



# Gap Year Guide

**Adventure**      **Time Out**  
**Volunteer**



**Explore**      **Travel**  
**Work**  
**Internship**      **Experience**

## Why take a gap year?

- Gain **skills** and **experiences**
- Gives you a break from study and **time** to reflect and focus on what you want to do next
- Earn **money** before going to university or to fund your travels
- Can enhance your CV and make your application stand out. Many **employers** value the experiences students have gained.
- If you are applying for **university** in the future, you could tailor your gap year to relate it to the subject area you plan to study.

## Things to consider

- Careful thought and planning are essential
- How will you fund your gap year?
- Keep in mind what you want to do afterwards, this will make it easier to transition to work/study when you return.
- Weigh up the benefits of travelling with friends and going alone

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
An opportunity to have a break from studying and return refreshed. You can volunteer, get valuable work experience, and travel the world.	Some people find a year out becomes a distraction from their longer-term plans.
A productive gap year can be valuable on your CV.	An unstructured year out may not add much value to your future – careful thought and planning is essential.
You could relate the experience and activities to the subject area you plan to study.	It can be harder to return to study or work after a year-long break. Check with your university. Are they happy for you to take a year out? Certain courses may not be e.g. Maths. Admissions tutors may ask how you plan to keep your knowledge and skills up to date.
You can earn and save money towards your higher education costs or future plans.	It can be expensive, and you could find yourself in a worse financial position at the end.
You will develop maturity if you don't yet feel ready for higher education or work life. For some careers, it can be an advantage to be slightly older and have some life experience.	If you don't get organised, you may end up spending your gap year just 'thinking about it'.

## Do your research

- Start **planning** well in advance. Some voluntary work schemes are popular and have strict deadlines, and you need to consider when you need the money to pay for airfares or visas.
- Organise your **ideas** – some might fill an entire year, others a few weeks or months. You could also combine more than one idea. Split the year in half or into thirds. You can spend half the year working, and then go travelling. If you don't want to travel, you can spend a third of the year gaining work experience, another third earning and saving money then learn a new skill or study for the remainder.
- If you're using an agency or scheme, check out how long they have been running, if they are financially sound, and are members of a reputable organisation, such as ABTA or Year Out Group, where they agree to follow a code of conduct.

## Why book with a company?

It could save you money in the long run

There should be links to worthwhile projects that have a need for volunteers

There'll be support before you go and in-country support from local representatives during the project

Your safety will be a priority with risk assessments in place.

## Gap year ideas: some useful websites:

- <https://www.oysterworldwide.com/>
- <https://yearoutgroup.org/>
- <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/>
- <https://travelaware.campaign.gov.uk/>
- <https://www.bunac.org/uk>
- Volunteering England: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/i-want-to-volunteer>
- International Citizen Service (ICS) – government funded international volunteering placements for 18-25 year olds in the UK: <https://www.volunteerics.org/>
- <https://www.interrail.eu/> - travelling by train in Europe
- <https://www.trailfinders.com/> - specialise in round the world tickets
- <https://www.ucas.com/alternatives-to-university> - advise on alternatives to university and gap years

## Stay Safe

If you want to organise it yourself, research the costs of the features offered by organised schemes which appeal to you, but make sure you get advice on safety, any additional checks, and insurance cover you may need to consider.

- **Foreign travel advice** – check the gov.uk and Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for travel advice for specific countries (passport/Visa requirements, best time of year to visit depending on weather, religious festivals etc.)  
<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>
- **Staying healthy abroad** - <https://yearoutgroup.org/gap-year-advice-planning/staying-healthy-abroad/>
- **Travel Insurance** – if you are going abroad for two months or more check out this guide to getting the best Backpacker insurance deal for you:  
<https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/insurance/cheap-backpackers-insurance/>

You may find useful information on social media, online forums, and websites. Look at the reviews, articles, and advice from people who've 'been there and done that' for the sort of gap year you're considering. Follow gap year providers on social media:

## Gap year ideas, what can you do?

- **Volunteering** – support a worthwhile cause and gain valuable experience. You could take part in a wildlife conservation project, teach children, or help build a school in a third world country.
- **Travel** – explore the world, discover new cultures, and develop your independent living skills at the same time! You could go backpacking, InterRail through Europe, or fly around the world!
- **Paid employment** – earn money and gain new skills at home or aboard. Many employers will be happy for you to return to work for them during the holidays or if they are a large organisation you could work in a branch near your university.
- **Work experience** – if you want to gain relevant experience and skills for a particular career or subject you plan to study, you could consider a work placement or internship. These can last from a few weeks to a year. Depending on the type of contract on offer, you may or may not receive a salary. These are very popular and competition for places is high, so you will need to apply early.
- **Part-time courses** – why not take the opportunity to try something new? You could take up a new language, try a new sport or music instrument, or learn a new practical skill. There are some great, free online courses available on : <https://www.futurelearn.com/> and <https://www.coursera.org/>

## Gap year tips

- **What do you want to achieve from a gap year?** New skills, experience, or do you want more time to consider your future? Set yourself goals.
- **How much time can you be away and when?** What do you want to spend your time doing and where? Are you going to work, are there interests or hobbies you can take further, do you want to help others by volunteering? What value will be?
- **What is available?** Research the wide range of gap year and volunteering schemes available or look into organising it yourself. Look at the reviews, articles, and advice from people who've 'been there and done it'.
- **How much money will you need?** Unless you're planning to work or have some financial help, you are going to need money. Set yourself a realistic budget that you can afford to stick to. Costs vary considerably, so research carefully and don't forget to add things like flights, visas, accommodation, insurance, and vaccinations. If you are booking with a company, find out what is **not** included in the price.
- **When to apply for deferred entry?** If you are sure you want to take a gap year you can apply for deferred entry but make sure you explain how you plan to make your gap year relevant to your future studies in your Personal Statement. If you decide you want to take a gap year after you have applied, you will need to contact the universities directly to see whether they will still offer you a place for the following year. There is no guarantee that this will be an option as each university makes decisions based on the number of applicants. You can also apply to UCAS after leaving college as a Former Student but we recommend students make the most of the support on offer to them while they are here as we cannot help Former Students with their Personal Statements.

## Gap Year Travel Essentials – great advice from Prospects website:

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/gap-year/7-steps-to-the-ultimate-gap-year>

- **Healthcare** – vaccinations, medication (malaria tablets), EHIC card
- **Travel Insurance** – check if you need 'adventure' cover (bungee jumping)
- **Passports** – is it valid for the required length of time
- **Visas** – check requirements with specific country embassies
- **Banking** – let banks, UCAS & Student Loans company you are going abroad
- **Safety tips** – leave contact/travel details with friends and family
- **Culture shock** – do your research on a country's customs, laws, religion
- **Packing** - what to buy before you go and a packing checklist
- **Coming home** - how to plan for your return to avoid post- holiday blues

Information taken from the UCAS, Prospects and Unifrog websites: July 2021.