

Staycation means it's a blue Christmas for Brits - Almost 15 million Brits will be separated from family

Submitted by: Archetype (Text100)

Wednesday, 3 December 2008

Under embargo until 00.01am 4th December 2008

It's hailed as the holiday season but for over 31 million (66%) Brits, this Christmas will be a 'staycation' at home, with almost 15 million people unable to spend the festive period with their immediate family, according to a study released today.

The study, commissioned by Skype, shows that almost half of Brits (48%) will miss out on spending the holiday season with those they want to. When asked who they wished they could spend this Christmas with but can't - immediate family topped the list, followed by extended family and friends.

Less than one in four Brits plan to travel domestically or internationally this Christmas and are staying put for the duration of the holidays. For many a 'staycation' is their Christmas of choice, preferring celebrating from the comfort of their own home rather than battle the busy roads or airports. Almost one in ten Brits say their travel plans have been impacted by the current economic climate.

It's a family affair

Being with loved ones at Christmas is a top priority for most of us and it is a time of year when people select family over friends. Only 12% of those questioned said that there are friends they would like to spend Christmas with but are unable to. This compares to the 31% that have immediate family they would like to be with but can't.

Global family networks

Family networks are increasingly widespread and over a quarter of the total British population (28%) would have to travel hundreds of miles to be with close family and friends. Over one in ten Brits would have to travel into the tens of thousands of miles to be with those dearest to them, making seeing everyone in this short space of time virtually impossible, even if money was no object.

Postman v postmaster

This Christmas might be a 'staycation' for many Brits who are unable to travel to see friends and family, but it won't stop people getting in touch. People are adopting new technologies that enable them to connect with loved ones no matter where they are located. Whilst traditional landline telephones (69%) and Christmas cards (65%) still top the list of Christmas communication methods, these are closely followed by email (60%), mobile phones (45%) and more recent communication trends such as instant messaging (22%) and social networking (19%).

One in ten Brits are also making online voice and video calls enabling them to connect with people they can't travel to see. This means they don't need to miss out on seeing those closest to them and can even take part in things such as virtual present exchanges and traditional Christmas pastimes like a game

of Charades.

% of Brits that use the methods of communication*

Landline 69

Cards 65

Email 60

Mobile phone 45

Mail / parcel delivery 30

Instant messaging 22

Social networking sites 19

Online voice / video calls 10

Technologically advanced

As you would expect the younger generation use IM (30%) and social networking sites (41%) the most to stay in touch at Christmas. However, the over 55s don't appear to be put off by new technology, with almost one in five (18%) already using IM and seven per cent using social networking sites to chat with friends and family over the holiday season. They are ahead of the youngsters when it comes to online voice and video calls with 11% (higher than the national average – 10%) opting for this method compared to only nine per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds.

“Being separated from loved ones at Christmas can really affect our enjoyment of the holiday. People can feel stressed, worried or even guilty when they can't be with the ones they love. It can be especially hard on parents separated from their adult children and grandchildren, or for those who have elderly relatives who may otherwise be quite lonely,” said Dr Sally Ann Law, a personal and executive life coach. “However, new technologies are now making it easier for people to stay in touch without it costing the earth. Receiving a video call from a long distant friend or relative at this time of year can make all the difference and is the next best thing to being there in the room with them.”

“Christmas is about tradition. This is why it is important for people to be with those closest to them,” said Skype spokesperson, Mike Bartlett. “It is also a chance to show and tell people you care and the research suggests that people aren't afraid of trying new ways of ensuring they can speak to their loved ones. Location is less and less of an obstacle and it has never been easier for people to stay in touch.”

Other regional findings

- People in Northern Ireland are the least likely to travel with over eight out of 10 (83%) planning to stay at home for Christmas this year (national average 66%)
- People from the East Midlands are the least communicative in the UK: only 58% send cards to friends and family they don't see over Christmas (national average 65%), 58% use email (national average 60%), and 20% use IM (22% national average)

- Almost one quarter (23%) of people in the West Midlands use social networking sites to communicate with friends and family they don't see over Christmas (national average 19%)
- Women in the West Midlands and London are the highest users of social networking sites in the UK with almost one third (29%) preferring this method of communication
- Almost one in 10 (8%) Londoners plan to travel internationally this Christmas – the highest of all the regions (national average 3%)
- People in the South West would have to travel the most to see all the friends and family they wanted to over Christmas with over half (53%) having to travel hundreds of miles (national average of 36%)
- Men in Wales are the highest users of landlines to keep in touch with friends and family they don't see at Christmas with 81% preferring this method (national average 69%)
- People in Wales are the most likely to get in touch over the internet with 15% of the Welsh using voice/video calls to communicate with friends and family they don't see over Christmas - highest region using this method in the UK

- Ends -

Notes to editors

*people were able to select more than one method of communication

For further information, please contact:

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About Skype

Founded in 2003, Skype is revolutionizing the way people communicate around the world. Skype has more than 370 million registered users globally who use Skype software to communicate for free through voice and video calls as well as instant messages. Skype generates revenue through its premium offerings, such as calls made to and from landlines and mobiles, voicemail, call forwarding, and SMS. Skype is used in almost every country on Earth, and people have made more than 100 billion minutes worth of free Skype-to-Skype calls. Conversations over Skype can take place on computers, mobile devices and Skype Certified™ hardware. Skype certifies and sells hundreds of hardware products from more than 50 partners, and works with hundreds of third-party developers who have created plug-ins to extend Skype's functionality.

Skype is an eBay company (NASDAQ: EBAY). Learn more and download Skype at www.skype.com.

Access to a broadband Internet connection is required. Skype is not a replacement for your traditional telephone service and can not be used for emergency calling.

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