



# 'WE WERE STORMED BY TERRORISTS'

A year out is supposed to be a year of travel, sun and fun, but last month two Brits died while on gap year adventures. **more!** spoke to three girls whose dream trips turned into nightmares...

## TERROR IN THE NEAR EAST

**L**ouisa Edwards, 23, a writer from London, went to Israel to work on a kibbutz. During her travels she was nearly bombed and kidnapped by terrorists. My gap year in Israel started with four months in a kibbutz. Whilst I didn't experience any of the scenes from Israel that we're now used seeing on TV, it was also a world away from the life presented on the advertising video that I saw before leaving the UK. The pictures of plump and happy rabbits hopping round fields were a far cry from the harsh reality. Before leaving I was committed to the concept of a kibbutz, an independent farming community where everyone works together for the good of each other, but I was expecting it to be more

hippyfied and laid-back. Instead it was bloody hard work. The searing temperatures made it impossible to work during the day, so the hard stuff really started at 5pm and continued till two in the morning. You name it, I was doing it – decorating, cooking, washing, helping on the farm, picking mangoes from trees... It was hardly a holiday, but it taught me a thing or two about getting my hands dirty. I'd never had to pick up after myself at home. And looking back, my stay on the kibbutz was paradise compared to the rest of my trip. After four months on the farm I left to stay in Tel Aviv with some Jewish friends. That's when things started getting hairy – not long after I arrived in there, the Palestinians started to attack the city and surrounding area. Tourism agencies placed the level of danger at four out of five. It was terrifying knowing that

a bomb could explode next to us at any moment. As I travelled on to Jerusalem the situation got worse, and soon after I arrived the hostel I was staying in was attacked by terrorists. My timing couldn't have been luckier – I just left the building to get some lunch, and when I returned the place was wrecked. The staff told me how the terrorists had randomly fired guns, threatened the residents with violence and kidnap and turned over the furniture. Although the events really freaked me out, after a few weeks in Jerusalem I became strangely used to the dangerous way of living. I never considered packing up and going home. Naively, I



Louisa: nearly killed after leaving the safety of a kibbutz

## 'I POPPED OUT BRIEFLY. WHEN I RETURNED, THE HOSTEL HAD BEEN SPRAYED WITH GUNFIRE'

was convinced that if things really got bad and war broke out, the embassy would fly us home. It hasn't put me off traveling, though – I really grew up during my time out, fending for myself and having to make my own decisions. I also got to see how other cultures live first-hand, which is priceless.



Christina: thought she was going to be raped

## IN FEAR IN INDIA

**W**hen Christina Sampson, 21, a writer from Sussex, spent a year working as in a disabled orphans' home and travelling in India, nothing could have prepared her for the shocking conditions – or the threat of rape. When I finished my A-levels I was desperate to have some fun travelling the world before getting stuck in a nine-to-five job. However, I was also keen to give something back, so after flicking through a gap year brochure, I

decided on a three-month placement in a disabled children's home in India. At 18, I was excited about entering the adult world. Unfortunately, I was forced to do more growing up than I wanted. Conditions at the centre were very poor. As care assistants we were expected to help dress the 60 kids, teach them maths and English and help with physio, though no training was given. Our accommodation was very basic too – we washed in a bucket. The children were very sweet, but I saw some awful things. The worst experience I have ever had was when one little girl caught her skirt on the stove and literally went up in flames. We had to drive her to the hospital because the ambulance would never have come in time – the smell of her burnt hair in the car was sickening. She stayed in hospital for 10 days until she died. It was so hard, there were many times I nearly quit, but I didn't want to let the kids down. I felt relieved if a little guilty when my time was up. Optimistic, I headed for southern India with Katie, another British girl. Our first

stop was a city called Trivandrum. Tired after a 10-hour train journey, we settled for the first hotel we could find. What a mistake. Our room was horrendous: it had bars on the windows and stained mattresses. But it was so cheap (£1.50 a night) that we decided to make do for one night. After a short sleep we were woken by the phone. The seedy blokes who worked on reception started hurling abuse, swearing and detailing how they wanted to do violent sexual things to us. When we heard footsteps coming up the stairs followed by beds squeaking and groaning, it clicked

our room and onto us. We sat huddled together in a corner, of the room, armed with penknives and squinting through the darkness, hoping that the nightmare would end and that we wouldn't be raped. Thankfully, something disturbed the men and after two hours they gave up. Because it was the middle of the night, we were too scared to leave but we fled at dawn, not daring to look back or contact the police. It was our word against the management's. If I'm honest, I wasn't aware quite how difficult taking a year out would be. Admittedly, I was

## 'IT CLICKED THAT WE WERE STAYING IN A BROTHEL AND THE MEN THOUGHT WE WERE GAME'

we were staying in a brothel – and the men who'd called assumed all women were fair game. Then they started banging on our door, ranting obscenities. Katie and I were terrified – the door was flimsy and we were sure they would force themselves into

just a naive 18-year-old and took far too many unnecessary risks. I did have some great and humbling experiences, including checking out famous sites like the Taj Mahal. But the most valuable lesson I learned is how lucky we are here in the UK. ▶