

Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Jade Dyer

Dates	July 2012 to August 2012
Locations	USA
Activities	Overland tour and independent travel



Why did you want to do a gap experience?

I had always wanted to travel to somewhere further afield than Europe and I wanted to experience a different culture and way of life. I thought that this would be a great opportunity for me to gain some confidence and develop as a person. At the same time this would mean I could meet new people from all over the world which would broaden my mind and outlook on life. I also thought this would be a good chance to network with other people and get good contacts for later on in life. I was also excited that I'd be able to put all the geographical skills, knowledge and theories that I'd learned in the classroom into practice in real world situations.



What did you do on your gap experience?

I got myself a job in a local pub so that I could earn extra money to put towards my travels. I also thought that working in this environment would boost my confidence, which it certainly did. I took part in the 'Northern Trail' travelling from Los Angeles, California to New York across the north of the USA for three weeks with a group of 12 other people from all across the world. It was such a valuable experience to meet people from cultures and I have made friends for life. Many of them have said I can go and stay with them if I ever want to visit their countries.

I then spent a week travelling independently in New York City, which I was slightly wary of at first but soon found it was actually really easy to get around and the people are very helpful. Some of the activities I did were white water rafting, hiking, observing geothermal activity at Yellowstone NP, horse trekking, wildlife watching, the Maid of the Mist boat trip and much more!



What did you find easy and challenging

Getting around New York City using the subway and bus system was so easy and cheaper than I thought it would be, as I bought a week's unlimited MTA card. I found it easy to budget as I had done a detailed budget. I found the whole camping experience easier than I thought. After a few days could put a tent up and down within minutes. The most challenging thing for me was deciding where I wanted to travel and for how long. I also found my first day alone in NYC a little challenge as I was anxious about being on my own. However by the second day this anxiety was gone and I



was actually glad to be able to travel around independently and do what I wanted to. The 9 mile Panorama Trail hike in Yosemite was challenging as I'm not very physically fit and I didn't drink enough water so suffered from heatstroke, but it was a very rewarding feeling to have completed such a difficult hike.

What impact has your gap experience had?

I feel like it has improved my geographical knowledge greatly and it has provided me with inspiration to learn and motivation for university. I'm also motivated to learn and try new things. The experience has also boosted my self-confidence and I now feel like a more independent person.



How do you think this experience will help you?

I think that this experience will help me for university as I feel more comfortable with meeting new people now and am more independent.



What do you plan to do next?

I am studying BA Geography for three years at Plymouth University. I might take a year out during study as a placement year to get a foothold in the workplace.

What do you wish you had known before your gap experience?

Before my gap experience I wish I'd known that the later you book flights, the more expensive they become.



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

Make sure you plan your trip and book your flights as early as possible because it can save you money. On the other hand, if you're booking a tour sometimes it's worth risking leaving it a little later to book it (unless it's a popular one) as the companies tend to reduce the price closer to the date.

If you're going somewhere with lots of bugs/or camping then invest in a good insect repellent, even if it costs more.

If you have a laptop/smartphone use Skype rather than paying out for an international phone contract/SIM. It's free and easy to use, you just need a Wifi connection, which you can get for free at most hotels and campgrounds. I'd still advise bringing a phone and maybe getting a really cheap international SIM for emergencies.

Most importantly, remember that you are there to enjoy yourself, so don't spend the whole time talking to people back at home.

Obviously let them know you're okay as often as you can but explain to them before you go away that no news is good news!