

## TAKING A GAP YEAR

### What is a gap year?

A period of time, usually taken after post-16 studies and lasting fifteen months, when you are free from formal education. It is an opportunity for new experiences. Get out of your comfort zone!

### What can you do in a gap year?

We suggest that the ideal gap year should have three (or more) parts:

- raising the money yourself for whatever you want to do for the rest of the year;
- a few months in a working situation on a project of some sort;
- travel overseas (not smart hotels, but roughing it as a student).

### Some suggestions for the project:

teaching and community work overseas  
expeditions and conservation work  
childcare and childrens' camps  
business, IT & office skills courses

paid placements: engineering, finance, management  
career experience: medical, law, journalism, tourism  
sports coaching, ski courses, other outdoor pursuits  
and almost anything else that interests you

### What can you gain from a gap year?

a break from studies and examinations  
a chance to rethink your future  
you will get more out of university

independence, confidence, a sense of achievement  
skills and experiences that employers value  
fun and new friends worldwide

### What will be the approximate costs?

*Options that can pay for themselves:* industrial & commercial placements, social / caring work, working with children; work & travel programmes; European Voluntary Service.

*More expensive options:* teaching & community work overseas (price range £2,000 to £4,000), expeditions and conservation work (price range £3,000 to £5,000); skills courses, sport and outdoor pursuits (prices vary greatly).

*Independent travel after your main project:*, impossible to estimate, but need not cost more than a few hundred pounds unless you want to visit several continents..

### How can you raise the money?

Most gap year volunteers raise most of the money from paid work. Most gap year organisations offer alternative starting dates (e.g. Sept, January, April) and will advise you on fundraising. Work as you travel; grants from schools, charities, businesses, Rotary; fundraising events.

### Our advice on how to find your gap year provider:

Look for several organisations in your field of interest. Sources of information include our database of organisations offering gap year opportunities (e-mail us for a free copy); [www.gapadvice.org](http://www.gapadvice.org); [www.yearoutgroup.org](http://www.yearoutgroup.org); the internet. We suggest you do not rely *solely* on internet searches: organisations appearing on screen may have paid big money for this to happen, and may be subsidiaries of travel companies. You may be satisfied with what they offer, but there is a risk of disappointment. The cheapest price may not be best value for money; follow-up checks are essential. If the organisation does not have a UK office, there may be no come-back if things go wrong.

*Before you commit yourself to an organisation, ask them for names of recent participants, talk to them, and ask all the searching questions you can think of. Was there a selection process and pre-departure briefing? Were they met on arrival? What training was given? What work did they do? Did it benefit the community where you were working? Was there in-country support? Did they feel safe? What accommodation was provided? Did the experience come up to expectations? Were there unexpected additional costs? Was it value for money? Was there a de-briefing afterwards?*

### We are here to provide free information and advice on all aspects of taking a gap year.

Email us any time on [gapyearfairs.lockhart@virgin.net](mailto:gapyearfairs.lockhart@virgin.net).

Lawrence Lockhart, Gap Year Fairs, updated June 2014.