



20 THINGS I LEARNED FROM

“Travel for long enough and one day you wake up to realize: This is no longer a vacation, it's your life.”

Over one year ago I quit my job and decided to travel around the world. This was both a dream 10 years in the making and one of the best decisions I've ever made. In the last 12 months I learned a lot about long-term travel, what I need to be happy, and how to survive outside of the U.S. Many of these things can't be learned at home or in a book, and while reading about them on the internet can only get you so far, a lot of people have asked me to explain how I've done it.

Well, here's part of the answer:

*"There's no substitute for just going there."
-Yvon Chouinard*

My trip hasn't been about sightseeing (although I've done that) as much as just being somewhere. The simple challenges of daily routine can be overwhelming: trying to eat, drink and sleep in a place where nothing makes sense, you don't speak the language, and where none of the basic comforts of home are available. It's not easy, but if you want a fast-track to personal development, get on a plane.

When I was younger my dad often said, "The hardest part is just getting out the door." And that may be the most important lesson of all: it's too easy to get complacent at home and if you aren't at least a little uncomfortable, you probably aren't learning anything.

If you've already traveled extensively, you may get a kick out of this. If you haven't, here are some reflections, tips, and advice about long-term travel on my one-year anniversary of life on the road:

1) Most of the world's people are friendly and decent.

Except for the French*.

Some stereotypes really hold up, but on average, most of the people I've met around the world are extremely polite, friendly and helpful. They are generally interested in why I chose to visit their home.

They are eager to assist if it's obvious I'm lost or in trouble. They'll go out of their way to try to make sure I have a good stay in their country. And, contrary to what most Americans tend to think (see #3 below), they often don't know much about the United States (or necessarily care).

Don't be convinced before leaving that "everyone there is _____". Show a modicum of respect to people and their culture and you'll be blown away by what you get back. Try picking up a little of the local language. Just learning how to say "thank you" can make a huge impact.

* Sorry, I couldn't resist. To be fair, France is like everywhere else: most people are decent. It's just that France has a particularly large proportion of bad apples that give the place a well-deserved reputation. I've met a lot of wonderful people in France, but also a disproportionate number of a**holes (not travelers generally, but residents of France). This isn't based on a single trip nor is it restricted to Paris. Almost every non-French local in Europe agreed with me on this one.

2) Most places are as safe (or safer) than home.

I remember confessing to my mother recently that I had a big night out in Budapest and stumbled back to my apartment at dawn. Her reaction was: "But don't you worry about being drunk in a foreign country?"

Ha ha, not at all mom! I've never felt so safe!

The only place I've been violently mugged was in my home city of San Francisco. Many of the people I know there have been robbed at gunpoint, and on more than one occasion there were shootings in my neighborhood.

In one incident just a block away from my apartment (Dolores Park), a man was shot five times and somehow escaped, only to collapse about 10 meters from our front door. You can still see the blood stains on the sidewalk.

TRAVELING AROUND THE WORLD

By Clayton B. Cornell

Turns out we actually live in a pretty dangerous country. In over 365 days on the road, staying mostly in dormitory-style hostels and traveling through several countries considered 'high-risk,' the only incident I had was an iPhone stolen out of my pocket on the metro in Medellin, Colombia. I didn't even notice and deserved it for waiving the damn thing around in the wrong part of town. Most people think that in a place like Colombia you'll still get kidnapped or knocked off by a motorcycle assassin, but that's not true. According to the locals I talked to (who grew up there), things have been safer there for at least 10 years.

Caveat: This doesn't give you a license to be stupid, and some places really warrant respect. Guatemala and Honduras, where there are major drug wars going on (and the Peace Corps recently pulled all of their volunteers), or Quito, Ecuador, where everyone I talked to had been robbed, are reasonably dangerous (I had no trouble in any of them).

In reality, based on the sort of mindless binge-drinking that happens in most travel hot spots, you'd expect travelers to get knocked off a lot more often. But if you pay attention and don't do anything stupid, you'll be fine.

3) Most people don't know (or care) what America is doing.

I think the whole America vs. the rest of the world debate has been summed up perfectly in this post:

10 Things Americans Don't Know About America

I couldn't have said it better:

"Despite the occasional eye-rolling, and complete inability to understand why anyone would vote for George W. Bush, people from other countries don't hate us either. In fact -- and I know this is a really sobering realization for us -- most people in the world don't really think about us or care about us."

I've met people that didn't even know that San Francisco (or California even) had a coastline (now there's a sobering conversation for you. So much for thinking that's the center of the world eh?).

One thing is true: Americans are not well represented on the travel circuit. It just doesn't seem to be culturally important to us, unlike say, the Australians, who never go home.

4) You can travel long-term for the price of rent and a round of drinks back home.

My favorite question from friends at home has been: "how the hell are you still traveling?"

Well, for what you spent at lunch I can live on for a whole day in Indonesia. That's all there is to it.

- Monthly rent for a shared apartment in San Francisco could be: **\$1,100 per person.**
- My average monthly expenditure during the last year of travel: **\$1,200 / month*.**

That's **\$40 / day**, and includes some ridiculous and totally auxiliary expenses. For example:

- 10 days of Scuba diving in Utila, Honduras - \$330
- Kitesurfing gear rental in Mancora, Peru - \$100 for two days
- Flight to Easter Island (50 percent subsidized by my dad) - \$400
- Acquisition of 4 Surfboards, + Repairs and Accessories over the year - \$750
- Purchasing a bunch of gear, like a new netbook (\$380), wetsuit (\$175), boardshorts (\$55), camping gear (\$100) a SteriPen water purifier (\$125), summer sleeping bag (\$55)
- Riding the NaviMag Ferry through the lake district of Chilean Patagonia from Coyaiquhe to Puerto Montt (\$200).
- Taking a total of seven nearly cross-continental flights (like Brussels=>Greece) during my four months in Europe.

And so on. I also went out, a lot, and spent way too much money on alcohol.

Before I left home, my original budget projection was **\$50 / day**, which I would consider lavish in many parts of the world.

