

My name is Lara Whitehouse; I am studying the Bachelor of Secondary Teaching, Humanities and Social Sciences majoring in Bahasa Indonesian and in English Literature at the Charles Darwin University.

I chose to study at CDU because I wanted to be in an environment that I felt was welcoming enough to be able to speak to my lecturers when I needed help, to be able to make new friends easily.

I undertook two overseas study programs; the first a 3 week intensive in Bahasa Indonesia, at Kupang in West Timor and the second was a semester long exchange program in Yogyakarta which is in Central Java, at Universitas Gadjah Mada or Gadjah Mada University, and that was through the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian studies and I was studying the Flexible Language Immersion Program.

Essentially what made me decide to study overseas was a keen interest in learning Bahasa Indonesia. I thought what a better way to be, to learn Indonesian than actually being in country. It was also a sense of curiosity; I wanted to find out more about this place I love. Once I was accepted into the program I was ecstatic, excited, nervous and just essentially just keen to get on a plane and go.

I received a fair bit of funding support; I received two New Colombo Plan grants. One worth \$2,000 for the shorter 3 week program in Kupang, and one worth \$5,000 for the longer semester exchange program.

Oh the best parts of becoming a part of a new university community overseas was defiantly the people that I met. I was in a totally global classroom with all these international students from all these different parts of the world who had a extremely keen interest in Indonesia just like I did.

The people at the Office of International Services at both universities were always there to support and encourage international students and help them with pretty much anything they needed. Apart from that making local friends at uni and just being able to go out and have a coffee with them, have a conversation, practice my Bahasa.

I think my overseas experience was a huge personal learning journey. A journey of personal growth, I became more resilient, more flexible, more tolerant. I feel I've really learned how to communicate with other diverse cultures.

I made a lot of Indonesian friends whom I still keep in contact with over Facebook and Skype and Whatsapp and I've come to rely on them for my Bahasa Indonesia practice now. I think that the flexibility of having both shorter and longer term programs means that no matter how busy you are in your life you don't have to take 6 months off to be able to study overseas and to have that experience.

If there is any advice that I can give to new students wanting to include a overseas study program in their study plan, I suggest do it, just do it, take the opportunity because it will come. If I could go back to the beginning of my degree now before I'd started, I would have a look at my study plan, I would have a look at the structure of my course and see where I could fit it in. How I could get credit of the overseas study and make it count towards my degree. I also think that anyone wanting to study overseas should remember that it's a really big opportunity and it's really something to look forward too.