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Challenge

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turers end the day with a stay in a traditional Maori village.

On day six, the group takes an eight-hour hike through New Zealand's volcanic Tongariro Plateau. Day 11 includes a 3,000-foot mountain-bike descent, and the following day, participants take a 30-second free-fall tandem skydive. Days 15 and 16 include a sunrise swim with hundreds of dolphins.

The activities continue for 60 days and include other events, such as a three-day trek across New Zealand's Southern Alps, sea kayaking, jet boating and scuba diving.

In the midst of the adventure, team members take time to hear speakers discuss cultural issues and practices. The lectures are later used in papers and homework assignments for participants who choose to earn school credit for the program. Getting credit is not a requirement, and many people choose to participate strictly for personal enrichment.

Senior psychology major Emily Garten opted to earn credit for the program. Garten is graduating in June, but she will be attending Pacific Challenge's Southeast Asia program in the fall for pleasure and experience.

"(The program) surpassed anything I've ever dreamed or hoped for," she said.

University students Lea Payton and Hiroka Okana are currently on the 50-day Southeast Asia trip, which visits Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The two students are receiving credit through the Uni-

versity and said it was easy to get.

"The international studies program at (the University) is very open and willing to oversee students who wish to gain credits while traveling," Payton said in an e-mail interview.

Payton and Okana are among a group of 18 people currently traveling in Southeast Asia. Program highlights include climbing Vietnam's highest mountain, rafting through limestone canyons and taking a two-day boat journey down the Mekong River.

The itineraries for both the Australia and Southeast Asia trips are designed to be both exciting and educational, according to trip leader Rachel Sanson. Sanson, a New Zealander, leads the yearly trips and said, "It's absolutely the best job I've ever had."

Sanson is enthusiastic about the design of the trip and said the bonds built between team members are lasting ones.

"They invite us to their weddings and will call and tell us they've had children," she said.

Teams include participants from all over the world, and are best suited for ages 18-30. No outdoor experience is necessary, and the program is designed for people of all physical levels.

The New Zealand and Australia trip costs \$5,650 for 60 days, and the Southeast Asia trip is \$4,500 for 50 days. To learn more about Pacific Challenge, check out its Web site at www.pacificchallenge.org.

Erin Cooney is a freelance reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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Plane crash

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Dominicans, returning to or visiting their homeland.

The plane lifted off at 9:14 a.m., more than an hour after its scheduled departure. It was not clear why the flight was late, and the Federal Aviation Administration would not say. By 9:17 a.m., it had nose-dived into the blue-collar community of Rockaway Beach, which sits on a sliver of land separating Jamaica Bay from the Atlantic Ocean. The plane destroyed four houses and damaged more than a dozen others.

For a nation feeling under siege, the crash was yet another horrific tragedy. It was especially hard-hitting for Rockaway, a waterfront community that lost dozens of firefighters and police officers in the collapse of the World Trade Center's twin towers.

Linda Spadaro, who lives about three blocks from the crash site, said she saw flaming debris falling from the plane.

"I saw an engine fall off," Spadaro said. "It just fell off. The plane blew up to a huge fireball. This is horrible. I can't believe this is happening."

Billowing black smoke from the crash was visible more than 20 miles away. Blocks away, another fire broke out from a fallen engine, authorities said.

"It's terrible," Ellen O'Toole, a Peninsula General Hospital worker, said nearly four hours after the crash. "There's no survivors."

Bill Schwartz, a plumber who was driving through the neighborhood, said he saw the crash.

"The plane was at a nosedive," said Schwartz. "So I pulled over to look at it. It didn't seem right to me. Then I saw flames coming from the left-hand side of the plane. Then I saw one of the wings broke off. You could see it breaking apart bit by bit."

More than 100 relatives of the passengers awaited them in the city of Santo Domingo, and news of the crash caused an outpouring of grief. President Hipolito Mejia declared three days of mourning on the island nation.

New York Gov. George Pataki reported that the pilot may have pur-

posely dumped fuel in Jamaica Bay before the plane went down, possible evidence that he knew his plane was in danger.

But the former director of NTSB, Peter Goelz, said ruptured fuel tanks in one or both of the plane's wings more likely caused the fuel in the bay.

"It would be highly unusual in that period of time that they were dumping fuel," said Goelz. "It's likely that all of the crew's energies would be devoted toward keeping the plane in the air."

NTSB took the lead in the investigation, underscoring the government's view that the crash was an accident. The safety board, the FAA and independent aviation safety experts said they were leaning toward a mechanical failure because the engine appeared to fall off and because the crash happened so early in flight.

This particular plane had 88 "service difficulty reports" filed with the FAA since it was bought new by American in 1988, according to a database analysis by Air Data Research in Helotes, Texas. In the past five years, 49 out of 54 of those reports have dealt with corrosion issues. But neither the number of reports nor the corrosion problems are unusual, especially for a plane that flies between the Caribbean and New York, according to Air Data Research President John Eakin.

One of the two engines had gone 9,788 hours since its last overhaul, while the other had gone 694, said American spokesman Al Becker. Those engines are supposed to get overhauled every 10,000 hours. It's still unclear which engine fell.

The crash could not have come at a worse time for American Airlines or the industry as a whole. Already in financial trouble before the Sept. 11 attacks, carriers laid off thousands of employees after the suicide hijackings. Congress promptly approved a \$15 billion assistance package that included \$5 billion in cash and \$10 billion in loan guarantees.

Travel was slowly picking up as the holiday season approached, but analysts said Monday's tragedy will likely prolong the industry's recovery.

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