



theleap

CORONA
PROOF

Milly's
Gap Year Guide

Dear Leapers,

My name is Milly and together with my team at The Leap we have been advising and organising gap years for nearly 30 years. Clearly navigating this pandemic has been a unique challenge for us all but we are doing it with creative determination, jumping through many a hoop to get the hundreds of gappers away this year despite lockdown. We have officially become covid travel experts.

How have we done this you might well ask, when the country has been in lockdown?

Well, it hasn't been easy, but it has been an exciting, dynamic journey involving the HOUSE OF LORDS, confirming that Leap programs were legally permitted through the volunteering, education caveat, BESPOKE INSURANCE to cover FCDO advice and covid, EXTENSIVE RISK ASSESSMENTS, with our overseas partners, LEAP TEAM BUBBLES and the COLLABORATION of many a supportive family.

It has been the most exciting year and we've learnt to be nimble, and solution orientated to keep up with the ever-changing hurdles of PCR tests, border closures, flight cancellations, red lists and quarantine making this the toughest time to travel and operate a travel business since WW2. Sadly, we predict the covid chaos is going to be with us for some time, so we remain poised to help you navigate a safe and responsible 'get away'.

We are immensely proud of what we have achieved this year, rescuing many projects from the brink of collapse and helping gap year students access some sense of normality through a constructive and enriching travel experience.

So, if you are gapper parents, don't worry there are solutions, they are not going to be sitting on your sofa for the next 18 months. And, if you are a gapper with only a few festivals (fingers crossed) to look forward to – get in touch, there is so much you can do.

So, I have put this little guide together to get you thinking and planning...

Speak soon,

Milly



WHAT TYPE OF TRAVELLER
ARE YOU?

Ask yourself - how do you want to travel...

I can officially tell you that you can travel but the first thing I want you to ask yourself is what type of traveller are you?

An independent backpacker

The independent backpacker wants to travel with utter freedom, making decisions on a daily basis and changing them on an hourly basis.

They are happy to make friends pool side, arrive in new places with no plans, staying in random places and not worried about routine. Happy to travel alone or with a friend or 2.

If this is you - then I recommend you join Leap VIP which will give you the guidance needed in these weird times (read on).

A structured pack animal

Pack animals love meeting new people from all walks of life but walking cold into a hostel night after night isn't their thing. They need more structure, a plan and in the perfect world a ready-made family of friends to make them happy. The structure gives confidence and comfort for both the gapper and the parents left at home.

Lots of ideas for you here - we of course do our team volunteering and adventure programs (Kenya and Costa Rica Adventure being my favourites) but also start with the Year Out Group to have a look at what is also around. Right now, be mindful of false promises, anyone asking for more than a tiny deposit and if they don't have the right insurance or thorough covid safety protocols and flexible cancellation terms - walk away. Do not start booking direct with overseas companies as if it all goes pear shaped you will never get your money back.

A combi-traveller

What we've found a lot this year is that some people like to do a bit of both. Start with a Leap program to find your feet and get travel savvy, then spread your wings and off you go knowing that you know the fundamental travel basics to be a safe and responsible traveller.



COVID TRAVEL ADMIN

Brace yourself for covid admin...

Seriously there is nothing simple about travelling right now. Now, we were admin guru's before the pandemic but not like this...it's a minefield of exploding bombs to push us off course through every working day. So brace yourself, you have to become super flexible – expect your flight to be changed 101 times and every cold beer in an exotic place is a bonus.

Out top tips:

Flights

Do NOT book cheap flights through some dodgy booking site online. This is not the time, you need access to a human being. Remember buy cheap, buy twice.

Incident support teams

This was really interesting back at the start of the pandemic – we were helping as many people as we could to repatriate kids from far away places and I know how this personally feels as my son and his friends were rescued from Bolivia. So my message here is do not leave home without signing up to one. We can tell you who the best teams are.

QR codes and PCR tests

Entering or leaving a country is a minefield and ever changing. We have helped many gappers navigate the timelines for PCR tests, covid quarantine and QR codes.

Navigating UK Green, Amber and Red Lists

We live on government websites to catch any changes and trust me there are many.



INSURANCE + RISK ASSESSMENTS

Do not leave home without ...

I know this is the dullest of topics but this, my friend, is the Willy Wonker's golden ticket to secure your safe passage out of here.

So, brace yourself and take this in...

Insurance

You simply cannot leave home without it and the key message is the policy must *insure you regardless of the FCDO travel advice*. This is essential and many insurance companies are happy to sell you their policy without telling you – do not fall into this trap.

Thankfully Guy is of a tenacious breed, and he spent lockdown persuading insurance companies to insure us as a company and all our Leapers despite the FCDO advice. He thankfully nailed it and a company who insured war-torn journalists saw our gappers as a walk in the very low risk park.

