

GAP YEAR VOLUNTEER



A Guide to Making it
a Year to Remember

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Introduction

Whatever age you are, whatever level of experience you have, whatever stage you're at in your education or career, you have something to offer and something to learn about yourself and the world around you. If you're taking time out and want to contribute, you could find yourself building houses in Cambodia, saving turtles in Costa Rica or teaching English to a class of eager kids in South Africa. The chances are, you'll never see the world – or yourself – the same way again.

But an important aspect of organising your gap year volunteer placement is preparation. No matter what you want to do, you need to plan ahead in order to make the most of all your opportunities. Give yourself plenty of



INTRODUCTION

time to look into volunteering possibilities, and you will have more options and choices as well as adequate time to raise the necessary funds and organise the million and one details that are involved in making this temporary change in your life. The earlier you start, the more relaxed you will be and the more you will enjoy the whole process.

Whether you're a 'gapper' or a 'career breaker' you will have questions about what you can do to help others and really make a difference. It is an important decision and you need to fully understand every aspect of what's ahead of you. We've endeavoured to raise many of the most important questions here in order to set you on the right track. Remember, the key to making the most of your gap year is to be honest with yourself about what you want to achieve and what you expect. Don't do something because



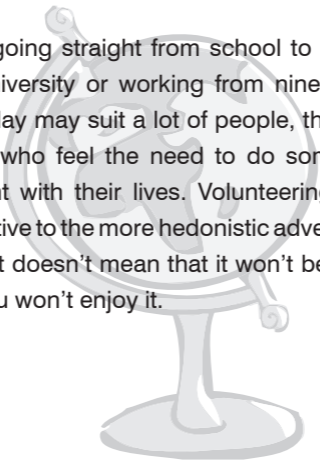
all your friends are doing it or because you think it'll look impressive on your CV. Find something that you can put your heart into and you'll receive a lot more in return.



Chapter 1

Why volunteer?

While going straight from school to college and university or working from nine to five every day may suit a lot of people, there are others who feel the need to do something different with their lives. Volunteering is an alternative to the more hedonistic adventures, but that doesn't mean that it won't be fun or that you won't enjoy it.





There are many reasons to volunteer:

- to make a difference to the world
- to meet others and make new friends
- to learn new skills
- to gain confidence in yourself and your abilities
- to travel to other countries and learn about different cultures, and in turn, learn more about your own culture
- to learn about the behind-the-scenes activities of charitable and business organisations
- to open up new opportunities for yourself with universities or future employers by adding skills and life experience to your CV.



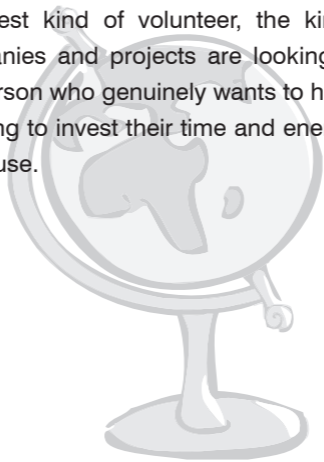
How do you decide if volunteering is right for you?

For many people, volunteering is something they'd like to do but often the magnitude of the preparations involved means that they lose interest or give up the search in frustration. But more people than ever are taking time out to volunteer, whether to see the world, increase their skill base, to make a real difference to the lives of underprivileged people or to help save the planet. It's up to you to decide exactly what it is you'd like to do during your placement.



What makes the best kind of volunteer?

The best kind of volunteer, the kind that companies and projects are looking for, is the person who genuinely wants to help and is willing to invest their time and energy into the cause.





What are they looking for?

Companies and projects rely on volunteers to supplement their salaried staff and try to recruit people who will bring something new and different to the work they are doing. You may have the experience required to assist the English teachers in a school in Laos or you may have worked in the building trade during your summer holidays and can read plans accurately and thus help build houses in Cambodia. Whatever your experience or age, you have something to offer if you are willing to work hard and contribute to the project. Overall, they're looking for someone who has passion for their project.