



GAP YEAR GUIDE





- 1 WELCOME TO THE GUIDE
- 2 WHY TAKE A GAP YEAR
- 3 GAP YEAR BENEFITS
- 4 TIME TO MAKE A PLAN
- 5 GAP YEAR OPTIONS
- 7 FINANCING YOUR GAP YEAR
- 8 GAP YEAR WORK OPTIONS
- 9 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
- 11 CONTACT US

TABLE OF CONTENTS





WELCOME TO THE GUIDE



Welcome to The Ultimate Gap Year Guide. As an organization that has had over 28,000 alumni over the years, we have some insights to offer for branching out into the Gap World. Wherever you are in your Gap Year journey, this guide will help you work through your questions at each stage.

Let's get going!

Begin by asking yourself some questions...



WHY TAKE A GAP YEAR?

ARE YOU...

- *Burned out from school?*
- *Need a fresh start or fresh perspective?*
- *Committed to learning more about community development, marine or wildlife conservation, environmental sustainability, or global politics?*
- *Curious about your future and somewhat hesitant about diving right into college?*
- *Wishing to develop some specific skills (don't worry, we'll break these down later) while traveling in another country?*
- *Do you feel like something is missing, and do you seek meaning in what you do and why you do it?*



Deciding why you want to go abroad is a first and crucial step in your Gap Year adventure. Answering these questions will help you then move forward and decide:

- *How do you plan for an entire year of travel and self-exploration?*
- *What should you research?*
- *Where should you go?*
- *What kind of experience do you want to have once you're there?*

Don't worry, there are many questions, and we're here to help point you in the right direction. At GVI, we know the key to a successful Gap Year full of meaningful transformation is first having a plan. Our guide breaks these questions down into easily digestible chunks that will get you geared up and ready to go.



GAP YEAR BENEFITS

This is a year that will inform the important decisions you make with your life moving forward; a year that will create stories you tell to family and friends for years to come; and a year that will teach you much about yourself and the world around you.

Taking a gap year is an investment for your future. It will help shape who you become, both personally and professionally. Here are a few reasons why we think gap years are beneficial for student development.

IT MAKES YOU STAND OUT

Taking a Gap Year can make you more desirable to colleges and employers. In the last decade Harvard University has seen a 33% increase in the number of accepted students who are taking gap years.

IT MAKES COLLEGE LESS DAUNTING

Students who have taken a Gap Year are able to better identify colleges that fit their personalities and career ambitions. Research has also shown that Gap Year students are more likely than their peers to graduate in four years.

GAP YEAR STUDENTS ARE HIGH ACADEMIC PERFORMERS

Once enrolled, college students who have taken a Gap Year tend to outperform their previous high school grades. These students typically enter their universities with more direction, social confidence, practical experience, and are less likely to have academic burn-out.

IT IS A MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE

Your classroom education will be enriched by your experiences abroad. As you sit in the library reading about economic disparities, the realities of environmental degradation, and gender inequalities, you will have context to link it to. This real world connection is the key to making your studies have more meaning and more impact.

IT IS SELF-DISCOVERY

Gap Years give you the chance to explore your other talents. Maybe you have a passion for photography, writing, cooking, or the environment. Travel lets you discover new sides of yourself which will enrich your life once you return.

IT WIDENS YOUR NETWORK

Taking a Gap Year will teach you how to become more socially aware and expand your circle of friends. Travel opens your eyes to diversity in a way that helps you build connections and bridge cultural gaps. It widens your global network, which benefits both your personal and professional life.

IT TEACHES YOU SKILLS

A Gap Year will help prepare you for your future, in work or school. Traveling teaches you time management, planning, and budgeting, which enhances your skills of problem-solving, adaptability, flexibility, and self-knowledge. Confronting these sometimes challenging realities while abroad will help you feel less overwhelmed in future potentially stressful situations. You will have the opportunity to gain qualities associated with intercultural and global competence, and develop leadership and teamwork skills.

