Grad trips still a must, but on a smaller budget

Final-year students at SMU (from left) Serene Ang, 23, Cheryl Lee, 23, Ian Kwok, 25, and Adel Lim, 23, are still bent on taking a vacation before they venture into working life.

SUNDAY TIMES STREET POLL

100 graduating students from NUS, NTU & SMU (33 students were from NTU, 33 from SMU, 34 from NUS)

Are you still going on grad trips?

YES 76

NO 24

Most switch to nearer destinations

South-east Asia 24

Australia/New Zealand 11

Taiwan/Hong Kong/China 11

Europe 11

Korea/Japan 9

Others 10

(USA, 6; Tibet/Nepal/India, 2; Eastern Europe, 2)

Most opt for shorter trips

1-2 weeks 54

3-4 weeks 17

1-2 months 5

Out of the 41 who are cutting back, the recession has made them:

Take shorter trips 10

Cut number of destinations 4

Most have a tighter budget

$300-$900 10

$500-$900 9

$1,000-$3,000 3

$3,000-$5,000 2

$5,000-$7,000 3

$7,000-$10,000 1

Less than $500 3

Source of money

Savings 59

Parents 14

Combination 3

Are you cutting back because of recession?

No 35

Yes 41

Interior

East Asian destinations like Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, and Australia and New Zealand, follow close behind.

Grad trips typically occur in May, June and July, the time after students graduate and before they start work.

Mr Lin De Wei, 24, a final-year computer engineering student at NTU, is among those who would like a grad trip to Europe but he has settled on looking out for the "Welcome to Taiwan" banner upon touchdown. "I had initially wanted to go to Europe, but it is now too expensive," he said.

"Times are bad, and it's not good to spend money to go to a faraway place," he expects to make his trip in June. Despite the downturn, he intends to spend $2,000 during his 10-day trip.

For those who do so, a grad trip is a rite of passage into working life. Ms Samantha Lim, 23, an NUS final-year English Literature student, said: "I must go on a grad trip. It is a tradition, and it gives some closure to my life as a student."

Having heard about grad trips from her seniors when she was a freshman, she plans to go to Nepal or India for missionary work and sightseeing.

Ms Rin Leow, a marketing executive at Super Travels, said the grad trip phenomenon probably became popular here about three to five years ago. "Singapore students are more affluent now. Some work part-time, hence they would have the finances to travel," she added.

But various tour agencies note a less extravagant approach now.

CCT Holidays saw a drop of 15 per cent for students who booked trips to Europe and the United States this summer, compared to last year. Ms Alicia Seow, its senior vice-president of marketing and public relations, said more of the trips are now six to 15 days, instead of the usual 14 to 21 two years ago.

STA Travel, which caters mainly to students and young adults, saw a similar trend this year. Mr Timothy Su, its marketing manager, said: "We expect a 20 per cent increase in inquiries and trips by soon-to-be graduates to the Asia-Pacific, compared to Europe at this year's National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (Natas) fair."

The fair started last Friday and ends today.

Are you still going for your graduation trip despite the recession? Have your say at www.straitstimes.com