

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 p141).

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 ziggurats. Some people travel to find

out more about their ancestors, while others just like the cost-cutting of sleeping on relatives' couches. Two other top ways to target potential destinations are to follow the festival scene (see p109) or head into the great outdoors with some hiking, cycling or other activities (see p103).

Most travellers look at doing several stops, including a destination where they can work (see p113) to get cashed up before heading out again. The round-the-world ticket (see p88) can be the perfect way to skip around the globe. You could decide to team up with your best buddy or the love of your life to travel together, which may mean that you'll have to plan an itinerary together. A good alternative can be to look at doing some legs of your journey alone and meeting up to travel together at certain points. If your boyfriend would rather surf in Indonesia while you explore China, it's easy enough to meet up in Hong Kong before heading on to Europe. Check the Who With chapter (see p83) for a few more ideas on travelling with friends and partners.

RESEARCHING YOUR DESTINATIONS

Once you've hit on a few destinations to visit you can start finding out a little more about them, including the best time to visit and the local customs and culture. You'll get a closer look at what the destination has to offer and start working out which towns or cities you'll include on your itinerary – are you more New York than New England, more Milan than Ko Pha-Ngan?

There's a more serious side to research, including details such as immunisations, visas and other precautions, which will be different depending on where you go. Be sure to check travel advisories (see p41) before you travel.

INTERNET

Chances are you'll have started your research by googling a few destinations, probably while you should have been working or writing an essay. The quality of the information you'll find will vary, though the internet can have some of the most up-to-date information from travellers. **Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree** (www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree) is a good

example, as travellers post questions about destinations they're interested in and they're often answered by travellers who've recently been to the same places. You'll probably also come across **Lonely Planet's Destinations** (www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations), with profiles of every destination in the world. The **CIA Factbook** (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>) has a more technical look around the globe, including comments on roads and telecommunications. **Virtual Tourist** (www.virtualtourist.com) is a user-generated site with loads of reviews and tips from other travellers.

Tourism Websites

Another popular place to gather information is from tourism websites. You'll see when you read a few of them that they specialise in 'brochurese', a gushing language where every island is a 'secluded paradise' and even a hole in the ground can be described as 'a boutique getaway subterranean retreat'. They're good for basics and usually have plenty of inspiring pictures, but they're really trying to sell their destination. You can find tourist offices in your destination by visiting **Tourism Offices Worldwide Directory** (www.towd.com), which has links and addresses for most tourism offices in the world.

Online Travel Agents & Bookers

Several websites offer booking services and also provide destination guides, which can be a good way to get an idea of what a destination is like and what the major attractions are. Even if you don't book with them, they can give you some good ideas on places to head for or (if you want to get off the beaten track) avoid.

Here are a few:

- **Expedia** (www.expedia.com) Has links to various local sites.
- **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com)
- **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com)
- **Viator** (www.viator.com)

GUIDEBOOKS

Okay, so being a guidebook company we're always going to tell you that guidebooks are essential tools – they offer information on places to stay and eat, detail

- ✦ **TO PREVENT SNORING** When sleeping in a crap hostel with battered flat pillows, just slip the guide into the pillowcase to give your head a few extra inches of elevation. No more snoring!
- ✦ **TO ESCAPE WITH YOUR LIFE** When some punk fronts you with a knife in Soho, just slam the book into his face as hard as you can and run like the wind.
- ✦ **AS TOILET PAPER** Not the best use for a book, but when it's either your hand or the paper you'll use the paper. Make sure it's for the places you've been to though, or you'll spend an unpleasant hour cleaning bits you still need!
- ✦ **AS KINDLING** When you're camping in a cave and your idiot brother forgot fire starters, you'll turn to your very dry and flammable guidebook for help.
- ✦ **AS BUG CONTROL** In a mosquito-infested hotel room, where everything is nailed down and the only thing heavy enough to smash the gigantic evil blood suckers is your guidebook, you won't mind a few blood splats on the cover.
- ✦ **TO BLOCK A MOUSE HOLE** When your girlfriend won't go to sleep because of the mouse hole in the corner of the room, you will be REALLY glad that your guidebook blocks it enough to reassure her so you can get some kip.
- ✦ **TO KEEP A WINDOW OPEN** When the temperature is hitting 40°C and you have no air conditioning and the window won't stay open, a guidebook is a great thing to use as a wedge.
- ✦ **AS ROACH MATERIAL** When the big man with the dreads and machete asks you for something he can roach, you'll give him the cover of your Jamaica guidebook. In about five minutes you won't care anyway.
- ✦ **AS INSULATION** If you're climbing and didn't bring enough warm clothes, you can layer pages from the guidebook inside your clothes and get some extra warmth.
- ✦ **TO GET GIRLS** For some reason, playing the little-boy-lost in the middle of a European city works wonders. A guidebook makes a perfect prop. Or so my better-looking brother tells me.

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what to see, give you language basics and cultural insights. Still not convinced? Check the 10 Ways To Use Your Guidebook boxed text (above) to see how reliant you could become on your guidebook for everything from security to toilet paper.

Before buying your guidebook you should work out a rough itinerary, so consider just browsing a bookshop or library until you have a good idea where you're heading. Multicountry books which cover areas such as Europe or Southeast Asia can keep your options open and you can always buy a new or used book on the road if you change your itinerary. Most travellers come prepared by buying a book before they head

off so they can read up before they leave. It gets you excited about your destination before you get there.

Selecting Your Guidebook

There's a confusing array of guidebooks on the shelves in most bookshops, but flip through them and see which one suits you. As well as Lonely Planet, there are other popular brands including Rough Guides, Let's Go, Time Out, Moon, Frommer's, Fodor's and Footprint. Before parting with your hard-earned cash, ask your friends and family which books they've used.

When you're in the bookshop, read through the guidebooks a little and compare edition dates (latest

may not always be best though, as having the latest book is no use if it's wrong), hard information and reviews. Which book has a style that suits you? Some guides are written for business travellers or families so they might not suit your idea of all-night partying. Some books will go into greater depth on activities such as hiking or surfing, so if you're basing your whole trip on doing these activities check the coverage in different books. You might also consider a specialised guidebook that concentrates on cycling or cultural travel.

Also think about how long you plan to spend in each destination, as this will influence the level of detail you will want from your guide. For example, in Lonely Planet's *Europe on a Shoestring*, London usually gets 18 pages, which is fine if you're going to be there on a short trip. If, on the other hand, you're staying a while and travelling around the country, the *Great Britain* book might be better as it gives London a whopping 88 pages. If you need even more depth, you should try a city guide, which gives the British capital around 460

pages, or if you're on a brief visit, *Pocket London* has 244 pages, and *Discover London* has 304, including a lot of snappy colour photographs.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

With internet booking becoming popular, the travel agent around the corner could be an endangered species. Good travel agencies offer things you can't get on the web, such as advice on where to go, and they also help with booking tricky connections and tell you which vaccinations you'll need. Their brochures can be a good source of free information and even if you don't want to go on an organised tour, you can get a good feel for a country's major sights from the full-colour pictures in these glossy publications. Travel consultants are often widely travelled and most will be happy to share their experiences with you. However, many consultants work on commission, so they may be keen to make the deal and won't want to waste too much time if it's not going to result in a booking.



TIM GERARD BARKER / GETTY IMAGES

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 p25).

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 p70) 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.