



Carmel College – Making A Difference In Madagascar

Carmel College students love adventure - think four weeks in Madagascar. We welcome extraordinary experiences, living in a remote rural village where we funded and then helped build a small community hospital and trekking through mountainous regions or deep canyons in heat often nearing 40 degrees. We also love dancing lemurs, colourful chameleons, mighty baobab trees and slippery snakes. Needless to say, we certainly encountered all of this and more on our recent trip to this stunningly beautiful country.

Thanks to our school's long-term association with World Challenge, and working alongside international organisations like Feedback Madagascar, Zonta and 'Days for Girls', we were offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit Madagascar, setting off in early December for this month-long adventure. It took two years of fundraising and personal preparation to bring the three phases of our adventure together as a coherent whole.

The first phase was our community engagement project, which provided us with the opportunity to pay for, and then also assist in the building of a two-room hospital for the rural community of Ambohimana in the Ifanadiana district. Living conditions in the village and surrounding areas are very basic and the small hospital facilities that we built made a meaningful contribution to this community's own development initiatives. We also spent afternoons teaching children English, immersing ourselves in Malagasy life and were particularly humbled by the kindness and generosity of the locals who have so little, yet gave us so much.

Another wonderful aspect of our trip to Madagascar was the opportunity we had to personally present 40 'Days for Girls' hygiene kits to this non-profit charity whose goal is to work hard to keep girls going to school once they begin their periods so they don't miss out on valuable learning opportunities. This initiative was led by Nadeen Amso, a Material Technology student who developed the manufacturing system over a two-year period. Zonta students and teachers at Carmel College then made these kits and we delivered them personally. Students also raised an additional three thousand dollars to help keep the initiative going in-country.



A third aspect of our trip was more physical and involved the personal challenge of completing three difficult treks in different parts of the country. The landscapes were breath-taking and spending Christmas Day in the highlands of Andringitra National Park, with its spectacular views of huge towering granite peaks was unforgettable. Thanks to the efforts of our teachers Pauline Larkin, Pip Buddle and Jess Fitzgerald in preparing an unforgettable traditional breakfast and open-fire dinner with very limited resources.

During the month we were in Madagascar, we learnt and grew so much thanks to the challenges we faced, the people we met and the wildlife we saw. The trip was definitely not easy yet we were always able to pull together and find new solutions to our problems, as well as make important decisions as a group. Our adventures in Madagascar ran smoothly thanks to the kindness of locals we met along the way.

With the initial planning for our next World Challenge adventure to South America in 2020 already underway, we hope that future students will also take up this once in a lifetime experience.

- Written by Aislin Hook, Lauren Collett and Pauline Larkin. ●