

SHOESTRING

Exploring the world - on a budget

Issue #2 | Free
October 2010

Transdnistr:

Communism's last European stand

La Dolce Vita

Peter Moore talks about Vespas

Raw Foods

How to travel on specific diets

The Fulbright Commission

Teaching in Argentina

Lion Encounters

Getting close and personal

Plus:

How to haggle * Geocaching * Essential pack list * Austin



G' Day!

The second issue of Shoestring is finally here, and it's here to stay!

Shoestring is written by travellers, for travellers. This magazine is designed to share travel experiences and advice picked up while on the road. But it should also give inspiration.

Volunteering abroad is one of the main Gap Year experiences people go for. Sophia Kwong spills the beans on what teaching in Argentina is like as part of the Fulbright Commission.

Staying healthy while you are on the move is very important, which is why Doris Fin has put together some advice on healthy eating and muscle relaxation. But if it's adrenaline you're after, be sure to check out Emily Johnson's Ugandan adventure.

When I set off on my own Gap Year back in 2006, I had no idea what opportunities and experiences were out there to be discovered. All I wanted was a one-stop kind of magazine that could tell me about what others had done, how to recreate the trips and what to look out for. I hope you will find Shoestring to be this magazine!

Happy Travels!

Cornelia

ISSUE #2

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Cornelia Kaufmann

PICTURE EDITOR: Cornelia Kaufmann

DESIGN & LAYOUT: Cornelia Kaufmann

CONTRIBUTORS: David Simister, Karima Wenner, Sophia Kwong, Doris Fin, Joseph Reaney, Sebastian Marshall, Emily Johnson

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Cornelia Kaufmann (CoKa), Karima Wenner (KaWe), David Simister (DaSi), Doris Fin (DoFi), Sophia Kwong (SoKw), Youness Alvandi Tabrizi (YoTa), Jin Gibson (JiGi), Durango Area Tourism office (DATO), Roger Cullman (RoCu), Joseph Reaney (JoRe), Werner Haug (WeHa), Joao Leitao (JoLe)

CONTACT: editor@shoestring-magazine.com

WEBSITE: www.shoestring-magazine.com

IN THIS ISSUE:



PETER MOORE: VESPAS AND LA DOLCE VITA
P. 6



ARGENTINA WITH THE FULBRIGHT COMMISSION
P. 8



KEEPING HEALTHY WITH RAW FOODS
P. 11



ADRENALINE RUSH AT THE SOURCE OF THE NILE
P. 13



GUIDE TO BRITAIN'S BEST DRIVING ROADS
P. 15



TRANSNIESTR: COMMUNISM IN EUROPE
P. 17



WALKING WITH LIONS IN ZIMBABWE
P. 20



LEARN THE FINE ART OF HAGGLING
P. 24

And much more inside!

TRAVEL NEWS & DEALS



The skyline of Chicago reflected in the Chicago Bean.

Lonely Planet and iPhone
Travel guides Lonely Planet have teamed up with Apple and created the Lonely Planet City Guides II app for the iPhone 4. The app contains offline maps, recommended places and editorial content from the paper guides.

New Dragoman Tours to Libya
Dragoman Overland Tours are offering new Libyan and Egyptian Explorer route from Tripoli to Cairo and vice versa. This new trip combines it all: ancient and modern, desert and city, culture and the outdoors.
www.dragoman.com



Chillis on sale at a market stall in Zanzibar's Stone Town

Melbourne to Darwin flights
Getting from one end of Australia to the other has never been easier. Qantas have just launched a flight from Melbourne to Darwin on Mondays during the Northern Territories peak season.

YHA Australia goes Green
Under a Carbon Reduction Programme, YHA Byron Bay is the first to get solar panels installed which will be used for the gas hot water system. So far, customers have contributed over AUS\$ 10,000 to the project since 2008.

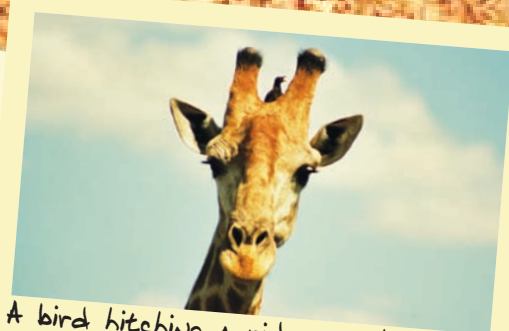
Curacao declares independence

The Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao became an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands on October 10. With the status change comes great potential for development on the island, including new port facilities for the "Hidden Treasure of the Caribbean."

