



Pinpointing Your Gap Year's Travel Health Needs

The Pinpoint Travel Health Guide to Staying Healthy During a Global Travel Adventure

Introduction

Gap years are no longer just adventures for 18-year-olds wishing to broaden their horizons before determining their university or career path. Increasingly, we hear the word 'year off' or 'sabbatical' being used by those already in a career but desperate to 'find themselves' or 'do something different', because life is too short to be stuck behind a desk.

Some gap year travellers – very much the description that has replaced 'backpackers' – have younger children within their 'entourage'. Other globetrotters are more mature and trying to cram in the worldwide adventure they were not able to tackle in their teens or early twenties.

Regardless of which type of 'gapper' you are, whether on a quest to impress a future employer by detailing specific experiences on your CV, or giving something back by volunteering and using skills you have already developed, your gap year needs are actually the same.

The fundamental thing is to explore new countries, cultures and experiences in a safe and healthy way, filling the memory bank with positive recollections, not negative associations.

With Pinpoint Travel Health's help, you can put yourself in a position to achieve this.

Why travel health is so important for gap year travel

Staying healthy whilst exploring the world is absolutely key. A gap year adventure can involve significant expenditure, so you do not want to waste that money by falling ill overseas. If you do, you will either lose out on some of the experience, through being bed-ridden or hospitalised, or potentially have to cut short your travels, to return home for medical care.

Your travel memories should not revolve around hospital wards, trips to clinics or doctors' appointments. They similarly should not linger, through contracting a disease that can affect you for life.

Similarly, you do not want to arrive at a country's border and find that you are refused entry. Some countries insist that you can demonstrate vaccine certification, the most common requirement being a yellow fever certificate. Gap year travellers need to be very alert to this, as various countries will want to see this certification if you have travelled to a country that has a risk of yellow fever transmission or even when you have merely been in transit in such a country's airport.

It is essential that you make travel health planning part of the research process when you start to plot your journey across the world.

What diseases might you encounter around the world?

Unfortunately there are a variety of diseases, prevalent in certain areas of the world, that can turn global travel into a negative experience.

The enemies to watch out for (and safeguard against) are largely hepatitis A and B, Covid-19, cholera, typhoid, yellow fever, Japanese encephalitis, rabies, tetanus, polio, meningitis, tuberculosis, flu and malaria. You can protect yourself against these diseases through pre-travel vaccination. Other diseases prevalent in the world are those for which you will typically have had a vaccination as a child, such as measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) and polio.

Then there are other diseases against which vaccination is not available or only given in certain instances, such as dengue fever and zika virus.

Some diseases, such as schistosomiasis (bilharzia) can be contracted by swimming in parasite-infested water. When it comes to health hazards like this, you will need to exercise caution and common sense.

Getting gap year travel health planning right

There should be two elements to your travel health planning:

- 1) To be alert to the presence of some of the diseases mentioned above in your intended destinations
- 2) To be aware whether these are likely to impact you and your itinerary.

Point one seems relatively easy for a gap year traveller. If you use a search engine, you will find various websites that will tell you which diseases are to be found within a particular country. These websites will then highlight which vaccinations are recommended or to be considered. But that is where the advice tends to end. This is also where the advice of most travel clinics or doctors will begin or end.

So this is why you should look to point 2. The reasons for this step are as follows:

- The advice you receive from most websites is just focused on a country. Yet, the diseases mentioned may:
 - only be present in certain regions or zones within that country
 - only prevail in particular seasons
 - only be a risk if you engage in certain types of activity or are immersed in an environment with poor sanitation or living conditions
- Vaccinations and antimalarials (of which you may require a few different kinds) can add a lot of extra expense to your gap year costs. It makes no sense to have vaccinations or antimalarials you do not need, on the basis that the disease risk is not prevalent in the areas you will visit, or at the time of year you will travel
- Not everyone has a health situation that allows them to have vaccinations. If you can pinpoint locations that will be exciting and fulfil your gap year dreams, but also not expose you to a disease risk against which you cannot be vaccinated, you are in a much better position to explore
- You may not like having vaccinations, so why subject yourself to that, if there is no need, based on your specific itinerary and the pinpointed locations that you will be in?

