



How I Spent My Summer Vacation or Why Every Guider Should Consider Being a Trip Leader

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Photos: Brenda Fraser



“Did you get away this summer for a holiday?” I asked my friend, who is also a Guider.

“I sure did,” she answered with a huge grin. “Another leader and I accompanied a group of girls on a provincially sponsored Guide trip. We celebrated Canada Day in Ottawa and Independence Day in Washington!” What a brilliant idea, I thought. I’d love to do that.

Although that conversation took place ten years ago, my excitement for the idea hadn’t waned when I saw a notice in *Pipeline* promoting Adventure to the Capitals 2015. I decided to make the time to apply, and I was honoured to be one of two leaders selected to go.

Adventure to the Capitals was as much fun and full of discovery for us leaders as it was for the girls. For the other leader, it was her first time exploring Ottawa, Washington, Montreal and Québec City. In the Ottawa hostel, which was the capital city’s jail from 1862 to 1972, she was assigned a jail cell for the four nights! In Washington, I was as moved by the girls’ reactions to

the monuments along the National Mall as I was to the monuments themselves. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial inspired one of our young adventurers to engage in a long, wide-ranging conversation with two National Park Service rangers about freedom and justice. In turn, I was inspired by her thoughtfulness and curiosity, and the two rangers were, too. In Québec, we challenged ourselves to step outside our comfort zones and speak French. That’s not easy when you want to feel confident that you’re boarding the correct bus or leading the group in the right direction! It was wonderfully easy, though, to indulge in drinking chocolate and to try bagels and poutine in different places in our quest to find the best ones.

When I was selected as a trip leader, I expected to visit museums and monuments and shops. I didn’t expect to meet so many kind strangers who were quick to lend a hand or show their enthusiasm for our adventure. In the stairwell at the Ottawa Jail Hostel, we met Pathfinder leaders from Alberta on an independent trip. They had traders and crests for just

such occasions, and we had crests to trade with them. Everywhere, so many past and present Guiders noticed us in our matching uniforms and distinctive international scarves. In planes and airports, on the streets and at museums, they introduced themselves and offered recommendations or assistance. The librarian at the oldest English-language library in Québec was so excited to meet us (I popped in because it’s featured in an Inspector Gamache mystery novel by Canadian writer Louise Penny) that she gave us an impromptu historical tour while she reminisced about her years in Guiding. The girls brought 12 boxes of Girl Guide cookies to give away as gestures of thanks; they could have easily given away twice as many!

In Ottawa, where we organized a bridging event with a Pathfinder group, we leaders bonded over Obama cookies at the Moulin de Provence bakery in Ottawa’s Byward Market. There was so much laughter and sharing of Guiding experiences that the bridging event extended into the evening, and the group came back to the hostel with us for a tour of the former jail.

No question, getting time off work and taking time away from family in the summer is a big commitment. Planning and writing a detailed trip application also takes time. But I thought about Guide camps and other youth camps that my own children participated in each summer. Volunteers had given up their holiday time with families and friends to make it possible for my children to have incredible, sometimes life-changing, adventures. Applying to lead a national or provincial trip was my way to pay it forward.

The girls got to experience their Adventure to the Capitals because Guiders helped make it possible by taking the time to apply as trip leaders. But I feel as if I was the



lucky one. I got to know two Guiders (the alternate Guider played a significant role in the trip planning) and eight wonderful girls. It was the best part of the trip. They were enthusiastic, engaged, interesting and interested. Ten years ago, my friend said the same thing: She felt privileged to spend two weeks on an Adventure to the Capitals with a group of amazing girls.

I encourage every Guider to seek the experience of leading a provincially or nationally sponsored trip. The time and effort to apply is well worth it.

Three tips I learned from the application process:

1. Although the application processes are slightly different—for nationally sponsored trips you submit your online application directly to the national selections group; for provincially sponsored trips you submit a paper application by mail to the BC international committee—both processes use the same STA.1 application form. That means you can start preparing some of your answers ahead of time, such as your

the list up to date. When you sit down to fill out the application, your list will make it easy to fill in that part of the form. Keep a different record of your tenting and outdoor supervisory experience, as this information is sometimes required separately.

2. The application form asks you to self-evaluate your qualities and skills. The selection committee is looking for specific answers about you. Don't tell them; show them. And make every word count, because your answers must be 75 words or less. Here's how I self-evaluated my adaptability: "When our unit camp at a site along the Fraser River had to be cancelled because of heavy rain and wind warnings, I asked the local church if we could camp in the church hall. The Guides pitched tents inside and maintained them as if they were outdoors. They set up shelters in the churchyard where they cooked and washed dishes and practised outdoor camping skills and resourcefulness. It was one of our best camps!"

So, make a note of the qualities and skills listed on the STA.1 form, and start recording

previous experiences supervising youth inside and outside of Guiding. Start gathering that information now. Dig through your records of your past supervisory experiences: who, what, where and when. Then keep

appropriate situations and your actions or responses as they arise. Then, when an opportunity presents itself to apply for a trip, you will already have that information on hand. And if you have more than one example to choose from, use the one most related to the type of trip you are applying to lead.

3. Get your standard first aid and keep it current. All Guiders leading girls on travel events over 72 hours must have standard first aid certification. Many districts organize opportunities for their Guiders to earn their SFA certificate, so ask your district commissioner about this.

Three tips from the international committee:

1. Phone or email your international adviser for advice. She is there to help you with the process, and she wants to share her specialized knowledge about trip applications.

2. Allow at least a month to work on the application. That will allow you time to put it aside for a week. When you see it with fresh eyes and hear it with fresh ears (read it out loud to yourself), you will see which answers need improving. This will also give you time to ask a friend or family member to read it over. That outside reader may have suggestions or insights you won't have thought of.

3. Ask people to be your references who know you well or have worked with you in a variety of situations. And give each of them plenty of notice so they have time to write your reference and send it to the selections committee before the deadline.

AWARDS

Doreen Keizer, a Guider in Victoria, has been awarded the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award in recognition of her contribution to her community. The Caring Canadian Award, which was established by the former Governor General Roméo LeBlanc, recognizes individuals who volunteer their time to help others and to build a smart and caring nation. Congratulations, Doreen!

GONE HOME



Thelma Poirier, Surrey
Heather Robbins, Victoria
Shirley Siteman, Victoria