

GAP SEMESTER



New Zealand and Australia Gap Semester Program

ADVENTURE, INDIGENOUS CULTURES & CONSERVATION

www.pacificdiscovery.org



Overview

Explore the wonders of life Down Under before you hike and climb your way through New Zealand on this epic gap year program!

New Zealand and Australia are two of the most ecologically intact and diverse countries in the world, and you'll be able to see it all. From the Outback in Oz to the sheep-dotted green hills and dramatic mountains of Aotearoa (New Zealand). While traveling around both countries, you'll try your hand at white water rafting, snorkeling, surfing and canyoning, while also immersing yourself in the Maori indigenous culture by attending cultural performances. So if you're looking to get stuck in a myriad of different activities, both on land and at sea – this program is most certainly for you!

But that's only half of the adventure! You will also give back to the local communities by doing hands-on volunteer work at several coastal national parks. You will work alongside park rangers, help plant native trees, and learn all about native New Zealand and Australian ecology and wildlife, while also getting the chance to spot endangered birds, camp under the starry night sky, and relax on beautiful white sandy beaches at the end of a rewarding day of volunteering.





Safety

With our 20 years of operation and more than 100,000 student days in the field, we have an excellent safety record.

We even got voted as one of the Top Gap Year Providers for Safety by students on Go Overseas! Safety is something we pride ourselves on at Pacific Discovery, so it feels amazing to be recognized for the efforts we go through.



Accreditations

We have had our safety management systems assessed and accredited by the Gap Year Association (USA), Year Out Group (UK), and OutdoorsMark (New Zealand). Assessors have commented that our systems are among the best they have observed.



Who We Are

We are an accredited gap year provider that offers experiential gap semester and summer programs to some of the most amazing places on earth. Our programs are deliberate overland journeys, blending authentic immersion in diverse cultures, meaningful service-learning projects, rewarding adventures, wilderness exploration, and personal development.



Our Programs

Our programs are more than simply a travel, time-out or study abroad experience. Each is instead an overland journey of discovery, where students are immersed in a facilitated learning environment, designed to maximize the educational and life-skills potential.



Our Philosophy

We want to make the world a better place by providing extraordinary learning adventures that assist students in gaining the skills, confidence and insight to realize their potential in an increasingly global society; developing empathy for other cultures; furthering understanding of international issues; and heightening appreciation for the earth's wilderness and diversity.

Core Educational Components

Our programs are as much a journey of personal development as they are a physical journey, and participants are supported in reflecting together and thinking about their values, goals and what they wish to gain from the program experience.

PRE-PROGRAM

Prior to program start, participants are asked to create some goals for the program – this is personal and unique to each individual group member. Participants are given a suggested outline of skills and competencies that they can choose to focus upon.

DURING PROGRAM

At program orientation, goals participants have identified are discussed in a meeting with the program leaders. Throughout the program, ideas, tools and strategies are discussed that can be useful to help participants achieve their goals both on the program and for the rest of their lives. Participants are encouraged to journal during the program to assist them in clarifying their thoughts and define what they are learning.

TRANSFER AND FOLLOW UP

At the conclusion of the program, participants give a presentation to their group and leaders, summarizing how they've been challenged, what they've learned, how they've grown and how they intend to apply what they've learned to their lives after the program.

Towards the end of the program participants are also asked to write a letter to themselves imagining where they want to be in 6 months' time and identifying behaviors, habits and changes they wish to put in place. These letters are sent to them 6 months after program conclusion, helping reinforce the learning that has occurred.



Program Design

Each of our programs incorporate the following six core program components. These six interdependent components, provide immense opportunity for students to learn about themselves, to push their boundaries, question their assumptions, to stimulate problem solving and inquiry skills.



EDUCATIONAL FOCUS

Our programs are experiential education programs, meaning that learning is hands-on and tangible. For example, students will learn about a country's history and culture by immersing themselves in it, meeting local people and hearing life stories.



