

THE REAL WORLD

Colm Hanratty

Editor of Hostelworld.com



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Colm Hanratty, 30, (pictured above) is editor of the backpacker travel site Hostelworld.com. His job has seen him travel through 29 countries and stay in over 50 youth hostels. Hanratty has a degree in journalism and media communications from Griffith College, Dublin.

How useful was your degree?
In college, we learnt basic writing skills, investigative journalism and web design. I also did photography for a while, and radio, but what got me this job was the journalism degree. After I graduated I went travelling for a year in Australia. When I came back, I set up a travel website as a hobby. I am a great one for keepsakes, I hold on to things such as flyers. I just thought I'd pass my knowledge on.

What do you do now?
I travel for maybe four to five days a month for Hostelworld. From my travels we make three-page downloadable guides on the homepage. I also create podcasts and update the online guides, sample itineraries and lot of marketing. I write the customer newsletter and update the content on the site, competitions, news, and promote new sections of the site. It is the first job I have had in journalism.

How did you get into it?
I graduated in June 1999, worked for the summer and left for Australia in October. I was away for a year to the day. I did all sorts of things, but I got sick of it. Eventually, I sent a letter to Hostelworld to say, "Hi, I'm doing this site as a hobby, any chance that you have a job?" It was a fluke. Coincidentally, they were advertising for an editor. My website was shortlisted for an award called the Golden Spider - a big internet award in Ireland.

Hostelworld was also shortlisted for an award and that's how I found out about them.

What was your worst job?
I didn't detest any of them too much. I worked as a debt collector in Australia. I would be looking at the account, see how much they owed, have the phone number and before you even pick up the phone you just think, I am about to have a fight. Then you would pick up the phone and have that fight. That makes you stressed. I used to always have horrible phone calls last thing on a Friday evening. It took a bit of the fun out of finishing on a Friday.

What advice would you give to new graduates?
People should send in a letter if they like the look of a company. Nepotism can be a great thing, but for the rest of us it's just a matter of posting in work that you've done and hounding people. If there is a particular field or company that you want to work for, find out the HR e-mail address and just post in your CV and a covering letter. You never know what might be out there. It totally worked in my favour.

The thing that helped me make the transition from college to full-time work was that, although I was flapping around for a year, I have found something that I love. I love my job, even when I am in the office doing nine to five. Tomorrow I am going to Granada in Spain, in June I go to Seville and July, Dubrovnik. I have found that it's good to pick a niche and really go for it.

INTERVIEW BY ANNE GIACOMANTONIO

Hostelworld.com has reviews and online hostel bookings for more than 17,000 hostels in 168 countries worldwide

GAP YEARS

Prepare to go the extra mile

Whether it's to expand your horizons or your contacts book, there's likely to be a gap year itinerary to suit you, says **Virginia Matthews**

A gap year sounds the perfect time to learn white water rafting, go trekking in the Himalayas or spend time swimming with dolphins. But for every new graduate opting to devote their gap year to exotic travel, nature-watching or extreme sports, there is another one concentrating on boosting their employability - via an internship, work scheme or an international community or environmental project, for example.

If you decide to take some well-earned time off before heading out into the world of work, the benefits of a well-structured gap year can be enormous to your career, as well as to you as an individual.

Jon Rose, an ex-surveyor, is the course co-ordinator at Snow Challenge, which offers a 12-week course for ski improvers and would-be ski instructors in the Canadian Rockies that attracts mostly male high-flyers in IT and banking, as well as school leavers and recent graduates looking for a way into one of the big professions. At a cost of £6,350, which includes "everything apart from beer money", the course might not immediately sound like a recipe for success in finance or technology. But according to Rose, the sheer physical challenge involved can bring out hidden talents.

"I've seen hundreds of graduates come onto this course and really mature over the 12 weeks, even those who haven't done much more than sit around

and do the occasional essay for the past three years.

"Networking with others already in, or looking to join, the same sort of profession is a big plus, as is the development of team working skills in what can be a very challenging environment."

Away from the ski slopes, the Mountbatten Institute, once known as the Mountbatten Internship Programme, was founded in New York in 1984. Its rather grand-sounding mission is to "foster international and cross-cultural understanding through experiential education, practical training and residence abroad",

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and it is also rather handy if you want to join an international bank, law firm or other large organisation.

The programme offers a one-year training programme in either New York or London to around 500 graduates each year and is viewed by many City employers as a first-class ticket to a glittering career.

If the Mountbatten internship is aimed at those with their long-term professional future already fixed firmly in their minds, then Bunac's less ambitious aim is simply to find young people opportunities to work, teach and volunteer all over the world. Yet here too, says Haydn Parks, Bunac's marketing and

promotions manager, participants need reassurance that the whole experience will be beneficial to their long-term career prospects.

"Some young people want danger and excitement and a physical challenge or even risk, while others are looking for better understanding of the world and a glimpse of how business operates on different continents," he says.

"Whether you opt for paid employment in the US or Canada, or would prefer to volunteer in Africa or Asia, gap year graduates tend to want to network with their contemporaries, broaden their perspectives and see at close range how the other half of the world live.

"Along the way, they gain independence and self-assurance, an impressive range of practical skills and make their CV look very interesting and unique," he adds.

Sociologists tell us that the current generation of graduates - the so-called Generation Y - are more dependent on their parents than ever before; both emotionally and financially. While Parks doesn't believe that all gap year candidates fit into this mould, he stresses that "hand-holding by Bunac is there for those who need it".

"We offer a full support package for anyone feeling homesick or unhappy but for the most part, people do successfully complete their assignment and feel a real sense of achievement at having done so," he says.

In terms of cost, Summer Camp USA will set you back £329, including accommodation and flights, while the



First bite of the apple: schemes

various volunteer programmes weigh in at between £250 and £1,565.

Most BUNAC volunteers are female and between them, they represent a broad range of arts, humanities, science and social science degree subjects.

Raleigh International, previously known as Operation Raleigh, is an education charity that provides adventurous and challenging expeditions for young people from all backgrounds and nationalities.

Over the last 24 years, some 30,000 people have been involved in more than 250 expeditions to more than 40 countries. New ventures in India include building elephant trenches to keep elephants and their human neighbours apart, and anti-poaching expeditions at an Indian National Park.

Raleigh Venturers, who are usually between 17 and 24 years old, can opt for a four-week, or a more popular 10-week, expedition, which consists of three different environmental,