

ASTO
International
Exchange 2013

UK – Australia

Emma Harley



So where to start?! Far out - it's hard to try and sum up the best three months of my life in just one report but I guess I'll start at the beginning...

It all started with a letter and a nerve wracking interview (which I came out of crying - as I was convinced I had been completely rubbish.) I clearly hadn't been that rubbish as the next week I got a phone call from Lucy at ASTO saying "Emma, we are sending you to Australia!" I think I actually let out a wee scream!

Two months passed in a frenzy of university exams, finding a new flat and packing (what do you take for sailing in Aus in winter?!) Before I knew it, I was being driven to the airport by my family and after a very tearful goodbye at the departure gate I was off - all by myself to the other side of the world! It's hard to describe how I felt at that moment - mainly nervous, excited and completely overwhelmed by it all.

My journey there was quite a long one but I remember that while I was high in the air above the Australian coast I looked out the window. Below me I saw beautiful green land, sandy beaches and then water, sea, ocean. It stretched to the horizon and I knew that it would all be ok. After all, I was going sailing on that very ocean and I couldn't wait!

I touched down in Gladstone, the town where I was to join STS Young Endeavour. I had a few days to spare before the voyage started so I used them to get to know the amazing country I had just arrived in. I visited nearby tropical islands, heard parrots cawing and got to grips with the fact that they don't have 1 or 2 cent coins - weird!

The 7th of June finally arrived and I made my way to Gladstone marina. It was a hot and sunny day with blue skies. Across the park, I saw white masts and a royal blue hull. My stomach was full of butterflies! This was the Tall Ship I had travelled so far to sail on. Walking along the wharf, I saw a



group of around 6 young people all wearing Young Endeavour t-shirts. These were to be some of my shipmates for voyage 10/13, who would sail together from Gladstone to Brisbane. We all introduced ourselves and they were all so surprised that I was actually Scottish! This was the first time I encountered the true friendliness of the Australian people. They made me feel instantly at home. We spent the next few hours sitting in the park as more and more youthies turned up until all 27 of us were there. We sat in a big circle and everyone spoke about their excitement for the adventure we were going to undertake together.

It was then 4pm and time to board. We were brought on, given name badges and shown to our bunks. I met one of my first language barriers at this point when staffie Paige told me there was a dooner on my bed for me. I was relieved when I found my bunk that this was nothing more than a duvet (pewh!)

My first day on board Young Endeavour was amazing. After a brief introduction from Captain Matt we cast off the lines and sailed along the Gladstone River to our anchorage for the night. On the way we played a few icebreaker games, had a tour of our new home and got to know our watch. After my first delicious meal (the food on Young Endeavour really is amazing) we took part in our first night of activities. This mainly involved learning the most important part about square rig sailing – climbing the rigging! First we each completed an inversion test which involved us hanging upside down in our harness – as a bit of reassurance that they worked. Then our watch completed the “up and over”. One by one, we climbed to the t’gallant and along the footropes. We all sat on the yard until our whole watch were up. Sitting 30m above the deck in the dark with the stars up above whilst chatting to new people was something I will never forget. It was an amazing way to bond us on the very first night as everyone was encouraging those who were scared and we felt like we had achieved it all together! After some inspiring words from our captain and a cup of hot chocolate it was time for my first night on my Australian ship.

The next morning was an early one as we were woken by a morning song and being asked to be up on deck. After everyone was up we played a quick name game before heading for breakfast and 90 second showers (showers on a boat did take a bit of getting used to!). We had our first morning brief and found out lots of information about how the ship runs. Then we got straight into the international sail training tradition that is happy hour! (Singing *happy, happy, happy hour, happy hour, happy hour. Happy, happy, happy hour, yeeeeaaaaahhh happy hour!!! Arrrrriba!*)



Our first day was full to the brim of learning. As a watch we set and furled the staysails more times than you could shake a sick at! It’s a great way of really learning how things are working and why they are happening. Then as a whole youth crew we set the main sail and practised tacking the ship. That first day unfortunately the heat and the rolling seas got to a lot of people – and some became very close friends with the guard rail! I am so fortunate to not be seasick but I really did feel for the people who were. As the ship was sailing well and people were finding their feet we settled into our night watch rota.

During night watch we looked after our sick people, helmed, kept lookout, learnt about doing rounds and had general banter. The wind got up to around 30 knots and the waves were big but the stars

were out and I loved it! I was amazed that I could be out on night watch still just in my shorts, a t-shirt and fleece – not the 8 layers I am used to sailing in Scotland!