JOB SATISFACTION AND FUTURE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In a recent Gap Year survey conducted by the American Gap Association, 86% of respondents reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with their job. In addition, 63% reported voting in the 2014 November elections, when The Washington Post estimated that only 34% of the voting-eligible population casted ballots.

Of the sample population, 89% reported participating in community service in the last month!

TIME TO MAKE A PLAN

There are many exciting options when it comes to what you can do with your year off to make it very "on". It will take time to research these opportunities so you can find the path that best fits your wants and needs.

Ask Yourself:

- Where in the world do you want to go?
- Is there a culture you want to better understand?
- A language skill you want to develop?
- A type of environment that you want to explore?
- What are your specific motivations for taking a Gap Year?
- Are you interested primarily in personal or professional development?
- Do you want to focus on community engagement through volunteer or internship programs?
- Who do you want to go with? Is this an experience that you want to do independently, with an organization, or with friends?
- What kind of budget do you have? This will determine how much you will be able to travel and how long you will be able to be away from home.
- What soft skills do you want to develop?
- Do you want to start and maintain a blog in order to better your writing skills?
- Do you want to focus on rounding out your resume by engaging with local opportunities?
- Do you want to learn more about and contribute to solutions concerning environmental issues?
- How detailed of a plan do you want? Having direction is key, but would you prefer to have some freedom to change course mid-way through? Or does a set itinerary sound ideal? Or perhaps some combination of the two?

Check list:

- ✓ Choose your country or region (if you're opting for a multi-country trip, choose a starting point)
- ✓ Choose what skills you want to develop or focus on (e.g. language, history, writing, environmental awareness, politics, community development, networking, travel planning, time management, etc)
- ✓ Decide your purpose or intent for taking a gap year, and write a short summary of what you want to achieve from your time abroad
- ✓ Decide if you want to go alone, in a self-created group, or with an organization
- ✓ Figure your budget
- ✓ Make a plan or rough itinerary you will follow if traveling alone



VOLUNTEERING, INTERNSHIPS, AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

NOW THE FUN PART...

Choose your own adventure!

How you choose to spend your Gap Year is a very important consideration. Now that you have reflected on what you want to get out of the experience, you can look at your options to see what best aligns with your goals. No matter what you choose, remember that the attitude and energy you bring to the experience is just as important as the experience itself.

Take a look through some of the different ways you can structure this time to make it truly personalized and unforgettable.



GVI has 19 years of experience in the abroad industry, so we have plenty of knowledge to share about volunteering, internships, and experiential education.

Picking the right location and project will come primarily from your own interests and goals, as discussed above. The available options are seemingly endless; however, we have compiled some key elements to be on the look out for when investigating these organizations. These can serve as a rubric for deciding which program is a best fit for you.

Many Gap Year organizations likewise incorporate a volunteer or service element to their abroad program. It is important to make sure you understand their projects, as well as the service engagement abroad.

Use the questions below to guide you in choosing a responsible and reputable organization that provides in all your gap year needs.
Speak with a representative to get further the details if necessary.

IS SAFETY A PRIORITY?

Look into the company's health and safety procedures. The chances of something happening are very unlikely, but you want to be certain the organization has a solid plan in place and a network of support to help you just in case. GVI's health and safety record is one of our highest priorities and achievements.

ARE THE PROJECTS SUSTAINABLE?

Find out how sustainable the projects are. You want to look for organizations that work with local partners. This way, when the participants leave the project, the community can continue to build on their contribution for long-term success.

ARE THE PROJECTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

Is the company directly responding to the needs of the community? Make sure that the organization accepts feedback from the community and is implementing project changes based on their advice.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

Some organizations offer the option to take service-learning courses (that you can potentially receive college credit for!). These courses incorporate a service project or engagement with academic learning. Be on the lookout for how they structure their curriculum or courses, and how instructors engage with the learning material.

WHERE IS THE MONEY GOING?

You want to find a company that is transparent with its funds, and that puts the majority of proceeds back into the project, not back into the organization.

WHAT HAVE OTHERS SAID?

