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# Africa & Asia Venture (AV)



## The AV Gap Year Guide



*"The best source of knowledge is experience"*



*"The world is a book and those who don't travel only read one page"*



# Where to start...

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## Welcome to the 'AV Gap Year Guide'!

Packed with information on the benefits a year out can bring and how to make the most out of it, written by gappers for gappers.

I've taken what I learnt from my year out and the ways it has helped me over the last 11 years, added the 23 years experience of AV, the gap volunteer organisation, plus top tips from some recently returned volunteers to help give you an insight into the world of gap years.

If you have further questions after reading this guide then we're here to help so get in touch...

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Remember...a gap year isn't just another holiday, it's an experience for life. Everyone will come back from travelling with pictures of sunsets and beaches, make sure you do something else too.

Good luck and have fun!

  
Anna  
Africa & Asia Venture  
Volunteer Kenya 2005





# The Benefits

- Challenge yourself and widen your horizons
- A refreshing break from education
- It could be a chance to earn some money before university / college, or have a break before going into work
- Develop skills and gain valuable work experience for your CV/Resume
- A Gap Year may not be the right option for everyone, so think about what's best for you

**A gap year is a chance to do something different:** whether you choose to work all year or spend part of the time abroad, it is a chance to stand on your own two feet. Develop skills, take responsibility for yourself and gain valuable life experience whilst meeting new people, giving something back and discovering new limits...



**But remember** it's a year out not a year off. A gap year is an opportunity not to be wasted, a well planned year out can have huge rewards in future years as well as being fun!

"A structured gap year can set you up for the next 30 or 40 years of your career"

Richard Reed, Co-Founder Innocent Smoothies



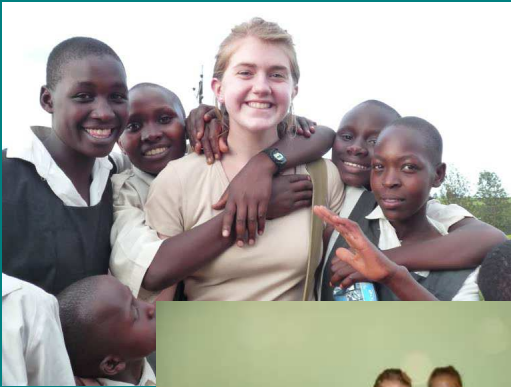
## Make it count...

The backpacker trail has become a well trodden and expensive path to follow. If you want to make your year out count, you need to go the extra mile and do something more than just travel. It's not an excuse to sit at home and watch TV or prop up the local bar. These days moving from beach to beach, clocking up the airmiles and passport stamps, won't cut it either.



*"Some things in life cannot be taught, only experienced"*

# Case Study 1



**“The more  
thought and planning  
you put into something,  
the more you will get  
back  
from it”**

## Top Tips: Katie shares some of her knowledge after taking a gap year in Kenya

“Taking a gap year was the best decision I ever made.... It’s a big decision to take, especially if your friends are putting you off, or your parents aren’t very keen. A gap year isn’t for everyone, and it *definitely* isn’t an excuse to sit on your sofa, watch Jeremy Kyle, and live off the bank of Mum and Dad.

It definitely made me more confident in myself, and made me realise that it’s okay to sometimes be out of your comfort zone, and to push yourself. I think it’s helped my communication skills, too, and I feel like I have gained independence.



It has opened my eyes to different cultures and customs. I would advise you to think long and hard about what it is you want to achieve on your gap year...whether you want to visit a particular place, whether you want to learn a new skill or language, or whether you want to give back to the community. The more thought and planning you put into something, the more you will get back from it. The opportunities are endless. If the main thing holding you back is money then I would say just go for it! There are so many jobs you can do to earn money over the first half of your gap year, and fundraising can be really fun. As long as you’re enthusiastic and willing to have short term pain, for long term gain, you have absolutely nothing to worry about.