The next day continued to be busy and filled with fun! At morning brief we were graced with the presence of “Salty” who told us a few tales of the sea and the sayings connected to it. Then a surprise appearance and song from “Nana” who duly returned the belongings we had left lying around to us. With more teaching and learning of sail theory, setting and furling and tacking we were soon starting to take more control of the sails. I love the fact that Young Endeavour try and get the youthies leading sail setting as soon as possible. It really gives you a sense of achievement already! The day also included our inaugural rope races – the non-competitive competitive sail knowledge bonus round competition! After a night and day of full on sailing we arrived at anchor at Fraser Island. In the evening we took part in three way chats where you speak to the whole crew for a few minutes as if you were another youthie. It was a great way to learn more about the huge range of people on board and what made everyone tick. Although it was quite tricky to tell everyone convincingly that “I” was really awesome at AFL (Australian Football League for anyone who doesn’t know – it’s kind of a weird mixture between football and rugby played on an oval pitch?!) and my cousin was a famous Australian singer! Much hilarity was had that night and I went to bed with a big grin on my face.

The next morning it was up nice and early for some shore leave! We were run ashore in the wee boat and were soon playing Rugby league (I was just following people’s instructions when I got the ball and they shouted at me “RUN”!!). The beach was sublime – white sand clear blue seas and a great bunch of people. We ran around, laughed, swam and played for what seemed like far too short a time before we returned to our floating home.



Once everyone was back on board we set off! We had a lot of mileage to cover and this was our chance. We spent the next 4 days at sea cramming as much in as possible in order to prepare ourselves for command day! We climbed the rigging, set the square sails, practised tacking in all the different roles, and really took control of sail setting and furling. One of my biggest personal challenges was climbing the main mast in big swell and winds to help pull down the main gaff topsail. I was swinging around and hanging for dear life whilst also trying with all my might to pull on this sail! It was at this moment that it decided to pour down (Yes it does rain in Australia!). When I finally got my feet back on the deck I was very relieved. Despite all this we had a bit of time to relax during silent running (where everything on the ship is turned off!) and all you hear is the sound of the waves against the hull, the wind in the sails and the laughter and chit chat of new friends.

That evening as we anchored of Morton Island we were given the task of command day elections. This is where the youthies select who will take all the positions on the ship for the next 24 hours. This includes captain, sail master, watch leaders, chefs and watches. The staffies are not involved at all so it was completely up to us! We opted for a put your name forward for the position you want and then we drew out of a hat to see who got the position. I had put my name forward as sail master but when someone else's name came out I was more than happy to be in a watch and supporting my new friends in their roles.

Command day is what the whole voyage is leading up to and boy is it a learning curve! The staffies handed over the ship completely to us youthies and gave us a list of around 25 tasks which it was our mission to undertake. Myself (an engineer), Tom (an architect) and Joe (a pilot) were given ownership of one of the tasks – build a hammock big enough for all 27 youth crew to sit on it at the same time! So we set about our task and I must say were rather successful. It was great fun working with the guys and I felt very proud when everyone got on and it did not collapse! After a few more fun tasks at anchor we set off sailing. Managing to set sails all by ourselves was a huge achievement and so rewarding. And so we settled into our final night watch of the voyage which proved to be one of the most challenging nights of the voyage. We were called up out of our beds about 5 times throughout the night in order to tack the ship. Everyone would appear on deck in an array of pyjamas and jumpers to tack the ship before scurrying back off to bed. We were exhausted and it certainly took a lot of effort to pull myself out of bed! But knowing we were doing it as a team was what made it all worthwhile.

Our last night of the voyage ended in a tradition of pizza, a slideshow of photos from the voyage and writing a letter to yourself in 6 months time – I can't wait to receive that letter!

Voyage 10/13 on Young Endeavour was one I will never forget! I learnt that Australians really are wonderfully kind and banterful people – even if they do sound weird and say things like “How you going?” and “Far out!”. They welcomed me with such open arms and for that I will always be so grateful. I had so much fun and I couldn't wait to do it all again!



After a few days in Brisbane of restocking the ship, hosting school visits on board and meeting the new staffies for voyage 11/13, I was given a stripy shirt and it was time to do it all again! Except this time around I was on a different team – the staffies team – as I was being an assistant watch leader to the Blue watch.

Voyage 11/13 from Brisbane to Sydney was completely different from 10/13. With a new full staff team of 14 and me wanting to do my best it took me a while to adjust to my new role on the ship. I did struggle a bit with how to act but I soon found by being myself I was ok! The voyage ran similarly to the last one – building on the youths skills until command day where they took control.



