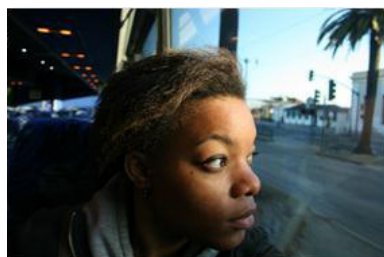


Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Siobhan Totterdale

Dates	November 2011 to September 2012
Locations	Japan, Australia and USA
Activities	Independent travel, working



Why did you want to do a gap experience?

During my gap year I wanted to gain independence while experiencing life in other countries. I wanted to observe the cultural differences in countries that are similar to the UK, such as Australia and the USA. I also aimed to improve my photography and art skills and create a travel blog. I wanted to have new experiences such as surfing and volunteering for local environmental charities in Australia. I wanted to gain independence and improve my organisation skills. I wanted to be able to build a CV full of different work experiences, earn some money for university and possibly find a scholarship to go to university in America or Australia. I wanted to get to experience new environments. By doing such a variety of activities I hoped to gain a range of experiences that would aid me in whichever career I choose as well as a group of friends and contacts around the world.



What did you do on your gap experience?

I travelled for 10 months, beginning in November in Tokyo, Japan which I had always wanted to see. During my stay, I spent my time exploring the neighbourhood markets and talking with the locals, and exploring districts further away with a new person every day. This was useful in helping me to gain confidence when meeting new people and being motivated to go out and explore.

I left Tokyo a week later and flew to Sydney, Australia. I rented an apartment with another girl I met. While in Sydney I worked signing people up to give monthly to the Cerebral Palsy Alliance. This job took me all over Sydney.

By January I decided I wanted to move on. I got a job as a live-in nanny in Tumbaramba, NSW looking after two little girls. I loved this time. The family was warm and welcoming, and they treated me like family. In this time I got to meet a diverse range of people and got taught about the agricultural industry. I got to watch sheep shearers in action. I also worked in a café at a local festival. This was such a fun part of my year, a definite highlight.

I returned to Sydney and headed to the Gold Coast and then to Byron Bay. I went to work for 3 months on an organic farm in Corrindi Beach, NSW.

My time on the farm was another highlight, and when the three





months were up, I went with a group of friends from the farm to Brisbane where we lived for approximately a month and a half. During my last week, I went to Moreton Island- the second largest sand island in the world. It is 95% national park and the most beautiful place I went during my gap year. I saw a whale jump out of the water about 100m away from me, and climbed the largest sand mountain for the unspoilt views at the top. I left Australia at the end of August to start the last section of my gap year; a 10-day speed trip across America visiting family before returning to the UK.



What impact has your gap experience had?

I gained valuable work experience and life experiences. I made wonderful friends all over the world and will be visiting them in their countries when the opportunity arises. I saw family I haven't seen in years, and met their new families. I got to see some breath-taking buildings and inventive features for sustainability in architecture. I got to explain to people why I always loved Geography, and had undeniable evidence that it is not a useless or boring subject, but a valuable one that can help in so many aspects of peoples' lives and take you places. A love of Geography is the foundation for a life of adventure and discovery.