Skim over reviews and testimonials to see what past participants have said. If possible, ask to speak with an alumni of a project or program so you can ask them some insider questions and get a better feel for the company. Go Overseas and Go Abroad are the best places to check for these.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MENTORSHIP

Do the organizations offer proper support and guidance through the program duration? If you are participating in an internship, are you getting quality trainings, complete with mentorship sessions and one-to-ones with knowledgeable staff? GVI provides all of this and more!

WHAT KIND OF ALUMNI SERVICES DO THEY HAVE?

Alumni networks are incredibly important. How active is theirs? What kinds of activities or rewards does their network offer you after your experience? Do they make it easy for you to stay involved once you return home? GVI's Alumni Program provides participants with ways to stay involved with our projects even after they return home, including opportunities to win points for discounts off future project participation.

FINANCING YOUR GAP YEAR

Taking a Gap Year is a financial investment, and setting a budget is an important first step. If you already have enough saved, congratulations! If not, and perhaps even if so, it is very possible for you to raise the necessary funds.

With a bit of planning and hard work, you can make your Gap Year dreams a financial reality. Here are some simple ways that we've seen work first hand for those who wish to raise money for their travels.



SAVE EARLY

Start saving with part-time jobs, or birthday and graduation gifts. You can also try selling used items such as clothes or books to local stores. You will want to start planning as early as a year or two before your journey. Some experts also recommend splitting your gap time between working and traveling.

FUNDRAISE

There are two primary methods: real-world (local) fundraising and crowdsourcing. Local fundraising can take many forms and includes simple ideas like a car wash. Popular crowdsourcing sites like Kickstarter or Indiegogo are also great online platforms for raising funds.

Students looking specifically to volunteer might try Volunteer Forever, a website that gives you space to describe your project and then helps you raise funds. Whatever method you use, be clear about your goals. Explain your mission and its benefits, particularly the benefits to others, and define specific needs like raising money for a plane ticket.



FIND FINANCIAL AID

There are scholarships and grants available to help fund your gap year. The American Gap Association is a good place to begin your search. If you're applying to colleges, consider school-sponsored programs, or colleges with a gap or bridge-year option. For example, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has a competitive Global Gap Year Fellowship that offers a \$7,500 stipend for students to take a self-designed gap year.



GAP YEAR WORK OPTIONS

If you want to work during your gap year, there are a few options for paying as you go. You can always do a bit of both, and see where there are opportunities as you travel. Here are a few we recommend.



WORK AT A HOSTEL

Check GoAbroad.org to see a list of popular hostels that will exchange room and board for part-time work.

BECOME AN AU PAIR

If you like working with children and/or have experience with babysitting, try working as an au pair. If you search GoAbroad.org, you can find opportunities in the United States or overseas, many of which offer free room and board.

TRY WOOFING

This organization allows you to work on an organic farm in various countries around the world, often in exchange for room and board. Certain farms also allow participants to take some of the food that is grown.

GO TO AUSTRALIA

Try working in the hospitality field or on a ranch in Australia and get compensated upwards of \$20 an hour, through programs like *Take Australia* or *Visitoz*. Domestic programs (for the US) such as *AmeriCorps* may offer a similar stipend or student loan deferments work.

TEACH ENGLISH

If you can commit to a longer stay, consider teaching English. Countries such as Korea and Thailand offer very decent salaries to teachers which will allow you to save some of the money you make.

LIVE ON A BOAT

Some sailing or cruise companies offer jobs working as a member of their crew. These jobs are worldwide, and available for a variety of different skill levels, from hospitality to deckhand work. You can also find work on a cargo boat.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- FOR PARENTS OF UNDER 18 TRAVELERS -

One of the most exciting aspects about a Gap Year is the opportunity that exists for self-discovery. When it is treated as a form of experiential education, it can aid you in your personal and professional development. Many of the suggestions we have offered are supported by the American Gap Association, which is another great resource for your Gap Year research. Prepare yourself for a life-changing adventure! This is a unique, once in a lifetime opportunity. Seize the day!