The important thing to know is that the only way you can take step 2 is to use the Pinpoint Travel Health service and order a Travel Health Brief. You have the ability to tailor this exactly to your itinerary, specific locations in which you will spend time, your own existing health conditions and your intended activities.

If your gap year travel is completely off-the-beaten-track and taking you through local communities and rural areas, it is likely that the Travel Health Brief will advise you on a number of vaccines that will protect you. But, if you are not trekking or paddling up remote rivers, simply exploring larger cities and towns, coastlines and events, there is a chance that you will not require some vaccines. It can pay to know.

What other planning should sit alongside this?

The process of exploring your travel health, by ordering a Pinpoint Travel Health brief, could take place when you are planning your routes and experiences, before booking any flights or accommodation, as part of your route planning strategy.

This is particularly true if you are pregnant or unable to have vaccines, as you could potentially verify an itinerary that you have created to strategically avoid a seasonally occurring disease within one of your intended destinations.

Alternatively, you can reference your fully confirmed route and plot every single location – right down to village or individual farm or community school level – as well as your work/volunteering intentions, to assess your precise disease risk.

At this same stage of your gap year travel planning, you should focus on other key elements of your travels. These include:

- Learning about the culture, customs and local laws in the countries you will visit
- Discovering what behaviours are prohibited
- Understanding expectations about dress code (which could affect your packing!)
- Reading up on the other risks you could face, by visiting the FCDO travel advice web page for that country, whether these relate to weather, theft, violence or hijack
- Acquiring vital knowledge about scams operating in these areas
- Getting up to date with the latest advice on terrorism threats and how to act, if caught up in an incident
- Discovering whether there are any public holidays that could affect your plans
- Starting to learn a few key phrases in the native tongue of the countries you will visit
- Assessing where you might get work and what sort of work that will be.
- Buying a travel insurance policy that will provide vital health benefits and support, should the worst occur. Do make sure your pre-existing health conditions are covered. The same goes for any sporting activities – or work – that you intend to do.

What travel health elements need to go in the backpack?

Travel health for a gap year traveller is not all about vaccinations administered via injection prior to travel. Some things can, and should typically, go into the backpack. These include:

- Any antimalarial tablets required. It is important you take your course before and during your travels, as instructed.
- DEET-based insect repellent
- Imodium, or a similar diarrhoea treatment
- Sunscreen, to at least Factor 30
- Sunglasses with UVA/B rays protection
- Rehydration sachets

- Anti-bacterial hand gel
- Water purification tablets
- Carbon monoxide detector and batteries
- Any medication with which you have been prescribed at home
- Antiseptic cream
- Antihistamine cream
- Plasters
- Bandage
- Small nail scissors
- Paracetamol
- Contraception and condoms
- Tampons
- A few toothbrushes
- Gaffer tape
- Torch and spare batteries
- Travel wipes (useful if you cannot take a shower)

Rucksack and packing

Having easy access to these items can be important, so don't opt for a top-loader rucksack. Choose one that will allow you to keep such necessities in a different compartment, accessed through another part of the rucksack. Keeping your medications dry is also vital, so make sure your rucksack is waterproof and well-made and buy a rain cover for it. Make sure you also keep medications protected, by putting them into sealed plastic bags, so wet clothing or spillages will not affect them.

Remember that back health is equally essential, if you are to enjoy your gap year adventure, so shop-test your rucksack before buying it, by putting it on your back, assessing if it sits comfortably and whether its straps offer protection against cutting in and rubbing. The same care should be taken with your hiking boots.

Your packing list should also include long-sleeved shirts and long pants, which also will help protect against mosquito bites and excessive sunburn. A mosquito net can be a great asset but make sure you also take some gaffer tape, so you can repair any holes in mosquito nets. A broad-brimmed sun hat is another essential, as part of your sun safety.

