

Chan Siu-ming says he hoped to get the most experience out of the shortest time and with a strict budget.

COURTESY OF CHAN SIU-MING

# WHEN THE END MEANS A NEW START

BY SARAH YU

Going on trip after graduation has almost become a rite of passage for many university graduates before plunging into the world of work. The trip heralds not only the end of school life but also a brand new start.

Joseph Lui Kwok-wah, 24, spent 25 days visiting three different places before starting work. "From May to July, I visited one place each month," he said. "I can't do that if I have a regular job."

Giving up the option of going to Europe, Lui spent HK\$15,000 on travelling to Cambodia, India and Xinjiang in China. "I enjoy travelling around the world, especially to developing places where not many people care about," Lui said. "I want to experience life outside Hong Kong."

During his three trips, Lui was not simply having fun; he also got extra insights into the meaning of life.

Lui volunteered at an orphanage in Cambodia. He was impressed by the kids who

rushed out to greet him and his travel companions.

"It looked like the orphans, who suffered from AIDS, have never been loved or cared by anyone before," Lui said.

Not only did the kids' thirst for love shocked him, but also Cambodia's Rubbish Mountain.

"There were over a million flies hovering around the place! I couldn't really talk to my friend properly in such an environment," Lui said. "How can people live in such a terrible place like that?"



COURTESY OF JOSEPH LUI KWOK-WAH

Joseph Lui Kwok-wah (left) and a Cambodian boy (right) live in the Rubbish Mountain where flies are hovering around.



COURTESY OF KERI CHONG YUK-YUN

Keri Chong Yuk-yun posted photos taken during her trip to Taiwan on her online travelogue, which has attracted more than two million views.



COURTESY OF STEPHEN CHUNG CHUN-KIT

Stephen Chung Chun-kit (left) proves language difference has made no barrier when people get to know one another.

Lui saw local children walking barefoot on the landfill, and one was a five-year-old child who had to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of his younger siblings.

“Unlike Hong Kong kids, Cambodian children are happy with only one candy,” Lui said.

The trip to Cambodia made him rethink the motto of “being happy is he who is content”. Lui felt he was lucky because he was born in Hong Kong and had a lot more than the people there.

Being moved by people living in a difficult environment, Lui felt the urge to help others when he was back in Hong Kong. “In the future, I hope I can give a helping hand to people in need,” Lui said.

Like Lui, fresh graduate Chan Siu-ming reflected more on his future career after his one-month backpack journey to India last summer.

Chan was encouraged by seniors at the university to have a graduation

trip. “It would be difficult to take a long time off to go on a vacation when you are working,” Chan said.

According to Chan, having a trip after graduation has become the norm among university graduates and they usually prefer backpacking rather than joining tour groups.

Chan said he hoped that he could get the most experience out of the shortest time and with a strict budget. To achieve this, a detailed plan was a must. Chan and his friends spent over a month on planning their trip to India.

“Planning is a part of the trip,” Chan said. “Taking part in planning made me enjoy the trip more.”

Chan decided to spend more than half of his trip on volunteering at the Kalighat Home for the Dying, a hospice service for the poor in Calcutta founded by Mother Teresa. “I greatly admire Mother Teresa. I want to serve dying people like she did,” Chan said.

One of the tasks Chan was assigned was helping orphans to bathe. When he touched the children, he found they were very skinny and he could grip an orphan’s thigh with only one hand.

During his short visit, the most depressing thing to Chan was the death of the orphans. “Lives are fragile,” Chan said. “It is such a wonderful thing that we are still breathing and living in this beautiful world.”

After the journey, Chan thought about the dignity a dying person should be given. “A dying person, even a poor one, deserves respect,” Chan said.

The trip has made Chan more determined to help people in need, and later, he turned his wish into action. He now works in a local organisation which helps people living in “cage homes”, which are homes of the very poor people and occupy only a bed space with a wire cage around them.

“There are a lot of people living below the poverty line. I hope I can work to improve their situations,” Chan said.

Other than getting new perspectives of how other people live, graduates gained new values and learnt independence after these trips, which well equipped them for the future.

Stephen Chung Chun-kit, 22, travelled around Europe as a backpacker alone for 40 days, and it was an once-in-a-life-time experience for him.

Chung was being kicked off the train at a desolate place near the Slovenian border because of a visa problem. He had no choice but to spend the night on the streets. Luckily, he met a Syrian who offered him a free meal. This eased both his hunger and his mind.

Another troubling incident occurred when he travelled through a slum in Marseille, and his wallet was almost stolen by three thieves.

“I had to face many challenges throughout the trip. These challenges

made me more independent,” Chung said. “And most importantly, I learnt to keep myself safe.”

In spite of the dangers encountered when travelling alone, Chung also had light-hearted moments during the trip.

Chung had met lots of people from all around the world, like young men from Argentina, girls and a couple from Germany. Chung found foreign people he met in the journey could be his good friends as languages proved no barrier for them to get to know each other.

“There are all sorts of people in this world. You just have to be open-minded,” Chung said. “I gained confidence in meeting new people and making friends with them. I had never done the same thing in Hong Kong.”

The journey made Chung realise “there is always more than one way to live your life”. He said that many people in Hong Kong are constricted by the society and all they know is to earn money.

“They do not know how to spend money to get happiness,” Chung said. “Our lives should be more than earning money. There are a lot more things in the world we can pursue.”

After graduation trips, many share their travels with other people. Keri Chong Yuk-yan put her travelogue about her graduation trip to Taiwan on her blog, which has attracted over two million views.

“I was surprised that there are so many people interested in my trip,” Chong said. “A number of readers even wanted to go to Taiwan after reading my travelogue.”

All of Chong’s classmates at university went on graduation trips. “Going on a graduation trip is a must, even though we might encounter problems,” Chong said.

“Being a student by definition means we can try more and experience more. It will be different once we have to work,” Chong said. ▾

“Going on a graduation trip is a must.”

Chan wants to serve dying people, like what Mother Teresa did.



Orphans suffering from AIDS make Luj (left) reflect the meaning of life.

COURTESY OF JOSEPH LUI KWOK-WAH



Chong says all her classmates went on graduation trips, which have become a must for university graduates.

COURTESY OF KERI CHONG YUK-YAN



COURTESY OF CHAN SIU-MING