

WHERE THERE BE DRAGONS



GAP YEAR GUIDE

PART II

RESOURCES TO PLAN YOUR GAP YEAR

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After college applications the decision to plan a Gap Year might feel daunting but we're here to help it feel fun and inspiring since **this year is all about you.**

This guide is designed to help you finalize your decision about where you want to go, what you want to do, and how to plan your Gap Year. Inside, we'll cover:

- Gap Year Timeline
- How to Take a Gap Year
- Interactive Planning Activities - Goal Setting
- Interactive Planning Activities - Ad Lib
- Interactive Planning Activities
- Considering Dragons For Your Program?
- Personalized Support Abroad
- Financial Aid & Funding Your Gap Year Experience

While you can always apply on your own timeline, but **here is a timeline** of what a lot of students follow when they're planning their year.

GAP YEAR TIMELINE



JUNE, JULY, AUGUST

.....

Many Gap Year Students finish up high school, graduate, and work during the summer to save money or plan for their Gap Year.



SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER

.....

Students often decide to do something more structured and supported or a group based program so they can gain skills and independence while having in-person resources.



JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL, MAY

.....

Students may return home from a group or planned experience and use these newly developed skills to do something more independent like solo travel, intern, or volunteer.



JUNE, JULY, AUGUST

.....

Students prepare for whatever is next in their journey whether that be college, more travel, working, or something else, they will take their experiences and apply them.

Need help? Reach out to us anytime during your process. The Dragons team is here to chat through all of your questions, no matter how big or small.

HOW TO TAKE A GAP YEAR

The best way to ensure you have the ultimate Gap Year is to take a step back and consider all your options. Here are six basic steps to go through in the early stages of planning.

1 CONSIDER THIS AN INVESTMENT IN YOURSELF

Investing in a Gap Year allows you to start college with greater focus and a stronger idea of what you want to achieve. This can help you connect your studies to potential career paths. Studies have found that students who take a Gap Year typically graduate in four years compared to the five year average, with higher GPAs than their peers, and 84% of students reported being satisfied with their careers. We have never met anyone who regretted taking a Gap Year!*

2 UNDERSTAND YOUR BUDGET

Depending on what you do, a Gap Year can be a significant investment but is well worth the time, energy, and resources. Gap Years can look different for students and vary in costs. There's a way to make it possible, no matter your financial situation. Discuss a budget with your family, start researching grants and financial aid, and think about getting a job now to save up in advance.

3 CONSIDER APPLYING TO COLLEGE

Leave the college stress behind by applying before you take your Gap Year, allowing you to be more present in whatever you do. 98% of colleges will grant a deferral if presented with intentional Gap Year plans. Especially if you choose to travel, it can be difficult to manage college applications while on the move.

4 PLAN AHEAD WITH CLEAR GOALS

There will still be room for spontaneity and the unknown, but planning your goals in advance will help you make the most of your time. Ask yourself questions like, "What do I want to learn? How do I want to be challenged? What do I want to experience?" Let yourself dream...this is the fun part! (See Goal Setting Activity on page 4)

5 GO ALONE OR WITH A GROUP?

Consider both. It's often recommended that students start with something more structured in the fall followed by a more independent experience in the spring. Experiencing group dynamics, learning independent travel skills, and being in a supportive environment that helps you most of your time can a great launching point for future solo travels. (See timeline activity on page 5)

6 DO YOUR RESEARCH

Create a list of guiding questions to help you compare and contrast different options. You might want to consider looking at things such as international vs. domestic travel, independent vs. group-oriented programs, focus on mentorship, etc.



INTERACTIVE PLANNING ACTIVITIES

Planning ahead and setting goals will help you make the most of your Gap Year and connect your time to your future studies, career, and life path. Here are some activities to get inspired and excited!

GOAL SETTING VISIONING ACTIVITY

STEP ONE

Choose a period of time in the future (e.g., next year, or the last day of your Gap Year, or even 5 years from today) and think about the things you want to accomplish by that date. Visualize yourself standing in that future moment of time looking back at the weeks, months, or years behind you.

STEP TWO

Starting with the journal prompt of “My Gap Year was the best experience of my life because...”, write about your “past” goals and accomplishments and how you reached them from the perspective of your future self.

STEP THREE

Write down the things you have accomplished in the past tense as though you’ve already achieved them. Make sure to include the steps that you need to take in order to reach your aspirations. It has been shown that looking backward at your imagined successes can help turn them into reality.

★ BONUS

Ask yourself “why” you want to achieve your goals. You may find patterns in what is motivating you and opportunities to adjust your motivation to be more true to yourself.

