

Credit Crunch Hits Gap Year Travels As Trips Shrink By Half

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Carefree Gap Years over as over 50% of travellers fear debt upon return Two thirds of students now travelling for only six months Lure of dangerous destinations a key factor for Gap Year itineraries

The well travelled gap year has become the gap half year as the credit crunch impacts upon the student travel market - that's the verdict of a new nationwide poll revealing that money worries are now the key concern for British students when planning Gap Year travels.

2,000 students and post graduates were surveyed for the study which was specially commissioned by the world's leading global social media network Bebo to celebrate their online reality adventure series The Gap Year www.bebo.com/thegapyear.

The findings reveal that among both recently returned and imminent gap year travellers, available funds are the key factor (64 per cent) in planning any trip. More than half of those surveyed (52 per cent) were also worried about being in personal debt upon their return given the current economic climate, while four in ten respondents admitted that the employment market was a key factor in shortening their trips.

As these concerns combine, itineraries are now being carved back from 12 to as few as just three months on the open road. More than two thirds (63 per cent) of those questioned were planning a maximum journey of six months away from home, with a mere 14 per cent planning a full year abroad.

While the global gap year market is now valued at upwards of £5 billion*, average recent spending on British gap year travels was found to be just over £4,000 per person, with most seeing the world on a shoestring, only having spent or planning to spend between £1,000 and £3,000 (40 per cent).

The survey also found that students are increasingly prepared to visit countries previously considered as dangerous to make their money go further. The lure of slightly more unsafe destinations seems to have become a badge of honour, with Kenya (19 per cent), South Africa (18 per cent), Columbia (16 per cent) Sri Lanka (15 per cent) and Venezuela (12 per cent)** - all subject to varying degrees of travel warnings from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office - now being frequently added to itineraries.

Twice as many boys as girls admitted being inspired by the danger factor when trip-planning (10 per cent versus 5 per cent), while boys were also found to be more likely to have lied to, or be prepared to lie to parents and friends about their whereabouts to save them from worry - 27 per cent of males indulging in little white lies, as opposed to only 15 per cent of females.

Solo trips are on the rise, while half of those surveyed (55 per cent) planned to travel with friends, more than a quarter (29 per cent) are now choosing to travel alone. Across the board, young holidaymakers seem to have left their inhibitions behind, with the vast majority taking part in extreme activities and deliberately risky behaviour. Of those who had recently returned from their travels, a staggering 31 per cent of men admitted they had indulged in unprotected sex, and a quarter of recently returned males also experimented with drugs (26 per cent).

Abseiling, bungee jumping, white water rafting and sky-diving all ranked highly amongst must-do challenges on gap years, topping the lists despite their obvious risks. Other dangerous activities like running with the bulls in Pamplona and visiting the favellas in Rio now also feature regularly in travel snaps.

Travellers revealed yet more about their journeys, with many hoping to find love, especially the men, with one in five (23 per cent) admitting to actively looking for action while away.

Bebo's The Gap Year study also revealed a rise in the age of gap year travellers, with a significantly older set jetting off than once was the case. The average age of departure is now 23, with a third of travellers leaving aged 21-24 (32 per cent), many having completed degrees and choosing to travel before entering the world of work. A growing proportion of 25-29 year olds (16 per cent) are also now choosing take a gap year when older and wiser. 52 per cent of travellers were also convinced that taking a gap year is a sensible investment in their future, believing their travels would only improve their employability upon return.

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