



Planet Wise

How to have fun and stay safe

ANDREW WILSON offers his professional advice on how to can look after yourself on your gap year and ensure you have a safer trip

So you've made the tough decision to take a year out and now you're starting to think about the consequences.

Before you go

Approximately 200,000 people of all ages set off on independent travel every year. According to Lonely Planet, up to 70 per cent will do little or no research before they go. Learning the hard way should not be one of the objectives of a successful gap year, but thousands of you will do just that and it makes sense to try and understand a bit about the areas you're going to before you touch down. So where can you turn for help?

The internet is a great place to start. Try the relevant tourist offices and companies such as Lonely Planet and Rough Guides (great guide books). The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (www.fco.gov.uk) is also a good

source of valuable information. Another useful site is the Year Out Group (www.yearoutgroup.org) who provide masses of information if you want to choose an organised trip.

Your research will introduce you to the political and cultural climate of the places you want to visit. And how about some of the physical stuff like terrain, and weather. Are you travelling in the wet season – and will this mean a risk of malaria?

To get you started, a simple question: what's the cost of living in your first port of call? Without knowing this, you won't know how long your money will last or how much even to pay for your first taxi from the airport to the hostel. Tipping someone the equivalent of 2p might seem a bit mean, but it probably works out as the same as a pound back here.

The period when travellers are most vulnerable is the first few weeks of their trip. You'll be unsure of what's going on, you won't know how to

Top tips

- If you've got a brand new rucksack, drag it through a muddy puddle before you go!
- Be careful on the roads – this is the number one cause of injury of Brits abroad.
- Take it easy! The vast majority of problems are caused by people trying to pack too much in, rushing around and tiring themselves out.
- Don't take anything valuable – an ipod costs the same as a year's salary in most third world countries, but if you haven't brought it, it can't be nicked.
- Be confident! Easier said than done, but it's all about not looking like a victim.
- Avoid other tourists – anywhere there are lots of tourists gathered, you'll find the scam-artists and pickpockets as well.
- Take half of what you think you need. Seriously.
- Have an amazing trip! Don't forget everything your mother

blend in, your kit will all look brand new and you won't even have a tan! All this will place a big sign over your head saying New Traveller! – visible to all touts, scam artists and money grabbers. Being prepared is the best way to avoid these dangers.

On your trip

Be aware

Every time you open a paper, there's one story or another about how dangerous the world is. Don't ignore this, but do take it with a pinch of salt – the world "out there" is not inherently more dangerous than here, it's just different. You need to trust your intuitions and be sensible about where you go and what you do.

Be responsible

Up until now many decisions have been made for you by your family or school. When you travel, it's all up to you – you have the chance to make every decision yourself. Some will be right and some less so. But heh! that's one of the great things about independent travel – the freedom to do what you want, when you want – but it also means that if you don't make the right decision, no one else will.

Be sensible

You're on the trip of a lifetime – but try not to slip totally into holiday mode. If you wouldn't do it at home, it's probably not a good idea to do it when you are away. Too many people make the mistake of seeing paradise and not looking any further. Just because it's hot, doesn't mean you won't get ripped off! Don't let this thought ruin the moment, but try and keep it at the back of your mind.

Get help

If you're starting to think that it might be better not to leave your living room, then don't worry – help is at hand. A number of companies have started running courses to prepare people for travelling around the world. These range from short seminars to longer residential courses, designed to teach you everything you need to know. For more information see www.PlanetWise.net.

Don't worry!

Despite all the bad press you hear, despite everything your parents have said and possibly despite everything in this article, don't worry about it! You will have an absolutely amazing trip and still be boring people with the stories for years to come. It's simply about having a bit of common sense – keeping safe is not about being invincible, it's about not standing out as vulnerable.

Andrew Wilson is director of travel safety experts Planet Wise, a company running highly interactive one-day and three-day courses specifically aimed at those in their Gap year. The courses are not only designed to teach people what they need to know (what to take etc), but also to try and get people thinking about the realities of their trip through a number of innovative scenarios. Further information at www.PlanetWise.net.

Our Passion Your Future



www.uksa.org

LIVE IT | australia
isle of wight

01983 203020
info@uksa.org

UKSA
United Kingdom Sailing Academy