CHECK OUT WHAT FESTIVALS THE UK HAS TO OFFER IN 2010 AT
www.thefestivalcalender.co.uk

Lake District autumn fun

The national park centre at Brockhole is putting on events for all ages this Halloween. There will be a special geocaching event in the Lake District, as well as a Cycle Skills course for youngsters. Dress to scare for the Fancy Dress Parade or go hunting with Silverband Falconry.
www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/events



A bird hitching a ride on the head of a giraffe at Kruger National Park, South Africa



Sydney's iconic Opera House seen from the water.

Do you have a story to tell?

Have you had the experience of a lifetime somewhere off the beaten track? Discovered something new to do? Or taken a spectacular photo that's just too good to be hidden away? Then get published in **SHOESTRING**.

Send your stories and pictures to
editor@shoestring-magazine.com

GUIDE TO EUROPEAN AIR PASSENGER RIGHTS

Have you ever been delayed at an European airport or your flight got cancelled while travelling in Europe? If so, these guidelines for passengers could be of interest to you!

Usually, when a flight is delayed, most passengers just wait until the plane is ready for boarding.

When flights are cancelled, most people try and find the next best flight that suits them. But passengers have rights, even on short delays, which they are not always informed of.

REFRESHMENT VOUCHERS

These should be handed out by airport staff but have to be asked for most of the time. If your flight is delayed and you don't receive vouchers, make sure you keep all the receipts!

ACCOMMODATION

If you're delayed overnight, or are left stranded somewhere because your flight got cancelled, the airline has to reimburse you for hotel costs incurred. Ask for a detailed receipt that lists all expenses. Some airlines do not reimburse hotels you couldn't use because of a cancellation. Do not rely solely on the airline to find accommodation.

FREE TRANSFERS

If you have to stay at a hotel due to a flight delay or cancellation, airport transfer should be reimbursed. Keep hold of all receipts and remember to ask for a receipt if you use a taxi! That receipt should include the name of the driver, pick-up and drop-off time and place and distance travelled.

Writer Profile



Name: Cornelia Kaufmann
Age: 23

Worked on the customer service team for an European airline and dealt with all these issues on a daily basis.

FLIGHT-TIME DELAYS

One hour of delay is deemed an acceptable time by most airlines, and is not refundable.

But if you are delayed more than three or even five hours, you can ask to change your flight to the next available one if travel arrangements don't suit you anymore.

If you choose not to travel, you can get a credit voucher over the sum of your affected flight. Accepting another flight from your airline should be free of charge.

But if you can find an alternative flight (same route) before the one you have been offered, you can get at least the price difference refunded. To claim back your alternative costs, provide a booking reference and your boarding passes for easy processing.

The same goes for other alternative arrangements such as trains.

.....
'Make sure you double-check the reason for delay'
.....

Always make sure you ask staff about the official reason for the delay. Make a note of it. Then ask the Aviation Authority to confirm the reason for cancellation - these incidents have to be logged. If necessary, double check with the airport



Cancellations, delays, lost luggage and compensation - all these things are regulated within Air Passenger Rights around the world.

concerned or (ie if bad weather is given as reason) the Meteorological Institute.

EXTRAORDINARY REASON

If the reason is an "extraordinary circumstance", it is deemed outside the airline's control. Reasons can be weather (ie thunderstorms, snow), nature (ie volcano), strike action.

EU COMPENSATION

However, there are also "non-extraordinary circumstances" in which the airline is at fault. These are mechanical and technical problems, or crew sickness (especially the captain) when nobody is on standby. If it is confirmed that your delay or

cancellation was due to such a circumstance, you are entitled to EU compensation.

If the distance between your two airports is less than 1500km, you get €250 per person, per affected flight.

Over 1500km, you're in for €400 per person, and flights over 3500km come in at €600 each. It is the law, that you get this compensation if it's the airline's fault you couldn't fly.

It's best to check the reason first, but you can always ask for it by mentioning the EU compensation you are entitled to under Regulation (EC) 261/2004 when you contact the airline for a refund. The going policy is: If you are entitled and you don't ask for it, you don't get it.

These guidelines only apply if at least one of the flights leaves from a European airport.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

UK Civil Aviation Authority
www.caa.co.uk

US Aviation Consumer Protection
www.airconsumer.dot.gov

Australian Passenger Bill of Rights
www.austlii.edu.au



EXPLORING CASABLANCA IN FIVE LANGUAGES

German-born Karima gets back to her Moroccan roots during a long overdue holiday in Casablanca. **SHOESTRING** follows her experiences in her mother's native country.

The first things many people think of when holidays in Morocco are mentioned are all-inclusive-hotels, camel riding and couscous. Well, they are wrong.

When Karima decided to take her German friends Mathias and Sven to Casablanca to sample Moroccan life, they met incredible challenges.

