

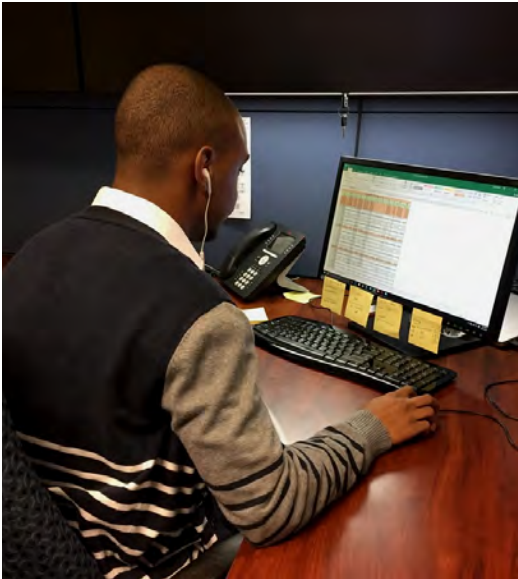
A scenic landscape featuring snow-capped mountains and a turquoise lake. The mountains are rugged and jagged, with patches of snow and ice. The lake is calm and reflects the surrounding scenery. The foreground shows green, grassy hills.

YOUR PLANNING GUIDE
TO THE ULTIMATE

Gap Year

Advice gathered from former gap year students
with resources from the experts

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Look for the compass throughout this guide for tips and examples from former gappers!

Hello from the Gap Year Association & Gapyearly!

We have worked with thousands of gap year students and have put together the following guide. To help you maximize your year, we have highlighted expert data, resources, programs, and counselors available to you.

We were once in your shoes, and understand how exciting and daunting the process can be. We are a free network of peer-mentors who have been there before. Enjoy our tips and get ready for an incredible adventure!

Enjoy,
Ethan & Dianna

GAP YEAR
ASSOCIATION

Cheers,
Jiyoung & Sasha

 gapyearly



01 What to do

Make a list of goals you would like to achieve, skills you want to learn, and experiences you want to have. Your goals should make you say: "Wow. That sounds so cool, but I don't know if I will be able to do it."



"For each item on the to-learn list, I thought about steps I would need to take to get to each of my listed goals." - Sterling D. For example, her goals included learning how to bicycle tour. To achieve her goal, she worked at a local cake pop store, and saved enough to attend a bike school, which taught her how to repair bikes. She then mapped out a route from Arizona to Oregon.



ASK YOURSELF

Grab a pen and start taking notes. Your answers to these questions should point you in the right direction:

- What if I could spend time doing something I love with no distractions?
- What career do I want to explore?
- Where have I always wanted to go?
- Is there anything that will be harder to do in the future that I should do now?

GAP YEAR GUIDANCE:

Most gap year activities fall under these four categories. This can help you organize and prioritize possible activities.

- **Career Exploration** - to understand what your interests / intended major looks like in the real world.
- **Service/Volunteering** - to emphasize empathy & interdependence of us all.
- **Paid Work** - for increased ownership of your gap year & financial literacy.
- **Free Radical** - allow some space to explore the unknown!

02 Where to go

Many students say learning a new language is a main goal of their gap year. 94% of gap year alumni also report that their gap year helped them interact with people from different backgrounds. Now is the time to experience the world by living in it! However, a gap year doesn't have to be global to be meaningful. There are amazing sites to be seen and vulnerable populations to serve here in the U.S. as well. Where do you want to go?



Consider doing a work exchange. Doing so will allow you to gain work experience and connect with both locals and travelers while living for free. Workaway, Wwoof, and HelpX are some of the top sites to check out. Many gappers have also reflected that staying in one location for at least a week or two (or more!) made the travel experience more meaningful.



ASK YOURSELF

Pull out a map or a globe and start dreaming!

- Do I want to go abroad or stay local?
- Will I need to learn a language before I travel?
- Do I want to learn a new language while I'm someplace new?
- Do I want a host family experience or a sight-seeing opportunity?

GAP YEAR GUIDANCE

"An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered."

- G.K. Chesterton

- Consider whether you want to visit as many places as possible or immerse yourself deeply in one location. Both options are valuable, but still different.
- Set up a plan with your parents ahead of time and agree on frequency and method of communication.