One of my high points of the voyage was sailing into Sydney harbour. Australia had even tried to make me feel at home with the weather they provided – cloud, rain and wind – a right dreich day! There is this one head you come around and slowly the Opera house and then the harbour bridge come into view! It's an amazing way to arrive at one of the most famous scenes in the world and not one that many people get to experience. However the main highlight for me was seeing the youths bond together and become

friends as if they had known each other their whole life. It really is what makes sail training so unique and I was pleased to see it in practice on the other side of the world!

Now in Sydney, Young Endeavour was going into a 2 month maintenance period. For the first few weeks I helped out on board – de-stowing, servicing winches and just being a general handyman! I loved seeing the boat being taken to pieces as you get a real understanding of how it gets put together. During this time I stayed on various staffies couches or in their spare rooms. I appreciated this kindness so much as it meant I could relax in real homes rather than in hostels.

It got to the stage where there was not much else I could do to help and after a bit of encouragement from the Staffies, I decided to go travelling. I spent a few days doing the touristy things in Sydney (learning to surf on manly beach, walking along Bondi beach, seeing classical music at the opera house and crossing the harbour bridge). I then travelled to the Blue Mountains, then Alice Springs! From Alice Springs, I had a shot of camel riding and then took part in a three day bus tour of Kings Canyon, Kata Tjuta and Uluru (Ayer's Rock). It really gave me a sense of what a diverse and vast country Australia is and taught me lots of lessons on the treatment of people and their traditions.



Next stop on my tour of the land down under was actually a new country – New Zealand! I had heard from various friends about the New Zealand sail training ship – Spirit of New Zealand – and I had arranged to sail as a volunteer on one of their voyages. Touching down on the plane in Auckland, I felt very far away from home again. It was at times like this when I wasn't on a boat or doing exciting things that I had time to miss my family and friends back home. This feeling was soon put to the back of my mind as I joined Spirit of New Zealand.

She is a bigger boat than Young Endeavour, with more sails and more trainees but I was ready for the challenge! I arrived to the flurry of a maintenance day and as soon as I stepped on board was handed some pieces of string and asked to tie them onto all the lee clothes! It reminded me a lot of Ocean Youth Trust Scotland and I instantly felt at home with the array of volunteers who were working over, under and around each other. In the afternoon the number of workers on board dwindled and we had a meeting with the staff for this voyage. I loved the range of volunteers on board and the different experiences we could all bring to the voyage. For this voyage I was a leading hand. This is a role for young volunteers and involves being a positive role model for the young people and someone they can go to (like a big brother or sister) to confide in.



Next thing the youth crew were arriving and I found myself getting into the swing of welcoming people on board, showing them their bunks and where to stow their belongings. I felt slightly out of my depth for the first evening as I (along with the youth crew) learnt the routine of the ship.

The next day was when the voyage really started. Unfortunately we couldn't leave the wharf as soon as we wanted as there were some new lifejacket boxes coming aboard for which we were delayed. However, they were soon aboard and we cast off the lines and headed out into Auckland harbour.

The next morning, I took part in a Spirit tradition – the early morning swim! And when I say early, I mean half 6 in the morning as the dawn breaks. Everyone gets out of bed and puts their “togs” or “bathers” (swimwear) on. Then there is a light jog around the deck until everyone is up on deck and then a light warm up. As a leading hand I was the first to jump in to the water at the front of the boat and swim to the back before climbing out again! That first morning I was absolutely dreading it – it was going to be soooo cold! But with all eyes on me, I didn't have a choice but to leap in whole heartedly. And it really was as freezing as I thought it was going to be! It certainly is a good way to wake up 40 teenagers!



As a leading hand, I spent half my day in the alley helping Steph (the fabulous chef) cook up some scrumptious food and bake cakes for afternoon tea. The other half of the day I spent on deck and helping out. After the first couple of days, the mate Luke asked me if I fancied running a sail station and teaching the trainees some sail hoists. I was so pleased and impressed that after just a few days they were willing to let me do that. I really would like to thank them for having the trust in me to do so. They also let me run nightly de-briefs with one of the watches. It did give me the warm fuzzy feeling to hear how the youth crew were getting on throughout the voyage and to be able to assist them in getting the most out of the trip.

