

# MEANINGFUL TRAVEL TIPS AND TALES

TAKING A GAP YEAR BEFORE COLLEGE



An Initiative to Make Travel More Accessible



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Welcome

[A Note From GoAbroad](#).....3

[Our Contributors](#).....4

### Tips & Tales

[Graduating Soon? Take a Gap Year Before College](#).....5

[Strategies to Get the 'Rents on Board with Your Gap Year](#).....9

[Applying for College After a Gap Year](#).....12

[What to Know Before You Go Back to College After a Gap Year](#).....16

[11 Inspiring Gap Year Ideas](#).....20

[Pros and Cons of Organized Gap Year Programs](#).....23

[Why You Should Spend Your Gap Year Helping Others](#).....26

[Figuring Out How to Pay for Your Gap Year](#).....29

### Get Involved

[Questions & Comments](#).....32

# WHY WE CREATED THIS BOOK FOR GAP YEAR TRAVELERS

## A NOTE FROM GOABROAD



**Y**ou just graduated and now you're wondering "what's next?" Maybe you're not ready to take on that pre-determined path of high school, college, full-time job 'til retirement. Figuring out your next step is overwhelming and no one knows that better than we do. That's why we gathered an awesome team of experts to give you a rundown on a hip new thing you might have heard of... **taking a gap year.**

Now, contrary to what you might have been told, a gap year isn't a "year off" at all. It's a year on. Whether you're taking the time to explore new academic interests with a study-focused program, giving back on a volunteer abroad program, getting a little more work experience, or learning a new language, it's all about growing and learning—about yourself, about the world around you, and the role you'd like to play in it. You're going to work hard, play hard, and explore far and wide. It won't be easy, but we think you're up to the task. So, ask yourself:

**Are you ready to take a year on? What are your first steps? How do you make the most of this experience? How important is knowing the language before you get there? Etc.**

The list of questions to ask before preparing to go on a gap year just gets longer and longer the more you think about it. But, we've already thought about it. In fact, at GoAbroad we've thought about it for 20+ years in the field, and we've learned a thing or two in all that time.

As part of GoAbroad's mission to provide the best and most comprehensive resources for meaningful travelers, our writers share their best gap year tips every step of the way— from choosing the right program and pre-departure to dealing those "oh my god I don't know what I'm doing" moments. They're the experts with real experience and all the best info on how and when to go on a gap year, the best possible program options for you, how to fund your time abroad, and anything you might need to know. So, now you can go out into the world and really soak it all in!

Interested in joining this initiative? [Partner with us!](#)

# OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**Niki Kraska**, after intermittent volunteer stints in South Africa, Guatemala, and India, decided to quit her job in the U.S. to pursue a life of full time international volunteering and writing. She uses her experience working in non-profits to volunteer wherever her heart leads her and plans to pursue an international master's program to further her impact, because, Ubuntu.



**Stacia** is an international development policy specialist with a passion for travel and writing.



**Jane Stine** is the Co-Founder and Managing Director of Loop Abroad, a study-abroad program for pre-veterinary students and animal lovers. She has been to 70 countries and all seven continents, and has lived in the U.S., Nepal, Costa Rica, France, Brazil, and the Bahamas. Jane currently lives in Chiang Mai, Thailand with her husband, son, and Winnie, the world's worst (best) dog.



**Cecilia Polanco** earned a degree in Global Studies from UNC in 2016. During her studies, she conducted an independent research project titled, "Pupusa Practices of the Salvadoran Diaspora in the U.S.," which allowed her to learn more about pupusa makers and their stories. Inspired by her research, Cecilia launched a food truck and catering company called So Good Pupusas. In partnership with her non-profit partner, Pupusas for Education, she aims to make higher education more accessible for undocumented students via last dollar scholarships, one pupusa at a time.



**Mariel Tavakoli** is a graduate of the College of William and Mary where she studied public policy and sociology. She fell in love with meaningful travel as a study abroad student in the Czech Republic, where she returned as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant after graduation. Mariel is dedicated to all things international exchange and spends her free time learning languages and always planning her next trip.



**Natalie Robinson** is currently an ESL teacher in China and traveling solo around Asia. Natalie has a bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology and a master's degree in teaching multicultural special education. She is an avid supporter of exploring the world, experiencing new cultures and finding one's own path.



# GRADUATING SOON? TAKE A GAP YEAR BEFORE COLLEGE

by Niki Kraska

**Y**ou're just a few months away from the big graduation day a.k.a. FREEDOM! Instead of studying your English lit notes in class, you're probably texting your best friend about upcoming summer escapades or worrying if that tenth college application was enough to secure your future.

Maybe you've recently considered taking a gap year before college; maybe those college apps have been the only thing on your radar. Either way, it's not too late to explore the options for your first year outside of high school and take a look at different gap year ideas.

**Gap year programs after high school have become increasingly popular, and gap year travel is all the more appealing.** What better way to grow and learn about yourself and the world around you before heading back into classrooms and textbooks?

Soon-to-be graduates: here's some last minute gap year advice to help make the pressing question, "Should I take a gap year?" an easy one to answer (Hint: the answer rhymes with guess).

## Just do it. Take a gap year before college!

Seriously. Take it from every person who has ever taken time "off" to travel, volunteer, intern, or learn a language abroad—it's worth it.

The reason is because **it's not actually time "off" at all.** You aren't sitting on the couch playing video games; you are forced to be more active in your life than maybe you've ever been before! (It should probably be called "Learn-to-Live-Your-Life Year," instead of gap year, for appropriate context). [Being out of your comfort zone](#) and away from your support system (and endless Wi-Fi) during a gap year before college **prepares you even more for your studies and career ahead.** Through a gap year of travel, [you'll become more aware of different lifestyles and cultures around you](#), more in tune with your skills/goals/potential, and more self-assured in making decisions and taking action.

Imagine walking into your first day of university confident in your selected poli-sci major and teeming with ideas to bring to the environmental club on campus (thanks in large part to what you learned while taking a break after high school and your gap year in France). Not to mention you're perfectly capable of out-testing any third year French major. **You'll be worldly and well prepared**—sounds just about perfect.

## How to Take a Gap Year Before College

It's not as hard as it may seem! In fact, no matter if you have already applied to your favorite universities or not, you can still opt for a gap year. Depending on your current sitch, here's how to take a gap year:

### Were you already accepted into a university?

**Solution:** Defer.

Personal development isn't the only perk that comes along with taking a break after high school, and more and more schools are recognizing that students actually perform better upon returning from a gap year program after high school. Look up your school's deferment policy; many allow deferment for one year with only a simple form to fill out. Make sure you do all the steps required to ensure your spot for next year!

Even if you have to apply again when you return, they typically won't make you pay the application fee or send in your transcripts/reference letters again (be sure to confirm this with admissions). If scholarships are at stake, ask about the appeals process with financial services. There's always a way!

