

Nina Santos – Young Blake Expedition 2016



On February 2nd, 2016, I was one of the 14 lucky young New Zealanders chosen to board the HMNZS Otago for a journey to through the Southern ocean & Sub-Antarctic. The Auckland Islands are a little-known group of atolls about 500km south of Bluff, and one of the world's most remote and pristine natural reserves. Together with the Royal New Zealand Navy, and spearheaded by Blake Leader Professor Gary Wilson of Antarctica New Zealand, I sailed with some of country's best scientists and conservation leaders and 13 other gifted young enviroleaders. Our big mission was to conduct a series of science projects that will contribute to the current & future climate change research and lay the framework for the proposed science facility to be built on the islands called Blake Station which the Trust is establishing.

As one of the first few people to explore the Sub-Antarctic islands, we collected sediment core samples, worked with plankton & seaweed and looked at the bottom of the seabed in order to identify how the islands are being affected by Climate change. We student voyagers have made our mark on conservation history, and have gathered data which will now be sent to places like Waikato, Korea and the United states for extraction and research. Knowing this makes me me feel so grateful & happy to have been part of

something so special, and serves as a reminder of why all the sea sickness I experienced was totally worth it. 😊 A little known fact is that less than a hundred people in the entire world have been to this part of the islands—So basically, much like Harry Potter; we really are the chosen ones.

Getting to witness the beautiful sights and the rare flora and fauna of the Auckland islands for the past couple of weeks has been a crazy and rewarding experience. I also got the opportunity to learn about “Navy ship life” and encounter amazing creatures like Sea lions, Yellow-eyed penguins, massive albatrosses and lots and lots of dolphins. The full on two weeks was filled with lots of new adventures, which included 6 am fishing sessions with the captain, scientific workshops, lectures about Antarctica, getting on rocket fast motor boats to go on shore, counting 5,000 planktons in our mini science lab, and getting to know the crew and workings of The NZ Defence Force's offshore patrol vessel. My favourite part of the trip was when my friends and I made the collective decision to jump off the ship and into the freezing waters of the Southern ocean (we had two navy officers on watch with Guns in case sharks showed up) --- It was a big life risk, but I LOVED every minute!

The rigorous, total-immersion experience has definitely uplifted my passion for the environment, and at the same time has developed inquiry, compassion, confidence and right action. But perhaps the most significant impact of the trip for me was that I left the islands with newfound optimism. Whenever I look at my 13 fellow student voyagers, I see an ambitious generation who is keen to learn as much as they could about the environmental threats that we face. A generation who is eager to educate others and inspire action on a bigger scale than we've ever seen before. I am more hopeful and excited about the future than ever, thanks to all the inspiring people I've been lucky enough to share this experience with.

The trip might have ended last week, but my journey only begins now. Now that I've discovered the rare revelations of the island's biodiversity and captured the conservation challenges for humanity, it's now my mission to promote the CONVERSATION ABOUT CONSERVATION, encourage action and fuel the drive to safeguard these treasures for years to come.