Covid Risk Assessment

I promise we are not going to bombard you with the Covid statistics per country or indeed the number of fire escapes in each hostel. Right now, what you need to think about is a country's infrastructure, asking questions such as:

Hospitals/facilities – how many and how equipped are they for a Covid or other emergencies?

Flights – how many airlines are flying in right now? This has a bearing on how fast we could get you out if there was an emergency.

Internet/phones – again how reliable and efficient are they to assist in repatriation out or to reach a hospital which could cope with a covid case.

Government – how reliable/dependable are they? Looking back at last year how fast did they lockdown and how did they look after trapped tourists?

If there was a problem in-country – who would look after our travellers?



WHERE CAN YOU TRAVEL?

You need to be flexible...

Advice and regulations change pretty much every week – so you must remain flexible and open minded. One of the interesting things to mention here is – right now, it's not easy to travel between countries – so forget the cross Asia hostel hopping extravaganza or the Top Gear style race from Argentina to Colombia. In fact, forget Asia right now – it hasn't opened a jot all year and yes everyone has been to Costa Rica this year.

Now is the time to choose one country and do it well – which I think is a positive. Slow down and take it all in. You can keep a close eye on the UK FCDO government website, or you can just ask us and we will keep you up to date.

Red lists – do not be afraid of a red list. We have learnt so much this year about what it means and how to circumnavigate responsibly and safely. Bear in mind this is just a UK system/advice – if a country is happy for you to travel there and you comply with their laws and regulations, then it's up to you to choose to travel and your appetite to risk. I can bore you for hours on our red list planning.

Find your perfect destination

Don't let your friends tell you where or indeed Instagram...this is your time.

Questions to ask yourself:

Jungle, mountains or beach?

Hot, humid or arid?

Architecture or environment?

Wildlife or community?

What level of challenge are you after?

[Find your perfect destination by completing our quiz](#)



TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

Try to travel with a conscience...

Simply put, we know too much about the people and projects we have supported over the years. Everyone is hurting so please if you can stay with local hostels, families and give back to a local project – it would make me very happy.

We know first-hand the enormous positive impact our volunteers have made both financially and by contributing to our overseas projects, many on their knees due to the pandemic and close to bankruptcy. A little story – we support a lovely animal sanctuary project in Costa Rica, early in 2021 having had no support for 10 months they were about to put the animals down due to not having money to feed or care for them. We were able to save them by getting them teams of eager Leapers.

Lots of projects out there and I promise the experience is so rewarding. It really adds to one's travelling experience and you can channel your inner Greta by getting involved in projects focusing on:

The Environment

Think beaches, micro-plastics, recycling, reforestation and sustainable farming.

Wildlife

Think wildlife sanctuaries, rewilding and anti-poaching.

Marine

Think about the reefs and their eco-systems, turtle conservation and mangroves.

leap *VIP*

LEAP VIP

Your golden ticket out of here

Behind every adventure is Leap VIP

Ok – I am not doing a cheap sell here as you can find out all the above by yourself. However, if you need our help, with the above then we have built an area called Leap VIP especially for you.

Leap VIP has been our lockdown hero and saved the gap year for many this year. It is a *travel community advice hub* which gives all the answers to the above and so much more. Basically, we do all the hard work for you, help you with logistics, forms, the lot whether a Leap team or an independent traveller.

Leap VIP gives you:

Latest travel updates

We make sense of the government travel pages and can tell where you go in one clear list of accessible destinations.

Leap endorsed projects

Access to our network of contacts all over the world and get in contact direct – they can help you create a unique travel experience and provide amazing back up overseas.

Gap year zoom consultations

Chat through your gap plans with me. I can help steer and give ideas.

Insurance and incident support team

All Leap VIPs can access our FCDO and covid proof insurance.

Access to our corporate flight team

All leap VIPs can access our corporate team at Trailfinders to access flexible flights.

Redeemable against a Leap program

Book a Leap program and the £100 you paid for VIP is redeemable against your program.

So, how do I become a Leap VIP member?

Super easy – [click here](#)



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Promise me...

Whatever you do:

Travel meaningfully by contributing to the local communities and environments you meet.

Keep an open mind and take a little step outside of your comfort zone and don't look back.

We're on hand to get your show on the road (or sea, or mountain, we're easy!) and ensure you have a wonderful adventure wherever you end up.

Now time to get dreaming.

Here to help,

Milly

WHAT NEXT ...

1. **Follow @gapyearexperts on Instagram**
2. **Join Leap VIP** - our travel advice hub to help gappers navigate this new world.

<https://www.theleap.co.uk/leapvip/>

Joining Leap VIP costs £100 for a year subscription but is redeemable against so many things the other side, even a leap program so it's a win win.