvious choice and going on expedition to Malaysia was the best decision I have ever made.'

A true pioneer of gap year experiences, Raleigh International has been offering 17 to 24 year olds, from all walks of life, the chance to participate in unique, meaningful and challenging expeditions to awe-inspiring locations around the world since 1984. Current expeditions to Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Malaysia are proving more popular than ever, while an eagerly-anticipated new expedition to India will add to the line-up of far flung destinations from February 2008.

Each ten-week expedition incorporates three distinct phases – the community phase includes projects such as installing a gravity-feed water system in remote Nicaraguan villages; the environmental phase could include working to transform a former prison island into a wildlife refuge; and the adventure phase can see participants climbing to the top of South East Asia's highest mountain, Mount Kinabalu, in Borneo.

Raleigh International's structured expeditions offer their young participants a diverse, safe and supportive experience which could not be achieved by travelling independently. Working in small groups comprised of young people from the UK, around the world and the host country, Raleigh's expeditions offer a rare chance to discover new cultures, develop indispensable skills and make friends for life.

University admissions staff and employers from a wide range of industries see Raleigh International as a valuable, life-enhancing experience, which sets participants head and shoulders above their peers. Cecile Walton, Human Performance Manager at Accenture, said: 'I have seen a large number of job applicants in an interview situation. Those who have been away with Raleigh really stand out from the crowd. They can offer concrete examples of the sorts of skills that Accenture values highly – leadership qualities, team work, analytical skills and the ability to think on your feet.'

As well as the popular ten-week expeditions departing throughout the year, Raleigh International also offers a series of five-week expeditions for those short on time, but not on

enthusiasm. What's more, the opportunity to fundraise is fundamental to the entire experience, which can help young people achieve their dream gap year without forking out a fortune. For a ten-week expedition participants are asked to raise £2,995 or £1,750 for a five week expedition – achievable sums which pay dividends in terms of building a sense of self-achievement before Raleigh's volunteers have even strapped on their rucksack and boarded a plane.

After this year's A' Level results are published in August, it is easy to see why this newest generation of gappers will be ditching the beach bum options in favour of an all-together more worthwhile year out with Raleigh International.

Young people interested in making the most of their gap year can visit www.raleighinternational.org or call Raleigh International on 020 7183 1270 for more information.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Youth organisation Raleigh International was established in 1984 as Operation Raleigh, before changing its name to Raleigh International in 1992 to reflect its increasing number of volunteers from all over the world. It is a leading expert in structured gap year expeditions and one of the very first organisations to adhere to the new British Standard for overseas expedition safety (BS 8848).

Prince William helped Raleigh International hit the international headlines in 2001 when he took part in an expedition to Chile with the youth charity. The royal is just one of more than 30,000 to have taken part in an expedition, including young people from around the world and 'at risk' youths from the UK.

Hundreds of case studies are readily-available on every type of gap year scenario – including pre-university, post-university and career gap year participants from all walks of life. Past volunteers and senior members of Raleigh's staff are available for interview, and high-resolution images of Raleigh International's volunteers and work around the globe are available in a variety of scenarios and locations.

For more information about Raleigh International please contact Michelle Byrne on 01452 381 654 or email michelle@fyrne.com.