Being a first year uni student, it is very obvious who has and who hasn’t taken a gap year. People who took a gap year tend to be more approachable, less home-sick, more independent and generally really fun people to be around. A gap year gives you an instant topic to talk about with people when you start uni – people who haven’t taken one want to hear all about it, and people who have taken one want to swap stories!”

**“Do it. It’ll be the best thing you ever do!”**



# Fundraising

- The cost of your gap year depends on what you decide to do
- With a bit of hard work and budgeting you can earn more than you might think
- Be realistic about how much money you need to raise and don't panic. It has been done before so you can do it too!
- Be disciplined about saving the money you earn
- Make sure you think through all the potential costs e.g. kit, jabs, flights and insurance



## Where to begin?

Whatever you decide to do in your gap year, work will be a part of it. Whether it's to gain experience in a particular career or raise funds for time abroad

- ⇒ Check local papers for job vacancies
- ⇒ Write to local businesses
- ⇒ Look at online job websites
- ⇒ Think about extra jobs you can do e.g. baby-sitting or gardening



## Why raise the money yourself?

- ⇒ Showing you've earned the money to fund your gap year stands out better on your CV/resume and you'll appreciate the experience more!
- ⇒ Your job will give you valuable work experience, even if it's not linked to your future career - it's about getting experience in the working environment
- ⇒ It won't always be fun but sticking it out shows commitment and will be worth it!

## Fundraising Ideas

- ⇒ For those doing charity work or volunteering you may be eligible for a number of grants or bursaries
- ⇒ You can also raise the money in lots of other ways e.g.
  - Run a marathon, do a parachute jump or a fire walk
  - Hold a cake sale or auction of promises
  - Organise a party or concert
  - 'Restaurant in your living room' (Invite your friends round for supper but charge them for the meal!)



# Case Study 2

- Don't panic if you don't get your grades or first choice university / college place
- Think carefully about all your options before rushing into a decision
- A gap year can help give you time to re-asses your options and re-apply if you decide to

"I realised there is so much more to life than going to university and getting a job, there's just so much to do and see!"

## Don't panic: Becky didn't plan to take a gap year, but after Volunteering in Uganda for 4 months with AV she's glad she did....

"I hadn't originally planned to take a gap year, in fact I was almost dead set against the idea of taking one as I was keen to get stuck into university life. Unfortunately when my A-level grades came out in the August I was six marks short of the grades I needed to take up my offer of medicine at Cardiff University. I found no courses I liked in the UCAS clearing and so had no other option but to take a year out before I started university, much to my dismay at the time."

**What were your biggest worries regarding your gap year?**

Not being able to raise enough money in such a short space of time but it was fine.

**So how did you fund your year out?**

I worked for the first six months at my local Council, used some of my savings and also applied to the Council for grants and bursaries available to youth and also those volunteering abroad. This way I managed to raise about £1500 in grants alone.

**What did you get out of your gap year?**

My gap year was a real adventure... I was able to do and see so many exciting things that I wouldn't have otherwise been able to. I chose to go with AV to Uganda for 4 months because they allowed me



To volunteer, travel and go with a group of people my age. I enjoyed the challenge of teaching, and being thrown in the deep end in difficult situations. It also taught me to how to look after myself i.e. organising travel plans, washing and learning how to budget etc, as well as making great friends. I got the chance to abseil down a waterfall, climb Kilimanjaro, ride a camel, go kayaking and white water rafting on the Nile, swim with turtles and go snorkeling in Zanzibar, and much more. I think I realised how much more there is to life than going to university and getting a job; there's just so much to do and see!

**How do you think your gap year will help you going forward?**

The experience of Africa gives me a good standing in interviews and and on my CV. It is an exciting thing to be able to talk about, something which very few others will have. It shows that I am able to cope with difficult and new situations and is an experience which really jumps off the page. I like to think of it as a more unconventional form of work experience.

