

Learning and Leading Gap Scholars

● Jerrylyn Saguiped

Dates	21 st January – 21 st July 2015
Locations	Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam
Activities	Overland tour in Africa, independent travel in south east Asia



Why did you want to undertake a gap experience?

My main aims and objectives for my gap experience were to gain clearer insight into what I would like to do in the future, get better at managing my money and just become more confident in myself. These three aims were all part of a more generalised aim of becoming more independent and self-sufficient. I wanted to take a 'year out' as I have always had an interest in travelling and felt like I needed a break from education instead of carrying straight on into university.

What did you do on your gap experience?

My gap experience was split across two continents. For the first 2.5 months (January-April), I was in Africa on an overland tour. The tour spanned 10 countries from east to south and included activities like game drives in national parks (including the Serengeti and Massai Mara), visiting animal conservation centres, village treks and tribe visits among other things. During this part of my experience, I went alone but met up with my tour group; the majority of whom I spent the whole tour with.



The second part of my trip was independent travel around south east Asia. Here I visited 4 countries and met up with two friends from home who stayed with me for the whole duration. We travelled through these countries and some notable experiences include: volunteering at an elephant conservation centre for a week, trekking in the rice terraces of Sapa and visiting Ankor Wat.

What did you find easy and challenging?

I found the planning quite difficult as there was so much more to think about and research than I had initially thought. However, having the Gap Experience Planning Toolkit and a mentor helped me to think logically about things and reassure me that I was going in the right direction. I also found it challenging to create the budget as I kept having to go back and make amendments. This paid off though, as I referred back to it countless times whilst I was away.





I found meeting and talking to new people easier than I thought it would be; especially once you find out everybody has common interests and are likely to be feeling the same way as you. I initially thought going through the border crossings in South East Asia would be particularly difficult (notably because I had read many stories of people having bad experiences at border crossings). This however was not the case and found this too easier than I had anticipated.

What impact has your gap experience had?

My gap experience has made me more confident in decision making; I find that I question my decisions less, and instead of worrying whether I make the “right” ones and I just go with what I feel is best. I am more motivated to actively seek out answers to my geographically related questions and feel more pressed to understand the impacts of both natural and man-made circumstances i.e. the impact of the damming of the Mekong River on upstream communities. I believe my geographical interest has also been enhanced as I was immersed in so much culture and learnt a lot from locals. Since my gap experience, I take the lead more and I believe this is due to having to seek out suitable accommodation, activities and more, especially around South East Asia.



What was the highlight of your gap experience?

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Were there any unexpected outcomes?

Though I knew my itinerary for the second half of my trip was flexible, I did not expect to re-route and go through Vietnam, though I’m glad we did. I also did not expect to stay in contact with as many people as I currently am.



What do you wish you had known?

One thing I wish I knew before my gap experience is how much everything (e.g. flights, insurance, tours) would go up in price if you left it too last minute to book. In my case, my tour price went on sale, then back to normal price. I could have saved £400.



What do you plan to do next?

As a result of my gap experience, I intend to travel a lot more; hopefully doing more volunteer work at animal conservation centres. When travelling I also hope to be able to learn to document my experiences better; perhaps learning how to do basic filming and editing. The gap experience has helped me immensely in learning



how to properly research areas I would like to travel to. In the future, I think I will be able to thoroughly research and budget for more trips of varying lengths.

From September I will be studying Geography at the University of Sussex for the next three years. After this, I intend to study for a Masters degree.

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

My advice for anyone thinking of taking a gap year is:

1. You can never plan too much. Research is key, and will definitely pay off in terms of finding better providers for activities.

2. Document everything. You will regret this if you don't, and in months or years after your gap experience, you can look back on your pictures/videos and also share the experience with others.

3. Have an open mind. You will experience other cultures in a way that you won't be used to and this might be frightening at first but if you learn to understand their culture, you will appreciate it much more. Be respectful to other cultures and be as courteous as possible.

