

# Gap years for graduates

TAKING A GAP YEAR AFTER MATRICULATING BEFORE HEADING TO UNIVERSITY HAS BECOME VERY POPULAR, BUT NOW MORE AND MORE GRADUATES ARE NOW CHOOSING TO TAKE A GAP YEAR *AFTER* STUDYING, BEFORE PLUNGING INTO THE CAREER MARKETPLACE OR EMBARKING ON A POST-GRADUATE DEGREE.

For those who opted to start varsity the year after finishing high school, a gap year after graduating means a break from years of studying and writing exams. Some see it as a chance to travel the world, others to take an extended holiday. Whatever the case, taking a gap year can profoundly influence your life and career, so make sure you research all possible options before making a decision.

## GAP YEAR OPTIONS

### Travel

If you're longing for an adventure, backpacking through Eastern Europe, Mexico or any other far-flung area is an option to consider. Although it won't add to your academic qualifications, it will provide ample character-building opportunities and expose you to new cultures and experiences. The drawback, of course, is that you will need to have a hefty sum of money stored up and you'll have to be prepared to live on a shoestring budget. Many people look for casual work, such as bartending and waiting tables, to replenish their funds as they travel.

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### Paid employment

This option allows you to travel the world and earn money at the same time. There are a variety of jobs available, although some of the most popular jobs include working as a counsellor at an American summer camp, becoming an au pair, working on a cruise ship or at a ski resort, or teaching English to foreign students. If you choose your job wisely it can enhance your CV and even help you to pay off student loans, save money for travel or pay for a further university degree.

### Voluntary work

This may not be the easiest way to spend your gap year, but it is certainly very rewarding. From conservation to humanitarian work, there are hundreds of places you can lend a hand and make a

difference. Bear in mind though that there will be no remuneration, so you will not have the chance to save money.

### Professional internships

This is the perfect option for a graduate or post-graduate student wanting to get hands-on experience and practical training while still having the chance to explore a new country and culture. This will broaden your skills base and add to your CV, giving you an edge over peers.

## GAPPING IN SA

If you're keen to take a gap year but can't afford to travel overseas or would rather not risk catching Delhi Belly while backpacking through India, here are a few local options:

- Gap Year South Africa offers a range of options where you can get involved in sports coaching, teaching, environmental awareness or HIV/Aids and health awareness. For more information visit [www.gapyearsouthafrica.com](http://www.gapyearsouthafrica.com).
- Spirit of Adventure in Magaliesburg started a gap year programme in 2005, catering mainly for matriculants. This is a great option if you want the chance to do lots of outdoor adventure activities and enjoy working as an instructor with young people. Visit [www.spiritofadventure.blogspot.com](http://www.spiritofadventure.blogspot.com) for more info.
- Work & Travel SA offers hospitality and tourism gap year placements in South Africa and caters for people between the ages of 18 and 35. Meet foreigners through the programme and choose from working in the winelands, Whale Coast, or Cape Town Seaboard at a variety of lodges and guesthouses. For more info, visit [www.gapwork.co.za](http://www.gapwork.co.za)
- Bundu Adventures offers young, energetic and adventurous young people the chance to work with nature and game on a Zululand Rhino Reserve. For details, go to [www.bunduadventures.co.za](http://www.bunduadventures.co.za)
- Offbeat Safaris is an artistic bush camp that also provides gap year volunteers accommodation. This rustic camp is a great option for nature- and art-lovers. Further information available at [www.offbeatsafaris.co.za](http://www.offbeatsafaris.co.za).
- Ons Plek in Cape Town is a shelter for young girls that offers a variety of options for volunteer work, especially for those studying or having studied child care work, social work, education, occupational therapy, psychology or recreational studies. Visit [www.onsplek.org.za](http://www.onsplek.org.za), for details.

### Pick 'n mix

Perhaps you'd prefer to mix and match some of the above options – work overseas for six months to save money and then head off for three months of backpacking and another three months of volunteering. Whatever you decide, be sure to plan ahead so that your gap year is both enjoyable and beneficial.

## USEFUL INFO

### Websites:

- [www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com)
- [www.firststep.co.za](http://www.firststep.co.za)
- [www.ccsusa.com](http://www.ccsusa.com)
- [www.worldwidevolunteering.org.uk](http://www.worldwidevolunteering.org.uk)
- [www.nextstepsa.co.za](http://www.nextstepsa.co.za)

### Books:

- The Gap Year Book* published by Lonely Planet
- The Virgin Traveller's Handbook* by Tom Griffiths
- Take the Gap* by Nicole Canning and Greg Eden (for those looking to gap in the UK).

### Pros

- You meet new people, experience different cultures and learn new languages
- Taking a gap year after varsity gives you the chance to take a break from studying before you start to work or do a postgrad degree, and the time to decide what sort of job you'd like
- You'll learn new skills and grow in responsibility, maturity and confidence
- If you choose to do paid work during your gap year, you will have the opportunity to earn and save money
- If you're planning on returning to university after your gap year to do a post-grad degree, you'll do so relaxed, invigorated and ready to work hard again.

### Cons

- Your study skills and knowledge may become rusty and you'll need to brush up on them afterwards
- A badly planned gap year can end up being not just a waste of time, but leaving you in debt
- You may find it difficult to return to academic life after a year's break
- You may become confused as to which career path you'd like to follow
- A gap year may be seen by prospective employers as an extended holiday.