How to keep safe during your travels

Looking after your health is one way to stay safe during your gap year adventure but you also need to think about personal safety.

If you do your country-specific research, you should have a clearer idea of some of the risks and also local scams and how they operate. Forewarned is forearmed. As part of this, note down the police and ambulance emergency numbers in each of the countries you will visit. It is also a good idea to note down the details of local embassies, who could assist you, if you get into trouble.

In general, seek to become hazard aware and learn to constantly scan your environment. If something or someone doesn't seem quite right, then keep an eye on it. If you need help, because you are unnerved, ask for it. Always avoid any political demonstrations and get yourself away from trouble and unrest.

Food and drink safety

Never leave food or drink unattended, as spiking can occur in many locations. Be careful where you buy drinks and don't accept any from strangers. Only drink tap water if you feel it safe but otherwise opt for bottled. Just check the seals on any bottles you buy.

Avoid ice in your drinks and, if buying fresh fruit, wash it yourself, in clean water, or peel it. Eat cooked, rather than fresh fruit and vegetables, as much as possible and be careful with street food and seafood.

If you suffer tummy upsets, take diarrhoea medication, if on the move and with poor access to toilet facilities, but otherwise it can be best to let the bug pass through and keep hydrated by taking on board fluids. If the issue continues for more than 36 hours, consult a doctor.

Allow your body to get used to the new climate and foods and also be cautious if going to destinations at high altitude. Altitude sickness can be very serious and it is best to move to extreme heights gradually, so the body can adjust.

Protecting against theft

Do not invite trouble by wearing valuable watches or jewellery or flashing expensive phones or gadgets around. Try to carry the minimum of cash and use safes for anything you do not need to be taking out with you, such as cash, credit cards and your passport.

Take copies of all of your important documents before leaving home: passport; visas; vaccination certificates; driving licence; health card; travel insurance and flight and accommodation details. Leave one copy behind, with a friend or family member, and keep the other separate from your original documents.

Be especially careful when using ATMs. These can be theft hotspots but also have skimmers in place, which will steal your details. Try to use ATMs inside stores or shopping centres, or ones that are covered by CCTV.

Taking a pre-paid money card with you is often the best way of managing your money. If you lose it, it can be replaced and, if stolen, the thief can only take what is on the card.

Staying safe whilst exploring

Stick to well-lit streets, do not walk down back alleys or walkways and avoid the beach at night. Apply locks to your rucksack and keep it secure around the leg of a chair or table, if in a café or restaurant. Try to wear your rucksack on the front if in high-risk theft areas such as train and bus stations, on public transport or at airports.

Do not hitchhike or go against local advice when it comes to places deemed 'unsafe'. Consult with a trusted local source to pick up on their knowledge, whenever possible. This includes assessing where it is safe to swim, or where dangerous rip tides could catch you out. Try to stick to beaches with lifeguards, abide by warning flags and never swim in the sea at night or after drinking alcohol.

If hiring a car, be extra cautious, as roads may be little more than tracks and more dangerous than you might imagine. Check that the basics of any hired vehicle are sound, with this including lights,

brakes, seatbelts and tyres. Do not leave any valuables on view in a car when you park and put anything into the trunk before you get to your destination, so that thieves are not aware it is there. At some popular beaches and other locations round the world, there will be thieves specifically watching what motorists do as they park.

Women's travel health

Women should follow all of the above advice, if travelling solo, but may need to take extra precautions.

Part of the pre-trip research should involve assessing the dress code for women within the countries you will visit and any special rules or laws that may affect you.

Be alert to anyone who may follow you. Ask for help from a police officer or other trusted person, if necessary. Wearing a wedding ring might be a tactic to try to fend off unwanted attention but so too is dressing modestly and not 'standing out'.

