

Taking a Year Out

Taking a year out can be a highly rewarding experience, and this handout is designed to offer you some guidance and useful tips if you wish to explore whether a gap year is for you.

Gap years have become more popular than ever before, with numerous projects on offer across the globe, not just for school leavers, but also for undergraduates, job changers and people who already have established careers but want to do something different.

Projects are varied and range from volunteering projects, environmental and conservation projects, working for a charity in the UK, working in a developing country, to adventure holidays offering a wide range of thrills from white water rafting in France to elephant trekking in Thailand. There are also many projects for teaching English as a foreign language.

Some schemes can be very costly - up to £3,500 depending on content, country and duration, and there are many different organisers. It is also worth noting that fees paid do not always benefit the community you may be working for directly, but rather cover the organiser's cost.

WHY TAKE A YEAR OUT?

Think about what you're hoping to gain from a gap year. Perhaps you need to earn some money to pay off your debts, or perhaps you want to take some time off from studying to travel and see a bit of the world. Some people also hope that it might help make a career decision later, although this isn't always the case. Whatever your reason, make it the basis for your planning.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Advantages include developing new skills and cultural insights, gaining maturity, having new experiences and meeting new people.

Disadvantages may include living on a tight budget, potential health risks, loneliness, being a year behind your peers in terms of starting a career and potentially missing out on graduate training schemes if unaware of the recruitment timetable.

WHAT DO EMPLOYERS THINK?

Many employers look favourably on gap years, provided that a candidate is able to show how the experience is helping him/her to be more effective in the job. Some employers, for example, are very sympathetic and often accept deferred entry

into a training scheme. However, this is not always the case, so do check with the employer prior to applying.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR TRAVELLING

- **Health** – visit your GP at least 4 months before you go, as you may need longer-term jobs; pack a medical kit including re-hydration salts
- **Flights/travel expenses** – book a return flight; consider getting a travel discount card (e.g. ISIC, VIP, Nomads)
- **Insurance** – research what you need specifically, premiums vary considerably
- **Security** – do check the political situation; take the contact details for embassies of all countries you travel through (see resources)
- **Passport/Visa** – research what is required, scan your documents into a computer and email details to yourself so that you have access to a copy if your documents get stolen, this should speed up replacement issues
- **Money** - organise power of attorney for your bank account, so that a trustworthy person of your choice has access to your account in case of emergency

JOB HUNTING TIPS

- Many graduate schemes are advertised from September onwards for the following September start, but some employers also recruit all year round. Research your chosen job sector and be aware of employers' deadlines
- Update your CV as appropriate, not only for your vacation work applications, but also to include your experiences for graduate job applications
- Keep in touch with the Careers Service. We're here to help you at any stage, and you can email any queries from anywhere in the world - careers@imperial.ac.uk. You can also book a Skype interview with a Careers Consultant

FURTHER SUPPORT

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Careers Service website:** www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/exploring-your-options/year-out
- **Bookable appointments** with Careers Consultants: book through JobsLive*
- **Reference books** - there are many reference books that you might find of interest, which are located in the



'Employment Abroad' section, Here are some examples of titles available: 'The Gap-Year Guidebook', 'Working Abroad', Jonathan Reuvid, Kogan Page; 'Jobs and Careers Abroad', Guy Hobbs.

- **General websites** - Gapwork - www.gapwork.com - provides a search facility about projects in various countries, as well as information about visas, insurance, safety issues, holiday jobs, accommodation and student reviews; Gapyear - www.gapyear.com - has a search facility about projects, including a wide range of business and finance placements, message board, blogs & journals, international gap year and placement schemes and more; Gap-Year - www.gap-year.com - a publisher of gap year guides and comprehensive online information about taking a gap year, including tips about how to stay safe and healthy, insurance, visas, hostels, travel companies, car hire and more; Real Gap - www.realgap.co.uk - is the UK's largest independent gap year travel company, sending thousands of people to hundreds of projects and programmes around the world, including volunteering, community work, conservation, teaching English, adventure travel, sports and expeditions.
- **Security & safety websites** - The Foreign Office Gap Year website for advice - www.gov.uk/gap-year-foreign-travel-advice; Travel Advice from the Foreign Office - www.fco.gov.uk/travel; Travel safety courses (for example www.objectivegapyear.com); Caroline's Rainbow Foundation - www.carolinesrainbowfoundation.org - a registered UK charity, promoting personal safety amongst young travellers, gap year students and backpackers.
- **Some organisers** - A comprehensive list is available via the general sites above, plus you can visit www.britishcouncil.org/iaeste (international placements for undergraduate scientists, engineers & architects); www.ccusa.com (working adventures); www.do-it.org.uk (for volunteering opportunities in the UK); eu.earthwatch.org (environmental programmes and expeditions); www.i-to-i.com (TEFL teaching and volunteer travel); www.raleighinternational.org (expeditions); www.ventureco-worldwide.com (adventure holidays for different age groups).
- **Other useful information** - www.greentraveller.co.uk (eco-friendly ideas for travelling to lessen impact on the environment).
- **Careers Service events** - each year we plan talks and workshops which are designed to enhance your chances of success in the application process - for details, see [JobsLive*](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive)
- For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure

* www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive

