

AMSF Travel Scholarship Report

Recipient: Alison Fraser

Destination: Nepal and England



**ADELAIDE MEDICAL
STUDENTS' FOUNDATION**



At the end of 2011, fresh from completing my final exams for medical school, I left Adelaide to spend 15 weeks overseas. During this time, I spent 9 weeks on medical electives at hospitals in Nepal and England as well as 6 weeks travelling and sight-seeing in India and Europe. I feel privileged to have had this opportunity to study medicine in such widely diverse locations as well as experiencing the culture of two vastly different areas of the world. I had an incredible time and believe I gained much, both from a personal and educational point of view.

I began my epic world trip in Nepal with two fellow medical students. It was quite a shock to leave the clean, quiet, organised life of Adelaide and arrive in the chaotic, rubbish-strewn streets of Kathmandu. Though I was aware that Nepal was a developing country with a living standards much below that of Australia, I was still astounded by the lack of basic sanitation and facilities in the country's capital city. Rather than staying in the tourist district, we stayed with a host family in the suburbs and really got a taste for daily life for the average Kathmandu resident. During various parts of our stay, we had to contend with increasing power cuts, petrol shortages and the absence of running water. It certainly made me appreciate many things that I just took for granted at home, such as being able to having a shower at the start of the day or having lights during the evening. However, though we were tested by these inconveniences, I was also surprised at how quickly we adapted.

As we arrived at the beginning of the Nepalese winter, we decided to do some trekking and touring in the initial part of our trip, rather than at the end of our placement as we had originally planned to take advantage of the relatively mild weather. Our hike through the stunning Annapurna ranges remains one of my favourite parts of the entire trip. We also visited Chitwan National Park, where highlights included a rhinoceros siting during an elephant back safari and watching a thrilling game of elephant football as part of the 8th International Elephant Races. We rounded out the year by watching a blazing sunset on New Years Eve over the majestic western Himalayan mountains including the famed Mt Everest.



On our return to Kathmandu, we started our three week elective at the Kanti Children's Hospital. As the only paediatric hospital in Nepal, it receives patients from across the country with a vast array of medical and surgical conditions. Though very under-resourced, particularly in comparison to Australian hospitals, it was heartening to see the commitment of many of the doctors working there to improving the well-being of their patients in spite of the limited availability of appropriate treatments and manifestly inadequate salaries of the medical staff. I particularly found it difficult to see children with conditions which are considered eminently



in Australia being diagnosed as terminal and denied treatment due to the lack of medications and appropriate facilities. While it was impossible to rectify this for every child, we were able to make a sizable donation to the oncology unit of funds raised in Australia prior to our trip in order to allow some impoverished children to receive appropriate chemotherapy.

From Nepal, I then travelled to India where I joined a two week tour through Agra and Rajasthan. From the majestic forts of Agra, Jaipur and Jodpur to the peerless beauty of the Taj Mahal, India provided a striking contrast to its

more rustic and considerably poorer neighbour, in spite of the numerous cultural similarities. While I found some parts of India overwhelming in terms of the chaos and crowding, I had an incredible experience and am very keen to explore more of this fascinating country at some point in the future.

I then left the subcontinent and journeyed to Europe with an unexpected stop in Istanbul courtesy of some aircraft rescheduling. From the balmy, sun-filled days in the Indian countries, I was suddenly thrust into the freezing snowy streets of Berlin which exacerbated what was already quite a significant culture shock. However, the snow made for a magical arrival into Cambridge several days later where I was to begin my second elective at Addenbrooke's Hospital.

I was accepted to a general medical placement in the University of Cambridge elective program and was assigned to Renal Medicine. Given the diverse range of patients encompassed by this area, I was able to spend time with a variety of specialist teams including general nephrology, vasculitis, dialysis and renal transplant. From my very first day, I was actively involved as a member of the team and was able to assist in procedures including renal biopsies, tunnelled line insertion (for urgent dialysis access) and a live kidney transplant. Having had very little exposure to nephrology until this point, I was able to learn an enormous amount about kidneys and their diseases as well as picking up numerous practical skills which I'm sure will prove invaluable when I become a junior doctor.



As well as spending time at Addenbrooke's hospital, I spent many evenings experiencing the student culture for which Cambridge is renowned. I had the opportunity to hear lectures given by international experts in a variety of different fields as well as attending formal dinners in the famed Caius and Robinson Colleges and philosophical debate in Queens College. I also spent weekends travelling to London, Coventry and Edinburgh where I visited historical castles, professional musical productions and a Championship football match. All in all, I had a fantastic time in the United Kingdom and am seriously considering applying for a position as junior doctor in Cambridge once I complete my training in Adelaide.



I feel both of my overseas electives were both highly educational and thoroughly enjoyable and, if given the opportunity, I would repeat these experiences without hesitation. I am very grateful to the AMSF for the support they provided in enabling me to undertake these placements. I would strongly recommend future medicals student consider the opportunities to complete part of their training in an international setting.