

5b- Introducing Gap Year

Student A: Adventures

A gap year was once thought of as being undertaken because something somewhere had gone wrong on the route from school through to higher education and on to the start of a career.

But now, a gap year is positively encouraged by universities, and employers look favourably on any worthwhile experiences picked up while away from home because of skills gained, such as independent learning, problem solving without a support network, self-sufficiency and internationalism.

Gap years are usually taken before heading off to university, but they can be taken at different times, for instance to break up your degree course or even before taking up a postgraduate course.

It is thought that every year about 100,000 British 18-year-olds delay starting higher education in this way. That's roughly one in eight of school-leavers each year.

Australia is the most popular destination for British students, with bungee jumping and walking the Sydney Harbour Bridge top of their list of things to do. Other popular destinations include Peru, Thailand and India.

1- Read the text and make notes of the main points

2- Discuss with your partner and take some notes about what seemed the most interesting according to you.

3- Plan your perfect Gap year: next year you don't have to go to school – you're going to take a gap year with your friend instead. Decide on where you're going to go and what you're going to do. Raise the different issues you will be confronted to and explain what you're going to do overcome them.

Student B: Gap year maintenance

Most students heading for a gap year take up a part-time job to save up for the trip. Even once they get to their destination, they'll work to earn their keep; popular jobs include bar work, fruit-picking and being a tour guide.

Of course, the gap year doesn't have to be a full year travelling. Students will often travel for three or six months because of lack of money.

Reflecting the increase in popularity of the gap year and the need to keep costs down, travel companies now offer structured gap packages where your entire trip is worked out for you. There are three main categories of a structured gap-year activity:

- expeditions, often with a conservation element and usually to developing countries
- courses to learn a skill such as a language or something that they can later teach others to do, for example windsurfing
- voluntary work, usually, but not always, outside the UK.

Sarah Boehm, 19, who went on to study medicine at Manchester University, taught English in India and found the experience wonderful.

We were allowed enormous flexibility in teaching the children – from general discussions on pollution and politics with the older students to games like I Spy and lots of English songs with the younger ones. It has given me a sense of self-reliance that I can survive without everything at home. It's been an unforgettable experience.

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