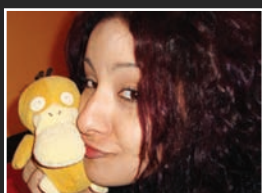
Day 1 After an unplanned but pleasant one-day-stay in Madrid where we missed our connection flight to Casablanca, we finally arrived. Finding out that my originally well-fastened tent had mysteriously disappeared somewhere between two continents spoiled my anticipation, so we were glad to just arrive at my mother's holiday apartment to relax a little after two stressful days.

As my last holiday in Casablanca was sometime at the beginning of this century, I had forgotten about my family's size and sound intensity. Until we arrived.

I found myself surrounded by innumerable relatives with Moroccan roots and residences all over Europe which immediately tried to welcome us with hugs and kisses and their greetings poured down on us in German, French, Arabic, Italian and English.

Lucky for me that I found loads of long-forgotten Arabic and French language skills in some dark corners of my brain, while the boys seemed a little overwhelmed with the situation.

Writer Profile



Name: Karima Wenner

Age: 24

Happy-go-lucky girl who's interested in finding out where life is taking her.

Day 2 We finally got used to frequently switching languages or trying to talk with our hands and feet and felt prepared for a first taste of Moroccan life-style.

As we had already found this holiday's motto "bang smack in the middle instead of looking on", we went right to the middle: a market, or souk as the natives call it.

In my mother's company we fortunately did not have to ask for anything ourselves. On the other hand, if you see what the Moroccan climate does to the size and colour of the vegetables there, you might stand in front of the stalls with an open mouth, so talking might become hard anyway.

'A fantastic mix of European and Moroccan lifestyle'

Day 3 After a relaxed day on the beach of Mohammedia, a town located about 40km north of Casablanca, we took our chance to visit the mosque Mohammed V back in the city.

It is known for its enormous size and - as my mother told us - for hundreds of workers who drowned during the construction of the mosque's baseplate because it is built in the sea.

Afterwards we enjoyed a fantastic mix of Moroccan and European lifestyle at the restaurant "Rest Sacha", located on a waterfront promenade close to the mosque. While eating a fantastic Tajine which is a typical Arabian dish optionally served with meat and vegetables in all variations, we witnessed a birthday party in the adjoining lounge.

Comparable to a typical European birthday party, there was a DJ, comfortable couches, hookahs and teenagers going wild to an interesting mix of dance anthems and Moroccan pop music.

Day 4 My family went out shopping and preparing my sister's wedding and as we decided not to take part in that, we expected a relaxed day. But that was not to be.

We had planned to install a shower curtain in my mother's apartment to avoid the daily flood in the bathroom.

Have you ever tried to buy screws and anchors in Morocco? If not: never try it without having read the next sentences carefully.

Our first stop was Marjane, which is a huge supermarket selling everything you need or don't. We found a cord and the shower curtain immediately, but the screw-and-anchor-problem had to be solved with a French dictionary.

After trying to explain what we needed for ten minutes the shop assistant finally told us that we could find it at a drug store down the street.

In Germany a drug store sells shampoo, so we were more than confused but chose to try, hoping that we had only translated the French word "droguerie" wrong.

Another ten minutes later we had finally understood the shop assistant's location plan to find the drug store. Arriving there, the next challenge was to cross the street, which is a real adventure in Casablanca as not one traffic light or sign there seems to be of great interest for the car drivers.

At a diner we asked for the drug store as we had not yet discovered it, due to our expectation of a shop stocking the mentioned shampoos.

The man we asked pointed at a small store next door which was the size of a phone booth and looked like it was only selling bulbs in all variations. Again the French dictionary was of great help so that we could eventually make our way home through the street of Casablanca with everything we needed ten minutes later.

Find out what happened to Karima next in Issue #3



From top: The entrance to the souk; vegetable mountains on a market stall and "mosque of the sea" Mohammed V in Casablanca. Photos: KaWe



RIDING VESPAS IN ITALY **ENJOYING LA DOLCE VITA**



Italian love affair with a two-stroke engine



Travel author Peter Moore is no stranger to the Vespa scooter. In fact, it helped kick-start his success after it became the unlikely star of one of his books.

Vroom with a View became one of the Australian writer's biggest sellers. It recounts his romance with Sophia - an ageing 1960s Vespa - in the sunny rural Italy, along with several breakdowns.

Peter Moore is the creative force behind books including *The Wrong Way Home*, *No Shitting in the Toilet* and *Swahili for the Broken-Hearted*, and claims to have visited 93 countries in his career as a travel writer.

Vroom with a View - essentially a witty account of road trip between Milan and Rome - has been so successful that sat down to write a sequel, in which he covers southern Italy.

Yet despite Vroom's success only being recent, the Vespa road trip is an idea which has hooked Peter since adolescence.

"It's basically been toying around for a while" he admits. "I remember growing

up and seeing all these Italian black-and-white movies, and Hollywood ones like *Roman Holiday* with guys riding around on Vespas and getting all the girls. It looked exceedingly cool".