03 How to do it

The logistics of taking a gap year include deciding whether you'll be planning your activities independently or joining a gap year program. That decision mostly comes down to budget and how much structure and support you desire. You will also need to decide where, and if, college applications fit into the process.



ASK YOURSELF:

Do your research!

- Do I want to apply to college before, during, or after my gap year?
- How much structure do I want?
- How much support do I need?
- How comfortable am I being on my own?
- Do I want to plan my own gap year or do I want to participate in a gap year program?
- Would I benefit from a Gap Year Counselor? Check out a list of GYA-accredited Gap Year Counselors.

GAP YEAR GUIDANCE:

Each gap year is unique. There is no right way to do it, but planning ahead will give you and your family peace of mind.

- Formal gap year programs can be a great way to travel and experience the world without worrying about logistics, but you'll want to plan your budget out ahead of time because both paths can get expensive quickly.
- When you look at your timeline, consider doing a gap program for a semester and doing the rest independently. It is ok to mix & match!

WWW.GAPYEARLY.COM/FAQS



There are experienced gap year counselors who can help prioritize your goals, and then match you with vetted, quality individual placements and group programs that fit within your budget.



Navigating College

90% of students who took a gap year returned to college within a year.

ASK YOURSELF:

College isn't going anywhere.

- Do I want to apply to college before, during, or after my gap year?
- Do I want to earn college credit?
- Will my gap year affect financial aid for college?
- Am I certain of what I want to study in college, or do I want to use my gap year to explore different topics?

GAP YEAR GUIDANCE:

A gap year can cost as much as a year of college, but it is also a smart investment as students generally come back more focused.

- Check the timelines and deferral policies for the schools you want to attend.
- Talk to your high school college counselor and your college admissions counselors!
- College credit can open the door for FAFSA and other financial aid. However, some schools also ask that you don't earn credit during your deferral period, so take note!

Pro-tip, apply to college while still in school. You will have more support, and won't have to worry about the process once on your gap year. At the very least, assemble all of your application materials before your gap year. If you do wait to apply to college, having the materials ready makes for an easier application process.



Independent Gap Years



Most gappers advise that you spend at least a part of your year alone. They've found independent experiences to increase their confidence especially when meeting new people, and they often ended up trying something new (and awesome).

ASK YOURSELF:

Do what's best for you.

- How much structure do I want?
- How independent am I?
- How well-traveled am I?
- Does working with a program open doors I couldn't open for myself?

GAP YEAR GUIDANCE:

If you plan well, an independent gap year can save you money and give you flexibility. It takes extra work to plan, so start now!

- If you plan on doing service-learning or volunteering especially with vulnerable populations or in developing countries, make sure you research how to be ethically responsible.
- Check out resources like Travelaccessproject.org for recommendations of popular gap year destinations.

Gap Year Programs



ASK YOURSELF:

Find the program that fits your goals and learning style!

- Do I want to be in a structured cohort or have freedom to do things on my own?
- Do I want volunteering, adventure, skill-building, or language learning?
- Do I want a host family stay? Do I want to visit many places or go deep in one?

GAP YEAR GUIDANCE:

Apply to programs that interest you and have necessary safeguards in place. Many have rolling admissions, but the height of the gap year admissions is April - July for the fall semester. Consider asking them:

- What safety structures do you have in place in case of an emergency?
- Do you have any references I can talk to?
- What does a typical day look like on your program?
- How much does it cost? Are there any extras like airfare, insurance, or activities?

24 accredited programs (and counting!) have passed standards approved by the Department of Justice.

Sample Gap Years

Check out more samples using the free mentorship service from Gapyearly

Sterling D.



- Led youth wilderness trips in Maine & peer led a youth trail maintenance crew for the Northwest Youth Corps.
- Biked alone from Oregon to Arizona, camping on public lands & surviving off of acorns, fish, and wild edible plants in the Cache Creek wilderness of California.
- Worked on a ranch in Argentina and a farm in Chile through Workaway, learning Spanish.
- Joined an Argentine family on their month-long horseback cattle drive from the Andes to the winter grazing grounds
- Found a job in a village of Chilean artisans and learned to turn fresh goatskin into slippers
- Taught hammock-making to dozens of youth at a wilderness summer camp
- Started making and selling sandals from re-purposed tires and leather

Minh Anh D.



