



You've seen the YouTube clip - the one where a posh chap called Orlando goes to 'find himself' in Burma on his 'gap yah' (if you haven't, Google it and treat yourself to a giggle).

Though the cliché of the privileged school-leaver heading off with a backpack to travel the world still exists, the gap year has grown up somewhat, encompassing a much wider, more complex audience.

Yes, it's still very much an ambition for countless 18-year-olds before they head off to university, but our tough financial climate means a lot of those school-leavers will be taking shorter trips - a 'snap year' rather than a gap year - than those before them. Then there are the career-breakers to consider: a growing number of people in their 30s and 40s are taking time out from their hectic jobs to see the world. Last but not least are the so-called grey gappers, the ever-increasing number of retirees who are keen to spend a chunk of their retirement fund on a once-in-a-lifetime trip.

▶ THE SCHOOL-LEAVER

This term is widening and now

increasingly encompasses graduates as well as pre-uni adventurers. Either way, an escorted tour is a good option for younger travellers as it provides parents with the reassurance of group travel, while also allowing their kids to make new friends.

Donna Jeavons, Contiki sales and marketing director for the UK and Europe, says: "Bookings for longer itineraries in culture-rich destinations like Latin America and southeast Asia have seen a significant increase in 2016, so it's clear the average young traveller is more discerning than ever. From trekking the ancient Inca Trail to staying with a local family in Vietnam, young people are seeking out life-changing experiences which can bolster

CVs and offer a new perspective on the world."

The working gap year is increasingly popular, providing an easy way for young people to fund their gap year and gain valuable work experience in the process. Jeavons says Contiki has experienced growth on a number of its longer tours, which clients often tag on to the start or end of their working gap year.

Increasingly popular itineraries include The Explorer, which visits Peru, Argentina and Brazil, and the operator's 15-day Big Tiki tour of the North and South Islands of New Zealand. The 20-day Grand Canadian tour, featuring stop-offs in Boston, New York, Toronto, Vancouver and the Rockies, has seen a 95% year-on-year



Bridging the gap

Gap years are growing up, meaning more potential bookings, says Aby Dunsby

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Hiking in Iceland

➔ booking rise, highlighting the US's popularity as a gap year choice.

US specialist TrekAmerica is also a great choice for gap year students topping or tailing working, studying or volunteering in the Americas, with its escorted tours providing them with a time-saving, cost-effective way of touring the States and meeting people. The operator keeps deposits at £100 or 10% of the total trip cost to maintain its appeal to its 18-39 audience.

For clients on a round-the-world ticket, recommend a cross-country tour, such as TrekAmerica's Southern Sun trip linking New York and Los Angeles, as it allows young people to travel point-to-point without flying. Those who want a dash more comfort can opt for one of its four new Plus tours, which feature twin-share accommodation, rather than the camping or budget lodging on its regular tours, extra included activities and a larger group size.

If they're not working abroad in the US or Australia, some young gap year-takers are reducing the amount of time they spend travelling to suit their budget. Tim Fryer, STA Travel's



UK country manager, says: "Travelling is an expected rite of passage for most young people, and the majority will try to fit in a trip of some kind over the summer, whether it's embarking on a round-the-world year-long gap itinerary or a shorter 'snap gap' of a few weeks."

STA's most popular gap year destinations remain Thailand, Australia, the US, Peru and New Zealand, showing that longer trips are still the

preferred choice. However, a more surprising destination is Iceland, sales to which are up 54% this year. Fryer says the country, as well as being popular with 'snap gappers', is increasingly being included in multi-stop itineraries with North America.

THE CAREER-BREAKER

Whether they're ditching their job for good and using the time away to reflect on a career change, or taking a break to fulfil a dream trip before settling down and having kids, this is an audience worth knowing about: the career-breaker will often have a clear idea about what they want to do during their time away and is also likely to have money to spend.

"Rather than students on gap years, we are seeing more people in their 30s and 40s taking career breaks," says Daniel Pawlyn, head of business development at Intrepid Travel. "They will often book six or seven trips with us over an eight or 10-month period, and they tend to combine group travel with independent travel."