This, coupled with his realisation that he was fast approaching forty, was what drove Peter to buy a 1961 125cc Vespa off the Italian version of eBay.

.....
'He just tossed me the keys to a bronze Vespa'

Sophia - as she becomes known throughout the book - is apparently Peter's scootering equivalent, being the same age and condition as he is ("a bit rough around the edges, but basically okay").

He also runs a modern day PX200 in his native Sydney, but it's the two scooters he runs in Italy which are best-known to his readers. Sophia, which he still owns, is being restored, but it's a rather faster Vespa which stars in the sequel.

Peter chose a Rally model for the second leg of his Italian odyssey, as he felt its larger engine was better suited to the hillier regions than Sophia's was.

"The Rally is particularly respected in Italy because of its bright orange paintwork, its stripes, and its hotrod performance. This 200cc was a better suited bike to southern Italy".

Less well-known is his Vietnamese Vespa voyage, commissioned by his Australian



publishers after the success of *Vroom with a View*.

A short story that's currently unavailable in the UK, *Same Same but Different* recalls Peter's time journeying around the Mekong Delta on another Vespa; this time one borrowed from a generous American café owner.

"He just tossed me the keys to a bronze Vespa, and let me ride around for the next ten days. Everyone rides around on scooters in Ho Chi Minh, and cruising the streets on a Vespa was very cool".

Two books later, and Peter is still coming up with ideas for more scooter stories. He compares the roads in India to those of Vietnam, and thinks the subcontinent would be another ideal setting for a Vespa run.

Yet despite Peter's obvious penchant for classic Italian culture, it's always been the Vespa (and not its Lambretta rival) that's been his scooter of choice.

"It's a shape you could draw with one eye" he enthuses. "It's perfect."

Peter is currently working on a book about Britain, which will be called "Blimey!"

WEBSITE

For more information about Peter and his books, visit Peter's website:
www.petermoore.net



From top: Peter Moore; Vernazza Cinque Terre; street in Bolsena; and a leafy, rustic backyard café. Opposite: Vespa. Photos: RoCu

Writer Profile



Name: David Simister

Age: 24

Journalist on a mission to find the best beer-garden in the British Isles - and doesn't mind travelling to get there.

THE FULBRIGHT COMMISSION TEACHING IN ARGENTINA



Experiencing the real life in host countries

The Fulbright Commission helps send thousands of students abroad every year. While helping out in their communities, they find their own daily routine away from home.

The Fulbright Commission aims to bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason and a little more compassion into world affairs.

In the aftermath of World War II, U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright introduced legislation to fund international exchange education. Since its passage in 1946, the Fulbright programme has provided exchange opportunities for over 300,000 students, teachers, artists and scholars in over 155 countries.

The foreign student programme awards non-U.S. citizens grants to study, teach, or conduct research at an American university.

Meanwhile, the U.S. student programme provides Americans with reciprocal opportunities at overseas institutions. In addition to the traditional research grants, there are a plethora of special programmes with specific concentrations ranging from the slow food movement in Italy to journalism internships in Taiwan.

‘Finding a café where I could become a regular’

One of the newest programmes is a collaborative effort with mtvU that sponsors creative worldwide musical projects.

This year, I had the privilege to join the ever-growing Fulbright family as an English Teaching Assistant (ETA) in Argentina.

I had been overseas a couple times before, but it never felt like I was living in these places, as much as just visiting or passing through.

Since I had already

experimented with whirlwind backpacking/adventure travel, I was ready to embark on life as an ex-pat - complete with all the day-to-day customs of shopping for groceries, cashing a paycheck, enrolling in a gym, and perhaps if lucky, finding that special bar or café where I could become a “regular.”

In a bizarre way, I longed to settle down somewhere long enough to establish a routine, because I knew these mundane tasks would become their own unique mini - adventures simply by virtue of occurring in a different country.

Having studied Spanish as part of my Bachelor’s degree, Latin America seemed like the natural place to look. Fulbright was a great fit, because it was a structured programme with a fixed 9-month commitment.

In cooperation with the Argentine Ministry of Education, the programme ensured that we were placed in reputable host institutions that matched our qualifications and interests.

ETA roles will vary according to country and region. In Argentina, we worked primarily at teacher training colleges and institutes.

I was assigned to the National University of Tucumán, one of the most rigorous and prestigious programmes in the country.

While my students had impressively high levels of English, they did not get many opportunities to speak it, lacking any real exposure to the language beyond TV and movies.

My primary responsibility was to lead conversation and discussion activities. Moreover, as a foreigner, I could provide a unique perspective not necessarily found in dictionaries and textbooks, so I always tried to incorporate an element of culture into the discussion.

The response has been positive, as they were curious about all aspects of my life - politics, high school, relationships, sports, even mealtimes.



