

Published August 4th, 2010

## Lamorinda Teens Traveling Abroad

By Angela LaScala-Gruenewald



Adam Streeter and some of his Ghanaian friends  
Photos provided

"In Lamorinda there is this high school to college to job trajectory," explains Campolindo graduate Adam Streeter. Admittedly, one would be hard pressed to find a student in the Acalanes Union High School District who disagrees with him. After graduation, college is the next step. Streeter is one of a handful of students who decided to detour from this path. Reflecting on his high school years he stated, "At Campo, I wasn't always doing the things I was passionate about. I didn't want to go back to the classroom right after high school."

Ironically, just three months after graduation, Streeter found himself sitting in a stiff school chair listening to a lecture. His classmates, however, were Ghanaian and spoke Twi (or another one of two-hundred different dialects). His teacher would occasionally use a cane to reprimand tardy students and his seat was seven inches wide and made of wood. Streeter described his tedious hours in the classroom as "physically exhausting at times." Yet he was not there to get a text book education. He was there for an entirely different intellectual experience.

Streeter decided to take a gap year abroad between high school and college. He wanted to see the world. Most of all he was committed to the idea of cultural immersion improving global relations and cross-ethnic understanding. In the spring of his senior year, he applied and was accepted to YES (Youth Exchange and Student Program) in Ghana, a ten-month commitment. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, YES was developed in order to improve Muslim-American ties. Foreign students would travel to the United States and live with host families. The goal was that these young ambassadors would discover more about American society while simultaneously teaching US citizens about various cultures and customs around the globe. In 2009, YES decided to start sending US students abroad to Muslim-populated countries; Streeter was part of the first test group.

Streeter's gap year in Ghana was the experience of a lifetime. From simple conversations with fellow bus riders to visits to traditional markets and community mosques, Streeter embraced the Ghanaian way of life. He attended weddings, explored beaches and developed friendships. Abruni! Abruni! ("white man") locals would shout as he walked by. Just as he connected with the people, Streeter also gained a much deeper understanding of Ghana as a whole. He returned home talking like a true political science analyst. "I don't think secularism is in Ghana's vocabulary," he explained during a conversation. A few minutes later this reporter had a complete run-down on the role of religion in the Ghana school system.

Streeter was not the only Lamorinda teen to go abroad. Lafayette Girl Scout Marina Rosso traveled to Costa Rica this July. She participated in a program known as Outward Bound. The program focuses on cultural immersion combined with a complete wilderness experience. Rosso went on hikes, volunteered at a local school and tasted traditional Costa Rican cuisine. "This experience was adrenaline pumping. It's a great escape from the daily life," she reflected.

Mehera Emrich is also going abroad. A recent graduate of Acalanes High School, Mehera has decided to take a gap year in Prague. During her stay in the Czech Republic she plans on teaching English to students. Emrich says that going abroad will give her "the opportunity to explore and try something new. I figured taking a gap-year would allow me to learn a new language and have interesting experiences." She will be attending Oxford the following year.

Streeter returned home in early July and will be attending George Washington University in Washington D.C. this fall. He plans on majoring in Middle Eastern Studies. To read his blog visit and check out pictures from his trip visit <http://adamtoghana.blogspot.com/>.

Globalization is no longer a term in the text book but the reality of our lives - the world is a big place, and the decision to go abroad and experience different cultures can completely change one's perspective and open up minds and hearts. To find out more about YES visit <http://www.yesprograms.org/> and to learn more about Outward Bound programs visit <http://www.outwardbound.org/>.



"Hey Mom! You'll never guess what I'm doing!"

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA