

# Learning and Leading Gap Scholars

## ● Victoria Adeyi

Dates	7 <sup>th</sup> October - 13 <sup>th</sup> December 2013
Locations	Fiji and New Zealand
Activities	Volunteering in a community, independent travel



### ***Why did you want to do a gap experience?***

Going on a gap year was very important to me. I wanted to do voluntary work in order to gain work experience, but I didn't imagine that the opportunity to take my gap year abroad would be presented to me. The idea of travelling to visit other cultures had always appealed to me, and so when this opportunity arose, I was very excited.

Through my gap experience I wanted to learn more about the world, and to help any community I would be working with. I was looking forward to seeing how people in other parts of the world lived, and to perhaps gain a more realistic perspective about life. I wanted to increase my geographical knowledge through travel and through practical work such as teaching and to enhance my knowledge of a particular aspect of geography I am most interested in – social geography. I also saw the opportunity as a way to gain confidence, both socially, and in myself, so that I would be more able to do things independently.



### ***What did you do on your gap experience?***

I spent the first 5 weeks in Fiji where I worked on a community project run by Think Pacific. After 5 days of inductions and team building exercises I spent my time taking part in various activities ranging from building flushing toilets to teaching English and sports in the local school. Whilst there, I lived with a Fijian family, shared their meals, attended cava sessions in the community hall and socialised with the rest of the villagers which all allowed me to learn a lot about Fijian culture. Every conversation was a learning experience for me and I valued it very much. I also took part in some adventurous activities including treks through the jungle, kayaking and snorkelling.



Following this I took a bus tour across New Zealand from North to South. I was able to see a lot of the country, both



cities and countryside. I saw a lot of fascinating geographical features, including places like: hot water beach; Waitomo, (where I saw glow worms, stalactites and cave corals); the volcanic centre in Rotorua; Te Puia geothermal reserve and Huka Falls near Taupo; and the Franz Josef glacier.

### ***What did you find easy and challenging?***

Before leaving for the trip I was apprehensive about travelling alone. However, this turned out to be much easier than I expected because I travelled around New Zealand on an organised bus tour, which meant I got to know the people I was travelling with.



In Fiji, I felt cut off from the rest of the world, and the lack of consistent electricity and internet enhanced this feeling. This was challenging at times: I was disconnected from my family and friends and sometimes felt almost as if the rest of the world didn't exist beyond the island I was living on! But at other times it was a beautiful and liberating feeling.

### ***What impact has your gap experience had?***

My experience in the South Pacific had a huge impact on my geographical knowledge, motivation and personal skills. In New Zealand I improved my geographical knowledge by learning about the landscape and how it was formed. I also learnt a lot about the different cultures of the countries I travelled to particularly in Fiji where the local Fijians were constantly filling me with knowledge of their extraordinary country. I developed a better understanding, for example, of the difference between the education system in Fiji and back home, and the importance of sanitation – something many of us living in developed countries probably take for granted.



I have also become far more confident than I have ever been and now feel equipped to plan and undertake independent travel in the future using my own initiative. I feel more confident about speaking to new people and my team working skills have improved through the community project work in Fiji. Since returning from my gap experience I have noticed that I my motivation levels have also increased.



### ***What do you plan to do next?***

I plan to continue to build on the geographical knowledge I have gained, both through travelling and studying. I want to take part in some community projects in other parts of the world, and I would also like to return to Fiji.

### ***What is your advice for anyone thinking of taking a gap experience?***

- 1) Have a budget which allows you to be flexible.
- 2) Travel on your own if you get the opportunity – it is extremely liberating.
- 3) Go with an open mind and be prepared for a culture shock. Be willing to accept and appreciate other ways of living, and go out of your way to learn from and be involved with local people.