ETHICAL TRAVEL & SUSTAINABILITY

Students show respect for local customs, develop meaningful cross-cultural relationships, learn minimum-impact grassroots travel techniques and come to understand social and ecological issues on a deeper level.



OUTDOOR EXPLORATION

Immersion in the wilderness is an opportunity for students to become grounded, teaches appreciation for wild places and provides us the opportunity to explore local environmental issues and relate these issues to global environmental themes



SERVICE LEARNING

Volunteer elements built into our programs allow students to really immerse themselves in a place and share an experience with local people, bridging the gap that often exists between visitor and host.



CULTURAL IMMERSION

We immerse students in the local culture, through homestays, volunteer projects and language study. Students learn empathy for other cultures and build bridges of shared understanding.



PERSONAL & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the program, students are given leadership opportunities from facilitating reflection to coordinating the daily schedule.



Sample Itinerary

***This is a guide to what you can expect to do on program.
The order in which the activities occur might vary***



WEEK 1 | ABORIGINAL HISTORY & 4WD EXPEDITION

Welcome to Brisbane, Australia! We will spend a few nights in Brisbane, getting to know one another and exploring the city and attending a cultural tour. Here we will have an in-depth program orientation, get accustomed to life down under, and play ice-breaking games to bond with our new program friends.

We then head North up to Noosa, and embark on our three day 4WD expedition on K'gari Fraser Island. We will traverse the golden sand by 4WD, taking in the crystal clear waters. K'gari Fraser Island is home to an abundance of wildlife with over 350 different species of bird. It is an amazing place to observe dingoes and echidnas in the wild, along with all the marine life!

During the day we will explore the nature and diversity of the island, snorkeling and paddle boarding, and venturing to the island hotspots with the experienced guides! In the evenings we will learn to throw a boomerang, eat marshmallows by the campfire, taking in the stars and sleeping in beach cabins.

WEEK 2 | SNORKEL WITH TURTLES & SURF CAMP

We make our way south towards Byron Bay. On a sensational section of coastline, Byron Bay has been a hippy hang-out since the 1970s and today is the quintessential surfing town. Tie-dyed hippies mix with bronzed surfers, artists and large numbers of local and international tourists there to enjoy its beaches, boutiques and cafes. It's a great place to relax. While here, we'll take a boat trip out to the Julian Rocks to snorkel with turtles and tropical fish – dolphins and whales are also regularly seen in the waters around the headland. This is the place to try an optional scuba dive if you really want to immerse yourself in this amazing underwater world.

Heading south to an isolated section of coast, we stay at a surf camp and learn to surf from our surfing-guru instructors on the myriad of breaks in the area. Spend evenings relaxing at camp, debriefing each day and hearing the instructor's wild stories before a great sleep in preparation for another day on the surf!



WEEK 3 | **CONSERVATION PROJECT & CANYONING IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS**

At the heart of surfing is a connection-to-nature philosophy. We get to experience this in a hands-on way by undertaking volunteer conservation work alongside National Parks staff in a coastal National Park. The project revolves around bush regeneration and dune conservation near Crescent Head on the East Coast of Australia. This program aims to secure as much of the native plants and species that can be secured in the wild as possible for the next 100 years.

Continuing our southward migration, we skirt Sydney and head inland to experience the wonder of the Blue Mountains National Park. Based from the main township, Katoomba, we'll get outdoors to discover for ourselves what makes the 'Blueys' so special. We will spend a day canyoning – a unique adventure involving hiking, scrambling and rappels through sculptured rock canyons.

WEEK 4 | **ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING & SYDNEY EXPLORATION**

This week, we will help out at an outdoor education center, which involves young people in positive environmental projects, inspiring them to protect the planet. We learn about permaculture and sustainable living. Project activities include site landscape work for sustainability education, tree planting to regenerate a key wildlife river corridor, and habitat survey expedition days to identify forest vegetation communities and koala territories.