### Are you still looking at colleges?

**Solution:** Check out universities that offer bridge years gap year programs after high school.

Just as many schools are looking at gap years as a benefit to their students, some colleges are going the extra step by [offering school sponsored gap year opportunities](#) for high school graduates, making it that much easier to have your college experience and eat your gap year cake, too. Applying to a specific university just because they offer a funded gap year program might not be the way to go, but if you can find a college that fits your interests, plus offers a gap year program, it's a win-win.

### Are you still not sure if college is the right track?

**Solution:** You should SERIOUSLY consider gap programs for high school graduates.

Translation: there is absolutely no fault in being hesitant about the whole college admissions process, especially when you can't even keep your eyes open after writing your senior thesis. Perfect time to consider a gap year before college to refresh your mind instead!

An extra bonus of taking a break after high school is that you don't necessarily need to apply before school is out. Spend your summer winding down, saving money, and searching for the perfect gap year program to join. When the next application period rolls around, you'll be even more prepared to [win over admissions counselors](#) with your travel experience.

### How to Actually Choose a Gap Year Program

The world is literally your oyster when it comes to taking a gap year before college. Remember – the best gap year programs after high school are ultimately the ones that align with your goals and personal mission.

#### Step 1. Ask yourself: What do you care most about?

The best way to begin planning on taking a break after high school is to start narrowing down your search. Figure out what you care most about doing during your gap year before college. Spend time doing community work in the Amazon of Peru or participating in a cultural immersion program in France (you could come home with an impressive accent). Future CEOs can get a leg up on the competition by learning Chinese while studying in China. In fact, there is a gap year program for every major language; you just have to decide if your gap year before college will include pizza in Italy or tapas in Spain.

#### Step 2. Figure out what you want to do.

We'd be a little concerned if you weren't already wondering what to do in a gap year before college. You might be keen to volunteer or intern, or master a language. If you are looking to make a social impact or get a taste of a potential career, volunteer placements and internships are perfect ways to spend your gap year before college.

You could travel through affordable Southeast Asia while teaching English to children in Cambodia, then educate yourself on positive elephant care while volunteering in Thailand.

## *"The main point and the heart of our gap year advice: don't limit yourself."*

Join an African safari after a public health internship in Ghana or take Tuesday night tango lessons during a veterinary internship in Argentina. Gap year volunteer and internship gap programs for high school graduates are constantly looking for motivated and energetic participants. As an 18-year-old-ready-to-take-on-the-world, you'll fit right in!

#### Step 3. Choose a location.

Picking a place to do your gap year after high school is half the battle – with the whole world out there, it can be tempting to squeeze in a world tour of sorts. But you're not racing to check off some arbitrary list or simply collect passport stamps. The wisest of gap year students choose to focus their energy on a region (or sometimes, a singular country) and commit to exploring it for the duration of their program. We highly recommend you follow in their footsteps when considering gap year options after high school.

If you aren't ready to let go of your Westernized creature comforts, stick to Europe or Australia. If you want to disconnect, head to the mountains or jungles of South America. If you want to gain an entirely new perspective on life, work with tribal people of Africa.

To help get the wheels turning, here are the most popular countries for gap years after high school.

- [Australia](#)
- [Thailand](#)
- [South Africa](#)
- [India](#)
- [Peru](#)

#### Step 4. Find amazing programs that can organize your break year after high school.

While organized gap year programs often include housing, meals, and in-country support, if you'd rather throw on a backpack and couchsurf through your own multi-cultural adventure, go ahead and do it! Or better yet, some gap year programs, like those offered by [Cross-Cultural Solutions](#) will give you the chance to experience multiple countries, communities, and excursions, all while not having to worry about where your next meal will be. Other popular gap programs for high school graduates are offered by [Carpe Diem Education](#) and [Greenheart Travel](#).

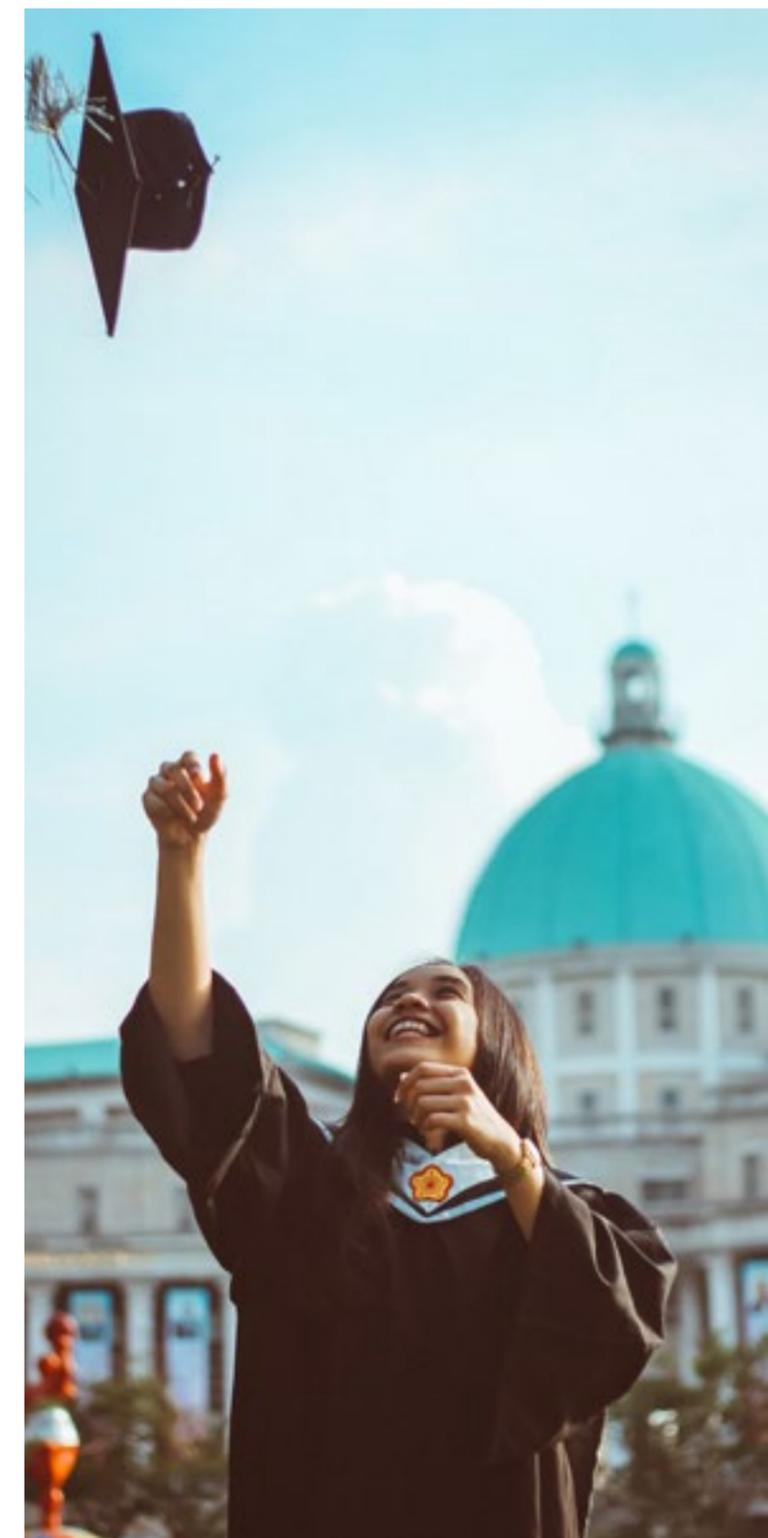
[Find more awesome program options in our [gap year program directory](#)]

#### Step 5. Read reviews, pick your favorite, and pack those bags!

Just like that, you've scoured all of your gap year options after high school and have found THE one. It's time to coordinate your visas, passports, plane tickets, and immunizations – not to mention stuff your face with all of your favorite foods (twice) and make time to say teary good bye's to friends and family.