- July-August: took improv training at the iO Theater in Chicago
- September-December: theater training at the National Theater Institute in Connecticut
- January-May: acting, dog walking, writing in NYC (Bed-Stuy specifically)
- June-August: working as the Assistant Technical Director at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center

Kate N.



- August-January: Traveled throughout the United Kingdom and mainland Europe, utilizing Workaway as a means of finding accommodation with a variety of host farms and families
- January-March: Came back home to work several jobs and raise up enough money to get out into the world again
- April-May: Worked on a coffee farm/animal sanctuary in Kona, Hawaii, found through Workaway.
- June: Went on a month-long backpacking and rafting trip in Southern Utah with Outward Bound.
- July-August: Returned home and worked on an organic farm/kids' day camp just outside of Portland.

04 Planning Your Itinerary

Using your notes from the first three sections, use this space to plan out a few possible itineraries, then write your goals into the corresponding timeline. If you can dream it, you can do it!

Goal 1:

Location:

Activities:

Length of Time:

Goal 2:

Location:

Activities:

Length of Time:

Goal 3:

Location:

Activities:

Length of Time:

Goal 4:

Location:

Activities:

Length of Time:

Timeline of a Gap Year

June, July, August

Example: Many gappers work the summer after high school to save up for their gap year adventures!

September, October, November, December

Perhaps you decide to do a structured program in the fall, make lifelong friends with your cohort, and even learn a new language!

January, February, March, April, May

After getting your feet wet, you decide to spend part of the spring exploring China with one of your new friends, then backpack the Appalachia Trail for a few weeks on your own.

June, July, August

End your gap year taking a month-long photography class, then volunteering at the local animal shelter. What a year!

Think about your gap year in the structure of an academic year. Many gappers spend the summer after high school working to save money. Students tend to begin their year with more structure in the fall and do more independent projects in the spring (i.e. traveling alone; creating a website or company). Take the summer before college to prepare yourself to jump back into academics.



05 Life After the Gap Year

Don't be afraid to jump back into an academic setting! Gappers often reflect that their one-year difference in age with their peers give them many social and academic insights. The extra layer of maturity gained by the year is not a glaring difference that deters a great social life in college. On the contrary, many gappers report that they enter school with heightened confidence that allows them to interact easily with a diverse group of people.

I. Talk to people; don't stress alone! Talk to academic advisor(s) early on about your concerns, and connect with former gappers for support.

II. Start off with a lighter workload. It is completely okay—in fact, it is wise—to take your first semester relatively light. Use your time to establish a community in this new place.

III. Ask your friends for advice. Many of your peers have likely finished their freshman year—ask what they wish they had known before starting!

IV. Share your gap year experiences. If you kept a journal, blog, or video log of your gap year, consider sharing your story through the Gap Year Association's Voices Project to inspire future gappers. Review your experiences on Gapyearly and mentor other prospective gappers.

V. Update your resume. Many employers have come to recognize gap year alumni as more focused, flexible, and better positioned to work well in teams. Do not hesitate to highlight your growth and set yourself apart from other job applicants.



98% OF GAP YEAR ALUMNI REPORTED THEIR YEAR HELPED THEM DEVELOP AS A PERSON



06 Resources

Go-to resources for researching and planning your gap year.

GAPYEARASSOCIATION.ORG

- Hear inspiring gap year stories through our Voices Project.
- Take a look at cold, hard research facts about the benefits of taking a gap year.
- Explore college deferral policies and official GYA-Accredited Colleges that are proven places for gap year alumni to land and be supported.
- Search GYA-Accredited Programs and Gap Year Counselors who have all met high standards set by GYA and the Department of Justice. You will be amazed by all of the unique opportunities that await!
- Discover the long list of financial aid, scholarship, and fundraising opportunities available to help fund your gap year! Plan early to make it a reality for your budget.



GAPYEARLY.COM

- Connect with past gap year students.
- Find tips on independently funding your year.
- Take a look at what others did during their gap time with first-hand reviews.
- Hear what parents of past gap year students have to say about the benefits of a gap year.