**What would you say now to anyone thinking of taking a gap year if they didn't get their grades / place at university or college?** Go for it!!! University can wait; taking a gap year is an exciting opportunity that should be seized with both hands



# Increasing Your Employability

- Experiences from a constructive year out are a great way to demonstrate your potential to future employers
- Demonstrate that you have initiative, can solve a problem and have taken on responsibility
- Employers are looking for more than your academic qualifications



## Going to university and think it's too early to worry about your employability? Think again!

In the current climate you've got to think one step ahead. Planning a structured gap year now can make a big difference when you start job hunting. It can also give you time to decide what it is you really want to do.

## Going straight into work or applying for an apprenticeship?

Think about taking a break before you begin, there are many years of work ahead and you may not get this length of time again. It will also add valuable experience to your CV/resume.

## How can a gap year help??

As the job market becomes increasingly tough, a gap year provides the perfect opportunity to gain experience which demonstrate key skills to future employers e.g.

- ⇒ Initiative
- ⇒ Coping with adversity
- ⇒ Team work
- ⇒ Responsibility
- ⇒ Time management
- ⇒ Commitment

**Use your gap year experiences** to illustrate your abilities, character and skills in application forms or interviews. If you've done something different you stand out a mile and talking about your amazing experiences will show future employers passion and enthusiasm!

If you were asked the question ...

"Tell us about a time when you had to overcome a challenge and what you did"

How would you answer?

Would your response set you apart?



## One AV volunteer's answer??

"Teaching 100 kids PE in Kenya with only 1 football was a huge challenge and I had to think on my feet. I split the group up and had to think of games with no equipment eg. Tag and British Bulldog. It was great fun and showed me there are ways and means to achieve everything."

# SAFETY

- Plan your gap year well and anticipate any dangers
- Be prepared - keep up to date with current travel advice
- Get the right insurance
- Visit your doctor or travel nurse for health advice
- Don't travel alone if you can help it
- Ensure someone knows your plans
- Remember - just because you're on your gap year doesn't make you invincible



## Top Tips...

- ⇒ Take photocopies of your passport, visas and medical certificates with you. Leave copies at home
- ⇒ Make sure your passport has a minimum of 6 months validity after your intended return date
- ⇒ Be aware of your surroundings. Customs and traditions vary in different cultures and you should be sensitive to these - if you draw attention to yourself you may be asking for trouble



## Insurance

- ⇒ Make sure you have adequate travel insurance that covers EVERYTHING you might do...**you can't take out insurance after you've left your home country**
- ⇒ Check the small print e.g. policies often cover Grade 4 white water rafting but not Grade 5
- ⇒ Beware... policies may be invalid if you have an accident under the influence of drugs or alcohol



## Medical Matters

- ⇒ Make sure you get all the correct travel inoculations
- ⇒ Some may require a course of injections over a period of time e.g. 3 months so **do not leave them until the last minute**



Keep up to date with travel advice online to make sure your next destination is safe to move on to

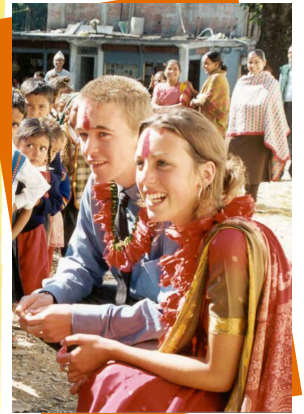


# The Options (1)

- The important thing is to do your research and plan it well
- Be prepared to show responsibility and commitment - dropping out of a placement can be damaging and disruptive, not just for you!
- Don't be afraid of doing something different

## Volunteering

- ✓ Use your talents and education to help others
- ✓ Opportunity to live and work in a new culture and get a real insight into life rather than being a tourist
- ✓ Perfect way to find your feet before a period of travelling - adds the extra wow factor to your CV/resume that backpacking alone lacks
- ✓ Recognised by employers and some universities (including Harvard!) as a constructive year out and is a great talking point in interviews
- ✗ Beware - there are a huge number of organisations now offering volunteering opportunities. Do your research to make sure they are genuine and talk to people who have travelled with them before.
- A few of the options available
  - work in a school as a teaching assistant
  - coach sport
  - teach art, drama or music
  - assist with wildlife conservation and environmental studies



