



kind of trip that offers exceptional value for money, though not because of luxury – because of learning, connection and purpose the students got to experience. That they were able to see and do things they'd never previously imagined and came home changed by them.

As one of our Y10 students reflected afterwards, *"I went along as I just wanted to help. The main thing for me was carrying out the turtle surveys, as it was good to see how the turtles needed our help. It made me more interested in the conservation side of things."*

One of the teachers accompanying the trip meanwhile summed it up beautifully: *"This was a wonderful opportunity for all involved. Our students*

pushed themselves to try new things, building personal resilience and confidence. They were thrown into an environment they'd never experienced before, all without their families, and absolutely rose to the challenge."

The educational benefits were clear, but the personal development they'd undergone was just as striking. They looked out for each other, worked as a team and ensured everyone felt safe, valued, and part of something meaningful.

A community effort

If Greece was a traditional trip with an environmental twist, then Costa Rica was something entirely different – a full-blown adventure that stretched our students in every possible way.

Challenge-style expeditions have become increasingly popular since COVID, and with good reason, since they tend to combine volunteering, sustainability, adventure and travel into one extraordinary experience. A quick online search will reveal a host of reputable providers, but we were clear on what we wanted from the beginning – a trip that would be inclusive, purposeful, and life-changing.

Working out at around £4,800 per student, this was never going to be a budget trip, but we were determined that the cost shouldn't become a barrier. The experience was open to all, with fundraising becoming part of the journey itself.

The travel company provided full parental communication, ran a launch evening for parents and students, and delivered a fundraising workshop, as well as managing all payments directly, which took a huge administrative weight off the school.

From there, the fundraising process became a genuine community effort. The school provided spaces for bake sales, quiz nights

and craft fairs, waiving all hall and stall fees. The students quickly found other creative ways of raising the money themselves, with the result that local cafés were soon hosting additional pop-up markets, and families began donating raffle prizes, as the entire school rallied behind them.

Time for adventure

When the time came, 48 students and four staff embarked on a month-long expedition to Costa Rica, travelling from wetlands in the north to the highlands in the south. Each group was supported by an experienced expedition leader, with school staff providing pastoral care and reassurance when needed; familiar faces in an unfamiliar world.

The students all lived and worked within local communities, tackling environmental and social projects that left a lasting impact. They taught English to disadvantaged children, built a greenhouse, repaired a path that facilitated wheelchair access to a local beach and took part in vital reforestation work. Every day brought new challenges and taught them new lessons in teamwork, humility and gratitude.

There was also time for adventure. Students earned PADI diving qualifications, spotted whales and dolphins from boats, and one student even celebrated their 16th birthday by waking up in a hammock on the beach – not your average teenage milestone.

Different people

As one of our Y12 students later reflected, *"It was incredible. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. It was good to get away from our real world, where people spend all day on their phones. We learnt that not everyone is as lucky as we are. We're lucky to have what we have, and this trip has made us more grateful."*



"I really liked how appreciative the community was after we did some work for them. We could tell it really meant something to them. It was an eye-opening experience. I've made new friends, as I had the opportunity to speak to people I wouldn't normally."

For staff, watching students use their Spanish skills to talk, laugh and teach with local children was unforgettable. Their learning came alive in the most human way possible, through conversation, connection, and play. Friendships formed across year groups, barriers disappeared, and confidence soared.

By the time they returned home, they weren't just different students; they were quite different people. Trips like this remind us that education isn't only about grades or targets. It's about growing as global citizens, understanding privilege, appreciating difference and realising that empathy, courage, and kindness are as valuable as any qualification.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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