It's time for unmatched personal growth and adventure. It's time for your gap year after high school!

Can't get enough? [Read the full article here.](#)





# STRATEGIES TO GET THE 'RENTS ON BOARD WITH YOUR GAP YEAR

by Natalie Robinson

So you just graduated from high school and you are tired of school. Let's face it, we have alllllll been there. As opposed to the traditional decision to attend college in the fall, you have decided enough is enough! (For now...) You've decided to take a gap year. Go you!

Making the decision to take a gap year is exciting and big step toward your future. But, now you have to get your parents on board... Yikes! Talking to your parents about your gap year may seem a bit daunting, but with a few strategies you will have them on board in no time. Below are six surefire strategies that address common parental concerns with taking a gap year. These strategies will help get your parents on board with your decision.

## 1. Explain what a gap year actually is...

Alright, this seems like a given. And, you'd think your parents would know what a gap year is, seeing as they're all the rage. But, when you mention you want to take a gap year, [your parents may have no idea what it actually entails!](#) The first strategy to get your parents on board is to explain what a gap year actually is; a hiatus between high school and college or university.

It is especially important to let your parents know that a gap year is not a permanent replacement for higher education, nor does it mean you will lose focus on your career. It is hard to stay on a never-ending academic track and a gap year lets you take a step back, get to know yourself and decide what you want to do. Don't forget to explain the importance of exploring your interests. Now is the time to really sell it!

## 2. Explain how a gap year can help you choose a major...and stick to it!

Changing your major is such a common occurrence for first year students that it is almost a rite of passage. Choosing a major is a huge decision that many students are expected to decide upon during their first year of attending school. Talk about pressure! The knowledge and experiences gained during your gap year will make the path to choosing your major easier. Spending your time exploring your interests before you commit to a major will ultimately save you money, time, and stress.

Taking a gap year will give you priceless experiences; experiences that will help you determine if you love working with children or if the prospect of teaching makes you queasy. Really emphasize that a gap year will provide you with practical and professional experiences that are beneficial to succeed in college and with your future career.

## 3. Include your parents in your decision-making process

Your parents have probably been involved in every major decision thus far in your life; this decision should be no different. In fact, including your parents in your decision making will help them feel more at ease about your gap year because they will be more aware of your plans. This strategy is beneficial for both you and your parents because you can bounce ideas off of them and decide exactly how you can get the most out of your gap year.

## 4. Have most of your research done and get ready to cite your sources

When you approach your parents to discuss your gap year, be prepared. I'm not saying to read a 500 page book on gap years, but be prepared to defend your decision and explain why it is the best path for you. This means you need to be knowledgeable about the educational and personal benefits of taking a gap year.

Websites like GoAbroad.com provide a wealth of information that can make talking to your parents easier. After you are armed with success stories and facts about gap years, you will be ready to reassure your parents that you are making the right choice.

## 5. Anticipate their concerns and encourage their questions

Ok, so answering a ton of questions might not seem thrilling, but parents want answers; they always have and they always will. Be prepared to answer your parents' questions about your gap year and to encourage them to ask more questions. Encouraging your parents to ask more questions will not only help get them on board with your gap year, but also provide you with more information for planning; it's a win-win situation.

Here are a few common points your parents may ask about:

- **Money.** It's great unless you don't have it... right? The good news is that there are wonderful resources to fund a gap year. From scholarships, to summer jobs to paid work abroad opportunities, there are infinite options to make your gap year happen. Being concerned about money seems to be a requirement for parenthood, but ingenuity when it comes to getting money shows that you are ready to make big life choices.
- **Safety.** If you are traveling abroad, or even to a new city, your parents will undoubtedly worry about your safety. Reassure them that safety is an issue regardless of location and that you will remain vigilant at all times. Plus, the point of an organized gap year program is to keep you safe, but give you room to grow and explore!
- **Staying Connected.** There are apps galore to help you stay connected to home no matter where you are in the world. Staying connected is easier than ever!

## 6. Show. No. Fear.

Parents can smell it. And, the minute they do, you're DEAD. Ok, ok, all kidding aside, talking to your parents about your decision to take a gap year may seem difficult, but think of what lies ahead! Taking a gap year opens doors to new opportunities and will ultimately prepare you for your future. When making life choices, there is no "one path fits all." Consider what taking a gap year means for you, its benefits and, perhaps, its disadvantages and talk to your parents.

As long as you can effectively communicate why you want to take a gap year, what your plan is, and how your parents can, and likely will, be involved, you'll be jetting off around the world in no time! You're about to embark on adulthood, it's time to start acting like it. Starting with talking to your parents like the rational human beings they are! If you're passionate about this experience, it'll be hard for them \*not\* to be totally on board.



# APPLYING FOR COLLEGE AFTER TAKING A GAP YEAR

by Jane Stine

**T**aking a gap year after high school or a gap year during college can be a life-changing experience. Don't miss out on a gap year because you are afraid of what the college admissions offices will think! The fact of the matter is, just like with anything else, a gap year can either help or hurt your college admissions prospects depending what you do with it!

In most cases, if you're thoughtfully planning your gap year (which you probably are, if you're reading this), applying for college after a gap year will be no problem. In fact, if you plan correctly, you'll likely find that applying to college after a gap year means your application is even stronger and your admissions prospects improve!

Here are some tips on successfully applying to college after a gap year or taking a year off from college for a gap year.

## Communication is key!

Let's consider two scenarios.

### Scenario 1: Communicating Cathy.

Communicating Cathy is thinking about a gap year. She really wants to decide if a career in medicine is right for her by taking a year to volunteer and travel before college. College application season starts. Cathy talks to her parents about her goals and researches programs that might be a good fit. She looks up some colleges that are good prospects for her and calls the admissions offices to ask whether it would make sense to apply now and defer admission, or to wait and apply next year. She takes her standardized tests as if she were applying this season, and keeps good records of her transcripts, grades, and teachers she can ask for recommendations.

