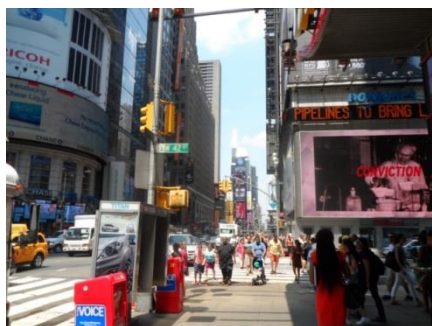


# Learning and Leading Gap Scholars

## ● Matthew Churm

Dates	June and August 2013
Locations	North America, Sicily
Activities	Independent travel



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

The reason I applied to the programme was simple: I intended to gain experiences which would improve me as a person and my opportunities in later life.

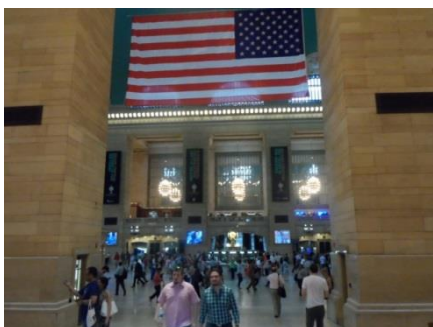
When I originally applied for the programme, my focus and aim for the gap year was on teaching. Teaching Geography as a secondary subject was and still is my aspiration for the future. The thought of experiencing the different ways geography was taught around the world excited me, and was the main reason I applied to the programme.



At the time I applied to the programme, I had very little experience of travelling abroad, only once had I ever travelled outside of England and that was during a Year 12 school trip to Italy. The opportunity to travel abroad was not open to me when I was younger, as I came from a financially deprived background. This lack, but eagerness to travel furthered my desire to succeed in the programme.

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

My first flight, of what would be 9 that summer, left on the 24<sup>th</sup> June from Heathrow for New York. I was staying in hostels throughout my trip, so the first task was to make my way to the Hostelling International hostel in the North West of Manhattan. This task was quite daunting, as I was dropped by bus in the middle of Times Square at half past 9 in the evening with a huge suitcase. It was pretty overwhelming! During the week I spent in New York, I visited the Empire State Building, the USS Intrepid, Central Park, Staten Island, the Natural History Museum, the Brooklyn Bridge, UN, the 9/11 site and even went to the beach! My time in New York was the most amazing week I remembered despite an initial wave of homesickness.



On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, I was meant to be moving to Washington to spend a week there, exploring sites and celebrating Independence Day in the Capital on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. On the 30<sup>th</sup> June however, I received an



urgent phone call saying that my mum had been taken seriously ill, and I used the contingency money left out of my budget to return to the UK the next day. Subsequently I landed back in Manchester just a week after leaving.

On Monday the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2013, I once again left my hometown of Chesterfield for London Heathrow, departing the next day to Catania in Sicily, via Milan. The plan was to explore Milan quickly during the stopover, however delays in the inbound flight prevented this. My girlfriend accompanied me as she was also interested in Geography and Tectonics.



We stayed in the small town of Gardini Naxos on the east coast of Sicily and spent four days exploring the surrounding area. One of these days took us to the ancient town of Taormina, which was stunning. Whilst in Sicily we also made a visit back to Catania and ascended Mt. Etna. During the visit to the active volcano we were able to see evidence of recent eruptions, and visited the observatory. The station doubles as a research centre for Italy's space related interests as well as providing a monitoring station for volcanic activity. Our time in Sicily was amazing, and was also a nice break from back home where I was busy preparing for University life!



On the 13<sup>th</sup> of August we returned to Heathrow via Rome, ending the gap experience which I had undertaken with the RGS-IBG. The support given to me by members of the organisation during my experience, especially Amber Sorrell (the previous Learning and Leading Co-ordinator) was fantastic! I would recommend this programme to anyone who has a passion for geography and wants a fantastic experience which improves their independence and confidence prior to attending University.

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

I still aim to teach Geography at secondary level but first I intend to study very hard for the next 3 years for my degree and at some point wish to return to finish what I had left of the gap experience.