

3. Where to go

For information on different countries have a look at guidebooks such as those in the 'Lonely Planet' or 'Rough Guide', series, and at travel websites to find out the best time to go and learn more about the culture, customs and ease of travel for foreign visitors.

It is important to check out your intended destinations on the individual country profiles at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice. This will inform you if there are any reasons why it might not be safe to travel there, and if there are any precautions you may need to take when visiting the country.

When you have decided on which countries you want to visit you should also read as much as you can to find out about the culture, language, climate, development status, safety, political situation, and points/issues of geographical interest for each country.

To search for details of available guidebooks and maps you can search the website of the map and guidebook shop Stanfords www.stanfords.co.uk. Remember that there is an unofficial 'Top Ten' list of countries that gap year travellers tend to go to. This list tends to include most of the following countries: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, USA, Peru, Thailand, Vietnam, Fiji, South Africa and India. This list exists because these are all fantastic and relatively safe places to visit, but there's no harm in looking a bit more 'off the beaten track' if you want your gap experience to be a bit different.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- Where would I like to go during my gap year? What destinations would meet my aims and objectives?
- Do I want to experience a particular environment? E.g. desert, tropical forest, glacier.
- Do I want to experience a particular culture or learn a certain language?
- Are my desired destinations considered to be safe and politically stable by the FCO? (check the above FCO website)
- Which regions of the country would I like to visit and for what reasons? Are there any sites of particular geographical interest I'd like to visit? (if you want to spend time in remote locations or rural environments remember to consider safety)
- Is this location a popular destination for travel? How easy will it be to get around the country and find accommodation?
 - What will the climate be like at the time that I'll be there? Will it impact on my ability to travel around (is road travel harder/more unsafe during the monsoon season, for example?)
- How common are English-speakers in the country? Is it a problem for me if English is not widely spoken? Do I need to have some knowledge of the local language before I leave?
- Are there any cultural nuances I need to be aware of?
- What are local attitudes to women in the country? How would a lone female traveller be viewed? Are there any behavioural aspects I should consider whilst travelling (e.g. don't go to bars alone)?
- Do I require a visa to travel there? Are there any restrictions on how long I can stay?
- If I am intending to work there, do I need a special sort of visa and/or are there any restrictions on taking paid employment?