The difference between a traveller and a volunteer is a world of understanding





# Case Study 3



“ In avoiding the well-worn backpacker pathway, I had the most hilarious, exciting, interesting, worthwhile, FUN three months of my life”

## Get off the beaten track: Sally found the best things to see and do aren't always those listed in the guide book...

“Despite all my family's attempts to dissuade me from working in East Africa I followed my instincts, which I will always do from now on, because, in avoiding the well-worn backpacker pathway, I had the most hilarious, exciting, interesting, worthwhile, FUN three months of my life. Volunteering at the Lessos Education Centre I taught hockey, English, PE and creative arts and if I could, I'd do it all again without changing one thing.

Yes, I'm sure the majority of 'Gappers' would say the same of their Gap Year and they'd be telling the truth. However, teaching wasn't the only thing I did during my Gap Year; I climbed Mt. Kenya, travelled up the Kenyan coast, went on safari, spent a week of luxury in Tanzania and a week in paradise aka Zanzibar, and did all this with a bunch of absolutely amazing people; before this I travelled around Germany, compiled a research project there and worked as an au pair. Yet, with all these means of travel tried and tested, teaching still wins hands down...and AV aren't paying me commission for saying it! What placed my AV experience above everything else I did on my gap year, was becoming an accepted 'local' in a small, rural, African village.

You meet a lot of cool people whilst travelling, but the downside is that travelling is travelling and so sooner, rather than later, you move on and these cool people are lost. Just as you start to talk about something other than how long you've been away and plan to stay, where you've been to and where you're going next, so you continue on your way, ticking each trip off your list of '100 things to see and do before you die'. You think they're guaranteed to impress because they have done so to so many others, right? Whilst I was in Kenya I explored some of the amazing surroundings of the Great Rift Valley, the Menengai Crater, Thompsons Falls. These and the dozens of other ways in which we occupied ourselves in our spare time were experiences we came across because we lived there and became better acquainted with the country and its people. They were amazing but aren't part of this 'official' guide book list. They're worthy of being in the top ten 'things to see and do before you die', but they're not because nobody knows about them except the locals...that's why they're so special!”





# Case Study 4



**"The small village of Pakang in the foothills of the Himalayas I now view as a second home and the people cared for me as if I was one of the family. My only regret was not being able to stay longer"**

## Immerse yourself: Alastair found you get so much more out of volunteering than just travelling as a tourist...

"When I decided to sign up to spend three months teaching in a remote community living in the foothills of the Himalayas, I had no idea what I had let myself in for. I was given lots of information, talked to people who had been there and watched films about India, but nothing can prepare you for the experience itself. From the moment we left Kolkata airport we were surrounded by scores of beggars and a feeling of absolute helplessness as to what could be done about it. The scale of poverty in India was impossible to comprehend from my sheltered Western perspective, but through teaching we could at least make some difference, however small, to the lives of those less fortunate.

Living and eating with a Lepcha family gave me the best insight into the culture and life of the Lepchas. Staying there for three months meant that I could truly immerse myself in the culture, seeing how they worked in the fields, planting and cultivating ginger and cardamom, helped by the children who had several hours work before and after school. I also ate with the family in their delightful kitchen, on little stools crowded round the clay oven. The food was delicious and I would never have guessed that after eating rice once or twice a day for three months it would still taste so good! The whole experience was set to the backdrop of stunning scenery with the houses nestled into the terraced hills. When the mist cleared you could look one way and see the plains, hundreds of miles away, stretching out into the horizon and the other way, the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. The small village of Pakang in the foothills of the Himalayas I now view as a second home and the people cared for me as if I were one of the family. My only regret was not being able to stay longer.

