

## ASTO Exchange Report 2007

My adventure started with an interview in London. I went in excited and nervous, I left excited and nervous, but half an hour later when I was *asked* if I wanted to go to Australia I was amazed. The fact I was going really sunk in however when, after two days of flying I landed at Brisbane airport.

A couple of days in Brisbane and I was off to join a British designed and built ship, gifted to the people of Australia, run by their Navy, for a completely unique experience.

After meeting up with other Youth Crew from *Young Endeavour* at the airport we all made our way to the marina. *Young Endeavour* sat waiting; she was the biggest ship I'd ever sailed and we were all pretty excited.

Everything started as I'd expect it too, with introductions and games. Climbing twenty eight metres to the top of the foremast was a new one on me however. Although I was sure I'd introduced myself as Ian, this was quickly amended to "Pom". The reply of "Prisoners" went down well. Maybe this is what they meant by "Cultural Exchange". Sailing a Tall Ship was a completely different experience to the smaller boats I'd been used too at home. I felt myself gain in confidence, understanding and patience.

The week was geared towards the Youth Crew taking over on Command Day-day nine. With this goal in mind everybody worked together to learn more about sailing in ten days than I thought was possible.

We had a fantastic week of relatively calm weather, gelling into one of the tightest teams I've ever been part off.

Command Day dawned wet, windy, and miserable; the handover took over with some trepidation. Handling *Young Endeavour* well takes the entire staff and crew, and the new management team had to ask a lot out of everyone. Everyone excelled themselves and the following day with tears in their eyes the trainees left, some with a slight envious glance in my direction, I was staying.



The next voyage started in a very similar way to the previous. There were a few staff changes, but the biggest change for me was responsibility. Along with bona fide staff member I was going to have a watch of my own.

This second week was the opposite of the first, raining for eight days followed by a glorious weekend of sunshine for Command Day. Never did I think at the start that I would have no problems climbing to the topgallant yard in force eight. It's amazing what you can achieve. The quality of commitment, fun and the skills of the staff was absolutely top quality. These were passed on to me and the Youth Crew effortlessly.

My time on *Young Endeavour* finished with a glorious barbeque of steak, prawns and oysters followed by a last night party where I was cast as Baby Bear alongside Captain Britney Spiers and the rest of the staff for our own contribution to proceedings.

Although it was sad to say goodbye to *Young Endeavour* I was looking forward to my plans. Heading north to Cairns I jumped on the Sail Training Association of Queensland's 100ft Schooner *South Passage*. I'd signed on for three weeks as a volunteer Watchleader.



This little ship operates in a completely different, but far more familiar fashion to *Young Endeavour*. Operating with mainly volunteers, and with a tight budget, they take literally thousands of young Australians sailing every year, hardly stopping in port for longer than a few hours.

I was able to put the skills I had learnt onboard *Young Endeavour* to good use, improving as a watchleader.

During the time onboard I definitely had some highlights. Whilst sailing out of Cairns I was fortunate enough to snorkel every day on the barrier reef for two weeks.

I also particularly remember one girl who hadn't been to school for the past six weeks, however after a week on the boat she vowed to return to school.

I then put my feet on dry land for a while, travelling around Australia, visiting friends I had made, including swapping a bed at the Captain of *Young Endeavour's* house for some babysitting duties. Seeing Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge will always stick in my memory.

I flew to New Zealand excited and anticipated. I had heard amazing things about my next ship, *Spirit of New Zealand*. This beautiful 3-masted Barquentine awaited me in Auckland. Having been given a uniform and some rough pointers as to my role I undertook a day sail to get my head around this even larger ship. The next day things got serious. Forty Trainees arrived eager to get started.

*Spirit of New Zealand* is operated by the Spirit of Adventure Trust and has a well respected practiced format of delivering high quality youth work. We set sail on a circuit of the Hauraki Gulf, where sailing the ship was not the only thing that was going to challenge the Trainees. We rafted, dinghy sailed, and tramped our way through a challenging, well planned and executed ten day voyage.



Life changing decisions were made on board, one girl realising that as she could do whatever she wanted in life then there was nothing wrong with rowing for New Zealand. Others had serious issues in life they were coming to terms with, whilst others simply enjoyed the experience and will only realise the benefits later down the line.

After ten days I, alongside two of the more permanent staff delivered a comparably tiny eight metre sloop from the east coast back to Auckland. We spent three days at sea, and although the weather seriously tested my stomach we all had an awesome time, seeing dolphins and birds and going to small coves where you'd never fit a tall ship.

It was then my opportunity to travel in New Zealand, seeing some amazing places and snowboarding for a week with the first mate from *Spirit of New Zealand*.

After sailing for two months and completing two thousand nautical miles on the other side of the world I quickly fell into the boat hitching life style. I knew coming home would be a shock back to reality.

I've realised that every sail training organisation around the world has the same committed people within them. These organisations also face the same challenges but also have the same fun.

I had three of the best months of my life and don't hesitate in thanking Ocean Youth Trust Scotland in nominating me, The Association of Sea Training Organisations for selecting and funding me, The Young Endeavour Youth Scheme, The Sail Training Association of Queensland and The Spirit of Adventure Trust.