**Considerations for Gap Year Programs Abroad**

Some text adapted from [Susan Griffith](http://www.transitionsabroad.com/information/media/susan_griffith_bio.shtml), Transitions Abroad

**Why Take a Gap Year?** Young people approaching the end of college are uniquely privileged to be able to contemplate taking three, six or 12 months off before going on to the next phase of their lives. Some parents and other onlookers may still feel a knee-jerk resistance to the idea of ‘interrupting’ an education or a career to take a year out, but those concerns are beginning to look rather outdated in an age that attaches great value to flexible learning and a healthy work-life balance.

Students with an eye to their marketability may want to consider options that will enhance their university applications or their resumes in later life. Programs cover an astonishing range of opportunities. Most good gap years comprise a medley of activities which complement one another, work and play, earning and spending, challenge and self-indulgence, worthiness and fun. A dramatic increase in the number of programs providing structured gap years has accompanied the rise in market interest.

**So Many Gap Year Opportunities from Which to Choose**

The range of choices can be overwhelming — monitoring lemurs in Madagascar, serving in the Peace Corps, WOOFing (working on an organic farm), surveying coral reefs in the Philippines, being a counselor at an English-language summer camp in France, teaching Spanish in Guatemala, and so on. Most young people find that as they daydream in front of their computer or cappuccino, one or two ideas swirling around in their heads will eventually float to the top. Relying on networking and local inquiries can be much cheaper than using the services of a mediating agency, but not many recent grads have the confidence to arrive cold in Sri Lanka, Kenya, or Mexico and locate a school, orphanage or other project willing to provide housing in exchange for their help. Nor are their parents willing to let them try.

**Where to Start**

Some who may be undecided about the next step may join the national service program such as the Peace Corps <https://www.peacecorps.gov/> or AmeriCorps <https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do> where in exchange for 1,700 hours of community service over a 10-month period, AmeriCorps volunteers aged 17–24 receive an education voucher, living allowance and invaluable life experience. Others look to programs like City Year, Teach for America, or College Possible.

One place to research organized programs is the website USA Gap Year Fairs <https://usagapyearfairs.org/> which has links to dozens of gap year providers. Extensive resources for planning can also be found on British sites such as <https://www.gapyear.com/community> Users can find travel companions, access a database with thousands of opportunities, and pose questions on the message boards.

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| **Top Practical Tips For Your Gap Year**   * Plan early * Review country information and advisories provided by Department of State and sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov), which highlights any potential dangers to American travelers such as coups, terrorist activity, natural disasters, epidemics, etc. * Be aware of the laws, customs and dress code for the country. Online and conventional guidebooks should provide all this information. * Online banking is a great way to manage your finances while you are away. But many Internet cafés are slow and access may not always be easy so don’t leave important transactions until the last minute. * Calculate how much money you will need for your trip and make sure you have some extra. Find out if you can use a credit or debit card to withdraw emergency funds at your destination and think about what you would do if your card is lost or damaged. * Research health requirements online and visit your doctor for advice on inoculations and malaria prevention if relevant. * Contact the relevant embassy or consulate of your chosen country for visa information. Be aware that you will not be able to obtain a visa that authorizes work without the full support of an employer abroad, which is very difficult to obtain * Shop around for travel insurance and make sure you are covered for everything you intend to do such as scuba diving or bungee-jumping. * Make sure your family or friends at home are aware of your travel itinerary. * If you are participating through an organization, ask for the contact details of a couple of recent volunteers to request first-hand feedback. * Consider getting a cheap local mobile phone on arrival or a local SIM card for your cell phone. * Send scanned images of important documents (passport, insurance info, plane tickets) to your email account for ready access. * Pay attention to your instincts and aim to achieve that perfect balance between traveling safely and enjoying yourself. If you are over-cautious you might miss out on something amazing, but at the same time you want to avoid unnecessary risks. |

**ADDITIONAL GAP YEAR RESOURCES**

Advice from the Center for Pre-Law Advising about taking a gap year before law school <https://prelaw.wisc.edu/preparing-for-law-school/time-off/>

Why take a gap year before grad school? <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/11-reasons-should-break-before-grad-school>

Five productive ways to spend a gap year: <https://www.hercampus.com/career/5-productive-ways-spend-gap-year>

Three meaningful ways to fill your time between undergrad and grad school: <http://www.katherinenobles.com/blog/2016/2/2/3-meaningful-ways-to-fill-your-time-between-undergrad-and-grad-school>

Additional Search Sites for Gap Year Programs

<https://www.goabroad.com/gap-year>

<https://www.gooverseas.com/gap-year>

<http://volunteerinternational.org/>

<https://wwoofinternational.org/>

  
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