Next, we settle into our downtown accommodation in Sydney. Bold, brash and beautiful, Sydney is arguably the world's most vibrant city. Explore Sydney's famous harbor and beaches by ferry, visit the Opera House and Australian Museum, and check out the local beaches and shopping areas. In our last couple of days in Australia, we will reflect and discuss our time in Australia before getting ready to head to New Zealand!



TO NEW ZEALAND

WEEK 5 | PAIHIA AND VOLUNTEERING IN A COASTAL REGIONAL PARK

Having arrived in New Zealand we will settle into our accommodation in Auckland.

Traveling northwards, we head to Paihia where we will visit the Waitangi Treaty Grounds and Waka Taua Canoe in the Bay of Islands. Waitangi is one of the most important places in New Zealand's history. Often called the 'Birthplace of our Nation', Waitangi weaves together the strands and stories of many people, events and places to reveal the rich cultural history of Aotearoa New Zealand. Waitangi Treaty Grounds is a place for all New Zealanders and the place where much of New Zealand's history was shaped through the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the Treaty of Waitangi. But you will learn so much more when you visit!

We will then make our way to the stunning Tawharanui Regional Park for our first conservation volunteer project in New Zealand. Tawharanui boasts some of New Zealand's most beautiful white sandy beaches, rolling pastures, shingled bays, native coastal forests and regenerating wetlands. The sanctuary is a unique blend of conservation, recreation and sustainable farming within Tawharanui Regional Park. Our days here are spent participating in volunteer conservation initiatives working alongside park rangers and a local group of community volunteers, and our nights are spent under the starry night sky as we camp in this beautiful location.

WEEK 6 | RAFTING, HOT SPRINGS & MOUNTAIN BIKING

Heading south, we travel to the geothermal and cultural heartland of the country. Spouting geysers, bubbling mud pools, steaming vents, boiling lakes and colorful sinter terraces are just about everywhere in and around Rotorua. Besides taking advantage of the glorious hot pools, we will visit the spectacular geothermal parks – each one so different from the others – in and around the city.

Our days here are full of adventure and energy as we go mountain biking in the Redwoods, and spend an afternoon rafting down the Kaituna River. The Kaituna River is Rotorua rafting's playground, and home to not just one, but three impressive waterfalls, including the highest rafted waterfall in the world – Tutea Falls at 7m! We will also be introduced to Maori culture while visiting Rotorua. Māori are tangata whenua, the indigenous people of New Zealand. They came here from Polynesia in the 13th century.

During the last few days of this week, you will take the reins as a group and decide what to do with Pacific Discovery's unique self-led section, which has long been ingrained in our DNA. As a group, you will take the time to look at the budget and time you have to see how you spend your days.

WEEK 7 | WELLINGTON, ETHOS ECO FARM & CONSERVATION PROJECT IN NELSON LAKES

Wellington, New Zealand's capital city, is vibrant and home to some of the country's best cafés. We'll explore the city at our leisure with options to visit Parliament to learn about New Zealand's political system or taking the famous Wellington Cable Car. We will gain insight into Māori culture through an intimate Māori educational experience at the National Museum, before giving you free time to explore independently and observe the beautiful sites and sounds of the Zealandia Wildlife Sanctuary.

From Wellington, we board a ferry bound for the South Island, cruise through the twisting arms of the glacial carved Marlborough Sounds, and come ashore in Picton.

We will then head down to Nelson to do conservation work. In the mornings we will learn about conservation projects and help with the management of wilding pines and the protection of the native plants and animals. The afternoons will be spent relaxing in the quaint mountain hut and exploring the wonderful Nelson Coastline.

WEEK 8 | ROCK CLIMBING AND BACKPACKING EXPEDITION IN NATIONAL PARK

Before traveling to the west coast, students will embark on a multi-day tramp through Kahurangi National Park, immersing themselves in New Zealand's rugged wilderness. Along the way, they will develop essential skills in navigation and bushcraft, gain hands-on experience in outdoor survival, and have the option to explore caves hidden within the park's unique karst landscape. This journey combines adventure, practical learning, and the chance to connect deeply with New Zealand's natural environment.

