

What to do? – Guide to planning a Gap Year

Not quite got the results you were hoping for? Or have you surpassed all your expectations? Maybe now you are considering taking a year out to reapply to university next year and find yourself with a completely unexpected and unplanned gap year on your hands. If so, don't panic! Have a read through of our "What to do" guide below to help you seize this opportunity and make the most of your year.

Step 1: Decide what things you might like to do or achieve during your year – there are some ideas below – you could do just one, all, or none of these!

TRAVEL; in the UK or abroad, **VOLUNTEERING**; at home or overseas, **GAINING WORK EXPERIENCE**; related to your degree or earn money, **LEARNING & STUDYING**; retake exams, gain a qualification, learn a skill.

Travel:

Step 2:

Decide what part of the world you would like to go to. To help you decide maybe have a think about the following questions...

Do you have friends or relatives you could visit? Is there a language you already speak or could improve on by visiting a relevant country? Is there somewhere you have always wanted to visit and never had the chance to? Have friends or family recommended somewhere that sounds fascinating? Is there somewhere you have learnt about at school that sounds interesting?

Step 3:

When you have decided where you would like to go...

Would you be confident to travel here independently on your own or with friends? Would you rather join an organised trip with more support? If you are interested in organised travel then you may find some ideas at www.yearoutgroup.org

Step 4:

Whether travelling independently or with a company take the time to research your chosen destination(s)...

Look into local cultures, customs, religions, language etc. Being prepared for where you are headed will not only reduce the culture shock you feel on arrival but enable you to better understand local communities and customs and will ultimately make your experience more enjoyable.

Step 5:

Before you leave...

Make sure you have all the necessary vaccinations, visas and insurance, that your passport is valid (some countries may ask for at least 6 months of validity from the time you return home) and take photocopies of all the important documents – take a look at the FCO "Know Before You Go" advice <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/about-kbyg-campaign/>

Volunteering:

Step 2:

Where would you like to go and what would you like to do? Think about the following...

Do you want to volunteer at home or abroad? What sort of work would you like to do? This could be with children, animals, on a construction project, in conservation or using a skill you already have i.e. sports coaching. Would you like to gain experience in your chosen degree/career i.e. working in a clinic etc before a medical degree?

Step 3:

How long would you like to volunteer for? Would you like to do this as an individual or as part of a group...?

Volunteer placements can last from a week to a couple of years, have a think about the length of time you would be interested in volunteering for. Would you want to join a team of volunteers and work on a project together or do a placement as an individual, maybe with other individual volunteers in the surrounding area? The Year Out Group www.yearoutgroup.org has many different volunteer opportunity ideas. For long term and short term volunteer opportunities in the UK have a look at Community Service Volunteers www.csv.org.uk.

Step 4:

When you choose an organisation to volunteer through...

Take a look at The Ethical Volunteering Guide www.ethicalvolunteering.org to make sure any volunteer project you are thinking of joining will be needed, worthwhile and beneficial both to the local community and yourself. The questions you should ask any organisation offering volunteer work should also help you find out if you will be well supported whilst on your project.

Step 5:

Whether staying at home or travelling abroad, research your chosen destination(s)...

Look into local cultures, customs, religions, language etc. Being prepared for where you are headed will not only reduce the culture shock you feel on arrival but enable you to better understand local communities and customs and will ultimately make your experience more enjoyable.

Step 6:

If travelling abroad, before you leave...

Make sure you have all the necessary vaccinations, visas and insurance and that your passport is valid for the duration of your trip. Some countries ask that you have at least 6 months of validity left from the time you will be returning home. Photocopy all important documents, i.e. passport, insurance policy, vaccination certificates, visas; take a copy and the originals with you and leave a copy back home. – take a look at the FCO "Know Before You Go" advice <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/about-kbyg-campaign/> .

Finally....whatever you do, enjoy it and don't leave home without your passport and tickets!

Gaining Work Experience

Step 2:

Why do you want to gain work experience?

For some more competitive university courses having enough relevant work experience can be the key to securing a place – does this apply to you? Do you just want the experience of holding a steady job for a year? Do you need to earn money to support you through university?

Step 3:

What types of jobs could you do, would these be paid or unpaid...?

The list is endless and depends on the skills you currently have. Maybe you feel it would be useful to gain experience working in an office, maybe you just need to earn money and want to work in bars, restaurants or anything going. Perhaps internships (these may be paid or unpaid) are the best way for you to gain experience in a specific field. Beware that commission only jobs you rarely earn as much as promised. If doing work experience to help gain a university place, talk to the admissions tutor to find out if it will, in fact assist your application.

Step 4:

Research job opportunities available and apply...

If you are thinking of finding work abroad take a look at The Year Out Group www.yearoutgroup.org for organisations who can help you with this. For UK work, local careers services, papers and temping agencies can be extremely helpful. Update and improve your CV before applying and attending interviews! Take a look at the government's Careers Advice for more information <http://careersadvice.direct.gov.uk>.

Step 5:

If headed away from home or overseas...

Research you chosen destination(s). If travelling away from home look into local cultures, customs, religions, language etc. Being prepared for where you are headed will not only reduce the culture shock you feel on arrival but enable you to better understand local communities and customs and will ultimately make your experience more enjoyable. Make sure you have all the necessary vaccinations, visas, insurance and valid passport – take a look at the FCO "Know Before You Go" advice <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/about-kbyg-campaign/>

Finally...good luck with all the jobs you apply for and remember even unsuccessful interviews are a fantastic learning experience.

Learning & Studying

Step 2:

What would you like to learn or what qualification would you like to gain...?

For some of you this may be an option before applying or re-applying to universities or jobs. Would you like to learn a new language – you could do this at home or abroad (or both!). Is there a skill you have always wanted to learn or an existing ability you would like to spend time improving – this could include a sporting activity, learning a musical instrument, an artistic or creative skill. Is there a qualification you could gain which would be useful to you or you would enjoy achieving. For some this could include looking at retaking A or AS levels.

Step 3:

How and where could you study...?

This could be at home or abroad, in conjunction with work to earn money or with travel and volunteering. Which organisations or governing bodies offer the qualification you are thinking of doing and where do they work? The Year Out Group www.yearoutgroup.org has ideas on organisations where you can learn a skill or gain a qualification in an activity or language.

Step 4:

When you have decided where to go and what to do...

Research your chosen destination(s). If travelling away from home look into local cultures, customs, religions, language etc. Being prepared for where you are headed will not only reduce the culture shock you feel on arrival but enable you to better understand local communities and customs and will ultimately make your experience more enjoyable. Make sure you have all the necessary vaccinations, visas, insurance and valid passport – take a look at the FCO “Know Before You Go” advice <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/about-kbyg-campaign/>

Finally....good luck and remember, the more you enjoy your chosen subject the more work you are likely to put in and the more you are likely to get out of it.

And finally....

This information is intended as a guide to how to make the most of some of the opportunities available to you. You could do one, all, a combination or none of the options above. Just make sure that whatever you do with your time you make the most of your year out, seize the opportunities available to you and enjoy it. Doing something worthwhile will lead to a year you will not regret and ultimately one that is far more rewarding!