




How to Maximize Your Gap Year Visits

A GUIDE TO HELP MAKE THE MOST
OF YOUR GAP YEAR VISITS



By visiting a gap year you get a feel for a day in the life. You'll see the place, meet the people, and catch a vibe for what it'd be like to participate in the program.

Here's our guide to making the most out of your visit!

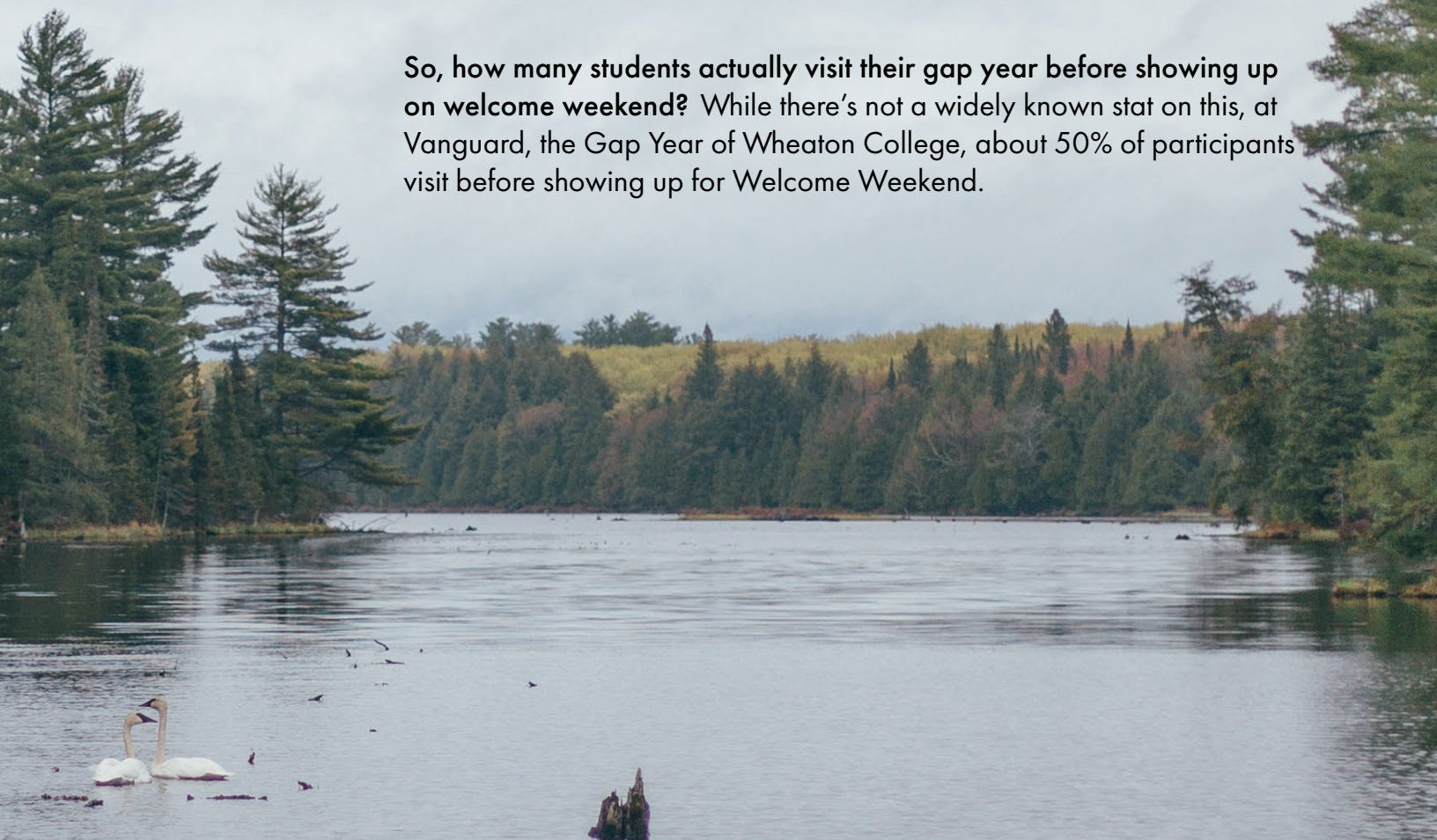
BUT WAIT. WHAT IF...?

I can't visit the gap year? If you can't visit a program, that's okay! You can learn a lot by reviewing the website, talking with program staff, viewing photos, and connecting with past participants. And if a gap year can't connect you with past participants—that should be a red flag!

My program doesn't have a "home base" to visit? If you're considering a travel-heavy program that doesn't have a central location, a visit is probably out of the question. Here are some things you can do to get a better picture of the program:

- Ask to connect with past participants and/or their parents. They can provide good perspective on the experience.
- Review the website multiple times over a couple of weeks and write down specific questions. You might be surprised at what new questions emerge over time.
- Get an idea of what you'll see and do by researching the locations the gap year visits.

