

Taking a Year out - What's it All About?

by Maria Dasiewicz



Whether you call it a gap year, time out or year out, it basically means taking 'time out' to do a number of possible activities at various stages in life. Usually people take a gap year pre- or during study at university or college, during a career change, and pre- or post retirement. There are probably as many reasons for taking a gap year as there are people taking one. Many people want to travel and live abroad before launching into a career, or they want to gain extra confidence and new skills. Others decide to take a year off in order to buy time to decide on their future career path, to plan major life changes, or get some valuable work experience.

It is generally a practice undertaken by those from developed countries, especially students. Some students spend the time travelling, others spend the time working, and many combine these into an international working holiday. A popular option for gap year students, also known as 'gappers', is international volunteering. In the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, a great number of the volunteers who helped in South Asia were on a gap year. Also, many gappers earn money while overseas by working cash in hand, often in the hospitality industry. Another possibility is to enrol in global education programmes that combine language study, cultural immersion, community service, and independent study.

Where it all began

The 'Gap Year' concept appeared in the decade following the Second World War when youth travel and cultural exchange was discussed amongst Governments as a useful tool to create more of a global understanding to prevent future global wars. However, the first 'Gap Years' actually began in the UK in the 1960s, when the baby-boomer generation headed off to India on the Hippy Trails, inventing the 'independent travel market'. In 1967 three students were sent on an Educational Trust to Addis Ababa, and this begun the Gap Year Volunteer Placements market. Ever since, 'independent travel' and 'volunteer placements' have been the two key elements to the gap year market. The third key element - Work & Travel - appeared with the introduction of student work visas.

The modern Gap Year pioneers - Tom Griffiths and Peter Pedrick - brought the gap year market onto the web in 1998 with the launch of *gapyear.com*. They have invented products, offerings, phrases and concepts that form the basis of the global 'Gap Year' industry seen today. Tom Griffiths, alias the Gap Year Guru, is considered to be a global authority on gap years and acts as a media spokesperson around the world. Gap Year growth is accelerating across all age groups in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

year out/gap year/time out - roczna przerwa np. w nauce
retirement - emerytura
to launch into sth - rozpocząć
to gain confidence/new skills - zdobyć pewność siebie/nowe umiejętności
career path - droga kariery
to undertake - podjąć
developed countries - kraje rozwinięte
to combine - łączyć
volunteering - wolontariat
in the wake of sth - w następstwie czegoś
while overseas - podczas pobytu za granicą
to work cash in hand - otrzymywać gotówkę do ręki za pracę
hospitality industry - przemysł hotelarski
to enrol - zapisać się
cultural immersion - zanurzenie w kulturze
community service - praca na rzecz społeczności lokalnej
to prevent - zapobiegać
to head off - wyjechać
trail - szlak
placement - znalezienie pracy
launch - wprowadzenie na rynek
authority - autorytet
spokesperson - rzecznik
to accelerate - przyspieszać
employment - zatrudnienie

How can I spend my gap year?

▪ **Paid Employment** - this option may enhance your CV and could give you a useful work taster. It may also help you to pay off debts or save up for travel. Also, it assumes you have already identified what you have to offer an employer, what you expect from a job, and that you are able to identify an area of work or sector you are interested in exploring.

▪ **Voluntary Work** - usually, this is the way in to many competitive careers like the media and working for environmental or charity organisations. It can also be an exciting way of putting something back, especially if it involves working abroad.

▪ **Travel** - independent travel can be a character building experience. It is a great way to see the world before you are tied down by studying or a job and can be great fun too.

▪ **Study** - this does not mean a full-time postgraduate course at a university, but rather short courses which could help you gain extra skills in TEFL, a foreign language or relevant vocational skills. There are plenty of opportunities in the UK and in other countries, however it is unlikely that you will get any funding for these.

▪ **Mix and Match** - usually people mix and match some or all of the above activities, working for a while to save up for travel which might be combined with overseas short term work or a part time course. It is important to focus on why you want to do it and what the potential benefits will be.

Gap year pros and cons

A properly planned gap year can be an invaluable asset on your CV, but a poorly planned gap year can harm more than your bank balance. Most employers are looking for evidence of well-spent time out and they may be unwilling to take a chance on you if they cannot see that you have spent your time wisely. Proper research and planning can save you from awkward questions and regrets later. There is a lot you can gain, whatever you do in your gap year.

⇒ **Travel** - easily the most popular of gap year activities.

+ Widens your horizons

+ Gives you experience of different cultures - quite important if you are planning to have an international career

+ Shows self-sufficiency and initiative

- Though it can be fun, it is a fairly common way to spend a gap year, so you will not get any prizes for being original. Also, you have to be careful that it does not just look like an extended holiday

⇒ **Work abroad** - whether it is teaching English or work placements in another country, working abroad can be a real asset to your applications.

+ Work experience is always a good thing and work experience abroad can be invaluable if you want to start your career overseas

+ Shows initiative

- Better if the work is related to your intended career

⇒ **Work placements** - if you do not have much work experience, a gap year may help you to acquire some.

+ You can try several careers before you settle on one

+ You can build up a wide variety of new skills and contacts

- It may look like you are unfocused on your career

- It may be expensive unless you are paid for your work

⇒ **More study** - taking a year off to boost your qualifications can address weak points in your CV.

+ Relevant short courses or vocational programmes can help you when applying for a job

- Courses rarely come free - you may have to invest some cash in your future

⇒ **Volunteering** - a good way to give something back to society in the UK or overseas.

+ Shows your ability to muck in, improvise and work hard

- You are not paid, so it is not a great way to build up some cash for uni.

Basically, a gap year is a chance to gain some experience of life. Many employers value the team-based and interpersonal skills that are developed on gap year projects. Many people who have been on gap years have a more mature outlook on life than others their age.

Not everything you do has to be tailored to your future, but you should be aware that someone may ask you why you decided to spend your gap year in a certain way. All the options have their good and bad points - the key thing is the ability to justify your decisions to colleges, universities and future employers. As long as you can do that, a gap year can be a great benefit to your future. ■

to enhance - poprawić

taster - przysmak

to pay off debts - spłacić długi

to save up - zaoszczędzić

to assume - zakładać

competitive - ambitny, zmuszający do rywalizacji

to put sth back - opóźnić

postgraduate - podyplomowy

TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) - nauczanie angielskiego jako języka obcego

relevant - istotny, odpowiedni

vocational - profesjonalny

to mix and match - połączyć różne rzeczy

to focus on sth - skupić się na

the pros and cons - za i przeciw

properly - odpowiednio

invaluable asset - nieoceniony atut

bank balance - stan konta

unwilling - niechętny

to take a chance - zaryzykować

awkward - niewygodny

regret - żal

self-sufficiency - samowystarczalność

fairly - dosyć

extended holiday - przedłużone wakacje

intended - planowany, zamierzony

to acquire - zdobyć

to settle on sth - zdecydować się na coś

to boost - zwiększyć, polepszyć

to muck in - przyłączyć się

mature outlook - dojrzały pogląd

to be tailored to sth - być dostosowanym do

http://www.springboard.hobsons.co.uk/advice/gap_year
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3530906.stm
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers/students/options/gap-year/>
<http://www.the-backpacking-site.com/gap-year.html>