💡 TIP

These are your goals! They can be as simple or detailed as you want them to be. Don’t put too much pressure on yourself. Your goals can always change and evolve.



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One of the things I have realized from my time in Nepal is how much I enjoy living at the edges of what I know. Every day I constantly find myself in situations where it’s just me against a challenge, and it’s when I can feel confident in those situations and overcome them- that I feel the happiest.”

-EMILY, PAST DRAGONS STUDENT



AVERAGE PERFECT DAY + BEST DAY EVER (AD LIB)

Action-packed experiences are easy to get excited about and plan for. It can be more difficult to be in charge of your own schedule every day. Start preparing by journaling about your “perfect average day”. Try to envision a day that will never bore you. What’s the perfect time to wake up? What do you do next? What do you eat? What and who do you see?

Not every day of your Gap Year is going to be the best day ever, and some experiences won’t feel impactful until you look back at them. You may not be able to plan for every detail but you can plan how you want to feel.

For the second part of this exercise, journal about your “best day ever” from the perspective of your emotions. Leave out the details and activities. Instead, say:

I woke up and felt _____.

In the morning I felt _____.

In the afternoon I felt _____.

In the evening I felt _____.

At the end of the day, I felt _____.

TIMELINE ACTIVITY

Fill out the following timeline with ideas for Gap Year activities/programs and associate them with the goals you hope to achieve during that time.

JUNE-AUGUST	SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER
<p>ACTIVITY: Ex. Bike Tour</p> <p>GOALS: Ex. To gain outdoor skills, to be physically challenged, to have fun and expand my idea of what I can achieve.</p>	<p>ACTIVITY: Ex. Internship</p> <p>GOALS: Ex. To get hands-on experience in my field of interest and have something to put on my resume.</p>
DECEMBER	JANUARY-MARCH
<p>ACTIVITY: Ex. Home for the Holidays</p> <p>GOALS: Ex. To re-set and catch up with family and friends who are also home for the holidays. To prepare for my future adventures.</p>	<p>ACTIVITY: Ex. Structured Travel</p> <p>GOALS: Ex. To learn how to travel responsibly in a group of like-minded peers and mentors. To acquire skills I can use when I travel solo.</p>
APRIL-JUNE	JULY-SEPTEMBER
<p>ACTIVITY: Ex. Solo Travel</p> <p>GOALS: Ex. To see more of the world and build a global community through meaningful cross-cultural engagement.</p>	<p>ACTIVITY: Ex. Personal Reflection</p> <p>GOALS: Ex. Take time to reflect on my Gap Year, learn how to share my experience with my loved ones/translate it into something for my resume/professional goals.</p>

CONSIDERING DRAGONS FOR YOUR GAP PROGRAM?

Immersive & empowering travel experiences. There are many different options out there for your Gap Year, but since you're here, we hope you're considering Dragons. With us, you'll have the opportunity to venture to incredible countries and genuinely connect with people and places. You will gain skills to be a responsible traveler rather than a tourist, engaging with different realities and perspectives while opening yourself to new ways of being in the world. Our programs offer big and challenging experiences where you will be supported every step of the way.

WHEN & HOW LONG DO YOU WANT TO GO?

Summer	Fall	Spring	10-day	2-week	3-week	TIP: Check any options that appeal to you! You can always design your Gap Year to accommodate your dreams.
4-week	5-week	6-week	3-month	Other		

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO TRAVEL?

<p>ASIA</p> <p>Bhutan Japan Cambodia Lao China Nepal India Taiwan Indonesia Thailand</p>	<p>AFRICA</p> <p>Morocco Senegal</p> <p>EUROPE</p> <p>Spain</p>	<p>LATIN AMERICA</p> <p>Bolivia Guatemala Mexico Peru</p> <p>_____ Add your own!</p>
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WHAT DO YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON?

What are your interests and skills that you want to develop? Each Dragons program focuses on 3-4 components. Rank the following Dragons [program components](#) from 1-8 by level of importance to you.

 HOMESTAYS	 LANGUAGE STUDY	 RUGGED TRAVEL	 LEARNING SERVICE
 INDEPENDENT STUDY PROJECTS	 COMPARATIVE RELIGION	 TREKKING	 SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

PERSONALIZED SUPPORT ABROAD

Consider the level of support you envision for a successful Gap Year. Would you prefer to go alone or with a group? Dragons instructors are the pillars of our programs and genuinely care. With the industry's best instructor to student ratio (4:1), each student receives the one-on-one **meaningful mentorship** and **support** to develop skills for their future. With an average of 4+ years living abroad and local language fluency, our **instructors help students immediately feel at home and safe** in new environments.