So, how many students actually visit their gap year before showing up on welcome weekend? While there's not a widely known stat on this, at Vanguard, the Gap Year of Wheaton College, about 50% of participants visit before showing up for Welcome Weekend.





A Quick Checklist

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

- Identify** your top programs and note what stands out about each
- Create** your criteria—what's important?
- Prepare** a list of questions to ask students and staff

DURING YOUR VISIT

- Jump** into any and all activities offered
- Ask** questions—nothing is off limits!
- Tour** the facilities and poke around to get a feel for “behind the scenes”
- Capture** your experience by taking notes and photos
- Eat** meals in the dining area to sample the food

AFTER YOUR VISIT

- Visualize** yourself in the environment
- Write** down your impressions and gut feelings
- Compare** your thoughts about each program
- Send** a thank you note to the people who led your visit



Questions to Ask on Your Visit

As you look at different gap year experiences, you'll notice that some hop around the globe and others stay in one location. This guide was designed for those visiting a program with a home base.

If a question doesn't make sense for the type of gap year you're visiting, skip it.

TO ASK PROGRAM STAFF

1. Could you walk me through an average “day in the life” in your program?
2. How is the year built to help participants grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually?
3. Are participants able to leave on the weekend or do they have to stay on site?
4. If I still need to do college visits, when is the best time to schedule them during the program?
5. Can I bring a car?
6. Are families allowed to visit during the year? If so, how much advance notice is needed?
7. Who do participants spend the most time around—fellow gappers, program staff, college staff, others?
8. What kind of activities are offered on site?
9. Where do participants spend most of their time?
10. What is the dating policy?





AS YOU'RE MEETING OTHER PARTICIPANTS

1. What has been your favorite part about your experience? Least favorite part?
2. How have you seen yourself grow through your gap year?
3. If you could change anything about the program, what would you change?
4. How do you spend your free time?
5. What nearby towns/cities do people go to hang out?

IF VISITING A FAITH-BASED PROGRAM

1. Do participants connect with a local faith community during the year?
2. How are small groups formed?
3. Where do participants worship?
4. What is the content of faith teachings?
5. How are participants challenged in their faith?
6. Is there a statement of faith that I need to sign in order to participate?

WHILE YOU'RE WALKING THROUGH THE LIVING SPACES

1. How much storage would I have access to?
2. Who else lives in/near this building?
3. Where do you do laundry?
4. Is there a housekeeping service or do participants clean their rooms and bathrooms?
5. What are the expectations for how clean participants keep their areas?

TO ASK THE KITCHEN

1. Do you have meals on a rotation? If so, how often does it repeat?
2. Can I see a menu of what you served for the past 2-4 weeks?
3. What kind of dietary restrictions can you accommodate?
4. Do participants cook their own meals or always eat in the dining hall?
5. Are participants ever left on their own to make or purchase their meals?





IF WORK IS A COMPONENT OF THE GAP YEAR

1. Who am I working with?
2. What kind of tasks/projects am I working on?
3. How is the work designed to challenge and develop me?
4. How many hours, on average, am I working each week?
5. Can I see the work areas?

IF ACADEMIC CREDIT IS OFFERED

1. How many college credits are offered?
2. What kind of institutions have accepted this credit?
3. How many hours are spent in a classroom every week?
4. Who is teaching the courses?
5. How much time is spent outside of class doing coursework?

AS YOU'RE WALKING AROUND, THINK ABOUT

Upkeep. What do the buildings look like? Are they in good condition or starting to show some wear? Do the facilities look clean or forgotten?

Consistency. Are you hearing similar answers to questions or hearing different responses from program staff and participants? If you're hearing different responses to the same question, press into that area.

Culture. Start putting words to what you're picking up about the general vibe of the place – does it make you feel alive or get you down? Do you feel inspired to learn more? Make sure to talk about this and write it down as soon as you can.






WHAT IF...?

I want to visit again? If you can swing it, do so! Some gap years offer other shorter programs. Ask if they offer summer camps, shorter trips, or other experiences that would allow you to sample what they do.

I still have unanswered questions? Don't hesitate to follow up with program staff! If your question would be better answered by a participant or a participant's parent, ask to be connected.

I've visited every program and still don't know how to decide? Add some structure! Have you tried making an evaluation chart?

[VIEW OUR CHART ONLINE!](#)

A young woman with short brown hair is posing in a sun-dappled forest. She is wearing a light blue and white striped t-shirt, a light blue cardigan, and dark purple shorts with a maroon jacket tied around her waist. She is holding a long, thin stick high in her right hand and has her left arm extended to the side. She is smiling broadly. The background consists of many thin tree trunks and green foliage.

READY TO CHECK OUT A
GAP YEAR? LET'S CONNECT
TO SCHEDULE YOUR VISIT TO
VANGUARD, THE GAP YEAR OF
WHEATON COLLEGE.

CONNECT TODAY



WHEATON
COLLEGE

For Christ & His Kingdom