### Scenario 2: Silent Sam.

Silent Sam is thinking about a gap year, but he hasn't told his parents because he isn't exactly sure what he wants to do. He doesn't start researching programs because he isn't sure where to start. College application season starts, and he begins applying to the schools his college counselor suggested. He doesn't call the admissions offices because he doesn't want them to think he might not enroll in case that counts against him. He and his parents pay the application fees and submit his applications. In the spring, when it's time to commit to a school, he tells his parents that maybe he wants to take a year off.

Who do you think is better set up for a successful gap year after high school? It's obvious, right?

Like most things, the optimal result requires a bit more communicating and planning. Colleges have this information and they're happy to share it, so give them a call! Talk to your parents and your guidance counselor. If you're currently in college and thinking about a year off, talk to your advisor or dean.

**You aren't the first person to take a gap year, and most academic professionals understand that gap years can have huge benefits and are happy to work with you to make it work!** In the expensive land of college tuition and non-refundable deposits, communicating early and often is the best plan.

## Plan for your goals

A gap year on its own doesn't help or hurt your college application; what you make of it does. Spending a year sitting around, working a few part-time hours, and hanging out at your parents' house isn't going to enhance your admissions profile anywhere. But think from an admissions officer's perspective. What if you came across a student who took a year off to:

- Study abroad for a semester and then travel in Spain to become fluent in Spanish
- Take care of a sick parent, get work experience on the weekend, and complete a free computer programming training course online
- Write a novel and learn how to self-publish it
- Get an internship at a local marketing business and then save up for a two-week trip to learn about journalism in Vietnam
- Volunteer on a horse ranch in Argentina and learn animal care skills
- Moved to Korea and trained and worked as an English teacher

Any of those things would make a student stand out and would show drive, independence, a passion for learning, a professional work ethic, an ability to self-motivate, and deep interests outside the classroom. **Those are qualities that colleges are looking for.**

If you plan on applying to college after a gap year, be sure to use your gap year to improve your application. That could be volunteering, working, interning, traveling, taking courses... the possibilities are endless! And you'll notice that many of the options on the list above don't cost money. It's all about making a plan and working to achieve your goals.



Applying to college after a gap year takes planning. Most schools start in September, but you may apply the January or even the November before. Keep track of the important dates and stay on top of things! Just like with anything else, applying to college after taking a year off requires careful planning to succeed.

## Don't assume—ASK!

Don't assume that you have to wait to apply if you want to take a year off—ask! Don't assume that your favorite college doesn't have study abroad as an option freshman year—ask! Don't assume that if you're already in college and you want to take a year off, you have to withdraw—ask!

## Are you sensing a theme? Ask! Ask! Ask!

Every year colleges in the US become more and more understanding of the benefits of study abroad, and they are more and more willing to work with students to help them embrace their outside-of-the-box and travel-based learning goals. **Talk to your school.** Many colleges now offer a first semester or first year abroad as an option for incoming freshman, and many have campuses in other countries. If you're currently enrolled, you can work with your school to grant credit for your program so that you can stay enrolled and potentially even receive funding.

If you're wondering whether it's better to defer admission or wait to apply, call up the school and ask!

## Build your resume

This is the most important advice for applying for college after a gap year: use your gap year well. In high school, there were teachers and counselors and peers reminding you and pushing you to get good grades, be involved in activities, and do community service. Now that's up to you!

One easy option if you're planning on applying to college after taking a year off is to keep a resume file that you can access from anywhere (such as Google Docs) and updating it weekly. This will make sure that you remember all the projects you've done, contacts and things you've learned, and projects you've made. It will also help you assess when you aren't making enough progress and push yourself to get more involved, reach out, and learn something new.

- What should you keep track of?
- Anything you've done at work (paid or unpaid), including the names of projects and their supervisors. This is a good place to record supervisor contact info.
- Anything you write or publish
- Any contests or awards you win
- Service and volunteer work (keep track of your contacts for this, too!)
- New skills learned (such as languages or computer programs)
- Any certifications earned
- Any classes you've taken (include a short description of projects or papers)

This way, when it's time for college applications, you'll have all the info you need in one place. Need a reference? Resume? List of achievements? You'll know what to do.

### What if my gap year isn't my choice?

You might be thinking, "This all sounds great, but my gap year isn't because I had a grand plan and want to improve my resume—it isn't up to me." Maybe you just can't afford college quite yet. Or you need to help out at home. Or you didn't get in the first time around. Or a million other reasons that happen to lots of people.

That's okay! Colleges understand that life happens, and applying for college after a gap year doesn't have to hurt your admissions chances. Be honest and make the best of the situation. What can you do to improve your skills, or at least keep them fresh? Take a community college class or a course online? Take a part-time internship at a local company in your field? Put in some volunteer hours at an organization that aligns with your career interests? Do what you can. College admissions officers are people, and people understand that life gets in the way.

If you've been accepted and you think you might need to defer admission, call up your admissions office and talk to them. Be honest about your situation and get to know your options. Once again, communication is key!

If you're already in college and you're planning on taking a year off from college, talk to your advisor. Being upfront and understanding what the requirements are can help you make the best of the situation, and even use it to your advantage.

### So, will a gap year hurt my admissions chances?

Nope! Don't be afraid of a gap year. A gap year will just be another year that factors into your admissions decision. Just like the rest of your educational career, if you do your best and look for opportunities to impress, it will improve your application.

Applying to college after a gap year can be a huge plus! It can give you a chance to pursue your dreams, be sure of your passion, gain experience, show your skills, and stand out from the crowd. If you're really worried, you can always apply and then choose to defer admission, so that your gap year won't factor into your admissions decision. You just have to decide which option is the better fit for you!

A gap year is a great opportunity, and don't let anyone tell you that it will hurt your chances of getting into college. Applying to college after taking a year off isn't scary as long as you communicate, plan, work toward your goals, and stay on top of your deadlines and responsibilities.

### Go get your gap year!

Taking a gap year after high school or a gap year during college is a big decision, but when you know it's right for you, you know it's right for you. You can find a gap year that meets all your goals, is within your budget, and helps your admissions chances, so start looking! You can start [learning about some program options here](#). Get ready to show those college admissions officers everything you're capable of!



# WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO BACK TO COLLEGE AFTER A GAP YEAR

by Cecilia Polanco

Taking a gap year and diving right back into the wonderful world of late night paper-writing, pop quizzes, and long weekend study sessions can be quite the transition. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you switch back into school mode.

### Buffer time is important

How do you even begin to process everything you've been through in the last year? You might have just got back and now you're switching gears getting ready for college.

You might have some time at home before you're off on your next journey, but gappers freshly back should consider this: YOU NEED SOME TIME. Time to rest, time to process, time to do nothing, to wash your clothes, sort through your souvenirs, to spend with friends and family, and to reflect on the likely amazing year you just had. Then you can start to think about and prepare for what's next.