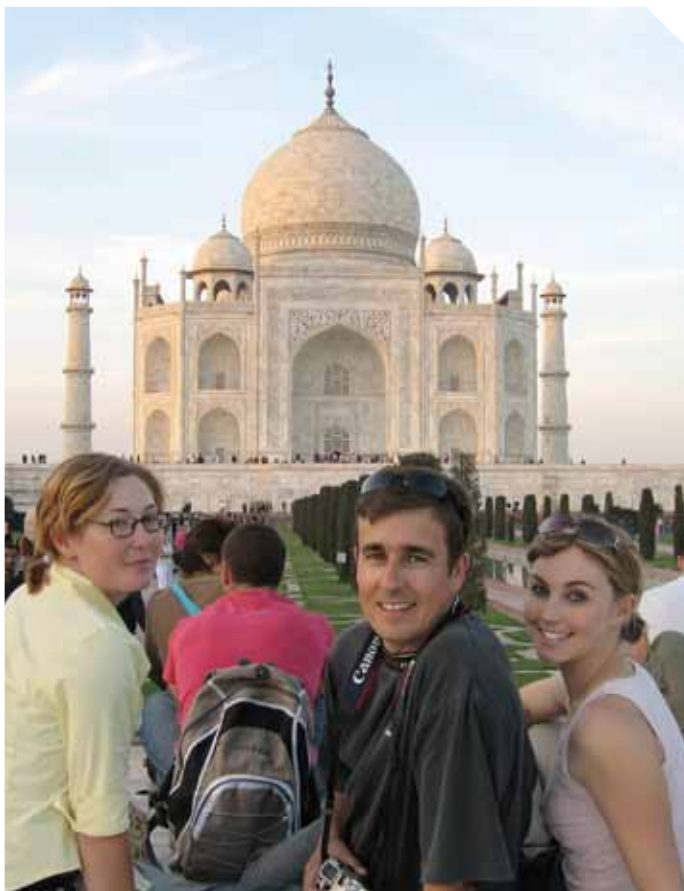
This is great news for agents, as career-breakers often mean extra chances to earn commission on multiple tours as travellers make up for the gap year they never took or travel to destinations they missed the first time round. That could include India, Central or South America, ticking off epic experiences such as watching the sun rise over the Taj Mahal or trekking to Macchu Pichu. They're also more likely to want to delve deeper into a local culture and get off the beaten track, says Pawlyn.

Clients looking to avoid the



TrekAmerica offers a new 56-day Ultimate Transcontinental trip, departing June 2017, from £5,269. trekamerica.co.uk

Wendy Wu Tours offers a 13-day Discover Japan tour from £4,590 including flights from Heathrow, domestic transport, accommodation and all meals. wendywutours.co.uk



ABOVE: Monument Valley with TrekAmerica

LEFT: Taj Mahal, India



LEFT:
Homestay in Ecuador

RIGHT:
The *Deccan Odyssey*, India

BELOW:
Itsukushima Shrine, Japan



→ tourist traps should also consider tours that encourage clients to develop a greater understanding of the country they are visiting. G Adventures' Local Living tours see clients lodging in unique residences for most of their trip, with a local host to give them insider access to a destination.

An escorted tour affords experiences that career-breakers would struggle to arrange on their own: think watching a Waorani warrior hunt in the Amazon in Ecuador, or helping to make byaslag, a local cheese, while living on the Mongolian steppe.

▶ THE GREY-GAPPER

The kids have flown the nest, the pension pot is full – what better time to start ticking off that bucket list? The grey-haired gap year market is getting bigger, and that's reflected in the type of holidays that tour operators are offering. Cosmos Tours & Cruises

“Activities include cycling in Xi'an, riding a Vespa in Saigon or hiking in the rice terraces in Longji

has launched a new range of 'bucket lister' holidays for 2017 which offer adventure without scrimping on the older market's penchant for luxury. Its new Hidden Treasures of Gujarat rail tour, for example, offers clients old-style glamour aboard the *Deccan Odyssey* while tagging on excursions to experience local traditions and cultures.

“Travellers often want to see the sights but also enjoy a more authentic travelling experience,” says Ben Briggs, head of

marketing at Wendy Wu Tours, whose core client age is between 40 and 65. “Our Discovery Tours offer activities including cycling along the city walls in Xi'an, riding a Vespa through Saigon or hiking in the rice terraces in Longji, which can run alongside well-known attractions.”

For retirees, trip lengths range from month-long adventures to full-on round-the-world trips. Colin Wilson, group sales director at Travelsphere, says its customers tend to opt for longer breaks, be it 30 days touring around Australia, two weeks in China or 32 days circumnavigating the globe.

“We are seeing a real increase in the demand for escorted holidays to India, Bhutan, Burma, China and the US, while closer to home Iceland, Italy and Croatia remain popular,” he says.

An escorted tour can also be a great way for retirees to begin

a longer 'gap year' adventure. Wendy Wu Tours has a number of short stays that could work well at the start of a trip, such as its five-day Classic Cambodia journey. “These allow guests to experience a new culture in the safety and comfort of one our tours, allowing them to settle into their travels. Shorter trips could also be a great way to end a larger journey with expert guiding and authentic experiences,” says Briggs.

With retirees increasingly opting for more-adventurous destinations, an escorted tour allows clients to soak up the sights and sounds of a destination while travelling safely alongside a local expert guide. Among Collette's new destinations for 2017 are India, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, providing further evidence that grey-gappers have a desire to explore long-haul. **TW**

PICTURES: BOA CAMPBELL; CARINDA HARRIS; BENJAMIN PALMER; STA TRAVEL; COSMOS; G ADVENTURES; WENDY WU TOURS

