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Projects Abroad Fiji “Isles of Smiles”

New Year Issue —January 2013

Editor's Note

Bula!

2013 is here! I feel for the Mayans. Indeed I do.

Aside from this being the hottest summer on record, I think we can safely say that frying an egg on the driveway is now possible. The months of November through to February top the mercury levels in Fiji. Albeit a big change for majority of our volunteers, they still do a great job at their placements. A familiar sight would be Fiji Water bottles in every backpack and hand —and a smile radiant enough to outshine the sun itself!

January 2013, to date, has been a very eventful month. We've had a massive influx of volunteers, majority of them are here from Europe. Our projects are kicking off quite well for the New Year. A recent trip down to Nadi to visit the Treasure Home was an eye-opener for me as I had never been to an orphanage before. I was completely taken aback by the dedication of the staff and the support provided by corporate bodies to keep the Home running. In the middle of whining about the heat, I had to take a step back and think about how petty our problems really were in comparison to these children's. I met this amazing lady who had spent all her holidays volunteering for Projects Abroad. This was her first trip to Fiji and she was really enjoying her stay. She said something that would stay with me for a long time: "Just when you think you have it bad, someone else has it worse". Karen Ngwenya, my sincere thanks for your words of wisdom.

A week ago, it was officially a month since I started work with Projects Abroad Fiji as their Information Coordinator and I am learning something new every day. The staff and the volunteers have made working a lot of fun! Projects Abroad has taught me that my own backyard lies undiscovered. I've travelled a lot to foreign lands but I've never seen my own.

With that said, I hope 2013 is your lucky year! Travel a lot, enjoy life and stop to smell the roses.

"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing" - Helen Keller

Vinaka

Michelle Ali

Information Coordinator

Projects Abroad Fiji





Jessica Warner —
our new Volunteer
Coordinator from
Ireland.

Welcome Jessica Warner!

Bula!

Jessica here, the newest member of the Projects Abroad Fiji staff team. For any of you coming to Fiji in 2013 (or already here) let me introduce myself. I'm originally from a rural part of Ireland but haven't spent much time there recently! I've worked for Projects Abroad since 2008, starting the office in Ireland and spending time working in our destinations. Over time I have gained a lot of experience and met some

fabulous volunteers and staff. Most recently, on my way to Fiji I stopped off for two months to work in our Cambodian office. There I was working with local staff, particularly dealing with professional volunteers (those coming with Projects Abroad PRO) and I also worked closely with the Two Week Special group who came over in December. This was a group of 18 Australian volunteers who worked in a centre for disabled children and children affected by HIV. Although it

was challenging and confronting for some volunteers at first, everyone gave 110% to the project and it paid off, I'm so proud of them all! I loved Cambodia and will miss it dearly, but am excited to take the experience I gained there and use it to begin this new adventure here in Fiji...

I arrived here at the beginning of January 2013 and have been getting settled in Suva for a week now. I'm acclimatizing gradually, coming from Ireland the

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weather is not what I'm used to in January, but I'm not complaining! Already I know I will love it here. Aside from paradise beaches and some of the friendliest people on the planet, I am blown away by the projects. Mokani Holiday School gives our volunteers the chance to give independent lessons and to keep the village kids entertained during their break. I'm really impressed by the effort and dedication our

volunteers are putting into their work and the children's smiles show their appreciation. The staff in Nadi and Suva are a lovely group too, I'm so lucky to work with them all! I'll be based mainly in the Suva office as the Volunteer Coordinator. This will involve picking up new volunteers, doing inductions, attending our Talanoa (Fijian for "yarn") sessions and generally being here for all our volunteers with any issues they may

have at all, whether it's a new idea they have for their placement or help planning a weekend scuba diving! 2013 will be an exciting year for Fiji and I am delighted to be part of it!

Moce mada (bye for now)
xx



Left: The infamous Angkor Wat



Jessica with one of the children from a placement in Cambodia

Home away from home for teaching volunteer

Rixt Baarsma is a 19-year-old Care volunteer from The Netherlands who has volunteered for Projects Abroad Fiji for two months. She was of a very bubbly character and was such a joy to talk to. I had the pleasure of meeting her in a few social dinners and also seeing her in class and was completely amazed at the way she interacted with the children. She definitely has a natural gift when it comes to teaching.

Rixt was placed at the St.