From top: The government building Casa Rosada in Buenos Aires; Fulbright ETAs attending an outdoor screening of a World Cup match in Buenos Aires; The Cataratas waterfalls which form part of the Iguazu Falls. Opposite: the view from a boat in the Glacier National Park of El Calafate. Photos: SoKw

Writer Profile



Name: Sophia Kwong

Age: 25

A hopeless romantic and foodie in search of love, adventure and the best margarita in the world





Top: Dogsledding in southern town Ushuaia; delicious South American dish empanadas and lemons; and ETAs from Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Uruguay meeting for a weeklong Regional Enhancement Seminar. Photos: SoKw

Most ETAs are placed in cities that do not receive a lot of international students or tourists - sometimes an ETA can be the first foreigner that the students have encountered!

As such, one of the most important criteria for the Fulbright selection committee is that applicants demonstrate a willingness to integrate themselves into the local community and foster cultural exchange beyond our classes.

On our application, we had to propose outside activities, and the breadth of these projects reflects the diversity of its participants. Current ETA projects range from constructing a community garden to joining the local chamber orchestra. Several ETAs are volunteering at local NGOs and organisations that match their individual interests, such as health, immigration, technology, and tourism.

My particular fascination

with Argentina is its famous food and wine culture: empanadas, yerba mate, asado, and a mind-numbing assortment of pastries and desserts.

As luck would have it, Tucumán and the Northwest provinces are world-renowned for their authentic regional cuisine, particularly its mouth-watering empanadas. As an added bonus, I had several opportunities throughout the year to travel during holidays and exams, eventually making it all the way to Tierra del Fuego!

.....>
‘Really living in a foreign country has been worthwhile’
 <.....

I have spent the last several months channeling my inner Anthony Bourdain, visiting hole-in-the-wall restobars, befriending restaurant owners, and glutting myself beyond

what can be considered decent human behaviour.

My gap year abroad has reaped several practical benefits - the prestige of a Fulbright grant and the year of teaching experience will improve my marketability to potential graduate schools and employers.

More importantly though, living, really living, in a foreign country (complete with all the unpredictability of cultural faux pas, language barriers, and international politics!) has been a completely worthwhile and memorable experience.

I recommend it for anybody who wants a break from their work/school doldrums, since having a routine is so much less tedious when it's in a new place!

