



PLANNING YOUR GAP YEAR



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While planning a gap year may at first seem an overwhelming and daunting task, the process can be broken down into a series of simple steps. This guide provides resources to help parents and students get started, and will show you the key five steps to plan your gap year.

While most start their planning in their Junior year of high school, we recommend a minimum of three months planning time before departure: the more time you have to plan, the better as certain processes, like vaccinations or passport/visa applications, may take several months to complete.

The Rundown

- 1) Discover Destinations and Experiences
- 2) Tackle Early Logistics
- 3) Find The Right Program
- 4) Know Your Resources
- 5) Further Preparations



STEP 1

DISCOVER DESTINATIONS & EXPERIENCES

Let the brainstorming begin! All of your gap year planning will revolve around where you intend to go. Get out your laptop and the travel guidebooks and get down to business:

- 1 **Where do you want to go?** Consider languages, communication-needs back home, potential cost, environmental attributes, etc. USA? Latin America? Europe? Asia? Africa? South Pacific? Antarctica?
- 2 **What do you want to do?** Teach? Wildlife conservation? Arts? Environmental work? Study a language or skill? Learn sustainable building techniques? Different interests will fit some locations better than others. Do your research and discover a gap year destination that aligns with your interests.

Hint: Get a pen and paper and spend 30-45 minutes on the GYA Accredited programs web page. Write down locations, themes, and activities that make you excited. This list will become the beginning of your gap year outline.

STEP 2

TACKLE EARLY LOGISTICS

Time to start getting into the nitty-gritty stuff. Tell your college, friends and family you intend to take a gap year and mark your intended departure date. Work backwards from your departure date and start blocking off your intended activities. Getting the word out and setting a time limit for yourself will help with motivation and commitment.

Start by answering the following questions:

- 1 **What needs to happen to make college a reality after your gap year?** This is an extremely important step, and one you should start tackling as soon as possible. Do you need to defer, take a leave-of-absence, or arrange for a Consortium Agreement? What deadlines and deposits need to be taken care of to secure your position in college?
- 2 **How long do you have for your gap year?** A semester? A year? Roughly 70% of gap year students are taking only a semester of program time, filling in the rest with time to work and more independent activities.
- 3 **How much structure do you need?** It almost always makes the most sense to start with structure and community (a gap year program) before having a more independent experience.

- ④ **What's your budget?** Do you need to work and save money before you leave? What expenses (airfare, food, lodging, activities, visas, travel insurance) do you need to factor in? Many gap year programs will cover at least a few of these if not all. Will you be using part of your college tuition? What scholarships and FAFSA monies are out there to help?
- ⑤ **Is it important to get college credit?** This can open the door for FAFSA and other sources of financial aid ... depending on the gap year program you choose.

Hint: Enroll the "right" experts in the process. In your searches, you'll find some holes in the information you need to know – find the right expert to fill those holes: if medical, look up the CDC website and get good insurance. If program related: look up information and peer reviews at GYA, USA Gap Year Fairs, GoOverseas.com, GoAbroad.com, and TeenLife.com. etc.

STEP 3

FIND THE RIGHT PROGRAM

You know where you want to go and what you're interested in doing. You've figured out your budget and financial plan. If you've decided to start your journey through a structured program then the next step is to seek out the program that best suits your needs, budget, and interests. First, check out our list of Accredited Gap Year Programs. Next, get to know the programs better. Some of the best questions to ask gap year organizations are:

- Who are your typical students?
- What safety structures do you have in place in case of an emergency?
- Do you have any references I can talk to?
- What's a typical day look like on your program?
- How much does it cost? Are there any extras like airfare, insurance, or activities?
- What do you suggest we do to best prepare? Are there books, movies, or articles? Check out sources like travelaccessproject.com for article, book, and movie recommendations for popular gap year destinations.
- For less-structured programs or for the do-it-yourself-er you can visit our "Unaccredited Programs Page," or start searching on teenlife.com, vergemagazine.com, transitionsabroad.com, or wiserearth.org

- Do your own research. Google the organizations and seek write-ups or reviews.
- Apply to those organizations that hold your interest and have any necessary safeguards in place and researched. Many are admitted on a rolling admissions basis, but the height of the gap year admissions takes place usually April - July for the fall semester.

Hint: There are gap year counselors who are available for a small fee to help you with the outline if you get stymied. They are frequently a lower-cost alternative stitching together independent contact. For a list of gap year counselors see here: gapyearassociation.org/gap-year-consultants.php

STEP 4

KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

The gap year industry is ever-growing and the resources available to you are numerous. For a start, visit the following webpages. Here you can find gap year inspiration, book discount flights, seek financial aid, and learn how to pack for the journey ahead.

- gapyearassociation.org/membership.php (Accredited Organizations)
- travel.state.gov/content/travel/english.html (State Department)
- statravel.com; skyscanner.com; kayak.com & yapta.com (Discount Flights)
- gapyearassociation.org/financial-aid.php (Financial Aid)
- gapyearassociation.org/blog/ (True Stories/Travel Tips)
- gooverseas.com & teenlife.com (Listings of Programs and Peer Reviews)
- For less-structured programs or for the do-it-yourself-er you can visit our "Unaccredited Programs Page," or start searching on teenlife.com, goabroad.com, vergemagazine.com, transitionsabroad.com, or wiserearth.org
- AND MORE!

Step 5 >>



STEP 5

FURTHER PREPARATIONS

You know where you're going. You've worked through planning the big steps of your trip. Your budget has been calculated and you've spoken to the university you'll be returning to. Now it's time for the final planning phase. These are the nitty gritty technical details that all travelers need to attend to before leaving the country. Make sure you've addressed them all!

- 1) For international gap years, make sure your passport is valid for 6 months AFTER the last day of travel. Some places literally will refuse you entry at the border without that extra validity.
- 2) Make arrangements for any visas and vaccinations. Some may take up to 8 weeks to complete, so be sure to make time for that. (Center of Disease Control) cdc.gov
- 3) Make a detailed packing list and don't buy everything new. Check the resources above for help, or go to the local army surplus store or good will so that you look like a seasoned traveler rather than a noob and easy mark.
- 4) Plan for communication. Will you bring a cell phone? Buy a local phone? Will you have access to email where you're located or will you have to go to a library or town?
- 5) Get a travel guidebook. We recommend either Lonely Planet, Rough Guides, or Let's Go.
- 6) Build or buy a small medical kit.
- 7) Read our tips on how to travel safely and talk about how to handle emergency situations with your parents or guardian. gapyearassociation.org/blog/
- 8) Book airfare. Do this at least a month in advance and take advantage of student-only fares.
- 9) Arrange for a Visa Debit card and a backup credit card. If traveling internationally, currently it appears that Visa is simply more accessible than the other major credit companies. Additionally, check with your bank to know the fees for using your card outside of the home area.

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- 10) Again, for international trips, make sure to register your itinerary with the State Department's Smart Travelers Enrollment Program (STEP) step.state.gov/step/
- 11) If you're traveling with a passport, it's never a bad idea to email yourself a photocopy of the front photo and signature pages in case you need to get it replaced.
- 12) Arrange for an airport pickup. Times of transition (jet lag, environmental, etc.) are when travelers are most at risk so set yourself up for success.

You should now be completely prepared to start your gap year. Run through the most important details one last time before you go, to avoid last-minute changes. Congratulations! You've successfully planned a life changing gap year.



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