It's time to head down the wild west coast of the South Island! Voted one of the top ten road trips in the world, we travel the length of the South Island's West Coast from Nelson to Wanaka. Enjoy rugged coastlines, beautiful rainforest and spectacular glaciers. We will spend a night at Punakaiki to view the impressive blow holes, carrying out another beach clean at Punakaiki Beach, then two nights at the tiny settlement of Franz Josef to explore and learn about the mighty glaciers that are located nearby.



WEEK 9 | CLIMBING IN NZ'S DEEP SOUTH

After wrapping up the final days of our student-led portion, we then make our way to Wanaka.

From the shores of Lake Wanaka, we learn how to rock climb on the cliffs of Wanaka's Hospital Flats. Our fantastic instructors introduce us to climbing technique, belaying, rappelling, and take us safely through two days of climbing instruction, tailored to all levels of climbing ability and fitness. We will continue our exploration of Wanaka with a three day trek in the beautiful Aspiring National Park. Take in the gorgeous views and learn about the local flora and fauna from a local guide!

WEEK 10 | STATION WORK AND PROGRAM WRAP

The trip concludes with a visit to Snowden Station, where students will experience life on a working New Zealand farm. This final stop offers hands-on opportunities to engage with daily farm activities, connect with the local community, and reflect on the skills and experiences gained throughout the program.

In our last couple of days, we will reflect and discuss our time on the program as a whole during program wrap.

**Each week there will be some designated free time so that you can catch up on email, do laundry, rest, and explore independently with others in the group.*

***Pacific Discovery reserves the right to alter and/or change the order of the itinerary, the focus of the projects, or the activities themselves due to dates, availability, and safety precautions.*



Program Highlights

- Snorkel with turtles and tropical fish in Byron Bay and Stradbroke Island
- 3-day 4WD tour of K'gari Fraser Island with stand up paddle boarding and snorkelling
- Work with the Department of Conservation to help protect native wildlife in Nelson Lakes National Park
- Learn to ride waves during a multi-day surf camp in Australia's East Coast
- Canyoning adventure in the Blue Mountains (swimming, jumping, and abseiling through waterfalls)
- White water rafting adventure over rapids and the highest commercially rafted waterfall in the world
- Volunteer project around bush regeneration and sand dune conservation on Australia's East Coast
- Attend a Maori cultural performance with a powerful display of haka song and dance
- Learn about the rich Aboriginal history of Stradbroke Island while walking along the historical Goompi trail
- Work with the Tasman Environmental Trust to help protect native wildlife in the Nelson Tasman Region.





COUNTRY INFORMATION

Australia's warm climate, friendly people, unusual wildlife and dramatic natural beauty make it a fantastic destination. With a landmass comparable to the United States but a population of only 26 million people, Australia is sparsely populated, yet home to some of the world's most vibrant cities. Australia's natural diversity is staggering - the world's largest coral reef, lush rainforests, and the most beautiful beaches. Wildlife is abundant, colorful, and visible - kangaroos, koalas, flocks of raucous parrots, sea turtles, and colorful reef fish.

With only 4.5 million people and just one thousand years of human settlement, New Zealand has a rich and dynamic culture which reflects the impact of Māori, European, Pacific Island and Asian influences. Kiwis (named after the fascinating and distinctive native bird) are friendly, welcoming and informal, but also fiercely proud of their national achievements - especially in rugby (the All Blacks) and sailing (the Americas Cup).



CLIMATE

Fall - Australia and New Zealand will be in Spring with temperatures of 60-75°F.

Spring - Both Australia and New Zealand will be transitioning from Summer to Fall, temperatures will vary.

Australia: 65 - 85°F

New Zealand: 65 - 77°F.



MEALS

Australian and New Zealand cuisine is very similar - an evolved fusion of British and European traditional dishes with some local flair. Special foods to try: kangaroo, shrimp on the barbie, yabbies (very similar to shrimp), emu, macadamia nuts, vegemite, chicken parmigiana (chicken schnitzel topped with tasty tomato sauce and cheese), barramundi (a local fish).

