

## **Why you should go on an international!**

International Opportunities (or IntOps for short) are chances to go abroad with Girlguiding. These could include exploring different cultures, volunteering abroad, meeting international Guides/Scouts, and so many more! In this blog, I'm going to discuss my IntOps journey, in the hope of inspiring YOU!

My journey started in 2022, when the opportunity came to apply as a young member for three trips abroad with Girlguiding North West England. I had previously attended a county international at the age of 13 before Covid, and was quite excited at the opportunity to attend another one! The first of the three trips was heading to Japan, where participants would be sightseeing and exploring Japan's different cultures. The second trip was to Canada, where participants would be attending a Canadian Girl Guide camp. The last trip was to Madagascar, where participants would be volunteering with a local charity to improve life in deprived areas. I was mostly excited about the Canada trip, as I loved the idea of meeting more members of WAGGGS (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts)!

To attend these trips, I had to go through a selection process. Firstly, I filled in a form online, which asked multiple questions about myself, why I would like to attend, and then basic questions like my county, unit, section, etc... It was then a nervous wait, but luckily I got through! After this, I then had to attend a big camp at Waddow Hall. During this camp, I took part in a range of activities whilst the leaders of each trip made their careful decisions about which girls they would love to take abroad with them. There were main activities during the morning, each themed around the four trips available. Madagascar had us working together on a bunch of teamwork tasks, like moving an 'endangered but deadly spider' using ropes at a distance. Canada had us using the resources around us to construct a flagpole. Japan has us tying pillows around our waists and attempting sumo wrestling, as well as some origami afterwards. In the afternoon, we had a wide game around the site, where we had to take pictures of ourselves relating to the list of prompts we were provided. One of the prompts was 'underwater', so I found a sign that said 'water' and sat under it. In the evening, we had a huge campfire and sang classic Girlguiding songs. At the end of the camp, we all went home to wait for the final decisions...



When the results came, I sat at my desk waiting nervously and refreshing emails. I found out that the other girls in my district who attended the camp got places on two of the trips. This made me even more nervous, as I still hadn't heard anything. When I finally got my results, I discovered I hadn't got on a trip. Even though I was extremely happy for the others, it was really upsetting to know I was the only one who hadn't been picked...

Time went on and I soon cheered up, deciding to put my effort into supporting the other girls with fundraising the best I could. And, of course, region soon announced the next lot of trips. The first option was USA, focusing on space and promoting women's involvement in STEM. The next option was Cambodia, working with a charity to care for endangered elephants. Finally, the last option was WAGGGS/Europe, focusing on travelling around Europe to meet as many WAGGGS members as possible.

Selections worked a little differently this time around, with us having to attend a county selection day instead of going straight to the region camp. Since I'm a member of Sefton County, this is the county day I attended. During the day, I took part in a bunch of activities, including artwork created from nature, coming up with fundraising ideas for every letter of the alphabet, and even building the Eiffel Tower out of dried spaghetti. After the county day, I found out I was selected for the big region camp again! This big selection camp was similar to last year. We took part in activity sessions in the morning, each themed around the four different trips. For USA, we decorated cookies and launched stomp rockets. For Cambodia, we played traditional Cambodian games and had a debate on which endangered animal we should save (a

debate I won for my 'enthusiasm and high-pitched voice'). For Europe, we had to plan a route around 5 European countries we were randomly given. Along the way, we were provided challenge cards with prompts such as '*you cannot use air travel for this round*' or '*the trains are on strike, use another transport method*'. We ended the camp with another big campfire and went home to, once again, await the results.



When results day came, instead of sitting at my desk this time, I was actually on a day out in Liverpool with my parents and their friends. Despite this, I kept checking my phone all day, and was so nervous! When I eventually got the email through, I opened it up to find out I'd been selected for the WAGGGS/Europe trip! I tried to keep calm, as squealing in excitement in the middle of Lush isn't the most normal thing other customers expect to see-

Now I've been selected, I've been working hard at fundraising for the trip. I attend monthly Zoom calls, where the leaders support us with fundraising, questions, and more. We also have two briefing weekends leading up to the trip, one of which we've already attended and used to plan our route. I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity I've received, and I'm looking forward to travelling across Europe with a new group of people!

***So, how can you get involved in an international adventure?***

Girlguiding North West England offers so many opportunities to members of all ages. For example, *Inspire Book and Go* for 18-30 years, *International Community Experience (ICE)* for 11-14 years, *Guiding Overseas Linked with Development* for 18+, and even the 3 trips offered each year to 14-18 year olds. All updated information on opportunities offered through Girlguiding NWE is listed here: <https://www.girlguidingnwe.org.uk/international-trips/opportunities/>

Girlguiding also offer international adventures at a UK-level, which are listed here: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/international-adventures/>

There are even opportunities for international adventures within the UK! Girlguiding has a great list of upcoming UK-based international camps, listed here: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/international-adventures/international-experiences-without-going-abroad/>. Furthermore, I've attended one of these camps and wrote a blog about it, which you can read about here for more international inspiration: <https://www.girlguidingnwe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Blog-post-6-Forest-Fest-23.pdf>

I hope this blog has inspired you to apply for an international. No matter whether you've been abroad before, or whether this would be your first time, everybody has an opportunity perfect for them through guiding!