

Living Abroad

Hello! My name is Jamie and I studied at Rainham Mark from 2003-2010. Since leaving I have lived, worked and studied in a variety of different countries and am writing this to let you know what options are potentially available to you once you leave school if you want to do the same. I am not from a particularly wealthy family and have always travelled independently without any support from my family so living abroad is not only an option for those with money. At first moving to another country seems very daunting, and the first few weeks in a new country are always very stressful, but moving abroad was without a doubt the best decision I ever made. Below are some of the options available to you if you are thinking about living abroad, I'd definitely recommend it!

The Erasmus Programme - Spain and China

After leaving Rainham Mark I went on to study languages at the University of Birmingham. As I was studying Spanish and Chinese I spent the third year of my course studying for around 6 months in Spain and then 6 months in China. In Spain I studied at the Universidad de Oviedo in the north of the country and in China I studied at Beijing Language and Culture University. The experience of studying in these countries and being immersed in the language on a daily basis helped me to improve my Spanish and Chinese a lot. Before studying abroad as part of the Erasmus Programme I had never considered living in another country but the experience opened my eyes to what a fulfilling experience it is and since then I have not stopped. In Spain I greatly enjoyed the tapas in Asturias, had a season ticket at the local football team and made a lot of international friends. Moving to China was the first time I had left Europe and it was definitely a culture shock at first. However, in the end it was an excellent six months and I had a chance to see both the Great Wall of China and the Terracotta Warriors.

If you study a language then the Erasmus Programme should also be an option for you, although things are currently uncertain with Brexit. That said, it is not just an option for those studying languages. I had friends studying Chemical Engineering and Physics who lived in Sydney, Australia and another friend studying Mechanical Engineering who lived in Texas for a year. If you are going to university it would be worth asking about the possibility of studying abroad if it is something you are interested in. It was my first experience of living in another country and one of the best things I've ever done.

- Erasmus Programme: <https://www.erasmusprogramme.com/>
- Alternatives to the Erasmus Programme if it ends after Brexit: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/28/if-the-erasmus-scheme-closes-after-brexit-how-else-can-i-study-abroad>

British Council English Language Assistant Programme - Spain

After finishing university in 2014 I decided that I wanted to move abroad again. I decided to apply to work as an English Language Assistant with the British Council in Spain. I was accepted onto the programme in a school in the northwestern Spanish region called Galicia and I spent an academic year teaching in a high school there. I was paid around €700 a month, which was more than enough to live on in Galicia, and worked around 12 hours a week. The pay for the bigger cities like Madrid and Barcelona was around €1200 a month. It was my first experience teaching English and was very challenging but I loved the region and have returned since leaving. I also again improved my Spanish and have lots of Galician friends who I am still in touch with. Spain is not the only option, I had friends who worked in Chile and China, and the programme also runs in Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico and Switzerland.

- Information on the programme: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/study-work-abroad/outside-uk/english-language-assistants>
- Full eligibility criteria: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/study-work-abroad/outside-uk/english-language-assistants/eligibility>

International Citizen Service - Bolivia

My next stint abroad was 3 months in the South American country of Bolivia with a government volunteering scheme called the International Citizen Service. I lived in a small town in the Andes where there was no internet or phone connection and the power would cut for hours whenever it rained, it was definitely a big change from the UK! We worked on the local farms, gave English lessons in the local schools, worked with the local dentist and built a water tank in the school amongst other things. Before leaving the UK I had to do some fundraising and whilst there was given a small monthly stipend to live on. This was something completely different to everything else I had done and I'd definitely recommend it. Whilst not volunteering I used to spend my time swimming in the river that ran through the village and reading in a secret spot on the roof of a half built hospital.

There have been some changes since 2015 when I went to Bolivia and the scheme no longer runs there. However, you could volunteer in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda or Zambia. You won't earn a lot of money but as you are given a small amount to live on and do not need your own savings it is an option open to anyone.

- Blog posts from other volunteers: <https://www.volunteerics.org/volunteer-blogs>
- General information on the programme <https://www.volunteerics.org/>

Working Holiday Scheme - Australia

At the end of 2016 I decided to move to Melbourne, Australia for a year. I applied for a Working Holiday visa online and it was granted shortly afterwards. This allowed me to move to Australia for a year. Melbourne is a city I love and I had some great experiences there. I have seen some beautiful places such as the Great Ocean Road and am now a big fan of AFL (Aussie rules football). Australia is about as expensive as London but with much lower rent and much higher wages. The quality of life is definitely a huge attraction and whilst there I did a number of interesting jobs such as manage a Real Madrid World of Football Exhibition, work at the Melbourne F1 Grand Prix and at the Moto GP. Full time work is quite hard to come by on this visa so that was sometimes stressful but I did a lot of work in hospitality and events and managed to save quite a lot whilst living independently and travelling around the state of Victoria. As I said at the start you are granted a one year visa but if you complete 3 months of work on a farm in a rural area you are able to extend that for a second year. That's how I found myself working on a ginger farm in Queensland at the end of 2017! After completing my farm work in Queensland I returned to Melbourne until the start of 2019. Australia may be a good option for your first time living abroad as it is an English speaking country with a fairly similar culture to the UK.

Although I have only had a working holiday in Australia, I know that similar visas exist in Canada and New Zealand, the latter for two years straight off the bat.

- Information on the Australian Working Holiday Visa <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/work-holiday-417>
- Realistic blog on life as a backpacker in Australia and Canada <https://sunsettravellers.com/two-working-holiday-visas/>

Teaching English with Apex English - Vietnam

As I write this I am sitting in my living room in Hanoi, Vietnam. I have been here for around a month and moved here from Melbourne to work as an English teacher. In order to do this I needed a degree certificate and to complete a Teach English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course which was fairly easy to do online. I have not been here for too long and am still getting used to the job as an English teacher and the chaos of the city but I will shortly be starting Vietnamese lessons and exploring the city a bit more. Teaching English abroad is an option in almost every country in the world. Everyone wants to learn English and as a native speaker you have the chance to work as a teacher. From my research I believe the best places to earn money teaching English are mostly in Asia; Vietnam, Japan, South Korea and China. However, I have friends who have taught English in the Canary

Isles, Kazakhstan, Eastern Europe, Colombia and many other countries. If you Google “teach English in X” you will find tonnes of information on whatever country you are interested in. Teaching English can be a tough job, and working abroad is not the same as having a holiday abroad, but if you try the job and you enjoy it then it is a great way to see the world.

- The company I am currently working for in Vietnam: <https://www.teachapax.com/>
- Some blogs from people teaching in other countries:
<https://www.teachaway.com/blog/5-teacher-blogs-get-you-excited-about-teaching-abroad>

Conclusion

So, since leaving Rainham Mark in 2010 I have lived in Spain twice, in China, in Bolivia, in Australia and am currently living in Vietnam. Moving around so often certainly has its downsides; you make friends who you end up having to leave, there will be moments when you don't understand what's going on and just want to go home, being sick abroad is not fun and it is certainly harder to build a career if you are moving country once a year. I have done some excellent jobs and I have done some terrible jobs. I often miss my family and friends back in the UK. However, for me this is a price worth paying as it allows me to see different countries and cultures, learn different languages and make friends all around the world. From the start my attitude has always been one of, “what do I have to lose?”. The worst case scenario is that I move to another country, have a bad experience and end up going back home. If that happens I'm in the exact same situation as I was before leaving, I haven't lost anything except perhaps a bit of money. I do not want to end on a negative note, I just want to be honest with you about my experiences of living abroad. Despite the downsides, it is not something I regret doing at all and is something that I would definitely do again if given the choice.