This is a tactic that all gap travellers should strive to achieve and that often means not looking lost by consulting maps in the street or in public view. Try to get a route in your head, to avoid having to consult a map. You can often do this out of view. Doing this also avoids flashing a phone around, if you are using Google Maps.

At your accommodation, try to ask for a room that is not on the ground floor and try not to share with strangers. Make sure windows are secure and consider taking a door wedge – even a security one, which will alert you, should someone attempt to enter through the door.

Take a personal alarm with you and make sure you always tell friends and family where you are and to where you will be travelling. If using a taxi, make it one through which your journey can be tracked, if possible. If not, make sure it is a licensed cab. Do not accept lifts from strangers.

If you are pregnant at the time of travel, make sure you take advantage of the Pinpoint Travel Health Brief, to assess whether or not a vaccination is necessary for your particular itinerary, or whether you should really have a vaccination but cannot, due to your pregnancy. In this case, you will need to take extra precautions to avoid falling ill.

Older and children's gap year travel health planning

For an older traveller, travel health planning may well require assessing any medical contraindications that could occur with regard to vaccines or antimalarials. Here, the Pinpoint Travel Health system can be a major ally. Armed with this information, you can save a travel clinic or doctor vast amounts of time in cross-referencing medications and vaccines, presenting them with your Pinpoint Travel Health Brief and its report, so they can then assess the best way of keeping you protected.

Any traveller with a complicated medical history, of any age, can take advantage of this and assure themselves that the treatment provided is right for them, as an individual.

Parents can assess what protection is required for their children and what medications are suitable for them. With the MMR vaccination not necessarily having been taken up by all families, this may be one area of travel health risk to consider, as these diseases can be more commonly experienced in some overseas countries.

Whilst many travel health planning websites will assume that UK children have had recommended vaccinations, the Pinpoint Travel Health system will take the accurate information from you, as the traveller or parent, and assess what gaps may need to be filled.

In some cases, an older traveller may also need to consider a booster vaccine, if it is some time since their last vaccination and if it is not a vaccine that lasts for life.

All travellers setting off for a worldwide adventure, should try to get themselves in as fit a condition as possible before departure. That includes a trip to the dentist!

Added security

You should download Apps that will help you keep in contact with loved ones and make sure that you have a phone charger that will keep you on the network and able to call someone, if you need help. Buying a local SIM, in each country that you visit, may help you keep control of the budget with regard to calls and texts and an e-SIM could help maintain your connectivity. Try not to buy this at the airport, however, as these items can be more expensive there.

Always make sure you have the name of your accommodation with you. However, do not share where you are staying with people you meet and do not post details of your accommodation, location, or travel plans, on social media in real time. Wait until you have moved on and cannot be traced by those with bad intentions.

Beware any electrical equipment that seems dodgy and unplug it. Take a torch and batteries, so you always have a means of seeing your way by night. Always know where fire escapes are located within your accommodation. Never light candles in your room, or smoke in bed.

If you find yourself in need of assistance, you can perhaps call your travel insurer, airline or tour operator, if they could help. For a real crisis scenario, you can call the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) on 0207 008 5000.

Protecting the budget

We have already highlighted how a Pinpoint Travel Health report could help you save money on unnecessary vaccinations, according to your specific itinerary, travel plans, health and time of travel. There are other things you can do, as a gap year traveller, to save more money. These include:

- Booking midday rather than weekend flights
- Picking budget-friendly countries, if your budget is tight
- Transferring between locations via overnight bus or train, so you save on accommodation costs
- Saving on accommodation by looking for house-sitting opportunities through a scheme such as TrustedHouseSitters
- Opting for a homestay or cultural exchange opportunity through Workaway, for which you will commit a bit of time to a pre-agreed work project, in exchange for board and lodgings. You might also be able to make your own plans, on a similar basis.
- Looking for 'happy hours' on food, as well as drinks. Some restaurants will have lower prices at certain times of day or offer a very cost-effective fix-priced daily dish or menu.
- Getting the best exchange rate that you can find
- Organising any entry visas in advance, rather than paying on arrival