Gap years have received some bad press in recent years, with the view that these projects do not make a positive difference to the communities. But I could see firsthand the difference that these projects can make. The money has helped build classrooms, fix roofs and buy teaching materials. The work done has helped to build bridges and improve water supplies. Most importantly the teaching has helped the children with their English, confidence and shown some children that they should not be too scared to make mistakes. For the gap year students the difference can be even greater, giving an insight into a different culture. A direct recognition that many people are far poorer in monetary terms and yet still live a rich life with a smile, a sense of humour, a wonderful community spirit and enormous generosity and kindness."



# The Options (2)

## Top Tips:

- ➔ Talk to people who have taken a year out and find out what they did
- ➔ Things to think about...
  - how long you want to be away for
  - where you want to go
  - what it is you want to achieve from your year out

## Ski Season e.g. Working in a chalet, hotel, bar or as an instructor

- ✓ The constructive value of a ski season depends on the job you choose to do
- ✓ Go the extra mile and get a qualification e.g. Ski instructor or cooking
- ✓ Working as a chalet host can develop time management and organisational skills whilst instructing demonstrates leadership and responsibility
- ✓ Think about doing something to help others when you return e.g. a volunteer project
- ✗ It's not all ski, ski, ski...don't underestimate how much work you will be expected to do
- ✗ Ski instructor courses can be very expensive
- ✗ Don't expect to come back from a season having saved a lot of money – ski resorts aren't cheap and you're likely to spend what you earn + more



## Backpacking e.g. Round the world ticket or inter-railing

- ✓ Get to lots of new places
- ✓ Meet lots of new people
- ✓ Independence – freedom to move around as you wish and go for as long as you like
- ✗ Not considered to be a 'constructive' year out
- ✗ Backpacking alone is no longer enough, combine it with something meaningful (e.g. volunteering)
- ✗ Can mount up to be expensive as it's becoming a well trodden path and the resorts are expecting you, along with thousands of others
- ✗ Try and get off the beaten track or else you're very much a tourist





# The Options (3)

## FAQs:

- ➔ When to start planning?  
*As soon as possible! A number of organisations will still have spaces so don't panic, but to guarantee the gap year you want, get organised!*
- ➔ Is it too late to raise the funds if I only decide on a gap year in August?  
*No! Work hard, save hard, plan carefully and it can be done*

- Work Experience** e.g. Year in Industry or an internship
- ✓ This is more than just working in your local bar, it's about exploring a particular career
  - ✓ A chance to gain relevant work experience
  - ✓ An insight into what a particular job is really like and if it's for you
  - ✓ Possibility of working at home or abroad
  - ✓ Looks great on your CV/resume
  - ✗ Many people do start to get itchy feet towards the end of placements, try and add a period of travel or volunteering in too



## A few other options because we just can't cover them all!

- Go on an expedition
- Study abroad e.g. art history course
- Take a secretarial course to add to your qualifications
- Do a cooking course
- Get your sailing instructor's qualification and do a season
- Work abroad and learn a new language
- Help on summer camps

And the list could go on...take a look at the Year Out Group website ([www.yearoutgroup.org](http://www.yearoutgroup.org)) for more ideas. Just make sure you do something worthwhile at some point in your year!



LONDON 18958 km

HOBART 1680 km

SYDNEY 2000 km

WELLINGTON 784 km

RUAPUKE ISLAND 21 km

KAHAKA 632 km

KAHAKA 632 km

KAHAKA 632 km

# A little more About AV...

- ♦ Founded in 1993, over 5,000 volunteers = 1,200 man years of service to developing countries
- ♦ Specialise in full-immersion community programs in the developing world
- ♦ 5 to 16 week volunteer placements in Africa and Asia
- ♦ All projects combine volunteer work with optional time for travel and adventure
- ♦ Includes in country orientation course and 24 hour support
- ♦ Founder member of the Year Out Group
- ♦ Charitable arm The AV Foundation - <http://www.aventure.co.uk/av-foundation/>

For more information please visit  
[www.aventure.co.uk](http://www.aventure.co.uk)

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AV had the perfect balance of support and trust. It was my own experience, but I had that invisible safety net at all times

Rachel Bell



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