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# THE NOMADIC IN-BETWEEN

*A restless reflection on life lived in motion, The Nomadic In-Between captures a year adrift between continents, cultures, and identities. From hitchhiking along the Karakoram Highway to cultural immersion in China, Catherine Ward chronicles her 14 months across 12 countries, a journey that blurs the line between adventure and belonging. Caught between the thrill of discovery and the ache of rootlessness, she explores what it means to live in constant transition – when “home” becomes everywhere & nowhere at once.*

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This has become my normal: the moving. The speed at which time flies, while at the same time feeling as though a year has gone by in only 24 hours; adapting to cultures that are not my own, in a place that is far from my home. At times I forget that I once had a place where I slept consistently, in an era when monotonous activities didn't feel as monotonous as they do to me now. There are endless questions swirling around in my brain as I overthink cultural norms or potential travel destinations. Time moves differently in the nomadic in-between, the space I live in when I'm neither here nor there, when all that is known to me is the moving, like a sloth and a cheetah in the same moment. After a while, travel begins to feel like normal life, and I imagine my existence continuing on this path forever. And then, both in the blink of an eye and after what feels like an eternity, I'm on a plane "home" – if I can even call it that anymore –, and it's all over.

I think back to the summer of 2024, when I was preparing to leave for 5 months of study abroad in Shanghai, China. I had no idea what my life would become 14 months later, extending my time abroad and re-entering the US a year later with completely new perspectives on the world and feeling more confused than ever about my life post-graduation. Between August 2024 to August 2025, I would travel to 12 different countries: China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, India, Oman, UAE, and Pakistan. I would obtain my Chinese driver's license and explore ancient towns in Yunnan and Sichuan, hike up multiple active volcanoes in Indonesia, and throw paint into crowded streets during a Filipino festival. I would soar through the water with a pod of wild dolphins in Oman, photograph protests in Pakistan during the 6th of Muharram, and hitchhike along the Karakoram highway near the Afghanistan border. I would hang off an overcrowded train car in India, sprint through a snowstorm in Japan, and have incredible conversations with hundreds of amazing people from completely different walks of life. I would experience thousands of mini-lives – these tiny perfect moments that would stay with me long after my plane's wheels touched down in the US over a year later. They would find their way into the farthest corners of my heart and mind, beckoning me to return and finish the journey around the world I'd started.

But I didn't know any of that then.

I'm not the same person I was a year ago. Sitting in a vibrant city, I feel restless, waiting for my next opportunity to learn a new survival language or take photos of beautiful people and impactful events around the world. This is our curse as travelers and adventurers; we live each moment so excitedly and immerse ourselves so fully into new people, places, and ideas, that being back in our own culture feels foreign. Do I wear a hijab in this place? What about a bikini? Is it okay to shake this man's hand, or should I simply wave hello? Is this person going to help me, or is their kindness a ruse to lull me into a false sense of security before I end up kidnapped in a foreign country? Is this street food going to make me sick? What do I do when I'm stranded at 3am with an uncharged phone and no English speakers around? How do I repay unheard-of levels of kindness by local villagers? And, most importantly, who am I and what is my purpose in this complex, beautiful world?

These are questions we travelers all ask ourselves, questions some don't dare ask for fear they won't ever discover the answer. Perhaps I don't want to know. Perhaps that is the wonder of a nomadic life, one of constant reinvention and an indefinite delay in settling down into a normal, consistent routine. For now, this has become my normal: the nomadic in-between.

## *The Nomadic In-Between*