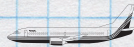




the
BIG
TRIP



**Your ultimate guide to gap years
and overseas adventures**

THE BIG TRIP

INTRODUCTION	05	Teaching English	138
Why Go?	05	Volunteering	143
Why Not Go?	07	Courses	150
Still Going?	07		
20 BIG TRIP TRAVEL EXPERIENCES	08	PART THREE: WHERE TO GO	155
PART ONE: TRAVEL SMARTS	19	Round-the-World	156
Get Planning	21	Europe	161
Paperwork	25	Australia, New Zealand & the Pacific	177
Money & Costs	33	Northeast Asia	193
Health & Safety	41	Southeast Asia	207
Get Packing	55	The Indian Subcontinent	223
Takeoff	61	North America & the Caribbean	236
Touchdown	66	Mexico, Central & South America	251
Staying in Touch	70	Africa	266
Being a Good Traveller	75	The Middle East	280
Coming Home	79	Russia, Central Asia & the Caucasus	293
		Traveller Tales	306
PART TWO: TAILORING YOUR TRIP	81	Big Trip Planner	310
Who With?	83	PART FOUR: DIRECTORIES	315
Transport Options	87	British Travellers	316
Accommodation	101	North American Travellers	321
The Adventure Trail	105	Australasian Travellers	326
The Festival Circuit	111	BEHIND THE SCENES	330
Jobs	115		
Working with Kids	133	INDEX	332



INTRODUCTION

It started with the Grand Tour. Way back in the 17th century, upper-class British kids would complete their education by heading over to parts of Europe to experience museums, paintings and, more importantly, wines that they'd only studied or read about in school. For a few months they'd tour the continent, though most only went as far as Italy (probably something to do with the wine). All of them returned with enough stories, souvenirs and sores to last a lifetime.

Fast-forward a couple of hundred years. Cheap flights have meant that even more people are taking a year off and seeing a world outside of school books and dull history lessons. Whether it's a gap year, an overseas experience (OE), an exchange program, a working holiday, a sabbatical, a year out or a year off, people want to head off to India, Italy, Israel or a thousand places in between to see what the world is really like. Today there are even more reasons to head overseas.

WHY GO?

But hang on, can't you just see all of that on TV or find out everything you need to know about the world

on Wikipedia? Only if you want to fake it. There's no substitute for getting out there seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling what the world is. Some of the smells and tastes won't be good BTW, but at least you'll have done it. You can shut the most boring book-smart expert up at parties just by saying 'Have you actually been there?'

For many travellers, what starts out as a vacation ends up a vocation, a passion becomes a profession. Take the economics graduate who thought he was bound to work in an accounting firm but did a stint with a music distribution company during his gap year. He was so inspired he's been in music business ever since, so his year off changed his future entirely.

Sarah Bruce was a traveller who didn't just have a year off but used the time to check out a field she might be interested in. 'I volunteered overseas for five months with Trekforce Expeditions. This really changed my perspective and my priorities and it opened a door for me to work in the charity sector, doing marketing.'

The jobs you do, the people you meet and the experiences you have can show you careers and

ESCAPING THE PARENT TRAP

So maybe your parents aren't so keen on you going away for months on end. They're probably making noises about going to university, settling down or getting a good job in a bank. They really need to move on. Here are our best arguments to stop them fretting and get them shelling out for airline tickets:

- ✦ **PROTECTIVE RESEARCH** If you can tell them about the place you're visiting, it can be reassuring. Everyone's going to freak out when they don't know where someone's going, but if you can explain your itinerary it will seem more real. Helpful facts ('They all speak English.', 'There's more than 30,000 tourists every year and they all seem okay.' or 'It's one of the safest cities in Central America.') can also be useful. You can even get them to read a few chapters of this book so they can see you're taking this trip seriously.
- ✦ **GET INVOLVED** Get your parents to help out with the planning and show them a detailed itinerary – they can even check progress on your blog. Show them you've got a budget and you have a time limit on the trip. You can always change itineraries later, but let them know when you do veer off the itinerary to save the grey hairs and panicked phone calls.
- ✦ **PHONE HOME** Create a schedule for phoning home, texting or whatever (there are more tips in Part One, p70). Make sure it's reasonable (calling every hour is crazy but only ringing once a month could lead to parental tears) and stick to it.
- ✦ **ON COURSE** Prove you're committed to the trip by doing a course (see Part Four, Directories, for more clues on this). Learning to speak a language, taking a first-aid course or even picking up some basic travel skills are all good ways to show that you're taking this seriously.
- ✦ **INSURANCE IS REASSURANCE** Show them you're prepared for the bad stuff by getting good travel insurance that will cover any emergencies.
- ✦ **CAREER BUILDING** This is your trump card. Explain that this trip could help your career and point to a few people whose careers have been helped by travel.

life choices you never would have seen back home. Opportunities open up when you're travelling. But as Tom Hall warns us, 'The trip didn't answer my questions about what I wanted to do with my life but it remains the source of some of my happiest memories.' Today Tom manages Lonely Planet's London office, so perhaps travelling did nudge him slightly in the direction of a career choice.

But it's not all about work. Just like those Grand Tourists of hundreds of years ago, you'll also gather friends and experiences that will be valuable for the rest of your life. Whenever someone mentions Thailand you'll remember a full-moon party, or if you meet a New Zealander, Canadian or Scot you'll be able to tell them stories of drinking in their pubs and laughing with

people from their country. These intangibles will stay with you your whole life.

Then there's the confidence building. Just to know that you've worked out how to catch a bus in Prague or protected yourself from malaria in Cambodia makes the problems you'll face back home at university or work seem simpler. As Amanda Akass sees it, 'Once you have trekked through the Andes in the freezing cold, scared off muggers in Rio, or been lost in a jungle at night, you feel you can do anything!' Fighting off muggers isn't a must-have skill for many gigs, but if you mention it in a job interview, they'd be too scared not to give you the job.

Plus after being in school since you were five, you've definitely earned a bit of time off.

WHY NOT GO?

We're not going to bullshit you: no trip is always easy. Travel brochures can turn out to be studio-shot lies and there will be times when you'll be broke, sick or just lonely and homesick. But with a bit of preparation you can minimise the lows and maximise the highs.

Before you go there's always the money to think about. Travel can be expensive and even studying at university comes with a pretty big price tag. We've got a few tips on making your dollars, pounds, euros and baht go further (see p33), but you may have to prioritise and work out how long you can afford to be away. Would you rather spend your time working in a London pub with a few short hops over to Europe? Or would you rather volunteer in Laos helping street kids? Or do you just want to trek to Machu Picchu then take your sore feet home? After balancing up time and money, should your gap year really be a gap month? Either way, we've got you covered and can help you come up with a budget that will make it work.

Lots of travellers worry about personal safety. You only have to switch on the news to know that there are some places in the world that you don't want to visit. And we want to steer you away from the really dangerous places in the world (see p43). For everything else, we'll prepare you as best we can by giving you the word on some of the everyday dangers.

And then there's the environmental concern. Aeroplanes do produce hefty carbon emissions and

tourists can bring problems to sensitive regions. This book will show you how to keep your carbon footprint tiny and how to respect the countries you're visiting to prevent damage to fragile environments and cultures (see p75). We also believe that travel can help developing nations if it's done responsibly – not every visitor needs to be an invader. At the risk of getting all Brady Bunch on you, travel should bring the world closer together.

STILL GOING?

Despite the worries, millions of people are still hitting the road every year and discovering what the world is really like behind the headlines and outside the school books. You'll find out that all the clichés about travel changing you are true, and you'll come back with memories that are worth more than any holiday snaps or souvenirs.

The practical tips in this book aim to get you from dreaming to doing and back again. From planning to coming home, we've pulled together enough tips from travellers to inspire you and get you there safely. There are world highlights so can you plan an itinerary to suit. There's also advice on job hunting and visas.

