

101 tips to get you to the US

Bombay based Natasha Pratap is a vivacious young lady with an infectious smile. Looking at her, you'd be forgiven for thinking she was a member of the just-in-college-and-just-entered-the-young-adults-club. You certainly wouldn't take her to be a high flyin' author of a book like Wanna Study in the US? – 101 Tips to Get You There!, until she opens her mouth and reveals her knowledge and expertise on the subject.

Natasha received scholarships to pursue her BA in English at Stanford University and her MA in Creative Writing at Boston University. She also holds a Law degree from the University of Cambridge, England. Natasha's award winning short stories have appeared in anthologies in the US and UK.

'Wanna Study... ' is India's first and only comprehensive book to focus exclusively on students applying to the US. It has been written especially to meet the needs of Indian applicants to help them improve the quality of their applications and thereby gain admission into some of the best universities. That it provides you with a lot of useful information, we can vouch, for we used it too to give you relevant and current information on Scholarships (Ref: Where to source your scholarships in India? – Vol.2, Issue 2).

In an interview with Ila Aggarwal, Natasha talks about her experiences abroad and her book.

- 1. What was the reason behind writing 'Wanna Study in the US? – 101 Tips to Get You There!'?**

Answer: There wasn't a single resource available to Indian students all over the country. I would keep getting questions having been abroad myself, and I realized it's the same kind of queries people have every year. I thought there has to be some affordable, accessible, informative resource that people can buy off the shelf very easily. That is one reason why I wrote the book.

Also, I felt there were three criteria for any one to write a book like this: firstly, that they should have been abroad themselves so that they can write on it inside out; secondly, they should be relatively decent writers so that they can articulate their thoughts and thirdly, they need to care about the issue because there could be lots of people who have studied in the US and can write well but they don't care enough. I had all these three criteria and kept wondering if I don't get down to it, who's going to get down to it? So it was really my way of giving back to others.

- 2. So did you have a lot of students getting in touch with you, looking for counseling (related to study in the US)?**

Answer: Not formal counseling. I think the book is a solid and sufficient resource.

3. On an informal level perhaps?

Answer: Yeah, informal questions and they would tell me what professional counselors were letting them know and many of them were just completely off the mark and it's sort of scary the kind of information that's floating around as it really affects people's lives. So the idea was to give the students enough confidence so that they can get involved in their application process.

4. Speaking from experience, why should a person go abroad for an education at all?

Answer: You know, I think I elaborate on this in the book because I talk of the top ten reasons for studying in the US. However, there are many different reasons: the system is very different; for one, I was exposed to subjects that I might not have been as an undergraduate here, for sure. Also I think growth is beyond a book – the entire experience of learning to live away from home, interacting with people from different countries is crucial.

There have been two transformative experiences in my life: one my undergraduate years at Stanford and the other all the Art of Living courses I've taken through the years. Those experiences were the most defining ones, so to speak. The growth I've experienced intellectually, emotionally, socially in those four years was tremendous. There's nothing that can compare to it.

5. So how did you do your research work on scholarships (when applying to universities abroad)?

Answer: I didn't do any when I applied.

6. Then how did you find out because as you said they are not very well publicized.

Answer: Most of the universities have a financial aid application form so you just fill it up. That's all there is to it...like you have an application form you also have a financial aid application form.

7. Most scholarships give partial assistance to students in the form tuition fee. However, there are numerous other costs involved in studying abroad. Please tell us:

a) What are the costs implied that a student should look out for?

b) How should one go about obtaining a 100% scholarship (or as close to it as possible)?

Answer: When you apply to a university, you have a financial aid form which says what you are able to pay. In the US, most schools have need-blind admission sort of thing which means that once they want you, they'll give you whatever money it takes to have you with them. Usually that does

not apply to international students which means that, even if they want to, they will see how much money they have to give you to get you there.

But even then, when they really, really like an outstanding student, there are cases where they do fund you taking into account your requirements. They provide their own estimates for the tuition fee and the estimated living expenses. They count things like your residential fee, that is, board and room, food and housing plus things like books, winter clothes and miscellaneous expenses. Taking all this into account they come up with a figure and they give you that. That's what happened with Stanford. I filled out the financial aid application form and, luckily, got a great scholarship.

8. How would you describe the campus life in the US/UK institutions?

Answer: I think that campus life is really varied depending on which school you are going to. For instance, if you end up in a place like NYU, you have a city campus life. It's like any other New York address and not like a campus as such. If you go to a place like Stanford, where I went, it even has its own post office. It seemed to me like a little town... huge property and very spacious; you would bicycle around, to classes; that wouldn't happen in NYU. When they're looking at a school, students need to research what environment they are comfortable with. I don't think that as international students you have much of a choice and can afford to be too fussy. If you get into a great school, you get into a great school; you just deal with whatever campus you have.

9. You are currently running a company by the name 'Words for Any Occasion': What does WAO deal with?

Answer: It's basically a niche creative writing boutique where I do anything creative with words. The assignments are very varied ranging from coming out with names for brands, writing creative texts, lyrics for a corporate anthem for a company. I've written the menu for a restaurant. I've realized that I enjoy very different kinds of writing.

10. One advice for our readers.

Answer: Believe in yourself and don't be afraid to work hard...there are no shortcuts!

To read the detailed interview with Natsha Pratap, log on to www.iamreadytogo.com/interview