

**Media Release - London, 25 July 2017**

**GAP YEARS: MUCH MORE THAN JUST A HOLIDAY**

Around 300,000 UK students are preparing to collect their A-level results on Thursday August 17 (August 8 for Scottish SQA results) and BUNAC, the experts in overseas work and travel programmes, are gearing up for a surge in gap year enquiries as young people weigh up their options and choices for the future. This year, for the first time, the long-established organisation is holding a gap year event in London on Wednesday 23rd August, where school leavers, with firm results in hand, can discuss their options face-to-face, find out what opportunities are available and potentially book on the spot. Those unable to attend the event can glean invaluable information and advice online from BUNAC's comprehensive Gap Year page which includes a new, downloadable Gap Year Guide and video, plus programme highlights and blogs focusing on three key areas: working holidays, internships and volunteering overseas.

In addition, a recent gap year survey of careers advisers and BUNAC alumni has thrown up some revealing insights into the perceived benefits of gap years. 97% of respondents felt that overseas work, intern and volunteer programmes helped develop school and university leavers' careers. Overall, the top skills acquired during an overseas gap year were seen to be stronger communication, independence, maturity and cultural sensitivity. In terms of personal benefits that this type of experience helps to develop, 91% of respondents highlighted making friends from around the world and 88% recognised the value of gaining a new, different perspective of culture and countries. Other key benefits were seen to be improved confidence and self-esteem, a sense of being a global citizen, the chance to discover new passions and hobbies and exposure to potential new career paths.

Comments Emma Beynon, Marketing Manager at BUNAC: "It's no secret that soft skills and life experience are just as important as good grades when it comes to applying for jobs and even university places. Our survey results have shown that a well-planned overseas gap year can be a fantastic opportunity to develop those skills, while travelling the world, living like a local, exploring and meeting like-minded people. It's also a chance to take a well-earned break from studying, gain a wider perspective on life and take stock of your options for further education and careers."

Here are some of BUNAC's top suggestions and NEW programmes for the Class of 2017:

1. Working Holidays In Australia, New Zealand and Canada

Heading Down Under or to Canada is the ideal solution for first-time gap travellers, since there are no language barriers and the culture is similar to that of the UK.

All three destinations offer a vast choice of paid seasonal job opportunities from waitressing, bar and kitchen staff roles to ski resort positions and fruit-picking. Australia has the added draw of a minimum wage equivalent to around £10 per hour.

BUNAC is the ideal one-stop shop for working holidays to these destinations, offering sociable Group Flights, with packages costing from £155 and including varying levels of support from the basics to the ultimate, enabling travellers to hit the ground running, meet like-minded travel companions and get the most out of their gap year.

The Work Australia Ultimate package is designed for 18 to 30 year-olds who are looking for a sociable, stress-free working holiday in Oz for up to 12 months. Costing £599, it includes year-long support from BUNAC's Australian recruitment agency, with job placement services, help finding accommodation, advice on tax, healthcare and bank accounts, as well as seven days of fun activities, visiting the sights in and around Sydney or Melbourne, plus ongoing support and social get-togethers.

New Zealand is eternally popular with lovers of the great outdoors, thanks to its breath-taking natural environment and opportunities for adventure and adrenalin. BUNAC's 12-month Work New Zealand programme also comes in a range of shapes and sizes from the no-frills Starter Package at £155 to the Ultimate Package costing £699. It includes a fun-filled activity week on arrival, plus year-long access to a dedicated working holiday resource centre in Auckland for help with finding jobs and long-term accommodation, as well as assistance with banking, tax, travel and a full programme of social events.

Canada is currently BUNAC's fastest-growing programme and offers a multitude of summer and winter seasonal job opportunities particularly in the Rockies. BUNAC will be hosting its first ever Work Canada Ultimate Job Fair in London on 11th and 12th August 2017 where the prestigious Panorama Mountain Resort, Four Seasons Resort Whistler and Blue Mountain Resort will be hiring front desk agents, snowmakers, ski concierges and more. Be aware, though, that working holiday visa numbers for Canada are restricted and running very low for the current season. Visa season can vary year on year but the release can usually be expected any time between the end of the calendar year and the following May.