Joseph the Worker Primary School to teach at the holiday school. Volunteers were very much welcomed as they were all so enthusiastic about meeting the children and getting to know them better. As Rixt says, "Projects Abroad has volunteers from all over the world, and we give the children a chance to experience a different culture and hopefully they learn something new from it, like how to handle dogs and the proper rubbish disposal methods."

Her typical day would begin with preparing class work for the entire day, every day for two months. She taught math, English and for fun, some Dutch! Rixt had so much fun teaching them Dutch as the children were quick to grasp new words. The teachers did their best to involve Rixt in their daily school routines so as to allow her to see the differences between local and international teaching standards.

According to Rixt, her time



spent at the placement taught her how to deal with children and that she was effective as a teacher. "I felt I made a difference when Melanie, a girl that was too shy to talk, was telling the most amazing story in front of all her classmates. It took two weeks but she did it!" Rixt helped Melanie come out of her comfort zone and taught her confidence. It was a proud moment indeed for Rixt.

Rixt believes her view of the world has changed in the sense that she had met some of the most amazing people during her stay. She adds on, "When I finally get back home, I will encourage others to do voluntary work as well."

She cites her most memorable experience was during the graduation of holiday school and when the grandmother of one of the children gave her a self-

made necklace as a show of gratitude for being an amazing teacher. This act of gratitude touched her heart.

Appreciating your time in your volunteering country is part of the advice Rixt gives to future volunteers, "Enjoy every moment of your stay in the country you're volunteering in. Even when you're having a hard time, remember it's an once-in-a-lifetime experience."

"Enjoy every moment of your stay in the country you're volunteering in. Even when you're having a hard time, remember it's an once-in-a-lifetime experience"

As she continues her travels around Asia before heading home, Rixt will definitely miss all the friends she made and the smiling faces that greeted her every day for two months. "I fell in love with the people of this beautiful country and I can't wait to return!"

We wish her well with her travels and thank her for volunteering at Projects Abroad. We hope this inspiring story encourages

others to help Projects Abroad continue to make a difference, and by doing so, learn something themselves along the way.



Project Updates

Care and Teaching

Another busy school year has begun and the City is bustling with Back to School sales. It's a mad rush for students starting secondary education and finding placements for them. The festive season is over and as a former student, I can imagine the misery of going back to school after a long holiday. We've had a very healthy response to the Care and Teaching Projects what with many of our volunteers being placed at many of the schools dotted around the Eastern and Western corridor of Fiji. Our services are being stepped up as we're becoming more involved with the projects and also trying our best to get other schools to benefit from Projects Abroad.

Holiday School

Holiday school has finished as the school year has begun and they were the most exciting projects to date as so many children turned up during the break to enjoy the alternative teaching experience. Graduation has come and gone for Nadi District School, St. Joseph the Worker Primary School and in Mokani village as well. It was a great moment for the children and the volunteers as it was so good to see team spirit and friendship. Tears flowed during graduation because our volunteers became attached to these wonderful children and they knew that it was the last time they would be seeing them. So much was learnt and we will be continuing Holiday School in the first break of the school term.

Community Project

Mokani village is where our Community Project is based. Since starting my term at Projects Abroad, I've seen a young man from Sweden and another from England call Mokani their home. They were involved with various activities in the village such as building houses, working the plantation and learning how to prepare traditional earth oven feasts. The village school is where we conducted one of our Holiday School sessions where these young men also pitched in. We are currently in the process of identifying further Community projects that will prove worthwhile for our future volunteers and the community itself. We pride ourselves on working together as a team to better the rural and urban communities.



Photos Galore!



Before I say goodbye for another edition....

2013 is set to bring newer and exciting projects for all our volunteers. We're looking into a Marine conservation project in the not-too-distant future and fingers crossed, that will see fruition. As Fiji is an island in the South Pacific, it is now more important than ever before to take care of our natural resources and environment. We need to leave behind a legacy for our future generations. Protecting our seas and oceans is the most precious gift we can give to our children. With the heightened levels of pollution, our oceans are vulnerable and so are our lands. We must work together to battle the rising tide of pollution. Fijian waters are abundant with so many species of marine life and we are renowned as a hotspot for divers. In order to protect our future, we must protect our present and make amends for the past. This is where our volunteers come in as they are very valuable to us. Projects Abroad volunteers pave the way for future generations of conservationists and also provides an extra choice for our travelers from Europe and the world. We hope that with your help and dedication to Projects Abroad, we can see this programme take flight. We thank you for your continued support throughout the years!

