

FYI

International Exchange Programs (IEP) is a not-for-profit that helps arrange working holidays for Aussies around the world: www.iep.org.au; 03 9329 3866

- Gap Australia: www.lattitude.org.au; 03 9826 6266
- Page 58 for information about studying overseas.
- Page 90 for information about working generally.
- Page 98 for information about volunteering.

Very, very cool ADF program

The ADF gap year is a very cool Australian Defence Force (ADF) program for students or recent school leavers. It's a unique 12-month program that can expose you to the ADF culture and its opportunities. You will be paid for your participation in the program, and there's no requirement to serve after your gap year. *Smart Start* rates it very highly! For more information, visit www.defencejobs.gov.au/ADFGapYear

Gap years are for losers!

Actually, that's not true, but it got your attention. *Smart Start* reports.

Just a few years ago, taking a year out before doing further study was simply thought of as dropping out. It wasn't a recommended option. But these days, many people do it and career advisors might even suggest it!

A whole year?!

Well, not necessarily. It could last anything from weeks to months.

You may have always wanted to pursue your hobby or use it to gain skills or life experiences. Remember that all sorts of things can compliment your CV because they show that you have demonstrated initiative and determination.

You could also use a small amount of time to research your likes and dislikes by working in different industries and to give you a feel of what the real working world is like. See pages 98, 135, 168 and 173 for information about getting work experience.

Don't do nothing

A gap year should never be 'doing nothing' because sometimes it doesn't matter what you're doing, as long as you're doing something. When you're doing something or learning or working, your mind turns over because it is processing new information. Plus you're put in situations where you meet people and come into contact with new ideas.

Learning is not always in the context of an education institution, but you know when you're learning and when you're not. If you defer and go into the workforce, think about keeping your hand in the system by doing a part-time course online, or a short course off-line, or something somewhere. Have a plan and goals.

Your parents might freak out

Gap years are not for everyone (and they're certainly not for everyone's parents). If you are keen on a gap year, you'll probably need to strengthen your case with your parents by organising it properly and making sure it acts as a qualification of its own. The best way to do this is not to lie, but be honest with yourself and figure out exactly what you want from a gap year and work towards it.

Use it

Oh, you can use a gap year to discover your inner self. But that's none of *Smart Start's* business, frankly. Or you might just want to get out of the classroom you've been stuck in for most of your life. Whatever.

But, while you're gapping, you may as well also use it to add skills to your CV. A gap year might be the right option for you. It can give you freedom, new experiences and time to make up your mind about what on earth it is you are going to do.

Gap help

There are programs and organisations to step you through the process and to help you have some constructive experiences. Some organisations are for-profits, others are not-for-profits. Either way, you will probably need to apply and come up with some money for fees, airfares and training. But, depending on where you go and who you go with, you might get 'pocket-money' from your 'employers'.

See pages 6, 38 and 88 for some stories about people who have taken gap years.

Dream it. Plan it. Gap it!**• Travel**

Experience cultures and ideas, gain skills and independence. But don't expect all that fun to automatically make you the most sort-after employee in Australia. Employers want people who have some solidity and who are not going to quit and fly off somewhere next week. So plan a response to the question: 'When are you next racing off?'

If you are going overseas, depending on what country you are going to, and if you are a native speaker of English, teaching English is often an option. So are summer camps, bar work, ski instructing, and being an au pair. But don't feel tied to these traditional gap year jobs. Use your imagination, get training and go for it.

• Volunteering

Volunteering demonstrates initiative, a social conscience and enthusiasm. You and your CV will be rewarded. It can be the best way to get experience in a field that you normally wouldn't have access to. Stay at home and volunteer, or travel and volunteer.

- Work overseas
- Work locally
- Pick fruit
- Surf and teach English or another language

- Do anything you want
- Dip your toes into the water to get some practical experience