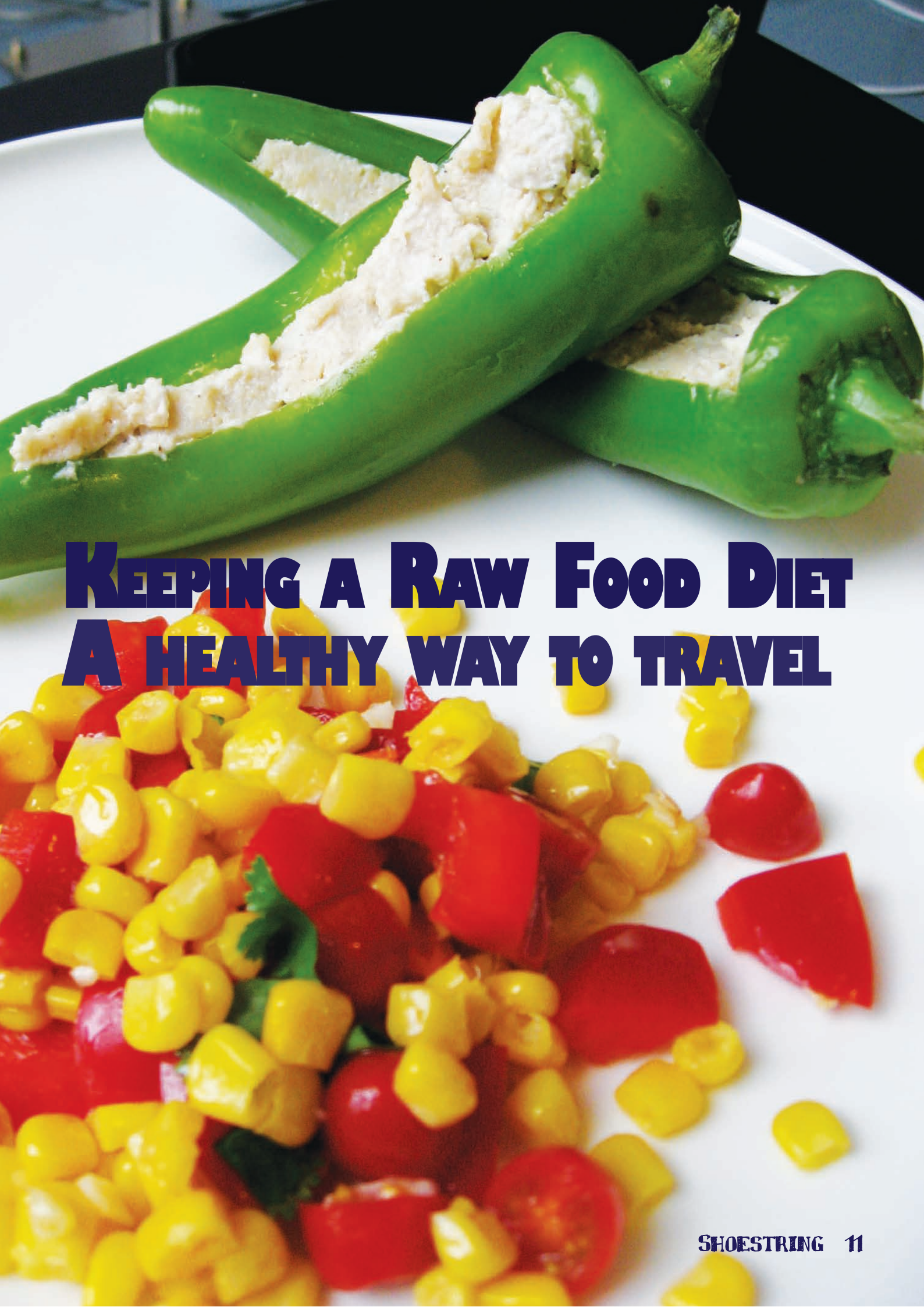
THE FULBRIGHT COMMISSION

Information about the Fulbright grant for U.S. students is available online:
<http://us.fulbrightonline.org/home>

Non-U.S. students are encouraged to visit the Fulbright Commission in their home country for grant opportunities. A list of participating countries is available at:
<http://foreign.fulbrightonline.org/>

Sophia's own blog
<http://www.finding-margaritaville.blogspot.com>





KEEPING A RAW FOOD DIET A HEALTHY WAY TO TRAVEL

Seeds, salads and natural sweets

Travelling, sampling the local cuisine and keeping healthy are a few things many people struggle with. But it's easy to stick to specific diets and get all the energy you need!

So you're about to embark on a journey to a new country and there are certain customs with food you don't really agree or relate to.

Whether the food is too fried, overcooked, too salty, too processed, or it just doesn't correspond to your diet, there are always ways to make eating healthy while traveling work for you. I'm going to share with you some secrets of how to get the proper nutrients your body needs.

Perhaps it's India, China, Israel, Costa Rica or America you have your heart set on, but you're worried you won't get enough protein, calcium, iron, vitamins, minerals, or have enough energy from the local foods? There is always an alternative to the ways the locals eat.

Most countries in the world are heavy meat eaters and it's tradition to eat meat with almost every meal, accompanied by some sort of cooked grain or starch, like potatoes, rice or pasta. What if I told you you could get enough protein and carbohydrates from food without cooking it? If you take a few minutes out of your day to make the effort to make this happen, I guarantee you'll find this unique way of travelling fun, exciting and a routine you'll probably keep with you for life.

Almost all grains, beans and seeds are sproutable. They provide enough protein, minerals and vitamins that are not only easy to digest, but are often destroyed during the heating process. Some of these beans, seeds and grains make a delicious milk too.

You can buy a sprouting/milk bag from a local health food store or online. You

just soak over night, rinse, drain, hang, and repeat twice a day the rinse, drain, hang process until you notice little sprouting tails growing from the bean, grain or seed.

You can mix it in a salad, in a smoothie, or get creative and mix with spices, herbs, and veggies into a wrap; in a lettuce or cabbage leaf. There are tons of tasty, easy and enjoyable raw recipes available online.

Often we may experience bloating, fatigue, pain, or nausea after eating cooked, processed, refined, or large quantities of food. The body can only handle so much and when we force it to undergo a stressful process it will react negatively.

First of all it is important to remember the following: Eat your fruits/dessert first. They digest the quickest because they are made up of sugar. Wait at least 20 minutes whenever possible before moving onto your main course.

.....
'If possible don't mix your meals'
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Try to incorporate as many green, uncooked vegetables as possible. If you are worried about germs, bacteria, or some sort of illness from eating raw, either wash with iodized water (available in drugstores) or add hot peppers, cayenne pepper, garlic, or wasabi to your meal to decrease the risk.

Eat your carbs next and your protein last. Whenever possible do not mix your meals. Proteins take the longest to digest and simple sugars take the shortest time.

Carry your own condiments and spices to make your meal more palatable: oregano, basil, cayenne pepper, lemon, ginger, olive oil, cinnamon, cardamom, honey, balsamic vinegar, and any others you may like. You can also eat many of the leaves and flowers that you find outside in a garden, forest, street, or park.

If you are not sure which ones are edible check with a local or look it up on the internet or plant book.