Regular food to expect:

- Breakfast: cereals, toast, eggs, fresh fruits, yogurt, tea, and coffee
- Lunch: wraps, sandwiches, salads, dinner leftovers
- Dinner: barbeque meats, vegetables, lots of fresh salads, pasta, wraps, chicken schnitzel.



TRANSPORT

We will be traveling in our own group van with a luggage trailer for the duration of this program.

SUITABILITY

Gap programs are intended for students aged 17 - 22. This program is suitable for anyone of average fitness with an enthusiasm for conservation and new experiences. There is always a volunteering component in our programs, so we can give back to the places that give so much to us. You need to be prepared for some physical work during this volunteering portion of the program; i.e. trail building, tree planting or painting. You don't need to have had previous experience with travel or any of the activities offered.

ATTITUDE

The program is a shared group experience. We would like you to join the program with an open mind and a willingness to work together with your group mates to make the program an amazing experience. The programs focus on group cohesion. We appreciate you for being open to learning and challenging your ideas and assumptions in order to get the most from this summer abroad experience.

GROUP SIZE

Group sizes vary per program and are generally 12-14 students, accompanied by two experienced and qualified Pacific Discovery program instructors. Local guides assist with interpretation of some historical sites, cultural experiences, and activities.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

We have selected a dynamic team of inspiring, supportive, resourceful, and highly experienced instructors to lead our programs. Our program instructors are committed to putting your welfare and safety first. They are people in whom you can trust and confide, who remain objective whatever the circumstances, and who take a genuine interest in your well-being. They implicitly understand the importance of balancing the needs of individuals with group objectives, facilitating a high level of group cohesion, inspiring a genuine appreciation for the areas visited and an awareness of minimum impact travel ethics. All of our instructors have Wilderness First Responder (WFR) first aid certification, and extensive group leadership and risk assessment/management training.

ACCOMMODATION

Our accommodation will be a mixture of comfortable and clean hostels, lodges and campsites. Accommodation is diverse, comfortable and carefully chosen to fit our needs and varies per program.



FREE TIME

Programs are heavily scheduled so that we are always on the move and having lots of structured fun; but we highly value rest and reflection. There will be some designated free time in a town or city each week so that you can catch up on email and laundry and rest.



HEALTH

One component of all of our programs is outdoor adventures like hiking, biking and kayaking, so while you don't need to have done any of these before, you will need to be prepared and have the fitness level to give them a go. If you have any queries regarding health recommendations for travel, please contact your doctor, or a travel doctor, to discuss this. For further information refer to: [http:// wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/) We also recommend you be up to date on specific vaccinations that are required to travel in this region.

We recommend that you carry a personal first-aid kit as well as any personal medication. Please be aware that for legal reasons, our program instructors are prohibited from administering any type of drug. Please ensure that you are adequately prepared.



SPENDING MONEY

Spending money usually goes towards drinks and snacks, personal shopping, laundry, email, entertainment, and optional activities. We recommend you budget approximately \$100 a week for this, but this varies per student and per program. The amount of spending money you bring depends on your budget and shopping habits. You need to bring this money yourself.

Optional activities are available on many programs that can add to this cost, such as skydiving, bungee jumping, extra surfing lessons, etc.



KEEPING IN TOUCH

Our students value the opportunity to wind down, immerse in their surroundings and talk to each other. We encourage students to self manage their phone use, and we strongly encourage flight mode. This allows students to still take photos and send updates to family when in wifi, but allows them to be fully connected to the locals, service work and community when they're out and about. You are able to purchase a SIM or use international roaming plans if you wish. The easiest option is to use the WIFI available at places we stay in main cities and towns. Family and friends will also be able to keep in touch and follow your adventures through Pacific Discovery's social media pages, and through an online Facebook album for your group (which your instructors will upload photos to each week).



PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Travel abroad requires a passport. If you don't have one, you need to apply for one as soon as you apply for this program.

