

# Backpacking (travel)

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**Backpacking** is a form of low-cost, independent travel. It includes the use of public transport; inexpensive lodging such as youth hostels; often a longer duration of the trip when compared with conventional vacations; and typically an interest in meeting locals as well as seeing sights. Despite the name it does not have to involve travelers carrying belongings in a backpack, although that is a common practice.

The definition of a backpacker has evolved as travelers from different cultures and regions participate in the trend. A 2007 paper says "backpackers constituted a heterogeneous group with respect to the diversity of rationales and meanings attached to their travel experiences. They also displayed a common commitment to a non-institutionalised form of travel, which was central to their self-identification as backpackers."<sup>[1]</sup> Backpacking, as a lifestyle and as a business, has grown considerably in the 2000s due to low-cost airlines and hostels or budget accommodations in many parts of the world.<sup>[2]</sup>

Visa laws in many countries enable people with restricted visas to work and support themselves while they are in those countries.<sup>[3]</sup>



Two Danish backpackers in front of the Vienna State Opera in July 2005

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## History

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People have traveled for thousands of years with their possessions on their backs, but usually out of need rather than for recreation. Seventeenth-century Italian adventurer Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri has been suggested as one of the world's first backpackers, in the sense of extensive self-supported traveling for pleasure rather than profit. <sup>[4]</sup>

The modern popularity of backpacking can be traced, at least partially, to the Hippie trail of the 1960s and '70s,<sup>[5]</sup> which in turn followed sections of the old Silk Road. Some backpackers follow the same trail today.<sup>[6]</sup>

In the late-20th century, backpackers have traveled to Southeast Asia in large numbers<sup>[7]</sup> which has caused popular Thai islands and several previously sleepy towns in Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos to be transformed by the influx of travelers. Backpacking in Europe, South America, Central America, Australia, and New Zealand has also become more popular and there are several well-trodden routes around the world that backpackers tend to stick to.

Technological developments and improvements have contributed to changes in backpacking. Traditionally, backpackers did not travel with expensive electronic equipment like laptop computers, digital cameras, and cell phones because of concerns about theft, damage, and additional luggage weight.

Backpackers have traditionally carried their possessions in 30 litre to 60 litre backpacks, but roller-wheeled suitcases and some less-traditional carrying methods have become more common, and there has been a trend towards keeping pack weights under the 7-10 kg carry-on limit of most airlines.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Culture

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Of importance to some backpackers is a sense of authenticity. Backpacking is perceived as being more than a holiday, but a means of education.<sup>[9]</sup> Backpackers want to experience what they consider the "real" destination rather than a packaged version often associated with mass tourism, which has led to the assertion that backpackers are anti-tourist.<sup>[10]</sup> For many young people in Northern Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel, backpacking is a rite of passage. In Canada, it is quite common for gap-year students to visit Europe and Southeast Asia. Backpackers are less commonly from China, India, the United States, Japan, and South Korea, due particularly to their large populations, accounted for by visa restrictions; yet, it is also gradually becoming more popular among affluent people from those countries. Backpacking trips were traditionally undertaken either in a "gap year" between high school and university, or between the latter and the commencement of work. However, the average age of backpackers has gradually increased over time, and it is now more common to see people in their 30s, 40s, and even older to backpack during an extended career break. Some retirees enjoy backpacking.

## Benefits

Studies by Columbia Business School professor Adam Galinsky have found that the benefits of travelling to other countries include an increased "generalised trust, or... general faith in humanity", as well as a "creative boost", when there is true "multicultural engagement, immersion, and adaptation."<sup>[11]</sup>

## Criticism

Backpacking has been criticised, with some criticism dating back to travellers' behaviour along the Hippie Trail.<sup>[12]</sup> For example, the host countries and other travelers may disagree with the actions of backpackers. However, the perception of backpackers seems to have improved as backpacking has become more mainstream.<sup>[13]</sup> Another criticism is that even though one of the primary aims of backpacking is to seek the "authentic", the majority of backpackers spend most of their time interacting with other backpackers, and interactions with locals are of "secondary importance".<sup>[5]</sup>

## Planning and Research

Planning and research can be an important part of backpacking, aided by such guides from companies like Lonely Planet and Rough Guides, books by travel authors such as Rick Steves, and various digital and online resources such as Wikivoyage. Resources provide information about such topics as the language, culture, food, and history. They also provide listings of accommodation and places to eat, together with maps of key locations. Digital format guidebooks are becoming more popular, especially since the advent of smart phones and lightweight netbooks and laptops.

# Variants

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Terms used to describe backpacking with more money and resources include *flashpacking* and *poshpacking*, which combine *backpacking* with *flash*, a slang term for being fancy, or *posh*, an informal adjective for upper class.<sup>[14][15]</sup>

*Begpacking* combines *begging* and *backpacking* in reference to individuals who beg (ask directly or indirectly for money), busk (perform while soliciting money), or vend (sell postcards or other small items) as a way to extend their overseas travel.<sup>[16]</sup> The trend has drawn criticism<sup>[17]</sup> for taking money away from people in actual need, etc.<sup>[18]</sup> Begpacking is the most common in Southeast Asia and is a growing trend in South America.<sup>[19][20]</sup>

## See also

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- Adventure travel
- Grand Tour
- Hostelling International
- Walking tour
- Mixed terrain cycle touring
- Travel pack
- Digital nomad

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## External links

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The dictionary definition of *backpacking* at Wiktionary



Urban backpacking travel guide from Wikivoyage

- [Backpacking](https://curlie.org/Recreation/Travel/Specialty_Travel/Backpacking) ([https://curlie.org/Recreation/Travel/Specialty\\_Travel/Backpacking](https://curlie.org/Recreation/Travel/Specialty_Travel/Backpacking)) at Curlie

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