Carry a jar with you and make your own dressing with



Opposite page: Filled peppers. Above: Tacos made from cabbage leaves, red peppers and sunflower seeds (DoFi).

the condiments and spices mentioned above.

For sweetener you can use stevia, honey, blackstrap molasses, brown rice syrup, agave nectar, dates, raisin, fruit juice, fruits, vanilla and cinnamon.

For calcium: seeds (pumpkin, flax, sesame), spinach, kale, collard greens, turnip greens, sundried tomatoes, bok choy, oats, soy, broccoli, oats, nuts and apples.

For protein: leafy greens, beans, oats, lentils, grains (quinoa has more protein than any other grain and makes an amazing snack and meal when sprouted), nuts, avocados, coconut, brown rice, tempeh (fermented soy), seeds (sunflower, sesame, flax, chia, pumpkin) and sundried tomatoes (non sulfured). Seaweed, bananas, carrots have protein but very little.

For iron: seeds (pumpkin, flax, sesame, sunflower), quinoa and oats. Avocados, seaweed, kale, lettuce, peas, mushrooms, garlic, mulberries have iron, but very little.

Remember that the first phase of digestion occurs in the mouth. If you do not chew your food properly, preferably into a paste, your stomach has to work harder to break down the food for you. It does not matter what diet you're on or how much nutritious food you eat, if you do not break down the food well before it enters your stomach, you may set yourself up for possible nutrient deficiencies.

The energy that's required to repair and restore your cells in your body, will instead be

used to digest your food. So take your time when eating. You can make it easier by grating, blending, mashing or cutting your food into small pieces.

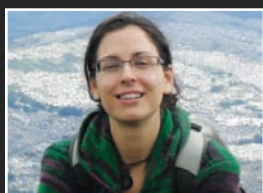
For some yummy raw food recipes, check out

shoestring-magazine.com

TIPS FOR TRAVEL:

- Equipment: pocket knife, grater, peeler, blender, sprout/milk bag, glass jar.
- Remember to read labels on everything you buy. If sugar, salt, white / enriched/bleached flour, colour, preservatives or any word you cannot pronounce is present in the product, do not buy it.
- Try to buy local, organic, fresh, raw, whenever possible and even if the locals do not approve of your diet, remember to have self respect and do what's right and best for you.
- Try to eat less meat, cooked foods, sweets, and fried foods because these can create a lack of energy, an increase in toxins in the body, a feeling of fatigue and a feeling of heaviness.
- Eat less nuts and more avocados and olive oil for your essential fatty acid intake.
- The more meat protein you consume, the less calcium available for your body.

Writer Profile



Name: Doris Fin

Age: 22

There are no risks, just opportunities when I'm open to all that unfolds along my path.

ADRENALINE RUSH AT THE SOURCE OF THE NILE

Extreme sports are all the rage in the Ugandan town of Jinja. Whether it's bungee jumping, white water rafting or horse riding, something's sure to get your heart pumping.

On the day, I was really glad I wasn't bungee jumping naked.

I had fully intended to do it - in fact, had been entirely gung-ho about the idea. Some surfers I'd met a few weeks earlier on the Kenyan coast had told me that if you jumped naked on the Nile River in Uganda, you could jump for free. As I am a bit of a thrill-seeker with a very small budget, the whole notion was vastly appealing to me.

"Yeah, I bungee jumped naked on the Nile," I would say to friends back home. "No big deal."

But now, with my toes on the tip of the platform and a 145-foot drop to the glinting river below, I was profoundly thankful that they had stopped offering the deal.

"All right, sweetheart," the Kiwi bungee jumping instructor said behind me, "wave to the nuns."

I looked down and to the right, where an entire church full of Ugandan nuns had gathered on the balcony to watch, and gave them my grandest wave. They cheered.

“One, two, THREE!” I jumped. “Oh my God oh my God oh my God...”

During those first few seconds when I was dropping headfirst toward the glinting river, the fear was too visceral for me to even scream. I knew the cord was there to catch me, but there's nothing intellectual about falling like that. It's completely primal.



Then I felt the bungee start to kick in - and let out a whoop of pure exhilaration.

‘Life is awesome’
I said again and
again

Jinja, a small town two hours from Uganda's capital city of Kampala, is located right at the source of the Nile where it begins its long journey north from Lake Victoria. Ideally situated on top of some class five rapids, Jinja has a thriving tourist industry offering white water rafting, kayaking, four - wheeling, mountain biking, and horseback safaris along the river. This overabundance of adventure has earned Jinja a reputation as the adrenaline capital of East Africa.

Whoever gave it that name wasn't kidding. After my jump, I ran around for hours all hopped up on the experience,

buying people drinks and telling anyone who would listen that they should go bungee jumping immediately. "Life is awesome!" I said again and again.

