

MINI SEMESTER



Australia Mini Semester Program

MARINE CONSERVATION & OCEAN
ADVENTURES

www.pacificdiscovery.org

Overview

Protect the ocean, explore the Great Barrier Reef and delve into the Aboriginal culture on this road trip along Australia's East Coast!

Calling all ocean lovers! Australia hosts breathtaking coastlines, tropical islands, and oceans that are home to a vast and colorful array of marine wildlife. During this gap year program, you will connect yourself to the land and the sea as you support a range of marine and environmental conservation projects. If you are committed to making a positive change for our oceans and the planet so that future generations can continue to enjoy nature's beauty, this Australia Program is for you!

There will be plenty of ways to discover the rich biodiversity of Australia's oceans, waterways, and wetlands by heading out on exciting water adventures too. Peek into the magical underwater world by snorkeling in Byron Bay and Moreton Island, spot whales and dolphins on coastal walks, ride waves to your heart's content during a multi-day surf camp and take on the wilderness on a canoe expedition in the Noosa Everglades. At other times you will delve deeper into the Aboriginal culture that has been kept alive in this country for more than 50,000 years. Indigenous people across Sydney and Cairns will share stories and the meaning of the cultures and way of life for a truly immersive experience.





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 | SYDNEY, ABORIGINAL CULTURE & CANYONING IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Welcome to Sydney, Australia! Bold, brash and beautiful, Sydney is arguably the world's most vibrant city. On arrival, you will be met by your Pacific Discovery Program leader and transferred to our downtown accommodation near Sydney, where the first European settlement in Australia was established over 200 years ago. A comprehensive program briefing takes place where we get to know each other, before we explore Sydney's famous harbor and beaches, the Opera House, and Australian Museum.

We'll leave Sydney for the Blue Mountains. Our base for the next 3 days will be Katoomba, a town in the area that borders Blue Mountains National Park and its bushwalking trails. Whilst we are here we have time to explore the area, check out the famous Three Sisters rock formations, and take on a day of canyoning. Getting a well-earned adrenaline and endorphin kick is what's in store in this beautiful National Park when we go abseiling, rappelling and climbing!

WEEK 2 | SURF CAMP & CONSERVATION PROJECT

We journey north to an isolated section of the coast where we learn to surf from our surfing-guru instructors during a four-day surf camp. We will learn to laugh at ourselves as we no doubt tumble into the water and we'll learn to trust ourselves as we slowly develop the skills and strengths needed to master this graceful art. Whether it is your first time on the water or you have a few days under your belt, the instructors will cater to everyone. Our evenings are spent relaxing at the campground and playing games, before a great sleep in preparation for another day's worth of riding waves!

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 of bush regeneration and dune conservation in some of the most beautiful coastal landscapes on the East Coast of Australia. Our project 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.



WEEK 3 | BYRON BAY, ISLAND EXPLORATION & AUSTRALIA ZOO

After some rewarding volunteer work, we head to Bryon Bay to take advantage of its beautiful beaches, boutiques and cafes including a snorkel trip. After relaxing in Byron Bay we will head to Stradbroke Island, also called Straddie by the locals. We will gain an understanding of Australian history with an informative walking tour where we explore the shore of Dunwich, a place of cultural significance for the aboriginals. We will also snorkel around the rock walls and the fantastic reefs of Stradbroke Island, which is known to inhabit six of the world's seven marine turtle species!

From Byron Bay, we drive north into Queensland. We stay on the Sunshine Coast near another gorgeous beach and try whale and dolphin spotting again as we walk around the national park headland. We will also spend several hours exploring Australia Zoo, learning about the zoo's wildlife, and the conservation initiatives of its late founder Steve Irwin, a famous Australian wildlife conservationist that is also known as the Crocodile Hunter.

