



# Gap Year for Graduates

Graduates planning a gap year program should focus on how best to improve their employability while still engaging in a gap year program that they find fulfilling and fun. Year Out Group, an association of the independent leading gap year organisations, offers advice on how to plan a gap year program that is suitable and worthwhile and best meets the participant's individual needs.

## Why take a gap year now?

Those that take a gap year on leaving school are said to arrive at university refreshed and focussed. What is more they are far more likely to complete their chosen course and get good degrees. If those students needed a gap year before university how much more do graduates need to recharge their batteries before starting a job. This is just one of many reasons why graduates may wish to take a gap year but as each gap year program is unique to the individual participant, the full list of reasons is too long to cover here.

There is however one major difference when taking a gap year on graduation compared with earlier namely the imminent task of securing that all important first job. Employers will be searching CVs and covering letters to spot those that stand out from the crowd. A well structured gap year program can help you achieve just this. At the same time it can offer you an exciting, challenging and valuable opportunity that can and probably will enrich your life forever.

The key to a successful gap year program is to research and plan in as much detail as possible. [Year Out Group offers a series of questions to help with planning a gap year.](#)

## What can I do and for how long?

There is a very wide choice of gap year programs available that is why it is important to sit down at the start of your planning and consider what it is you wish to achieve during the time available and what you would like to experience. If you do this and set yourself some goals you will have a useful framework for your research. For example you could:

- Improve on or learn a new skill on a course in UK or overseas.
- Live abroad on a cultural exchange.
- Participate in an expedition.
- Get valuable work experience, even check out a possible career, through voluntary work, structured work placements or internships.

These gap year programs can last anything from a few weeks to a whole year. Courses and expeditions have fixed times of a few weeks but voluntary work programs vary greatly. It is important that when researching your gap year program you try and obtain a clear idea of what you will be doing and how best to obtain the maximum benefit both for you and the organisation you are volunteering with. In every case you will need to be ready to show commitment. Dropping out of a placement can be damaging and disruptive – and not just for you!

## Where can I go?

You choose! It can be in the UK or just about anywhere in the world. Year Out Group's member organizations operate in over 90 countries and many have several gap year destinations in each country. Once again planning is important. Do research the countries that interest you in as much detail as possible before you make a decision.

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office's Travel Advice site is a valuable source of information and browsing through good travel guides in a book shop will also be helpful. (You can buy one later when you have made your decision).

### **How do I get started?**

One of the aims of Year Out Group is to offer advice on how to select a suitable and worthwhile gap year program and decide which gap year organization is best for you. This consists of 50+ questions set out in the section "Planning a gap year?" There is also advice covering insurance, health, equipment and finance.

Remember time spent on research and planning will pay dividends. You have a responsibility to obtain a good understanding of what is expected of you as dropping out can be upsetting.

There are no right and wrong answers. This is your gap year program so only you can judge. Use the questions to check out the individual organizations, their ethos and their programs. Ask questions. The bottom line is: Is this right for me? Am I right for the program?

### **What are the benefits of a gap year?**

While a gap year will give you an opportunity to recharge your batteries and really begin to think about your future, it should be used to achieve much more. If you have given some early thought in the planning stages to consider your strengths, weaknesses, values, experience and career aims, you can develop your gap year program to help you build on strengths, overcome your weaknesses and gain valuable experience.

Employers are looking for people that can hit the ground running and be effective almost immediately. This means that in your CV, the covering letter and interview you will need to demonstrate that you have the necessary skills and experience to do the job in question. Time and time again those that have enjoyed a well structured gap year program have been able to draw on their gap year experiences to show that they have what it takes. This quote from a recently retired recruiter of a major international company sums it up perfectly.

*"A well-organized gap year largely spent overseas is a powerful way of developing many of the personal characteristics that my company seeks in graduate recruits: initiative in planning the year, the commercial and influencing skills often deployed in raising money at the start, the teamwork involved in many projects, the drive that is needed to succeed in a very different environment and the international perspective developed from immersion in another culture. Above all the experience as a whole builds confidence -the confidence that comes from tackling a major challenge and succeeding."*