



## 20 QUESTIONS TO HELP RESEARCH GAP YEAR PROGRAMS

“You don’t know what you don’t know” is a commonly used phrase - and also one that inspires a helpful sense of caution. As you start planning your Gap Year, please use these questions to help frame the things you might not necessarily know.

It is important to think about your entire experience from before you even leave home all the way through to your return. For clarity, these questions are divided into three sections, each important in its own right. Remember, this list is not exhaustive so please come up with your own questions to make sure you get all the information you need. NOTE: AGA does not take responsibility for the thoroughness nor responses from any non-AGA Accredited Organizations: these questions are intended to help you structure your Gap Year. All AGA Accredited organizations will have already passed the 50+ page AGA application.

Visit us online at [www.americangap.org](http://www.americangap.org) for more information and resources.

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### SECTION 1: BEFORE I GO

This section is meant to help you identify some key things you may want to get more information on as you start looking for the right program for you. Each organization is unique and offers different experiences - take the time to figure out what exactly you’re looking for and be intentional about the process. Answers to some of these questions might be deal-breakers for you - if a program doesn’t fit your requirements right from the start, it’s probably not the one for you. Asking these questions will help you make sure you already have everything in order well before you leave home.

| QUESTION                                                                          | THINGS TO CONSIDER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| 1. Are there <b>pre-departure orientation</b> materials and what do they include? | Are there packing lists?<br>Are there any required vaccinations and/or necessary visa information?<br>What sort of relevant cultural/professional preparation might I need?                                                                                                         |
| 2. <b>How do I get there?</b>                                                     | Who makes the necessary travel/flight reservations?<br>Will I <b>travel alone</b> or in a <b>group</b> with other participants and staff?<br>If I travel alone, how do I meet up with the group after arrival?<br>How will I get from the airport to the organization/project site? |

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| 3. Can I speak to three <b>previous participants</b> ?                     | This is your chance to speak to recent participants about their personal experiences to get an <b>“unfiltered” perspective</b> on the program ... before you join it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 4. How does the organization evaluate <b>prospective participants</b> ?    | Who is your typical student? What can I expect other participants to be like? Are they typically high needs? Academically strong? Alternative? What is the age range? How many other students will there be?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 5. What is included in the <b>price of the program</b> ?                   | Are there additional costs I will be expected to cover? Airfare? Ground transportation? Room and board? Personal expenses? What should I <b>budget</b> for? Are you a non-profit? Where does my money go?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 6. Will my <b>insurance</b> needs be covered by my program fees?           | Does the program cover my insurance while I’m there or do I need to have my own? If I have to get my own, what do you recommend? Medical versus medical evacuation? Lost or stolen items? Check out these websites for international travel insurance: <a href="http://www.inext.com">www.inext.com</a> & <a href="http://www.internationalsos.com">www.internationalsos.com</a> (note: AGA does not earn commission nor specifically endorse these carriers.) |
| 7. Do you have any <b>financial aid</b> or <b>scholarships</b> available?  | How do I qualify? Is there an option for college credit/federal financial aid? How much is available for someone in my situation?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 8. What are the organization’s <b>policies regarding student conduct</b> ? | What are the rules? Are there policies regarding alcohol consumption, etc? Will there be a curfew? How are <b>policy violations</b> dealt with?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

## SECTION 2: WHILE I’M THERE

These questions might change for you depending on whether you will be traveling domestically, internationally, or both. No matter where you go, there are lots of things to consider, so make sure to do your research and get answers to these questions!

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| 9. What happens during an <b>average day</b> ?                                 | What sorts of structures are in place to make sure my efforts are put to good use? What’s the day-to-day structure of the program? Are there classes? How many hours of each day am I volunteering/interning/in class? Are there homestays? |
| 10. Will there be an <b>on-site orientation</b> as well?                       | When/where will I get info on things like: Cultural do’s and don’ts, personal safety/crime, food safety, transportation safety, currency exchange/ATMs                                                                                      |
| 11. What is the <b>local transportation</b> network like?                      | How safe is it? How much does your typical student/volunteer use the local transport options? How do they work? Airport shuttles? Public buses? Taxis? How will I get from my accommodation to the project?                                 |
| 12. What will my <b>living situation</b> be like?                              | How are accommodations evaluated for <b>safety</b> ? Will I have my <b>own room/space</b> ? If I am staying with others (roommates, host family, etc.) and there is a conflict, how do you usually assist students to resolve it?           |
| 13. I have _____ <b>dietary needs/restrictions</b> – can they be accommodated? | Is the organization prepared and able to assist me with any <b>food allergies, dietary requirements or restrictions</b> ? What might the <b>typical diet</b> consist of?                                                                    |

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| 14. I am on <b>prescription medications</b> , what is the best way to handle that while traveling?                                         | What resources should I bring with me?<br>What happens if I lose my medication, it gets stolen, or damaged?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 15. What happens in the event of a <b>medical emergency</b> ?                                                                              | How far will I typically be from a doctor (surgeon, general physician, etc.) during the program? What are the emergency/911 systems like where I will be? What about any current <b>medical conditions I have</b> ?                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 16. How do I <b>communicate back home</b> ?                                                                                                | How does the program suggest communication take place? Internet? Personal cell phones?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 17. What is the level of <b>local involvement</b> in developing service-learning or <b>volunteering projects</b> ?                         | I want to make sure I'm not causing harm in the communities I'm here to support - how do you ensure the community is included in determining the project need? Developing a project plan? Ensuring longterm success? Is the host community actively involved in creating project(s) that are relevant to the local population?                                                                                 |
| 18. How much freedom will I have to <b>determine how my time is spent</b> and will I have the opportunity to <b>travel independently</b> ? | Is every day of the program clearly planned and structured or will I have the chance to make decisions about <b>personal activities</b> ?<br>Will I have the chance to <b>make my own travel plans</b> and see things of <b>personal interest</b> ?<br>Do I have "days off?" Are there any local holidays that are taking place during my Gap Year?<br>If I want to stay longer than the program is that okay? |

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### SECTION 3: AFTER I RETURN HOME

Make sure you consider what your experience might be like once you return home. Your Gap Year will likely have a lasting impact on your life and even lead you in directions that you never considered before, so make sure you have the resources you need! Think about what types of support you may want, either from the organization you choose or any other, so that your Gap Year will truly be as meaningful as possible.

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| 19. Will I have the chance to give <b>feedback</b> on my ( <b>service-learning</b> ) <b>experiences</b> after the project? | Will there be an <b>opportunity to reflect</b> on and <b>evaluate</b> (service-learning) projects in order to integrate the work into a fulfilling and <b>meaningful learning experience</b> ?                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 20. Are there <b>post-program resources</b> available to help me integrate my experience?                                  | What resources/services does the organization provide to help make my experience coming home an easier transition?<br>Is there a <b>re-entry orientation</b> ? What about <b>reverse culture-shock</b> ?<br>Are there resources available to help me with <b>long-term integration of my experiences</b> into "normal" life?<br>Will I have continued contact with staff? |