Spirit of New Zealand, I found, is not so focused on the teaching of sailing but more on the all-round experience of the trainees on board. This means they do a more varied range of activities. One day we went on a “tramp” (hike!) on Great Barrier Island to some hot springs. They are so weird – it's a river that is as hot as a bath! Very odd indeed! That night we all paddled rubber inflatable rafts ashore in order to have a barbeque dinner on the beach. It was fabulous! We were the only people there, and with a fire made from torch light (it was against the law to build fires where we were!) we sang the night away with accompanying guitar and ukulele! I felt deeply moved when everyone sang the national



anthem in Maori – it was truly beautiful. The trainees also had a day of sailing their wee lugger sailing dinghies and climbing to the top of the mast. I was out in the power boat with Luke, keeping an eye on the lugger sailing groups when we spotted a small pod of dolphins. They loved the wake of the engine on the back of our boat and were swimming directly beside and underneath us! We drove over to the lugger boats and towed them so the trainees were so close to the dolphins they could have touched them! The rest of the plan for the afternoon was dropped as the joy of this magical moment was enjoyed by all!



After all this fun, it was time to get sailing and we did our overnight sail across the Bay of Plenty and down to Gisborne. It was great to get the ship really going. The trainees loved the chance to get out on deck in the dark, to see the stars and experience night sailing. I loved that we could give them that opportunity which most people aren't lucky enough to have. With the weather getting worse, we headed into Gisborne as soon as possible! After a night of final debriefs, handing out certificates and writing 6 week letters it was time for my final night on board Spirit of New Zealand – or so I thought!



The ship was due to sail from Gisborne to Wellington with a group of adult guests on. Since I was going to be travelling that way anyway, I was given the chance to stay on board for an extra 4 days and gain even more experience! Little did I know quite what an experience I was letting myself in for! We had been told the weather was going to be bad so we prepared the ship for heavy weather sailing. We reefed the sails, tied everything down that could be tied and made plenty of ginger crunch to help with peoples stomachs.

With the adult guests on, we cast off and headed out of Gisborne. Within about half an hour the swell was huge and the wind fierce. People became small bundles of waterproofs curled around buckets in any nook or cranny they could wedge themselves into without flying across the deck. The lively chatty attitude which had been on board an hour earlier had been replaced with one of illness and wish for it all to stop! Being as lucky as I am to not suffer from seasickness, along with Sarianna the cadet and Grandma the watch leader, we set about trying to make people as comfortable as possible. This involved a seemingly endless cycle of emptying sick buckets over the side, getting warn clothing and waterproofs for people, supplying them with water and ginger biscuits and keeping cheery! Slowly we managed to get people to their bunks so that only the hardy few were left to

helm and keep lookout. I was so exhausted but knowing that people were relying on me kept me going!

We pulled into Napier that evening to get some respite and the next morning around 80% of the adult guests left. They just were not having fun and seemed very relieved to be on solid land again! The rest of the morning we spent doing even more to make the ship more secure before we headed back out into it.

This time we had a much more structured watch rota, people had found their sea legs and that evening we all managed to eat a full meal for the first time since the voyage started. It was the best food I have ever tasted! We sailed south, with the wind increasing. We had a few damages to ship along the way; holes were ripped in the outer jib and main sail, a large part of the capping rail wasn't there when it got light again and the motor boat hanging off the back tried to escape a few times. I remember helming in the dark and the rain and wind battering my face and there is never a time when you feel more alive! When everyone comes together through that, you have a deep connection that will never be broken. When I was off watch, I remember curling up in the staff mess with the other girls on board, all with duvets and sleeping bags, and watching the film Tintin! We were pitching and rolling but I felt so comfortable and happy that I was exactly where I was.

As we entered Wellington harbour at 2 in the morning, it was gusting 50 knots of wind – I did not envy the captain Paul having to park! But he did it extremely well. Once the boat was firmly tied up to the wharf, we all headed down below and opened the beer! It was very well deserved!



I felt very sad to be leaving Spirit of New Zealand and its amazing crew. They were so friendly, opening and challenged me to my limits! I have learnt so much from them which I will most certainly use in my own sail training from now on.

From there, I had a very kind offer from Grandma (Sheila) the volunteer to go and stay with her for a while. I spent a lovely few days with her and her husband Chris at their home in Motueka. We went to the beach, went cheese tasting and out for lunch. I was very very sad to leave them as I continued on with my travelling around the South Island. While I was in the South Island, I felt one big earthquake and then several small aftershocks. It was really weird how



everything just started shaking. I was a bit frightened but it stopped quite quickly so it was alright! I spent the next week, visiting my friend in Dunedin, going bungee swinging in Queenstown, sea kayaking on Milford Sound and ice climbing on Franz Josef Glacier. New Zealand is a beautiful country – it reminded me a lot of an exaggerated Scotland – with bigger mountains and bigger lakes! I then flew back to Australia, where I decided that I couldn't come all this way and not go to the Great Barrier Reef. So to the Great Barrier Reef I went! I went snorkelling and diving on the reef and it is truly remarkable. I was relieved not to see any sharks! I also went white water rafting before heading back to Sydney.