"I learned the most from my instructors who inspired me to carve my own path in life and to be confident in my strengths. I gained invaluable lessons for my future."

- RACHEL, PAST DRAGONS STUDENT

MEET SOME OF OUR INSTRUCTORS



SHANTI, NEPAL COUNTRY COORDINATOR & INSTRUCTOR

Shanti began working as a Dragons instructor in 2017. While working with Dragons she has attained her Wilderness First Responder certification and her undergraduate education. Shanti has cultivated deep, strong relationships with the many people in the Dragons community in Nepal, and is currently using these relationships, along with her extensive instructor experience, to serve as Country Coordinator for all Dragons programs in Nepal.



TOUSSA, SENEGAL INSTRUCTOR

Toussa, also known as Astou Gueye, was born and raised in Dakar, Senegal. An activist, feminist, artist, entrepreneur, and farmer, she developed an interest in hip-hop at thirteen, writing her first lyrics as social commentary on her community. Her texts, primarily in Wolof, explore themes of work, dreams, migration, slavery, the challenges of being a woman, strength, and visions for the future. Through her music, she addresses pressing social issues while inspiring change and resilience.



JUAN DIEGO, PERU COUNTRY COORDINATOR & INSTRUCTOR

Born in Lima, Peru, Juan Diego always sought to escape the city to explore nature, inspiring him to study environmental engineering. After completing his degree, he pursued a Master's in Environmental Science to expand his horizons. Living in Europe opened up travel opportunities, allowing him to experience diverse cultures. He volunteered with an NGO in Cambodia, worked in an eco-village in Costa Rica, and later collaborated with indigenous communities in the Peruvian and Bolivian Andes, shaping his open-mindedness and curiosity.



SEAVYI YONN, CAMBODIA COUNTRY COORDINATOR & INSTRUCTOR

Seavyi hails from Battambang, a city renowned for its art and culture in western Cambodia. Described as easygoing, curious, funny, and welcoming, he worked with NGOs before entering tourism. Passionate about the complexities of foreign aid in development, a significant topic in contemporary Cambodian history, he aims to support personal growth and positive change through shared experiences. Over the years, Seavyi has hosted numerous high school and university groups from around the world eager to explore and learn about Cambodia.

FINANCIAL AID & FUNDING YOUR GAP YEAR EXPERIENCE

Many Gap Year programs recognize the financial barriers some participants may face and offer various forms of financial assistance to make their programs more accessible. To maximize your ability to find funding, start planning as early as possible and apply for every scholarship and grant you qualify for. Finding funding will require planning and work, so you'll need to plan accordingly.

At Dragons, we are committed to meeting folks where they are at, financially and doing our best to support you on your Gap Year journey. We offer **Sliding Scale Pricing** and well as **Scholarships** to give students discounts of 5%-90% off your program cost.

“

Kids will invest more when they feel they're being invested in.”

-MICHELLE OBAMA, PARENT OF PAST DRAGONS STUDENT



RESOURCES

In addition to our Gap Guides (Part I & II), our team of experts have put together a list of helpful blogs, guides, and information that may help you plan your Gap Year with confidence.

RELEVANT READS FROM OUR BLOG

- Q&A Gap Planning With a [Dragons Alumni](#)
- [10 Reasons](#) to Travel Abroad Between High School and College
- List of NGOs [We Support](#)
- Transference: [One](#), [Two](#)
- Slow [Travel](#)
- Why We [Learn Language](#)
- What is [Flexible Itinerary?](#)
- Financial Aid [Advice](#) for Dragons Programs
- Embracing The [Unknown](#)
- [Unplugged](#) Travel
- Questions to [Ask](#) When Choosing a Program
- Learning Service [Philosophy](#)
- GYA Gap Year Benefits [Data](#)



GAP YEAR ASSOCIATION (GYA) RESOURCES

- GYA Financial Aid [Advice](#)
- GYA [Deferral Guide](#)
- GYA Gap Year Benefits [Data](#)

CONTACT US

We've got you covered on everything from packing lists to travel guides, help with choosing the right program for you, and opportunities to put you in touch with alumni families who have been in your shoes. Our team is ready to help you through this exciting process. Give us a call anytime: **303.413.0822** or [schedule a call](#).



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Certified B Corporations are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified accountability, transparency, and social and environmental performance.

*Data points from the [Gap Year Association](#) website