- Downloading and using a budgeting App that will help keep an eye on expenditure in multiple currencies and keep tabs on your remaining budget e.g. Nomad Wallet or Spendee
- Making sure, if in a group, that you only pay for what you have eaten or drunk. An App like SplitWise can help with this.
- Asking for local tips of where is good and cost-effective to eat or shop
- Asking locals for advice on what is free to do

Work considerations

The work that you elect to do could affect your travel health requirements. For instance, if you take on farm work, you will be working around animals, which could increase your rabies risk. You are also more likely to be in a rural environment, where mosquito-borne disease risks can be higher. That is also true of jobs in and around rice fields in Asia.

The beauty of the unique Pinpoint Travel Health service is that it will feed all of this information in, analyse both the type of work and its exact location, and give you a clear view of the vaccine protection you require.

Volunteering considerations

In a similar way, Pinpoint Travel Health can analyse your intended volunteering activities and assess whether those might impact your pre-departure travel health planning. Here, for example, you might be working in a village where sanitation is poor and the risk of certain diseases much higher, as a result. If you are working for several months at the heart of a packed local community, that could also impact your health risk.

Many volunteering opportunities would be in places such as animal sanctuaries and that might mean coming into contact with rabies-carrying animals, such as dogs, monkeys and bats. All of this can influence vaccination recommendations. The good thing is that Pinpoint Travel Health will accurately advise you of this.

When to do your planning

The key thing with the travel health planning behind your gap year adventure is that you schedule it all in and make sure you leave enough time for it.

If you require vaccinations, you may need to allow a period of a few months for some of those, to make sure you can have the required number of doses before you depart.

You will also have to build in time for actually visiting a clinic, as some vaccines will only be available regionally, rather than locally.

Any antimalarials will have to be prescribed and taken before departure, so you can start to build resilience before arriving at your location.

You will also have to book a dental appointment and, if you are in need of enhanced fitness, embark on that fitness campaign some months ahead of boarding your first plane, train or boat.

It would also be advisable to take an GHIC card, if travelling in Europe. This will not cover all your medical costs but will pick up essential healthcare, in a state-run facility, to the level that a local resident would enjoy. That can be handy, in some instances. However, it is no substitute for travel insurance, which you will also need to organise before setting off and is only valid if travelling in

parts of Europe. If you already have an EHIC card that is still valid, you can continue to use this until it expires and will then have to apply for a GHIC.

Make a definite plan of what you need to do and when, to ensure your travel health arrangements have all been addressed before you embark on an adventure of a lifetime.

Summing up

Travel health plays a huge part in any gap year experience and can be the make or break factor within travel plans. Doing all that you can to stay healthy is absolutely fundamental to your enjoyment of a trip and a way to not adversely affect the plans of anybody else with whom you are travelling.

But getting things right, with pinpoint precision, is also essential. If you use the Pinpoint Travel Health service, just a little inputting of the details of your trip, your health record and your intended activities, will leave you in no doubt as to what you need to do. Importantly, it will also show you what is not necessary, potentially saving you money.

Armed with this report, you can save an NHS doctor or private clinic time and ensure that the medical contraindications, which could possibly be missed through their systems or manual cross-referencing methods, are flagged up. The report can influence which antimalarial is provided or ensure you do not receive a vaccine that could cause complications.

The Pinpoint Travel Health service can cover all members of the family, producing personalised and bespoke reports for each individual traveller in your group. That gives you the confidence that you are doing the right thing for everyone.

When you get your report, you will also be advised of clinics and centres local to you, where you can get your vaccines or antimalarials, or both.

Best of all, all of this will only cost you £15 (including VAT). When you set this in the context of the entire gap year adventure, it is a minor expense, especially considering the absolute clarity it will provide and the fact that its advice is tailored to you and your trip alone, not a generalised overview of situations worldwide.

Head to <https://pinpointtravelhealth.com> to order your Pinpoint Travel Health report today.

"Not all those who wander are lost."

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

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