But in all the planning and preparing the best advice we can give you is from Lonely Planet's founder, Tony Wheeler, who left everything he knew in Britain to go overland from England to Australia and ended up turning travel into big business. After years of travelling the world what would Tony say? 'Just go.'



20 BIG TRIP TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

OUR AUTHORS HAND-PICKED THEIR FAVOURITE SPOTS IN THEIR FAVOURITE REGIONS.



HAVING A ROYAL KILTLED KNEES-UP AT THE EDINBURGH FRINGE FESTIVAL (SCOTLAND, SEE P169) Imagine the maddest Scots getting all their friends over for a week of comedy and kooky arts. That's what you get with Fringe – the wild and weird all crammed into a medieval city that never sleeps.



WILL SALTER / LPI

DONKEY TREKKING INTO THE GRAND CANYON (USA, SEE P243) With only the slap of saddlebags and your own footsteps you could be in a Western movie, not at the biggest and busiest canyon the world has to offer.



LEFT: DALLAS STIBBLEY / LONELY PLANET IMAGES 5 FAR LEFT: ROBERT HARDING / PICTURE LIBRARY LIMITED / ALAMY IMAGES

COMING TO THE CHILLED OASIS OF THE TAJ MAHAL (INDIA, SEE P225)

Even the bustling touts hold this ancient mausoleum in awe and as you get closer, the lotus design, the gold spire and the sacred Muslim moon are all drawn in detail.

INVENTING NEW COLOURS IN THE CORALS OF GREAT BARRIER REEF (AUSTRALIA, SEE P182) The world's largest coral reef can be explored by glass-bottomed boat, but if you strap on the snorkel you'll see the colours up close and feel the tickle as rare fish get friendly.



ROBERT HALSTEAD / LONELY PLANET IMAGES

CHANNEL-SURFING THROUGH NEW YORK CITY (USA, SEE P243)

From the *Seinfeld* deli to the fashionista fantasy set of *Zoolander* to the Empire State's memorable turn in *King Kong*, New York is just waiting for you to shout 'Action!'



RIGHT: DOUG SCOTT / AGE FOTOSTOCK FAR RIGHT: MARK NEWMAN / LPI



GETTING DRENCHED AT JAW-DROPPING IGUAZÚ FALLS (ARGENTINA, PARAGUAY, BRAZIL, SEE P258) Most impressive are the gargling waters at Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat) that divide Argentina and Brazil, but you're bound to be impressed anywhere along this stretch of cascading water.



GET PLANNING

If you're tired of wandering past travel agents, looking wistfully at the prices and thinking 'One day...', then it's time to get serious. Travel is always on everyone's list of things to do, but why not put it as your number-one priority? Planning might sound boring but once you start buying guidebooks, imagining your itinerary and working out where to go, you'll feel like you're actually doing it.

TIMING

As well as finding the right time for your destination (see the destination chapters in Part Three for details on when to visit specific regions), you need to find the right time for *you*. Travelling is a great way to finish off high-school or university study, or if you've got long breaks in your study you can take a trip. Many people use the time while they're away to work out what to do next, whether it's between jobs or after school. Finishing study offers the advantage of fewer responsibilities and plenty of free time to plan what you'll do.

The downsides are that you may fall out of step with some of your friends – you might be starting university a year later or entering the job market after them. At the time this might seem like a big difference, but if you stay in touch with your buddies at the other end,

they might help you get a job or tell you which courses to avoid. Some would-be travellers worry that stepping out of their careers to travel will interrupt their climb up the corporate ladder, but the corporate ladder can wait. While you may miss some opportunities by being overseas, you'll also see even more possibilities – you might find out that you want to study overseas or volunteer (see p143).

The classic 'gap year' (as it's known in the UK) occurs just before university study, and it can start as soon as you drop your pen for the last exam and finish just in time for enrolment. It's a good idea to give yourself time to relax before heading away. And you'll need to raise some money to get you through your trip. You can get a rough idea of costs by heading to the Money & Costs chapter (p33), which will be helpful for working out when you can ditch that summer job.