### **You will continue to grow and know yourself**

Some deep things happened on your gap year right? You've spent time by yourself, with others, and got to know yourself in a global context. You're becoming who you want to be and meeting parts of yourself that are emerging in the new settings. That level of inner knowledge doesn't stop on your gap year, you can find ways to continue to develop yourself and get to know yourself during college.

### **You are stronger**

Not everyday on your gap year was a walk through the park. You had some tough times, but you know what, you made it through and are stronger for it. You carry that resilience with you into college. You're better equipped to go with the flow, remain calm and collected in stressful situations, and uncertainty is now just a part of life you expect. You're harder to throw off and catch off guard; you made it through your gap year, you can handle anything.

### **You are better prepared for college now**

You are more capable than you ever thought you were. It took some time and many miles, and some sticky situations, but now you think through the possibilities and can come up with solutions like no one's business. You are prepared to deal with challenges because you have faced them before. You're also not afraid of failure. You dealt with some of that and it didn't keep you down. No matter the outcome, you are ready to face it and keep moving forward no matter the outcome.

### **You can still build travel into your college plan**

It won't be long before you're sitting in the library in front of a computer screen reminiscing on the time you were most free and the world was at your fingertips. And now you're stuck here until... fall break,...Thanksgiving break? Where is the nearest airport, call me a Lyft!

No worries, it's okay to be adjusting to being on a college campus cranking out work. But you can still nourish the wanderer inside you. Study abroad, for a week, a semester, or a whole year! Take alternate fall, winter, or spring breaks. Save up some money and travel on long weekends, and find others who are passionate about traveling like you! Trust me, you're not the only feeling wanderlust!

### **You're a little quirkiest now**

And that's okay. You've had time to figure some things out about yourself. You know what you like, and what you don't like. And you've had time and maybe with some random folks abroad, have experienced safe spaces that allow you to be yourself. Turns out, you're a little weird, you're a little quirky, you might see the world in a different way, and that's totally okay. You're ahead of the curb!

### **You no longer have time for shallow relationships**

Pretty soon you'll have your intro down to a science: Name, Hometown, Major (probably undecided, lol), and a fun fact about yourself (I took a gap year!). But although you'll be meeting a lot of people, you may not feel like you're creating genuine, deep, long lasting relationships. That's okay. College is full of people to meet and you'll figure out who the ones are who will see your quirky side and whom you'll build some great relationships with. While abroad you had experience in getting to know people very quickly, and you can tell when you vibe with someone and when you don't. Your relationships will be better for it.

### **You need a community of support**

Not everyone will understand what it's like to be coming back from a gap year, but there are other students who can relate to your experiences and can provide a community of support for you. Whether it's other gappers or a club or organization, find a group of people that love what you love, have traveled, or even better, have taken a gap year with whom you can share stories, travel recommendations, and reminisce about the good old "gap year days."

### **And last, but certainly not least:**

### **Your gap year was just the beginning**

College is about to be awesome! If you think your gap year was amazing, it was just the Preface to the amazing book that is the next four years. Enjoy it. Don't forget the lessons your gap year taught you, and hold on to your love of travel, appreciating the world and love for the people who who inhabit it, and be yourself!

Peace, Love, and Happiness,

Cecilia



Gap year—good for the soul

**“Discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.”**

- Marcel Proust

**“Life begins at the end of your comfort zone. So if you’re feeling uncomfortable right now, know that the change taking place in your life is a beginning, not an ending.”**

- Neale Donald Walsch

**“Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray.”**

- Rumi

# 11 INSPIRING GAP YEAR IDEAS

by Mariel Tavakoli

There are a million reasons why you might be considering a gap year before attending college. Oh, and there's that other reason that Malia Obama is taking her own gap year adventure pre-Harvard, so why shouldn't you be so worldly? No matter how celebrity-inspired your motivations might be, gap years have been around as an option to enrich the lives of meaningful travelers for generations.

According to Gap Year Surveys conducted by the [American Gap Association](#), students reported the following when asked about the impact of their gap year experience:

*“I gained so much independence it is unbelievable.”*

*“I’m motivated to get as much as I can out of my classes and my time [at college], so I can be better prepared to share it with more people in the world who haven’t had the same opportunities I have.”*

*“My friends who haven’t taken a gap year look around and see only college, classes, internships, resumes... I look around and see the entire world waiting for me.”*



## Feeling inspired yet?

There are so many options for what to do with a gap year! Get the brainstorm flowing with these gap year ideas that will experientially expand your horizons before deep-diving into your academic career. Just think of all the ways you can grow and things you can learn in one year..

## Learn a language

### 1. [Andeo International Homestay: Spain](#)

Put your decade or more of school Spanish to the test with Andeo's language program in Spain's second-largest city, Barcelona. Between intensive courses at a local language school and a homestay with a local family, you'll be speaking like a native in no time.

Plus, as Barcelona is the thriving capital of the Catalonia region, Andeo's program won't just turn you bilingual, but rather trilingual! For other languages of interest, Andeo also offers programs in **Bolivia, Ecuador, France, Japan, San Sebastian, and Seville.**

## 2. [AFS-USA Intercultural Programs: France](#)

Wait, isn't a gap year supposed to come after high school is (finally) over? Another year of high school might sound like a drag on paper, but there's nothing like it to truly immerse in local life in a foreign culture. With AFS-USA Intercultural Programs, you'll expand your global network as part of a cohort of students from around the world that then becomes embedded in everything about the daily life of your destination—from living with a homestay to going to the local school. Say "Oui" to putting that minimum of one year of prior French to good use.

### Learn from others

## 3. [Thinking Beyond Borders \(TBB\)](#)

With Thinking Beyond Borders' Global Gap Year program, the world is literally your oyster and textbook. Over the course of the year you will travel to South America, Asia, Africa, and in the the United States to engage with local communities on pressing global issues and then see how these experiences can transform into a meaningful career path. There's no doubt with TBB that you'll enter college with the first-hand experience to actively contribute to classroom discussion and passionately enrich any future assignments in diverse disciplines.

## 4. [Pacific Discovery](#)

With 25 programs operating around the world, Pacific Discovery is a global leader in gap year programming that balances education, experience, and environment in each destination. Through a combination of cultural events, service-learning, and outdoor adventure, you'll connect with local people and your fellow group members as you take on this challenging and eye-opening experience together. Most of all, you become a first-hand regional expert, with invaluable knowledge that will set yourself apart on any resume going forward!

*"My friends who haven't taken a gap year look around and see only college, classes, internships, resumes... I look around and see the entire world waiting for me."*

## 5. [Carpe Diem Education](#)

Carpe Diem is known for their 12-week semester programs around the world, but their Latitudes program is unique in how it will launch your independence. After choosing to participate in one group program, you'll then spend their second gap semester on a unique, focused volunteer placement with a local community. Ready for this challenge? Coupled with accredited courses from Portland State University, you can start college with up to 36 credits and the maturity to conquer your next educational chapter.

