

Gap year UK-style

While it's true that conserving coral reefs in tropical waters, saving pandas in China or working with Bushmen in Botswana are exciting prospects, there are plenty of rewarding, exciting and CV-boosting gap year projects on offer in Britain.

UK-based projects are varied and can be sourced all over Britain and also offer the advantage of generally being cheaper, easier to organise (you won't need to apply for visas or arrange inoculations against exotic diseases etc) and able to offer a whole host of flexible benefits.

"There are plenty of rewarding, exciting and CV-boosting gap year projects on offer in Britain"

Samuel Woods – now studying at university in Italy – decided to spend his gap year in the UK for a number of reasons. "I spent my gap year in the UK partly because I was going to study abroad, but mainly because I wanted to do a whole range of things. For example, I planned to do some part-time study, some volunteering and get some paid-for work to help me fund my studies in Italy. To me, it made sense to stay in England and experience all these things from home."

"Arranging to do all this in the UK was straightforward. As I was based at



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You don't need to travel the globe to experience a challenging and worthwhile gap year, says **SARA EVANS**, as there are plenty of exciting and interesting options to choose from in the UK

my parents' home for most of the time, I was also able to save quite a bit of money while being independent and getting to meet new people. I'd recommend a UK gap year to anyone

– as long as you plan it well, there really are lots of opportunities that can allow you to develop new skills as well as provide personal satisfaction."

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Journey with a purpose

Samuel Woods hits the nail on the head here – it the planning and combination of projects that can make a UK gap year stand out. Basically speaking, there are four types of opportunities available. These four categories are:

- Conservation projects – working to save UK flora and fauna
- Volunteering projects – working with UK communities
- Study projects – taking a new qualification or studying for personal enjoyment
- Employment projects – working in a number of environments for financial remuneration.

Conservation projects

From Land's End to John O'Groats, there are lots of worthwhile conservation projects to get involved in. Most develop conservation, team-working and problem-solving skills as well as providing the opportunity to get hands-on with UK wildlife. Typical projects include working in the nature reserves of the National Trust, working with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, re-introducing

native species back to the Scottish Highlands (Worldwide Experience) helping scientists research basking shark behaviour (Earthwatch) as well as many varied local opportunities.

Volunteering projects

For students looking to make a difference, there's a staggering choice of options available. From working with underprivileged communities, the homeless, the aged or children in need there are plenty of projects looking for additional support. Involvement in these kinds of projects is not only personally rewarding, but also develops caring, team-working and social skills too.

Use this website – www.navb.org.uk – to search for local volunteering projects. The Community Service Volunteers website – www.csv.org.uk – also features thousands of volunteering experiences.

Study projects

Many students spend their gap year on a number of different projects. Adding a study course to say a voluntary or employment project can

provide additional intellectual stimulation as well as the possibility of acquitting further qualifications.

Language study is often a popular option as is Teaching English as a Foreign Language (www.tefl.co.uk; www.tesolonline.com), but other areas ripe for study include cookery (www.thegableschoolofcookery.com), drama (www.yearoutdrama.com) as well as traditional qualifications (www.hotcourses.com).

Employment projects

Using some or all of a gap year in Britain can be a great way to boost personal finances as well as provide a solid experience of work. The Year in Industry (www.yini.org.uk) is an organisation dedicated to finding quality work placements for students with over 250 companies.

Many students find this a good a good opportunity to confirm their degree choice while experiencing an illuminating insight into the world of business. Gap Year Jobs (www.gapyearjobs.co.uk) also

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provides an online database of gap year jobs that range from popular catering jobs to summer camp work opportunities.

Get more information

The organisations below all offer opportunities for young people to get involved in a number of activities during their gap year

Conservation:

- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers – www.btcv.org.uk
- National Trust – www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds – www.rspb.org.uk
- Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales – www.cat.org
- Friends of the Earth – www.foe.co.uk
- Earthwatch Europe – www.earthwatch.org
- Worldwide Experience – www.worldwideexperience.com

Volunteering:

- Rural Community Councils – www.acres.org.uk

- Save The Children – www.savethechildren.org.uk
- TimeBank – www.timebank.org.uk
- YouthNet UK – www.do-it.org.uk
- England – www.mvonline.gov.uk
- Scotland – www.mvscotland.org.uk
- Wales – www.wcva.org.uk
- N Ireland www-volunteering-ni.org

Earthwatch Institute (Europe) offer a number of UK projects ideal for UK gap year students. One of their newest involves working with grey seals off the south-west coast of England. During September 2005, Hannah Frampton (now a zoology student at Manchester University) spent a rewarding week working with Earthwatch marine biologists off the Isles of Scilly.

"I was really keen to find out more about UK marine wildlife," says Hannah, "so taking part in this project seemed like a perfect match for me. From day one, we got really stuck in – taking a boat out to the seals to help the Earthwatch scientists record their behaviour and take photographs of the seals. It was the breeding season while I was there, so we got the

opportunity to get pretty close to the pups – they were gorgeous, all big eyes and white fluff. The scientists are going to use our data and the photographs we took to help them get more info on grey seals. At the moment not much is really known about them, so our input will be really helpful."

"I was in a mixed group which was great as I got to engage with all sorts of people. Working in a small group also helped me appreciate the value of teamwork and definitely helped hone my networking skills. As well as learning about seals, we also got to find out more about other UK wildlife including birds and small mammals. Getting involved in a UK project really worked for me because it was quick and easy to arrange and I didn't have to worry about a language barrier preventing me from gaining new knowledge and skills."

Further information: Earthwatch will be providing seal projects during May, July and August 2006 in Cornwall and South Devon. See www.earthwatch.org/europe.

Raleigh International Trust is UK charity No. 1047653

See the rewards



"I was looking for a challenge, both physical and mental, but which would give me a real sense of achievement. Whilst working on worthwhile projects I saw some beautiful and remote places and met a whole mix of people from all cultures and walks of life."

Sophie Pinn, 18

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