

All cricket, curry and terrorism? UK students explore Pakistan Young creatives challenge UK media perception of Pakistan

Six aspiring British creatives have returned to the UK having journeyed to Pakistan with Offscreen Expeditions.

The team of 18-21-year-olds spent two weeks in October exploring Pakistan away from the headlines. Going beyond 'cricket, curry and terrorism' – the three words they used to describe the perceptions of Pakistan in the UK – their views and visions can be explored through a series of online videos, photos and blogs at www.offscreenexpedition.com.

The talented group of aspiring photographers, artists, a musician and a fashion designer were chosen as capable and positive young leaders, focused on creating positive change in their own communities. Having the opportunity while in Pakistan to explore how narratives are constructed has helped develop their skills for finding innovative solutions to current and challenging issues.

Building on a successful visit by Pakistani students to the UK this summer, Offscreen Expeditions, a UK-based not-for-profit organisation working in partnership with the British Council, is giving young people in Britain and Pakistan a space to debate and explore solutions to some of the most challenging issues they face today such as access to education and employment, terrorism and gang culture.

Offscreen Expeditions Director Jamie Buchanan-Dunlop explains: "This year Pakistan has seen a lot of media attention, from the floods, to the cricket scandal to the devastating impact terrorism has had on its people and culture. The expedition gives tomorrow's community the chance to form their own views and help to build understanding between young people in both countries."

The group travelled the country participating in activities including painting trucks, debating with a religious scholar about how Islam is being manipulated to justify violence, meeting a documentary filmmaker working to improve civil rights, and scrutinising the role of the media with students from the National College of Arts. In Mirpur, a region with strong links to the UK, the six visited a number of social-based action projects run by the British Council to learn how young Pakistanis are establishing projects and helping to make a difference in their own communities.

Imran, a student from Birmingham said: "There are lots of people setting up projects to improve things in their communities.. Terrorism does exist but there are people here doing a lot to help end it. I hope I can implement my new ideas that will inspire change in my own community."

Now back in the UK, the students are developing projects of their own. Rukia, who studies fine art in London, is translating her experiences into sketches and putting together a book to share, inspire and educate. Ruweyda, a fashion designer, will be launching her Pakistan-inspired collection after the New Year and is in the initial stages of setting up her own organisation promoting arts and creativity in East Africa.

Check out their stories online at: www.offscreenexpedition.com!

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For downloadable high-res images of expedition highlights and participant headshots, please visit: offscreenexpedition.zenfolio.com.

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

About Offscreen Expeditions

Offscreen Expeditions is an independent educational programme run by three UK-based social enterprises: Offscreen Education Programme, Digital Explorer and Bold Creative. Since the first Offscreen Expedition in 2007 the programme has garnered international praise and awards for its work in forging links between young people in the UK and overseas, including Best Blog at the 2007 WebAwards and an International Y Design Award for Best Community Website in 2008.

See our previous expeditions at:

www.offscreenexpedition.com/2010_uk

www.offscreened.com/expedition/2007

www.offscreened.com/expedition/2008.

For more information email sarah@offscreened.com.

About Digital Explorer

Digital Explorer is a pioneer in educational expeditions where pupils are at the centre. We take select groups of talented young communicators on curriculum-based expeditions, kit them up with the latest recording and communications equipment, facilitate their experience with teachers and broadcast their experiences to a global online audience – it's direct pupil-to-pupil education LIVE from one corner of the world to the other. Unsurprisingly, pupils find it far easier to relate to someone their own age compared to adult presenters, 'experts' or politicians.

www.digitalexplorer.co.uk

Expedition Itinerary:

Day 1: *What is my idea of Pakistan?* Arrival and visit to **tailor**.

Day 2: *Is the media right?* All day workshop with students of the **National College of Arts**, Rawalpindi, examining media views of Pakistan and the UK, and personal views of Pakistan and the UK. Dinner with **Samar Minallah**, documentary film-maker focussed on civil and human rights.

Day 3: *What does art mean to you?* All day in a **truck-yard in Rawalpindi** on the edge of a slum, helping paint a truck and talking to the men and children who worked there. Evening visit to Khaadi (<http://www.khaadi.com.pk/>) to choose our attire for the final celebration.

Day 4: *How do we view our past?* Visit to Taxila museum and spoke with curator, followed by trip to Jaulian monastery and the ruins of the **oldest university in the world**. Dinner with **Humayun Khan**, former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Pakistan High Commissioner to the UK, Ambassador to Bangladesh and Ambassador to India.

Day 5: *What does faith mean now?* Question/answer discussion with a student of **Dr Javed Ahmed Ghamidi**, a moderate Islamic scholar and founder of Al Mawrid Institute (<http://www.al-mawrid.org/>), followed by an afternoon workshop with students of St Mary's Academy, Rawalpindi with **interfaith NGO FACES Pakistan** (<http://www.facespakistan.com/>). Evening visit to **Faisal Masjid**, Islamabad.

Day 6: *How has my city changed?* A full day walking **tour of the Rawalpindi backstreets** with artist and photographer Aasim Akhtar, taking in hidden architectural gems as well as everyday life.

Day 7: *What is life like in a madrassa?* All day visit to a **boys' madrassa in Mirpur, Kashmir**, meeting the imam and students for discussions and a tour, and an impromptu game of cricket with the students! Dinner with the participants of the Active Citizens programme in Mirpur.

Day 8: *How can I make a difference?* Visits to two social action projects in Mirpur set up by the British Council's Active Citizens programme – a teacher training programme to **improve student interaction** and participation, and a **school set up for underprivileged, orphaned and refugee children** unable to afford education.

Day 9: *What will I do?* A day of reflection in the Murree hills; **hiking in the Ayubia National Park** and individual quiet time to **make pledges** for implementing lessons learnt on arrival back to the UK.

Day 10: *How has my idea of Pakistan changed?* Revisit thoughts of Day 1 and preparing speeches for the final celebration at the **Pakistan National Council of Arts**, which the **UK Foreign Affairs Committee attended**.

Day 11: *What have I learnt?* Departure day and **reflection on trip** as a whole.