

What I got up to this summer

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Summer Highs: Losing my Tube virginity solo, viewing the whole of Birmingham from Beacon Hill and consuming a screwball ice cream with every flavour of sauce and a flake!

Summer Lows: The amount of time spent on Public Transport.

As summers go the last one was pretty good, although I'm sure we will all agree that the preceding period of exams is not a difficult act to follow. It was a chance to relax, catch up with friends, but also to earn some money and gain experience to put on my CV. The majority of my summer was consumed with working for a contracting company on a placement. For this reason I will be writing a series of articles on this subject. They will give advice on the benefit of placements, how to get a placement, what to expect from a placement and, if like me you've just finished a placement, advice on what to do next. These should give helpful information on how to get involved in placements in your subject area.

I'm very fortunate to have landed myself with a placement for the last three summers, gaining experience in my field of study with a Civil Engineering Contractor. I spent half of the placement in the Temporary Works Design office and the other half seeing these designs constructed and utilised to contribute towards the construction of a multi-storey car park in Banbury. The project I worked on during the placement has helped me obtain and expand many skills that will come in useful, not only in a future career, but also throughout the coming academic year. I've really enjoyed the placements I've had and found them really useful in my academic studies.

Despite being on placement, I still found time to meet up with friends. Being a bit of a Brummie, I seldom venture down to London. Despite this, a friend persuaded me to meet up with her there on the promise that firstly, I would get to experience the best Bagels known to mankind and secondly, I would not have to make the daunting first time trip across London, on the Underground, by myself. Only one of these transpired. The Bagels were absolutely delicious! House Special Salt Beef, mustard and gherkins in a wonderfully soft bagel. Apparently, it's not only me that rates them; I'm told that at times the queue extends out of the shop and half way down the road as people come from all across London to get them. London isn't the only thing crossed to get a taste either; the Americans often cross the pond because they think they're fantastic too. In order to get to said bagels, however, I had to travel across London on the Underground, alone. I realise this is a commonplace task for many, but to the first time traveller it can be confusing and scary. On the plus side I had really good instructions from my friend so there were no unexpected surprises. I'm still baffled by how different to trains the Tube is, although it is exactly what it says on the tin, I suppose.

A more local first experience was a visit at the new Birmingham Library. Despite the divided opinion on the appearance of the exterior, the interior is quite impressive now that it's all finished off. I had previously visited the Library during its construction phase on a trip with some other university students. On my first visit I was impressed how large the interior spaces were as well as by the quantity of scissor lifts required to fit it out. Contrastingly, upon entering the finished structure, we were greeted by the sight of a chap dressed in tweed, speaking into an excessively large microphone, commenting on the visitors coming through the doors. Luckily, I avoided attention, despite having to linger to find out which was the best direction to head in. The highlight for me is the outdoors space on one of the higher levels. The terrace garden provides outdoor seating areas for reading as well as fantastic views of the city.

For even better views of the city and the surrounding suburbs I ventured a bit further, a four and a half mile walk uphill from my home town to Beacon Hill at the Lickey Hills just south of Birmingham. On arrival looking back gives a fantastic view of the surrounding area to the south as far as the Malvern Hills. But heading up and over the slope gives an immense view of Birmingham with the University of Birmingham's Old Joe taking centre stage with its red bricks standing out against the monotonous grey of the sprawl of concrete, steel and glass that is the city of Birmingham.

The summer didn't just revolve around sightseeing and gaining experience, but I also developed a bit of a habit; a sewing habit. Since completing textiles GCSE the only time I touched a sewing machine was to thread the needle for my long-sighted mother, that is, up until recently. Out of pure boredom the one weekend I purchased a crafts magazine, where one particular project caught my eye. So I began making it with the intentions of giving it as a gift at Christmas. That particular project is still not quite finished; however it has sparked a couple of other projects that I have successfully completed. Sadly this has been bad news for my bank account, as it's also sparked spending sprees on ebay, trawling sessions in haberdasheries as well as interest in joining the craft society at University. Joining the craft society seems like a really great way to continue my rediscovered hobby whilst at university, despite limited access to a sewing machine while living at University. Additionally, it'll be a chance to meet new people and learn new skills and that's what University is all about!

Alas, after all of the enjoyment of the summer comes the preparation for returning to University. Such preparations include massive shops with housemates and selecting research projects for the coming year. This sounds scary at the face of things, but after this summer it'll be nice to get back into the swing of things for the final push.

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