US Government Passport website: <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>

If you already have a passport, it must be valid for more than 6 months after program end, otherwise you need to get a new one issued before joining the program. Pacific Discovery will contact you regarding visa requirements and arrangements after you apply for the program.



TRAVEL INSURANCE

Pacific Discovery requires all students to purchase a comprehensive travel insurance policy for the duration of the program. Travel insurance provides cover in the event of medical expenses due to illness, injury, and emergency medical evacuation. Travel insurance may also include cover for loss of baggage or personal effects, and trip cancellation or trip curtailment.

To arrange your policy, [click here to go to our website](#).



COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted all of our lives greatly, and Pacific Discovery has developed rigorous policies for safety based on professional advice and endorsement. The health of our students is of the utmost importance at all times. We are working closely and regularly with health professionals on our COVID-19 policy, as the situation continues to develop.

[Read our full COVID-19 policy here.](#)



PEACE OF MIND

Pacific Discovery is an educational travel organization accredited with American Gap Association (USA). Since its inception in 2001, Pacific Discovery has taken several thousand students, graduates, faculty, family and special interest groups, on experiential travel and volunteer programs, utilizing a staff of experienced and qualified program instructors. We have an exemplary safety record, comprehensive Risk Management Systems and a database of alumni, parents, advisors and faculty, who are happy to be contacted for feedback. The program carries public liability insurance, and student funds are held securely until disbursement.

Program Tuition & Costs

A \$500 application fee is due when you apply. Upon acceptance onto program, a deposit is due within 14 days. Balance of program cost to be paid 60 days prior to departure.

Included in Program Tuition

- All in-country travel and transport
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All activities, excursions, entry fees and adventure travel as described in the itinerary
- Informal lectures from resident experts on conservation and sustainability, history, and culture.
- Experienced program Instructors and local guides.

Not Included in Program Tuition

- Travel (international flights) between your home and the program
- Internal flights
- Visas
- Spending money (we suggest allowing \$15 per day for drinks, snacks and personal expenses)
- Travel insurance
- Optional academic credit
- Optional activity costs ie skydiving, bungee jumping, and additional surf lessons.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Students should not book their travel until after they have received the flight confirmation email from Pacific Discovery with the program flight requirements and travel agent details. This is sent out 2-3 months ahead of program departure. This information is also made available in the student portal login section of our website.

Our preferred groups travel agent, [The Travellist Co.](#), can assist you to arrange international flights from your nearest regional airport, and return home. We prefer you to arrange your flights through our group travel agent to simplify arrival logistics, and so that you are traveling to and from the program with others in your group.





College Credit

Our programs are a structured syllabus with clear learning outcomes that offer true personal growth and global awareness. As a reputable gap year provider since 2001, we have developed strong industry connections, including two educational institutions which we offer college credits through for our programs.

Pacific Discovery partners with Seattle Central College to offer college credit, a recognized educational provider who offers exceptional study options for students. We have been running college credit options for students for several years now with this provider, and as long as requirements are completed, the system has been an excellent option for students in regard to continuation of study, deferment and easy transfer to other institutions.

If you're keen to explore this option further, please reach out to us using the contact details provided at the end of this catalogue. We'd love to help you identify what options are available to you and support you throughout the process.

Scholarships & Financial Aid

We want to make our programs as accessible as possible. Although we charge the minimum we can for our programs, we recognize that they can still be difficult to fund for many families. Please note that these scholarships go directly towards the tuition costs for the program and do not include assistance towards the cost of international flights. We expect scholarship recipients to demonstrate their commitment to this opportunity by fundraising for their international flights, personal spending, and the balance of tuition.

Our students supplement the program costs in a variety of ways. We encourage you to get creative! Create a Kickstarter, find a part-time job, fundraise. Think big and small. Each dollar adds up to one amazing adventure abroad.

- Exploration Scholarship
- Diverse Voices Scholarship
- Financial Need Scholarship
- Gap Year Ambassador Fellowship

To apply, please go to pacificdiscovery.org/need-to-know/scholarships-financial-aid



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