MORE GAP YEAR COMMUNITY

- USA Gap Year Fairs: a network of 40+ fairs each January & February. Meet representatives of some of the most well-regarded gap year programs.
- Gap Matcher: a web app that will help match you to the perfect program.
- GoOverseas.com: search programs, peer-reviews, and scholarships.
- Gap Year Radio: a stellar podcast for all things gap year!



Resources Continued

WORK EXCHANGE, PROGRAM REVIEWS & VOLUNTEERING

- Workaway
- Wwoof
- HelpX
- Educate yourself about long term impacts of unethical or poorly-conceived volunteering by visiting this site and reading this book.
- For more ideas and program reviews, search TeenLife, GoOverseas, and Transitions Abroad.



GETTING THERE

- The State Department travel website.
- Discount Flights: Sky Scanner, Kayak, and Yapta.
- Hostelworld: read reviews and book your stays ahead of time!
- Lonely Planet: has great country-specific advice.

PAYING FOR YOUR GAP YEAR

- Many gap year programs offer financial aid or the ability to apply 529 savings plans to your gap year education.
- Most students use a combination of working, fundraising, and financial aid.
- Check out a list of independent gap year scholarships here.

Travel Checklist & Pro Tips

You know where you're going. You have worked through planning the big steps of your trip. Your budget has been calculated and you have spoken to the university you will be returning to. Now it's time for the final planning phase. These are the nitty gritty details that all travelers need to address before leaving the country.



- Get a travel guidebook, such as Lonely Planet, Rough Guides, or Let's Go.**
- Build or buy a small medical kit.**
- Book airfare at least a month in advance and take advantage of student-only fares.**
- Make a detailed packing list and don't buy everything new, looking like a seasoned traveler will help prevent looking like an easy target.**
- Make a communication plan. Will you bring a cell phone? Buy a local phone? Will you have wifi or use libraries/internet cafes?**
- Arrange for an airport pickup. Transition times are when travelers are most at risk.**
- Take care of your mental health! Reflect on your coping mechanisms for if things get stressful or overwhelming.**
- For international gap years, make sure your passport is valid for 6 months AFTER the last day of travel or risk being denied entry.**
- Arrange for any visas and vaccinations. Some take up to 8 weeks to complete.**
- Check with your bank to know about any fees while traveling. Bring a debit card and a backup credit card. If going international, Visa is currently more accessible than the other major credit companies.**
- Register international itineraries with the State Department's Smart Travelers Enrollment Program (STEP).**
- Email yourself a photocopy of the front photo and signature pages of your passport in case you need to get it replaced.**
- Research how to travel safely and talk about how to handle emergency situations with your parents or guardian.**



You can do it!

THERE IS A WHOLE COMMUNITY OF FORMER GAPPERS, PARENTS, GAPYEARLY MENTORS, AND GYA MEMBERS CHEERING YOU ON.

Stay in touch:

Gap Year Association

- Facebook: @GapYearAssociation
- Twitter: @gapyearassn
- Instagram: @gapyearassociation
- YouTube: <https://bit.ly/2RjlLOU>
- info@gapyearassociation.org

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Thank you to our generous sponsors



PaciaLife is very proud to be a chief supporter of the great work being done at the Gap Year Association - where we share the belief that "nothing will change if we're unable to change ourselves." Our work at PaciaLife is research-based, individualistic, innovative and the most up to date transformational life coaching experience available. Building on more than four decades of experience, PaciaLife was founded with the intention and passion to fill a void in the education, life skills, grit, resiliency and personal needs for emerging young adults who have higher therapeutic or support needs than traditional gap year students. We offer programming that is focused on college preparation and preservation, financial literacy, nutrition, meditation, self-efficacy, and more. Call us anytime - we love our work and are thrilled to share!



Go Overseas is very proud to support the vital work GYA does for our field. We believe that gap year programs can make a positive impact on individuals, communities, and the world. GYA, its amazing member organizations and Go Overseas are natural partners in our shared mission to inspire students to take a Gap Year that will transform the way they travel, and light a spark that remains with them for the rest of their lives. Last year, Go Overseas acquired USA Gap Year Fairs in an effort to continue growing the Gap Year field for everyone and point students towards meaningful, culturally immersive experiences. GYA, USA Gap Year Fairs, and Go Overseas are aligned in our mission to make Gap Years a mainstream option for as many students as possible. Stop by our office in Berkeley anytime to say hello, and for a friendly and free co-working space!