WEEK 4 | K'GARI FRASER ISLAND 4WD EXPEDITION

Next, we head north to Noosa and embark on a thrilling three-day 4WD expedition across K'gari Fraser Island, where we'll journey along its iconic golden sand beaches, surrounded by crystal-clear waters. K'gari is a haven for wildlife, home to over 350 bird species, as well as dingoes, echidnas, and an array of marine life. We'll explore the island's lush rainforests, swim in freshwater lakes, and snorkel in vibrant coral reefs teeming with fish, while our expert guides lead us to the island's most stunning spots.

In the evenings, we'll gather around a crackling campfire to learn the art of throwing a boomerang, indulge in marshmallows roasted over the fire, and stargaze under the clear skies. We'll rest each night in cozy beach cabins, just a stone's throw from the ocean. This immersive adventure will provide a perfect mix of adrenaline, nature, and cultural experiences, creating unforgettable memories on one of Australia's most beautiful islands.



WEEK 5 | BEACH CLEAN UP & MAGNETIC ISLAND

After a few days of exploring Airlie Beach, we will give a helping hand to the marine debris cleanup efforts of a local organization with the aim to protect the Whitsunday Islands. We will not only aid in the efforts to keep beaches beautiful by picking up some of the debris, but also collect data to help track litter to its source and prevent it from entering the waste stream and harming the Great Barrier Reef.

The adventure brings us to Magnetic Island next, where the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area meets the rain forests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Over half the island consists of bird sanctuaries and a national park with a large koala population. We will stay on the island for three nights, giving us plenty of time for hiking, swimming and koala spotting.

WEEK 6 | MARINE CONSERVATION & GREAT BARRIER REEF

Our final stop in Australia is tropical Cairns. While we are here, we spend three days getting involved in marine conservation. We will learn all about coral, marine life and sustainability for our oceans, all while out on the outer Great Barrier Reef. A visit to the Great Barrier Reef isn't complete without doing some underwater exploration ourselves of course. We are lucky to have a personal marine biologist guide us around the reef on an unforgettable snorkeling expedition! Be astounded at the diversity of this World Heritage area – spot sea turtles, myriad tropical fish and marine creatures.

We end the program by delving deeper into Australian aboriginal culture. We will learn about the fascinating customs and ancient traditions that are kept alive in the rainforest of Kuranda, discover how the spear was used for hunting, try throwing a boomerang, and enjoy a traditional dance performance. We will spend our last few days enjoying the waterfront boardwalk and lagoon beach that Cairns has to offer, and it's unfortunately time to start program wrap. We complete the program by reflecting on all we have experienced and learned. Remembering that we are stewards of the land and sea, and that we are entrusted by our ancestors to take care of what has been given to us.



Program Highlights

- Snorkel with turtles and tropical fish in Byron Bay
- Learn to ride waves during a multi-day surf camp on Australia's East Coast
- Canyoning adventure in the Blue Mountains (swimming, jumping, and abseiling through waterfalls)
- Hike, swim, and spot some lazy koalas on Magnetic Island
- Volunteer project around bush regeneration and sand dune conservation on Australia's East Coast
- Get involved in marine conservation in the world-famous Great Barrier Reef
- Support the beach cleanup initiatives of local volunteer groups
- 4WD Expedition on K'gari Fraser Island
- Explore Australia Zoo, learning about the conservation initiatives of its late founder Steve Irwin, a famous Australian wildlife conservationist who is also known as the Crocodile Hunter.





COUNTRY INFORMATION

Australia: With a landmass comparable to the lower 48 states of the US, but a population of only 20 million, Australia is comparatively sparsely populated. This is due to the fact that by far the largest part of Australia is desert or semi-arid land commonly known as the outback. Australia is the flattest and driest inhabited continent, with the oldest and least fertile soils. Only the south-east and southwest corners of the continent have a temperate climate. Most of the population lives along the temperate south-eastern coastline. The landscapes of the northern part of the country, with a tropical climate, consist of rain forest, woodland, grassland, mangrove swamps, and desert. Australia has abundant and visible wildlife, from kangaroos to raucous parrots.



CLIMATE

Australia: March temperature - Average min/max 70/95°F Sep-Oct temperature - Average min/max 70/82°F



MEALS

Australian cuisine is very similar to that of their neighbouring New Zealand - 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).



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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