

A Fijian Shift in My American Heart

Written by Kaki Harrelson

Wednesday, 30 October 2019 06:53 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 October 2019 07:17



Kaki Harrelson in a village in the Yasawa Island Group in Western Fiji

Each second, each minute, each day, we become atrophied, slowly decaying, withering away like a slowly wilting flower. When we are born, we are aesthetic. We marvel at the beauty of the vast amount of time we have to live. However, we cannot be certain of what our future holds, and we most definitely do not own all of the time in the world.

These are the thoughts that circulated my mind as I set forth to find a life changing experience of travel. I was missing something in my life that I felt was necessary for making me feel whole. Making me feel that I am part of something bigger than my small hometown.

About a year ago I started to look for a teen tour that would satisfy my great desire to travel and see the world. When I found the Fiji scuba and service trip, I knew it was the trip for me. So, I quickly secured a spot on the trip using the money I'd been saving for years to pay for it because I knew it would be worth it. I was right.

Fiji: a land of peace, of beauty, of wonder, of depth and of curiosity. It is in the glittering blue ocean, in the warm smiles of the locals, in the sparkling white sand. Every word spoken on my trip, every action taken, every step forward we made was motivated by a sense of curiosity and adventure shared by my fellow Travel for Teens campers. Traveling to Fiji illuminated a new outlook on life for me. I was able to experience mountains and ocean and culture both above water and underneath, which was a dream that I never woke up from, only continued to live it for seventeen days.

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When I hopped on the plane for my great adventure, I was filled with excitement, anxiety and appreciation. I would soon be forever changed. I quickly connected with a girl on my trip when we met in the LAX airport for the first time to fly together to Fiji. From there I made many more new, fresh relationships with fellow travelers and counselors. These relationships are ones that I will always have and hold dear, as they are precious to me. These people gave me a sense of who I am and where I come from. They revealed to me something that was previously absent from my life, introducing

me to different realities people from my own society face, and that are so different from my own. They introduced me to new languages, daily routines, religions and ways of being educated. This granted me a new understanding of lifestyles away from my home and left me feeling connected to more of the world.



High above Nigolaka on Nigolaka Island

My trip sparked a passion for service and disconnectedness within me. Fijians showed me a new way of living, a new passion for life, a giving, loving, charitable and

exciting way to live. A way to live finding simple joy in people and surroundings rather

than materials and popularity. As an American, I am assiduous, always planning

ahead, next week, next month, next year. Always having a need to fill my days with things I believe to be important. However, the Fijian lifestyle taught me something new. It taught me to live differently, to look for anomalies, to listen for laughter and

music and to see the world in a more simple yet beautiful way. On my trip I was able to

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disconnect from my consumed American lifestyle and completely open my doors and become engulfed into a beautiful culture. This was done by rarely using my phone on the

trip knowing that the experience I could create in real life was one no one could ever create on their phone. While being in Fiji, I did not let one moment pass by that I was not being completely aware of my surroundings. This helped me take full advantage of each

activity the trip had to offer.

One activity I greatly appreciate from the Fiji trip was a trip to a local village to paint school buildings and play with the children of that particular village. This broadened my perspective of life on this earth greatly. I was amazed to find that these people live their lives on a small island village limited to many things, yet still find happiness in every single thing they do. Their kindness, contentment, selflessness and passion for life truly was something I had never experienced before. However, the activity most special to me was diving. I have a great love for the ocean, and one can only imagine the joy it gave me to indulge in the most fascinating and beautiful waters: the waters of Fiji. Diving is a mystical and magical escapade. Under the surface of the sea lies immense amounts of wonder and enthralling life, which was incredible to be surrounded by. I am forever grateful for that experience.

I went into this trip expecting to fill a part of me that I felt was missing, but instead it opened me up to wonder and the realization of the special gems, like Fiji, that are hidden on this earth. I am now not a person of wholeness, but a person engulfed by a never ending sense of wonder and curiosity. "Blessed are the Curious for they shall have adventure" (Lovelace Drachman). This is the quote I was given by my counselors at the end of the trip, and it serves as a reminder of the curiosity that drove me to follow my dreams, to travel across the world to Fiji, to uncover a new meaning of life, and to discover myself all at the same time. This was me being ambiguous.

This was me not being afraid of time. Through this I learned not to fear time, but to fear leaving your time empty and meaningless. "One day your life will flash before your eyes. Make sure it's worth watching" (Gerard Way). I believe travel is one of the best ways you can fulfill your life and become aware and educated. Through Travel for Teens I, a small teenage girl, living in a small quaint town, was able to step out into this beautiful world, to see the stars from a different view, to gain a sense of humbleness and a feeling of warmth knowing that I am part of something bigger than myself, bigger than my town, I am part of this Earth, and this Earth I shall

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travel.

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