### Learn about the land

## 6. [Frontier](#)

There are so many different directions for how to spend a gap year, but if you're interested in biodiversity, conservation, and sustainability, then Frontier is the perfect program provider! Frontier offers community development programs, yet they shine in their mission to protect endangered environments through volunteerism.

You might just have an Insta selfie with an elephant in mind, but the experience and awareness you will gain as you learn about real environmental threats and the community activism to prevent them will provide you with a foundation in the intersection between environmental science, international relations, international development, and social justice.

## 7. [Juara Turtle Project](#)

If you're passionate and looking for a gap year with less hand-holding and more doing, then the option of an open-ended volunteer program in Malaysia with the Juara Turtle Project is perfect fit—like a turtle and its shell! At a cost of \$30-35 per night, you'll become a part of the JTP community on Tioman Island as they work to protect and relocate green and hawksbill sea turtle eggs. With volunteers of all ages and local experts, you get to learn with and from a global community as they work together toward the tangible goal of saving the Malay turtles.

### Learn a new skill

## 8. [China Internship Placements \(CIP\)](#)

Whether you have a career path in mind or can't even decide on a college major, China Internship Placements will customize a bespoke internship placement and guide you through the transformative experience of living and working in the world's fastest growing economic power. After a year with CIP, you'll not only have a whole host of hands-on hard skills to put on their resume, you'll be able to speak (at least) basic Mandarin, know how to navigate a foreign culture, and be prepared for the demands of both the professional and academic environments in your future.

## 9. [Winterline Global Skills Gap Year Program](#)

Cooking, constructing, creating, scuba diving, trekking, communicating, first aid...Winterline believes that you never know what skills you'll need in life, so with their gap year program, you will gain the most important skill...

...how to take on whatever life throws your way. With an active curriculum that focuses on doing, Winterline focuses on the skills that will complement those you might learn inside the classroom that will prepare you for whatever direction your life leads them to go.

### Learn through pre-college

## 10. [Oxford Advanced Studies Program: England](#)

There's nothing like a little name-dropping on your academic record, nor the scholarly atmosphere of the world's oldest university to get you in the academic mood to start your studies. The Oxford Advanced Studies program aims to prepare gap year students for college-level academics through coursework and cultural immersion amidst the urban campus of the University of Oxford. Through the tutorial method, your intellectual comfort zone will be pushed and strengthened as you explore coursework in small groups and one-on-one with a tutor.

## 11. [American Institute for Foreign Study \(AIFS\): Austria](#)

If you want to get a headstart on the more traditional style of study abroad, a gap year with AIFS at the University of Salzburg is a sweet option! With a two-week German course and the option to live with a homestay or in a residence hall, you will feel the combination of a safe, globally-recognized program and the independence to live like a "college student" abroad. You can earn up to 17 credits and most importantly, a passion for international education that will last throughout the rest of your career!



# THE PROS & CONS OF ORGANIZED GAP YEAR PROGRAMS ABROAD

by Ben Maples

Organized gap year programs have long since been a favorite pastime of kids the world over, but it's finally becoming more widely accepted that high school students are taking a year off before college. Regardless of what you're into or what you enjoy, people just love going abroad, experiencing new cultures, and seeing as much of the world as it is possible to see!

Taking a gap year before college is not always plain-sailing; however, there are some elements of the experience that can spoil it for people and there are some that redeem them! Luckily for you, we've compiled a comprehensive breakdown of pros and cons of organized gap year programs abroad.

## The Cons

*Isn't the point of taking a gap year before college to spend a little time outside the rigidity and structure of a classroom? Even if your program doesn't include a study component, you might find the structure of an organized gap year program a little stifling. This might not be the best option for any student looking to go their own way and blaze their own trails.*

## They can restrict your movement.

You can't move around as much as you would like and this can be restricting, as it means you literally can't go anywhere else whilst abroad. If you're working somewhere or taking part in an activity in one place, then you will be required to stay there. This can be annoying because the whole point of a gap year is that you're able to not only explore the world, but also find a few things out about yourself. Staying in one place working or doing one activity means that your travel bucket list will have to wait, so be aware of this before you even apply for a program.

## You won't meet many new people.

You're going to meet new people abroad, that is a given. However, there will be a distinct lack of a consistent new stream of people for you to meet. If you're doing an organized gap year program, like a work placement, then you will be working with the same people virtually every day. You'll need to decide if this is what you want to do, or if you'd rather spend your year hopping from country and city, making new friends along the way.

If you're volunteering through gap year programs like **Carpe Diem Education**, for example, then you will meet new people in your group who will soon become like your family, but you'll be working a lot and won't necessarily have time to get to branch out on your own.

## There's less freedom.

In the very early stages of your organized gap year program, the idea of having added support from the people you're traveling with can seem not only enjoyable, but also essential, especially if you want to really learn and grow. As you become more comfortable with life abroad, the handholding or micro-managing of your might start to get a little annoying.

You'll start craving more independence, and this is essential to achieving what you want to by taking a gap year before college; essentially this means that you'll start getting the irrepensible urge to "spread your wings," and you yourself will have to come to the conclusion of whether or not that is a good idea.

## The Pros

For recent high school graduates interested in taking a year off before college, organized gap year programs are the perfect compromise between nagging parents and those restless feet of yours. The structure and supervision gives parents a little relief knowing you're taken care of, but you still ultimately get the best of traveling abroad for a year with every added advantage, such as:

## It looks great on your CV/resume.

Taking a gap year can often raise questions in university interviews or in job interviews. What did you do on your gap year? Working or volunteering on your gap year is exactly the thing to have on your CV/resume and something that hiring managers absolutely love to see. It shows you have work experience and it shows that you've taken some time to actually try and learn some new skills, too.

It's very important that you make note of your gap year achievements on your CV/resume, humble brag if you have to; people will not only be very impressed by your participation in gap year programs abroad, they will also count for a lot more in due course. If you learned a language, highlight this accomplishment alongside your work and volunteer accolades.

### **You might find something that you enjoy.**

There is a great opportunity for you here to find something that you love. You may find a job that you want to stick with or you'll find an idea of what you want to study in college. In fact, many people who end up taking a gap year before college have said that that experience is what made them want to study human and family studies (for example) or to look into similar activities at university.