For those who find the prospect of flying long haul quite daunting, regular Group Flights are available with BUNAC for up to 60 people travelling to Sydney, Auckland, Toronto and Vancouver, and provide a great opportunity to meet like-minded travellers and make friends before even arriving in your chosen destination. Group flights Down Under start from £1079pp and include a three-day stopover in Hong Kong, while those to Canada start from £520pp (direct) or £730pp with three days in Reykjavik.

## 2. Professional Internships Abroad

For students interested in seeing the world and gaining an insider view on a new culture along with valuable international work experience in their area of study or industry of choice, a professional internship abroad could be the perfect answer. BUNAC offers internships of 1 to 18 months' duration in a multitude of sectors from marketing and events to engineering and architecture in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and, NEW for 2017, in Canada with prices starting from £750. A NEW programme of Ski Internships in Japan is also being launched this month.

Teaching Internships offer the chance to gain a valuable TEFL qualification and work experience while exploring a new country, living with the locals and embracing a new culture. BUNAC offers these two to four-and-a-half-month programmes in Vietnam, Thailand, China and, NEW for 2017, in Colombia with prices from £595. Some placements are voluntary while others are paid.

Students with a passion for marine conservation and diving should check out BUNAC's NEW Marine Internship programme in Mexico which involves crucial research into the health and condition of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef. Participants spend 24 weeks on the Yucatan Peninsula undertaking a 12-week training programme to hone their dive skills and develop knowledge of the local marine ecosystem, followed by a 12-week work placement with a local dive school to complete a range of courses including the PADI Divemaster. The programme costs £5,100 and includes orientation, dive training and work placements, accommodation, meals during the training programme and an impressive array of PADI qualifications.

## 3. Gap Year Volunteering

Volunteering abroad on a gap year is an ever-popular way to spend an extended period of time living and working as part of the local community and making a genuine difference to people's lives. BUNAC offers ethical, low-cost volunteering programmes across Africa, Asia and the Americas, with opportunities ranging from teaching and childcare to sports coaching and construction.

NEW for 2017 are a Big 5 Wildlife Conservation opportunity in South Africa and a multi-project Volunteer Borneo and the Philippines programme.

Big 5 Wildlife Conservation takes place on the Welgevonden game reserve, in the heart of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve, where energetic and dedicated volunteers are needed to assist highly qualified local conservationists with game capture, feeding, relocation and monitoring, veterinary procedures, fence-line patrols, anti-poaching work and vegetation control. The programme costs from £980 for 18 to 46 days and includes a 4-day orientation, 2 full-day tours, transfers, meals and shared accommodation on a luxury permanent tented camp with plenty of opportunities to relax in the company of fellow volunteers after a hard day's work, from the bird hide and braai (BBQ) area to the fire pit and swimming gat (pool).

Volunteer Borneo and the Philippines is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get off the backpacker trail for 6 or 10 weeks and work in a team alongside indigenous communities with some of the world's most remote cultures and captivating wildlife, while following an itinerary packed with fascinating local sights and experiences. The programme is divided into 8 phases and offers a mix of conservation and community work and eco-tourism for a varied and engaging taste of the different facets of volunteering overseas. Living alongside the tribal Sarawak people and renovating community buildings, teaching English and building vegetable gardens, helping with beach clean-ups in Kudat, assisting NGOs with reforestation and development projects in the virgin rainforest of Bulusan and improving the local school on Ticao Island are just a few of the activities that volunteers will undertake. The ecotourism itinerary includes an enticing array of jungle and volcano treks, river safaris, canopy skywalks, snorkelling, wildlife encounters and more, from Gunung Mulu National Park to Sepilok Orangutan Centre, Lupa Masa Jungle Camp to Bulusan volcano. Accommodation is sustainable and hand-picked to enhance the cultural immersion, from home-stays to river and forest lodges, jungle tents and hammocks to tribal village longhouses. The programme costs £3,585 (10 weeks) or £2,488 (6 weeks - Borneo only) and includes induction, all meals and accommodation, plus all local transport including internal flights.

For further information, visit [www.bunac.org/gapyear](http://www.bunac.org/gapyear) or telephone 0333 999 7516.

For more details and to book a place at BUNAC's Gap Year Event on 23 August, visit [www.bunac.org/events](http://www.bunac.org/events)

Ends

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