

11 Ways to Make the Most of Your Summer

*When life gets rough, I like to hold on to my dream,
Of relaxing in the summer sun, just lettin' off steam.
—Olaf, Frozen*

Sometimes we get caught up in the word *should* when thinking about the summer. *People with my major should get this type of internship. I should move back home. I should push myself harder.* Let go of those “should” sentences, and let yourself imagine all kinds of possibilities. Many students begin looking to fill their summer months beforehand, and here are some ideas to make the most out of your summer. You could be interested in one or multiple ideas. It's your summer. Make the most of it.

1. **Learn something new.** Think of a skill that is useful or interesting to you (hopefully both). Take an art class or a cooking class. Dream about where you'd like to travel, and learn 50 helpful phrases in the local language. Even learning basic skills, such as changing the oil in your car or replacing a flat tire, will give a sense of accomplishment and could prove useful one day.
2. **Set an active goal.** While rest has value, staying active also has value. During the summer, research ways to move your body and set a goal for yourself. The Couch to 5K program is designed to get you from the couch to running a 5K in just nine weeks. If running isn't your thing, research how to start a garden or spend time at your local disc-golf course. It doesn't matter how much you move—just get moving!
3. **Take up a spiritual practice.** Often, spirituality and faith take a backseat to school and play. During the summer, experiment with one or two different disciplines. You can choose from quieter practices such as Bible study, meditation, or journaling or those with a more outward focus such as showing gratitude or finding a faith community to join. Finding a spiritual discipline that fits your style can be a gift that renews your faith again and again.
4. **Work at camp.** One of the most fulfilling things you can do for a summer is give your time and energy to a camp. You might not be paid a lot, but you will reap the rewards of meeting lifelong friends and knowing that you've made a difference in someone's life. You will also gain valuable leadership experience and almost surely enjoy a few s'mores.

5. **Travel.** Whether your taste is for adventures local or far away, summer is a great time to pack a bag and find something different. If you're the adventurous sort, plan a backpacking trip through a new-to-you country or on part of the Appalachian or Pacific Crest trails in the U.S. Look into your school's study abroad program to see what opportunities are open to you. If you are short on time, find one week or weekend when you can go somewhere else. Even a few days away can give valuable perspective.
6. **Work as an intern.** There is value in spending a summer learning about your chosen career path. You will gain experience in your field as well as have a great professional reference and job listing for your resume. Start with asking professors or your school's career or field placement office about internships that might interest you.
7. **Be a tourist in your town.** You can find plenty of adventure in your local area. Search the Internet and make a list of things you've never done. Museums, restaurants, parks, cultural events, and so on—you might be surprised at what your city or state has to offer in the way of fun.
8. **Volunteer.** Help make the world a better place. Pick a cause or organization that speaks to you and learn ways you can help its mission. There are dozens and dozens of ways to contribute, and in most cases you can give a little bit or a lot of your time. Put your skills and passion to work for others.
9. **Get a job you might never do again.** It might not have the career potential of an internship, but a temporary job can teach you flexibility and new skills and open your perspective to fresh things. Sign up with a local temp agency or apply at local businesses. You should be able to make a bit of money and gain appreciation for what it's like to walk in different shoes.
10. **Take summer courses.** Colleges often charge less per credit hour in the summer, and you can take advantage of that. Check to see if summer credits from a local community college would transfer. You can lighten your course load for the next year or maybe even plan to graduate early. Just don't burn yourself out by trying to do too much.
11. **Do "nothing."** After a long and stressful semester, maybe you just need a break. It's OK to spend some time sleeping and relaxing. Read for pleasure, watch movies, or play some games. Decide who your favorite people are and spend time enjoying their company. While you probably don't want to hibernate for an entire summer, give yourself permission to slow down and breathe.