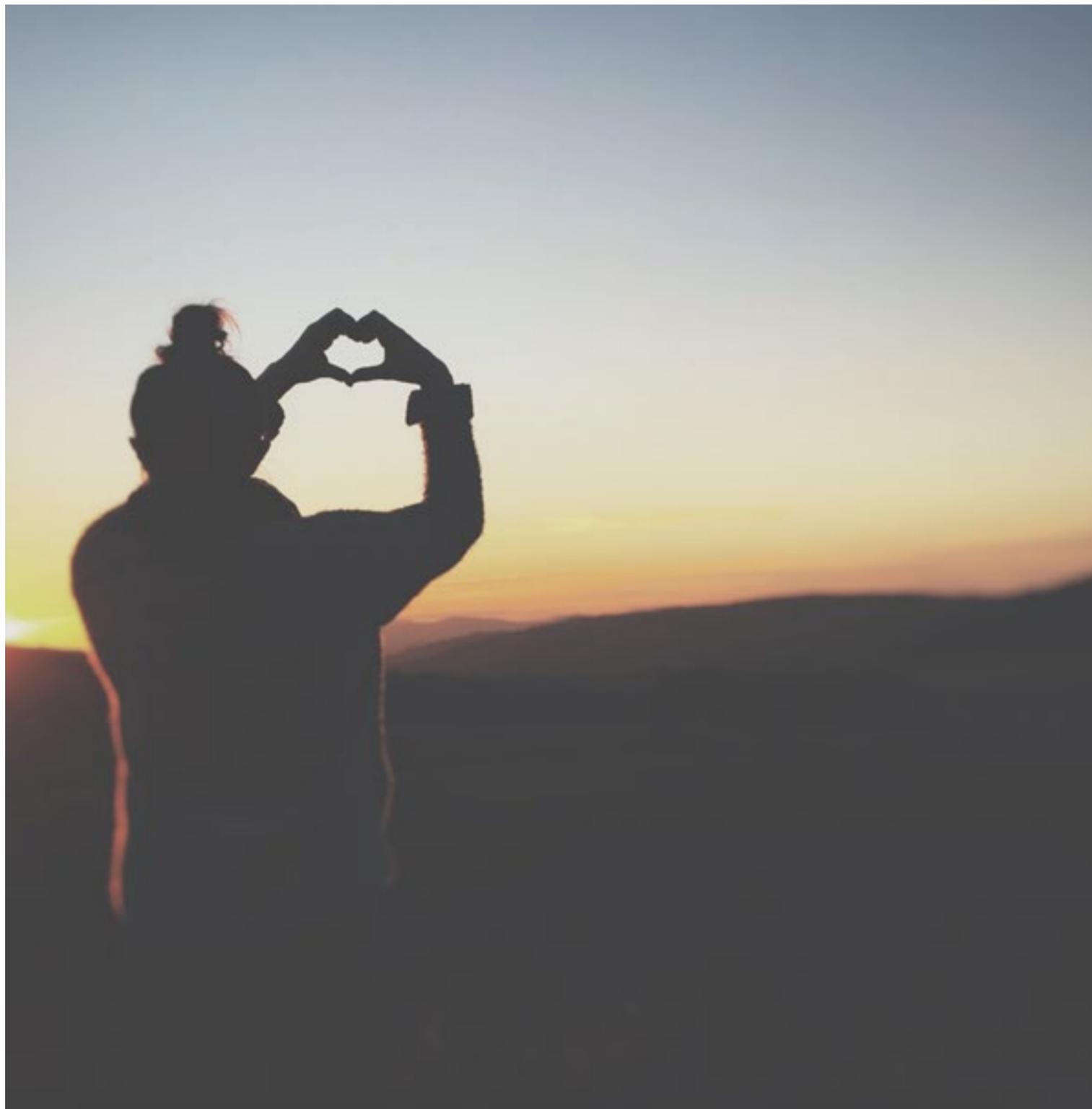
### **You'll gain unique experience.**

The experience of traveling and working abroad is invaluable. It shows that you have experience in the working world, which can help with your CV/resume, but more importantly than that, it helps you be a more well-rounded person. It will help you to learn more about yourself, illuminate what you're going to do with your life, inform you more about how the world works, and it will help you to understand the working world too.

Use these unique experiences to your advantage; learn more about the world and the way that people work, and (if you're working abroad) learn more and more about the way different cultures work too.

### **So, there you have it!**

The pros and cons of organized gap year programs abroad. There are plenty of things (and programs) to consider and a near endless amount of research to do, but hopefully this little list will help get you on the right track and allow you to make an informed decision, so when the day arrives for you to embark on your gap year abroad, you know exactly what you're in for.



# WHY YOU SHOULD SPEND YOUR GAP YEAR HELPING OTHERS

by Stacia Sahi

**T**aking a gap year is a great opportunity to explore your interests and find out what you're really passionate about. But, that doesn't mean that you can't also help others while on the way to finding yourself. In fact, helping others through volunteering abroad can be an important goal to set for yourself during your gap year. In helping others, you'll gain insight into your own strengths and interests, and learn valuable lessons that will prove useful down the road. Here are a few reasons why you should spend your gap year helping others.

### **It will help you to identify your own skills**

If you decide that you want to spend your gap year volunteering abroad, the first thing you need to do is figure out how you can best do so. That is, you need to evaluate your skills and determine what help you're equipped to provide.

For example, if you faint at the sight of blood, you don't want to spend your year as a medical volunteer for a blood donation bank. Or if you don't have your TEFL certification, then you won't be very effective volunteer teaching English as a second language. Honestly assessing your own knowledge and abilities is an important first step in determining how you can spend time giving back in a meaningful way.

When I decided to quit my full-time, permanent job to find something more meaningful, I spent a lot of time figuring out what kind of role would allow me to capitalize on my skills. I knew that I was a strong writer and editor, so I decided to look for a project or organization that would really benefit from these skills.

### **It will help you realize what you still want (and maybe need) to learn**

In identifying your strengths, you also want to gently assess your weaknesses, so that you can determine what skills or knowledge you want to gain in your gap year. Helping others and giving back to local communities is only part of the experience; bettering yourself through new experiences and learning is just as important.

I had always wanted to work for a non-profit. I'd learned about non-governmental organizations in school, but never gotten hands-on experience by working in the office of one, and seeing the daily challenges they encounter. I wanted to learn more. That was the experience I wanted to gain.

### **It will help you realize what you care about**

Identifying your own skills is also a useful exercise because your strengths are usually a reflection of what's important to you. This can help you focus in on what you care about. For example, if you've put in years on the debate club, then you're likely someone who values knowledge, details, and teamwork.

## **Your strengths are usually a reflection of what's important to you.**

Or if you realize that you have excellent lifeguarding skills based on your years of working at the pool, then you're also likely to care about physical fitness, and are someone who enjoys social settings, and who isn't afraid of a challenge. These traits can help you figure out what you care enough about to remain committed to volunteering over the long-term.

For myself, I'd spent many years volunteering as a dance instructor and with a literacy program, so finding an organization that helped children learn new skills was a natural choice.

### **It will help you determine what kind of work environment you're looking for**

There's huge variety in volunteer work available around the world. There's a big difference between walking dogs for an animal shelter, stuffing envelopes for a charity event, or painting walls on a construction site. So, when considering what you care about enough to contribute to, don't forget to also consider the work environment you most enjoy, or think you'd most enjoy, before deciding on a placement. Do you want to be indoors or outdoors? Do you want to be on a team or working independently? Do you want to be based in a city-type environment, or are you okay if the work takes you on the road to more rough and rural environments?