CHOOSING YOUR DESTINATIONS

India, Cuba and Thailand are perennial favourites with travellers, but you should go your own way. Are there places you've always wanted to see or know more about? You might be inspired by something you studied, such as the ruins of ancient Greece or crumbling Aztec



PAPERWORK

If travelling is all about being free, then why does paperwork take up so much time? It's boring but important stuff and it may mean waiting in a few long lines or reading lengthy documents, but you really can't leave home without it. The more you research the easier it will be once you're on the road – everyone's heard stories about travellers who get sent home at their destination's airport because they didn't have the right visa or their passport had expired. They're easy problems to avoid if you use the advance-planning tips in this chapter.

PASSPORTS

Famous for photos that make you look like a serial killer, a lunatic or both, passports are proof of your nationality and let you cross international borders. When you're overseas, it's your main form of ID, with visas and entry stamps showing that you have a legal right to be in a country.

You'll need to carry your passport with you in most destinations. You should avoid handing it over to anyone for long periods of time, though when checking in at hotels or hostels it's common to give it to the desk clerk to sign you in. When you apply for a visa, you'll entrust your passport to embassy staff, which can sometimes

mean being without your passport for a period of a few weeks (see p27).

KEEPING A COPY

When you haven't got your passport in your hands, it can be reassuring to know that you have the details which will make it easy to replace. You should copy down your passport number and keep it safely in a separate place from your passport. Some travellers keep it in their journal, but putting it in an email to yourself is a good idea as well. You can leave the number with friends or family at home, so you can call them reverse-charge (see p73) if you lose everything. You can also scan or photocopy the photo page of your passport, which can be handy when you don't have photo ID.

EXPIRY DATES & BLANK PAGES

If you've already got a passport, check its expiry date. Most countries require that your passport is valid for at least six months even if you're only intending to stay for a few days. Some immigration officials might also want to plonk their entry and exit stamps on clean pages only (though usually if you ask nicely they'll put them on another page), and you'll need a full page for some visas, so make sure you've got enough pages left before you head off.



Globe (def. 3)

ROUND-THE-WORLD

Think you can take on those slowcoaches from *The Amazing Race*? In this jet age, Phileas Fogg's 80-day circumnavigation is looking pretty slow, so your version of the trip around the world will be much faster. Chances are you'll be switching between planes, trains, automobiles, camels and tuk-tuks to get around the world any way you can. For more information on globetrotting, go to Transport Options (p87), particularly the section on getting a round-the-world (RTW) ticket (see p90). If you're going around the world you'll be hopscotching through countries and skipping over borders, so this chapter will tell you a little more about factors that affect planning such as climate and hassle-free border crossing.

PLANNING YOUR ROUTE

The most exciting part of any trip is when you spread out the maps, break the spines of those guidebooks and start planning your global adventure. Using a RTW ticket (see p90) is the best way to touch down on several continents, but how will you work out your route? With one of these tickets you'll need to lock in your destinations before you head off around the world...even if you're going to be flexible about timing.

CREATING AN ITINERARY

Personal decisions should always come first when you're planning your route. Start with a list of your 'must-sees' then prioritise 'would-like-to-sees' and 'would-like-but-can-drops', down to 'really-don't-cares' and 'no-friggin'-ways'. Your 'must-sees' can be based around needing to visit family or places you've waited your whole life to see. You can get a better idea of other priorities (including big festivals and the best weather) by checking the destination chapters in Part Three. You might also like to think about balancing your trip so there's some downtime mixed in with the partying. There's no better cure for a hangover than spending two weeks on a beach in Thailand.

From here you'll need to search for a ticket that covers all your 'must-sees' and work out how many of your other priorities the ticket takes in – check the fares table in Transport (see p88–9) for an easy comparison. You might have to drop a few of your choices or take side trips via an add-on flight or overland trip. If your RTW ticket drops you in Sydney, for example, you could get a budget flight to Darwin before heading south to see Uluru, then loop back to Sydney via the wineries around Adelaide. Try to work out how long you want to stay in each place including side trips, so you can look at getting visas (see p27) for the right length of time.