

# How to Plan a Gap Year

---

*The New York Times*, May 3, 2016

The White House announced on Sunday that Malia Obama, the older daughter of President Obama, will attend Harvard University, but before beginning college in the fall of 2017, she plans to take a gap year, when graduating students take part in an experience outside the classroom before continuing with their education or starting a career.

"A gap year is about taking a time out after being in school for so long to do something different, usually in another country," said David Stitt, a founder of Gap 360, a gap-year trip planning company based in Britain.

The custom is common in Britain, where more than 200,000 students choose to take a gap year, according to Ethan Knight, at founder of the American Gap Association, a Portland, Ore., nonprofit that gives free advice on planning a gap year. In the United States, on the other hand, only 30,000 students -- less than 1 percent of those graduating from high school -- take the route.

For those tempted to follow in Ms. Obama's footsteps, Mr. Knight and Mr. Stitt share their top tips on how to have a successful gap year.

**Research Your Options Well:** There are numerous ways to spend a gap year -- volunteering, working abroad or learning a new skill are just a few -- and it's best to survey all the choices before settling on one. "The world is literally your oyster, and you can't even imagine the cool options that are available until you start reading about them," Mr. Knight said. "Who knew, for example, that you can volunteer with animals at a wildlife rehabilitation center in Bolivia while learning Spanish?"

A popular pick at Gap 360, which plans 5,000 gap years annually, is to get a job in either Australia or New Zealand. "If you're between 18 and 30 years old, both countries offer a working holiday visa where you can work there temporarily without being a permanent resident," Mr. Stitt said. The jobs you can take on are diverse: It's possible to work in a bar or restaurant, at a department store or even on a farm.

Another common gap year route, he said, is to pick up and apply a new skill like learning how to sail a 100-foot-long sailboat in Australia before working with sailors, or training to become a ski instructor in Switzerland and then giving ski lessons.

Get inspired and explore possibilities by visiting sites such as [GoOverseas.com](http://GoOverseas.com), [GoAbroad.com](http://GoAbroad.com), [TeenLife.com](http://TeenLife.com) and the American Gap Association -- all list options for what you can do with your time off; the first three also have peer reviews so you can get Yelp-like feedback of the experiences.

**Plan Your Gap Year Through a Gap Year Travel Specialist:** Mr. Stitt and Mr. Knight both said that planning a gap year through a reliable gap year travel company is a good idea. "Going through a gap year planner will give you support throughout your journey," Mr. Knight said. Though the services vary,

some examples include access to a 24-hour emergency phone line, help with insurance requirements, visa-processing assistance, medical advice, such as which vaccinations you need, and a safety briefing on the country you're in. GoOverseas.com. GoAbroad.com, TeenLife.com and the American Gap Association have links to various trip planners such as Gap 360.

Expect Things to Go Wrong, and Smile When They Do: Your gap year, particularly if you're in a developing country, won't be seamless, Mr. Stitt said. "You're going to go through a bit of a shock, but embrace it," he said. Trains and planes won't run on schedule, the electricity may go, and the phone lines may not work well.

Frustrating, yes, but these glitches are exactly the point of a gap year, according to Mr. Knight. "You build resilience and also get an insight into another culture and how things work in that country," he said.

Don't Overpack: Ideally, you want to limit your luggage to two pieces: one small carry-on and a medium-size backpack you can check. A backpack is important, said Mr. Stitt, because you'll be toting your bags yourself and you don't want anything cumbersome. "If you forget something at home, you can always buy it wherever you are," he said.

A Gap Year Doesn't Have to Be a Year: Data from the American Gap Association shows that 70 percent of students in the United States who go the gap year route actually take only a semester off. "Don't sweat it if you can't take a year off. Even a few months is enough to have a life-changing experience," Mr. Knight said. Conversely, he added, you don't have to limit yourself to a year, either.

**Full Text:** COPYRIGHT 2016 The New York Times Company.  
<http://www.nytimes.com>

---

### Source Citation

Vora, Shivani. "How to Plan a Gap Year." *New York Times* 3 May 2016: NA(L). *Student Resources in Context*. Web. 24 Oct. 2016.

### URL

[http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/NewsDetailsPage/NewsDetailsWindow?disableHighlighting=false&displayGroupName=News&currPage=&scanId=&query=&prodId=SUIC&search\\_within\\_results=&p=SUIC&mode=view&catId=&limit=&display-query=&displayGroups=&contentModules=&action=e&sortBy=&documentId=GALE%7CA451215154&windowstate=normal&activityType=&failOverType=&commentary=&source=Bookmark&u=tall78416&jsid=610672a371ec0de19447dcfeac8a37ea](http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/NewsDetailsPage/NewsDetailsWindow?disableHighlighting=false&displayGroupName=News&currPage=&scanId=&query=&prodId=SUIC&search_within_results=&p=SUIC&mode=view&catId=&limit=&display-query=&displayGroups=&contentModules=&action=e&sortBy=&documentId=GALE%7CA451215154&windowstate=normal&activityType=&failOverType=&commentary=&source=Bookmark&u=tall78416&jsid=610672a371ec0de19447dcfeac8a37ea)

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|A451215154