

We know just how important it is to get first-hand information and to learn from someone else's experience.

In this series, we'll be bringing you interviews with past students, students from all over the world that have experienced a Reach Cambridge program and can now reflect on what they thought about it and what they took away from living and studying abroad for 3 weeks.

Without further ado, here is the first one.

Alena Sadiq from Pakistan came for July 2010 Reach Cambridge program



Where in the world do you come from?

Pakistan (And no, it is not as bad as you think. At Reach, I managed to change how most people perceive Pakistan, I believe I made them see beyond the stereotype, and made them see the good our country has, and I am proud that I got to accomplish that.)

How old are you?

I will turn 16 in about two months time! :)

Why did you decide to apply to Reach summer school? What were you expecting before you arrived? ...

Well I really wanted to do a summer course (as I had never done one before). I had a few friends from my school, seniors, who had gone to Reach, and highly recommended it. So I decided to go for it. To be honest, I didn't know what it would be like, except the exciting accounts on Reach's

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website and my friends' fun-filled experiences. So I was just generally very excited, and July didn't disappoint me one bit!

What program/subject did you study in Cambridge?

I took the Journalism, Media and Politics course.

How did you like it?

The classes were great. Our teacher, Alex, made us all feel comfortable from the first day, and encouraged us to express our opinion. I gained quite a lot of confidence in those three weeks. The lessons were interesting, diverse and taught in a manner that was quite different from the way most Pakistani schools taught - there was much more student involvement and close to no book memorizing. We also learned how to make a professional documentary, and we made our own documentaries in the last week. This was probably the most exciting part of the course.

What was your overall experience of the summer school? (classes, extracurriculars, lectures, field trips)

It was extraordinary, and I say this with all honesty. Those three weeks were simply spectacular. The supervisors were fun and helpful, the students were a great lot of people, and the classes(as I mentioned before) were amazing. The evening lectures were interactive, and covered topics from evolution to British music!(Little secret: Most of us wanted to hang out, and groaned when it was time for the lecture, but mostly ended up enjoying it!) We were given a lot of options for what to do in the afternoons like sports, crafts, sometimes music etc. Personally, my preference was usually eating out and shopping ;) My favourite destination was Starbucks where I and my friend, Alex Hodgson, used to go ALL THE TIME and buy all their frappuccinos and brownies. The field trips were good, we got to see much of England.

What's the best memory from your 3 weeks in Cambridge?

Now this is a tough one, choosing from all those great memories. I think I will cheat and mention more than one ;) On one of the weekends we went bowling, and it was my first time, and it was so much fun! I also made many friends that day, people who I hadn't met before, as we were staying at different colleges. Another great memory is that from the SABRE charity event for Ghana. We had a chance to learn how to play music like the drummers from Ghana. We also walked around Cambridge, with Ghanaian flags painted on our faces, collecting contributions in collection tins. At night we enjoyed a great party, with Ghanaian dancers. It was an interesting, cultural event.

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What are you doing now and what's next for you? Do you think the experience from Reach Cambridge will be useful?

Well I have three more years to go, and then I'll be done with school! Cambridge was a valuable experience. It inculcated in me, a confidence that allowed me to speak what I felt, to write what I believed and to implement the ideals of the freedom of expression. That helped me in planning and organizing a fundraiser in my hometown, for Pakistan's flood victims. It was a great success. I also started blogging after Reach. I became a well-rounded individual: full of new ideas and open to diversity. It also enabled me to make priceless friends from all over the world, who I am still very close to, and who add to my diversity.

Any last words of wisdom for this year's Reach students?

These three weeks will be some of the greatest moments of your life, so let go of whatever is holding you back, and make the most of this time. Don't get worked up about anything(I got upset on the same day as one of my friend's birthday) because it's not worth it. The time is short, so no need to waste it on grudges and fights. If something happens, be the bigger person, let it go, and just enjoy yourself! Oh and one more tip I think you all will find VERY useful: being on good terms with the staff and supervisors has its special benefits ;) Good luck, and have fun! In the end I want to quote a Bryan Adam's song, that describes perfectly how I feel about Reach July 2010, and I hope you all will feel the same way about Reach July 2011!

Here are the lyrics:

But when I look back now

That summer seemed to last forever

And if I had the choice

Yeah I'd always wanna be there

Those were the best days of my life

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