By now, my time down under was drawing to a very rapid close but I had time to fit in one last adventure! Very kindly, Captain Mike from Young Endeavour had agreed to let me come back and do a third voyage with them. I was so over the moon you have no idea. I was determined this time to give it absolutely everything I had, be completely myself and just enjoy absolutely every moment of it. With no regrets!

Voyage 14/13 from Sydney to Melbourne, was one of my most rewarding voyages ever. The weather was a wee bit cruel to us (the Bass Strait which is famous for being rough was like glass) with a lack of wind for most of the voyage. However, that didn't stop it being phenomenal. For me, this voyage culminated everything I had learnt over my time away. I felt comfortable about how the ship worked, how she was run, what the staff expected of me and how I fitted in to the team. My extra confidence helped make it so successful and in turn made me so happy.

One of the highlights for me was when we anchored in a bay called Refuge Cove. In the staff mess there is a picture of it on the wall and it looks idyllic. White sand and blue sea and it is Young Endeavour tradition that if you visit there on the ship you can sign the back of the picture. The day we arrived, it was so foggy you couldn't see this beautiful beach from the ship! But we signed it anyway and I am very proud to be the only Scottish name on it! Another highlight was when Dougie (the watch leader I was helping) trusted me to look after the watch by myself. I knew that



they really did trust me then and that meant a lot. However, without doubt for me the best moment from this voyage was when one member of our watch who was petrified of climbing made it up to the first platform. It was at a time when the whole youth crew were aloft and once the youthie had made it up onto the platform they all cheered, whooped and clapped. It was that support for each other which made me so proud and happy.

The first days of the voyage flew by in a flurry of sail handling, rope races, morning briefs, shore leave, climbing, rope swinging, film watching and command day elections. Again, the youthies took charge on command day and it was a huge success. I have never seen brass polished as much as I did that day! It really proves that Young Endeavours way of teaching sail handling truly works as every time they can give the ship over to the Youthies.



With the last night tradition of pizza and evaluations, I couldn't believe that it was all over. My last youth voyage on Young Endeavour. I have learnt so much from that ship and the staff on board it. I know that I will always have them in the back of my mind when I am sailing on the boats back home.

The last few days in Melbourne included a visit to the city and lots of Tall Ships activities - day sails, parties and tours. It was great seeing the ships from the Netherlands and Lord Nelson there too. Being a Naval Architecture student I was particularly interested in seeing Lord Nelson and Young Endeavour side by side as they were both designed by the same man. I also enjoyed meeting people from the other ships and expanding my outlook on sail training even further.

My last morning, I was up early and Australia granted me a beautiful goodbye in the form of a sky that was one of the most beautiful skies I have ever seen. On the flight back home, I desperately wanted to turn around at every stage – the only thing drawing me home was my family.



Now I've had to reflect on my time away. I've realised that for me sail training is all about the people. The wonderful, colourful people are what make it so amazing, inspirational and fun! I realised that even if we sound different and come from different cultures, we are essentially the same. Just people who want to help make a difference to Young

people's lives. To me that is the essence of sail training and I am so glad to know that it works just as well at the other side of the world as it does here.

Finally, I want to say the biggest Thank You to every single person who made my amazing exchange the best summer I have ever had. Thank you to ASTO and the Aus-Brit exchange for picking me in the first place and for funding my journey. Without you it would not have been possible. Thanks to the staff and youth crew of both Young Endeavour and Spirit of New Zealand. It would not have been the same if you hadn't all been so fabulous! Your kindness towards me was greatly appreciated and everything you did for me will always be treasured. Thanks to my family and friends, especially my mum, for supporting me the whole time. And Thank You to Ocean Youth Trust Scotland for my first ever voyage. If it hadn't gone sailing with you guys, I would not have had this wonderful opportunity. Just goes to show that sail training really is life changing.

To finish on a quote...

"How lucky am I to have had something so good that makes saying goodbye so hard." (Winnie the Poole!)

Or two...

"Ah! The good old time – the good old time. Youth and the sea. Glamour and the sea! The good, strong sea, the salt, bitter sea, that could whisper to you and roar at you and knock your breath out of you. But you here – you all had something out of life; money love – whatever one gets on shore – and tell me, wasn't that the best time, that time when we were young at sea; young and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing except hard knocks – and sometimes a chance to feel your strength?" (Joseph Conrad)