I wanted to get international experience in a developing country, but I also like living fairly comfortably, so I ultimately ruled out working in a rural setting. Know that this might be a trial and error process on your gap year, in order to find what works best for you!

### **It will help you gain a new perspective**

Once you've narrowed down the skills you can contribute and what you want to learn, the things that you care about, and the work environment where you'd be able to thrive, you'll likely have some pretty clear ideas about where you're going to spend your gap year volunteering abroad. But, having an idea of what you'll encounter and living the reality are two very different things. No matter how prepared you might feel for the experience you choose, you will definitely gain a new perspective from spending your time serving others.

For me, the opportunity I accepted was for a small non-profit in the capital city of Cambodia. The non-profit helped disadvantaged children and youth to get back into school or into life-skills programs, and I worked as program coordinator/communications person, writing fundraising appeals and grant applications. I applied for the position in Cambodia because it was a country where I had previously visited and had studied in school, so I knew that I would be comfortable enough to live there. I knew about the poverty much of the population faced, understood the root causes of it, and had seen it briefly with my own eyes.

However, I hadn't realized how quickly incomes in some parts of the country were rising, or expected that my co-workers would be people who had only recently escaped poverty themselves. One of my friends talked about how as a child he'd begged on the streets from tourists, but now was a teacher making a decent wage. Poverty maybe I'd been prepared for; but stories of people refusing to be cowed by poverty, and who'd successfully turned their lives around I was not.

### **It will help you re-prioritize**

With the perspective gained on a gap year spent volunteering, you just might find yourself shifting your priorities. Maybe you decided to spend the year working with Habitat for Humanity in anticipation of studying architecture; by the end of it you might realize a bigger interest in non-profit management or municipal housing policy. Maybe you thought working in a soup kitchen would make you feel good about helping the homeless, but instead it unleashed an interest in cooking and nutrition. You can't know in advance how your priorities and interests might change after you spend your gap year helping others; but there's a pretty good chance they will.

After my year in Cambodia, I had respect for the work my non-profit was doing. But, I also came away feeling that small non-profits can't achieve big change in the way that larger organizations with broader scope can. This impacts who I choose to donate to and the organizations I choose to work with now. And that's not necessarily the perspective or priority that I expected to walk away with—I'm glad for that.

Spending your gap year helping others may sound counterintuitive at first. After all, gap years are all about you and your own self-discovery. But, in serving others you can learn a lot about your own skills sets, interests, and work preferences—and you can gain perspective that otherwise you may never achieve. Helping others is one of the best ways that you can help ultimately yourself. That's why you should spend your gap year as an international volunteer, but that's just my professional opinion.



# FIGURING OUT HOW TO PAY FOR YOUR GAP YEAR

by Cecilia Polanco

**J**-Lo says love doesn't cost a thing, but a gap year could get pricey- depending on what you're looking for. The cost of your gap year depends on a few factors: where are you trying to go? For how long? With a program? Self-designed? Figuring out what kind of experience you want to have can inform how much it will cost.

When I was considering taking a gap year, I wasn't sure what a gap year was, I didn't know anyone who had taken one, and I wasn't sure what I would do on mine. But, I did know that taking or not taking a gap year solely depended on whether I could pay for it. I learned about gap years thanks to the Global Gap Year Fellowship through the "center for social justice at UNC," the Campus Y. I was applying for scholarships my senior year like it was my job when I came across this opportunity. I wasn't super sure what taking a gap year meant when I started the application, but I knew applying would make it an option. The Global Gap Year Fellowship through UNC was in its first year, so I would be part of the first group of students to be part of the program. I was definitely intrigued by the possibilities, but knew I wouldn't be going anywhere without some money.

This fellowship was a huge opportunity for me because it came with a scholarship for \$7,500 for my gap year. Knowing this information, I decided: 1) I would only take a gap year if I got the scholarship to pay for it, and 2) \$7,500 would be my budget. As a low income, first generation college student, figuring out how to pay for college was already stressful enough. I can't stress scholarships and grants enough, **the money is out there to pay for college and for opportunities to take a gap year, and it's worth a few Google searches to find them.** Luckily, I got the fellowship and the funding so it was #gaplife for me!

In addition to the scholarship, I saved up another \$1,000 working as a lifeguard before I left, and was able to raise another \$1,000+ from family and friends, which brought my monies to about \$10,000. That was my budget and it had to last until purchasing my plane ticket home: plan accordingly, y'all! Don't spend all your cash without a way to get home and save some for emergency purposes!

**"As a low income, first generation college student, figuring out how to pay for college was already stressful enough."**

I also found it useful to have some funds preloaded on my Skype, have a Paypal, carry cash, a card (preferably without foreign transaction fees), and a back up card, and I'd recommend researching international student (ISIC) cards as well. I learned about them after my gap year, but there are often perks that could be beneficial. I also had an adult (like my sister), authorized on my account so she could transfer emergency funds, and also keep an eye out that I was managing my budget well!

Additionally, it is helpful when considering a gap year and how to pay for one, to talk to an expert. Whether it's someone who works in advising for gap years, someone from a university that may provide funding for gap years, and fellow gappers themselves (like me!) can be a resource into how to go about applying for scholarships, grants, as well as saving and fundraising.

You'll want to reach out to the programs themselves, once you've got a few you're interested in, because they can provide more information about costs and if financial aid is provided for their program.

I recommend visiting the [American Gap Association's website](#) and their list of Accredited Gap Year Programs. They've done all the vetting for you! They also have some information on [financial aid for gap years](#). If you can get college credit for your gap year, it is a wise investment indeed!

**There are tons of resources for scholarships and funding (ahem FREE MONEY) through the [GoAbroad scholarships directory](#).**

[Here](#) you can also find out more about my Fellowship, which is only available to students admitted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Great reason to be a Tarheel!)

In starting your search for gap year dollars, it also helps to start with [Universities that are gap year friendly](#). You can find more program specific funding opportunities, as well as general scholarships as well. Here's an example from [Hostelling International](#), which offers 81 scholarships of \$2,000 each to travel!

Some colleges have programs built in so when you apply to the school, you can also apply for their programs. **Tufts University** has its **1+4 program** and **Princeton** has the **Bridge Year Program**, both are great examples of universities focusing on making international educational experiences affordable and accessible.

You can also hit the ground running with a fundraising campaign on [FundMyTravel](#). Instead of socks, ask grandma for a donation to your gap year funds so you can help pay your own way around the world.

My last pieces of advice are as follows:

**Start planning early!** The earlier you start, the more time you have to research scholarships and grants and find the right program and the right cost for you!

**Have some rainy day and emergency funds ready!** Whether it's some cash stored away in your backpack that's only for emergencies, or some small change in your sock, having funds available for cases of emergency is always useful!

Last, but not least...**Have fun ballin' on a budget!**

Peace, Love, and Happiness,

Cecilia



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