We understand that joining a project can be a somewhat daunting venture into the unknown. In order to offer an idea of what to expect while abroad, we have compiled a list of Frequently Asked Questions that outline GVI's programs and give insight into what a structured experience looks like. If you happen to have further questions, please give us a call and we will be happy to assist!

Q 1: How many staff will be on the ground and who are they?

We have a minimum requirement of one staff member per 8 teens. Typically, this ratio is smaller so that there are more staff on hand to ensure your teen has all of the support they need. All of our staff are chosen based on their experience of the country in which they work, their knowledge of the programs, and their high-class management skills. Our senior management team are always available to assist in an emergency as well., be clear about your goals. Explain your mission and its benefits, particularly the benefits to others, and define specific needs like raising money for a plane ticket.

Q 2: How many other participants will be on the project, how old are they, and where do they come from?

Most of our programs have between 8 and 16 participants. These numbers can vary depending on the time of year and the program location. Programs for teens under 18 are specifically for those between 15 - 17 years old. Most of our participants are from the UK or the US, however we accept participants from all over the world and have had travelers from various countries.

Q 3: What is the accommodation like and is it secure?

This depends on the location as well, but most of our locations have a shared house or home-stays with local, vetted families. The accommodation might be basic but it will always be secure. If necessary we will employ additional security measures for maximum safety. Bedrooms will be shared and single-sex, and staff will be available 24 hours a day for additional assistance.

Q 4: Is there somewhere safe for valuables to be stored?

Most of our bases have a safe, which is reserved mainly for passports, cash, and debit cards. Larger valuables such as laptops cannot be stored in the safe, and all items are brought at the participants; own risk; however, we do our best to ensure that our accommodation remains as secure as possible.

Q 5: How do we organize flights, visas and all of the other preparations?

The Country Expert assigned to the participants' chosen program will run through all of the logistical details and provide the necessary support leading up to your teens departure. All of our programs have a comprehensive Field Manual which outlines pick-up details, visa information, emergency contact numbers, and a packing list, as well as other useful information.

Q 6: How is an emergency dealt with?

We have Emergency Action Plans which we follow in any serious event, and our trained and experienced staff will manage the situation effectively, bringing in the experience of our senior management teams when necessary.

Q 7: Will family members be able to reach travelers while on the project?

Some of our bases may have limited communications. Guardians will have access to emergency lines if they need to reach participants urgently, as our office staff are able to contact staff in the field in the case of an emergency. Our Country Experts will also be able to advise participants on the best way to keep in touch with home when they are on the project. We will also notify guardians with arrival emails once we have all of our participants on our base at the start of the program, to the email they provide for their next of kin.

Q 8: Will participants be met at the airport?

For all of our teen programs we provide an airport pick-up window to ensure everyone can be met by our staff. We ask that all of our participants provide us with flight details at least 8 weeks prior to departure. We've had many participants coordinate their flight with other travelers to ensure they have a buddy.

Q 9: What does the program fee cover?

Program fees cover pre-departure support and materials, food, accommodation, training and orientation, long-term GVI field staff, 24-hour in-country support, project equipment and materials, and lastly, the cultural and adventure days we coordinate and plan for all of our programs. Not included are flights, insurance, visas and spending money.

Q 10: How much support do participants receive?

All of our participants will be assisted by one of our Country Experts prior to travel who will provide continuity and a high-level of specialist knowledge in making your important preparations.

Q 11: How can we trust GVI is a legitimate participants organization?

GVI is one of the most well-respected and prominent international volunteering organizations in the world. We are featured in international newspapers, magazines, and various international television programs. Since 1997, we have sent more than 2,000 participants away each year. In 2011, we were announced as "Best Volunteering Organization" at the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards. We also have a number of ambassadors who have previously participated in our programs and are willing to chat with you about their experiences.



HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

Our staff are more than happy to answer your questions, and to offer you further insights into the world of gap years, volunteering, international internships, and travel logistics. Travel well!

CONTACT US



info@gviworld.com



UK: +44 (0)1727 250 250

<http://www.gvi.co.uk/gap-year-volunteering/>



USA: +1 888 653 6028

<http://www.gviusa.com/gap-year-volunteering/>