Fortunately, my next adventure would begin the following morning with a rafting trip that left right from the Nile River Explorers backpacker's hostel.

If you want to replicate the 30-km day trip I took down twelve major rapids that day, you'll have to work fast.



Top: The bungee tower overlooking the Nile; Taking the plunge.



Writer Profile



Name: Emily Johnson

Age: 25

Emily is a wilderness guide - turned - journalist based in New York. Her favourite thing to say is "Here goes!"



White water rafting down the Nile; Horse Riding Safari in Jinja. Photos: JiGi

By the end of this year, a hydroelectric dam will have turned that stretch of the Nile into a lake.

Don't fret, though. The rafting isn't going anywhere; there are more rapids a bit further up the river.

The trip was a dream. There were long, lazy stretches where we drifted past green cliffs and munched on fresh pineapple, followed by wild plunges through rapids that devoured us whole and sprayed paddles in every direction. Because the Nile doesn't have treacherous rocks under the surface the way many other class five rivers do, we flipped as spectacularly and as often as we wanted.

At the end of the day, we piled into a shuttle back to the company's campsite where a

barbeque was waiting. Life might get better than watching the sun set over the Nile after a long day on the river with a belly full of kebabs and a bottle of Nile Special lager in your hand, but not by much.

.....>
'Kids turned up waving furiously at every bend'
 <.....

In the morning, I hopped on a motorbike - or boda boda, as it's called in Uganda - and rode 20 minutes outside of Jinja down the bumpy dirt road that led to Nile Horseback Safaris. Australian owner Natalie McComb set me up with a

peppy brown horse and we were off.

The route took us along the high banks of the river and through villages where kids turned up waving furiously at every bend in the road; their parents smiled and went back to work, obviously used to the presence of tourists on horseback. The company tries hard to foster a good relationship with the people in the area; among other things, they give piles of manure to local farmers for fertilizer.

After the ride, it was back to the hostel for one last night in Jinja. When we'd first arrived at Explorers Backpackers a few days earlier, it was early morning and my bleary-eyed travel buddy and I were fresh off a night bus from

Nairobi. Everywhere on the cozy outdoor patio was evidence of good times had the night before: beer bottles on every available surface, full ashtrays, forgotten items of clothing strewn about. We gave each other a "we've-come-to-the-right-place" look and passed out on some couches until they began serving breakfast.

We weren't disappointed. The hostel was packed with interesting travellers and cool young Ugandan river guides; the bartenders were engaging and generous. The festivities went long into the night.

The following day, on the bus to Kampala, I took stock of myself. My butt was tender from bouncing against a saddle for two hours; my hips, curiously out of joint from being jerked around by a bungee cord; my shoulders, sore from paddling. I had a terrific sunburn on the tops of my knees, not to mention that hollow feeling that comes with being a bit hungover.

In other words, I felt great.

WEBSITES

Nile Horseback Safaris
www.nilehorsebacksafaris.com

Raft Africa
www.raftafrica.com



BRITAIN'S BEST PASSES FOR SERIOUS PETROLHEADS

Get off the motorway and explore the United Kingdom's many twisty and bendy roads and mountain passes. And while you unleash the horsepower, you might even get to enjoy the landscapes passing by. Here's a guide to Britain's top 5 driving routes.

Sixty miles is an awful long way to go for a cup of coffee.

The A4086, which winds its way through the mountains of North Wales between Betwys-Y-Coed and Caernarfon, isn't exactly renowned for its abundance of Costas, Neros and Starbucks. It's also a long way to the nearest tea shop, but chances are if you've come this far you'll know the real rush lies not in caffeine but the road itself.

Britain's wild and desolate places are peppered with mountain passes which snake through the scenery to villages miles off the beaten track, and you either understand the adrenalin-fuelled appeal or you don't. If you're smitten with Britain's hidden scenery and like driving for driving's sake, the nation's mountain passes have been hand-crafted for the petrolhead in you.

Head to any of the country's more mountainous corners and you're bound to stumble across the hairpin bends, rollercoaster dips and crests, and deserted straights which make twisty little lanes linking obscure villages Britain's best driving roads.

With a rented set of wheels, a good satnav system and a real sense of adventure at your disposal, any of these fabulous five should provide hours of full-throttle fun:



1: THE EVO TRIANGLE

Denbighshire, Wales. So named after the British motoring magazine, which uses the B5401 from Cerrigydrudion heading north past Llyn Brenig, the A543 to Pentrefoelas and the A5 back to Cerrigydrudion as a heady cocktail to get the best from a car.

Quiet, fast-paced and blessed with lush scenery, it's a great way to spend an afternoon behind the wheel, with the visitor centre at Llyn Brenig proving a relaxing stopping point and a handy chance to discover more about the region's heritage.

2: CAT AND FIDDLE PASS

Derbyshire and Cheshire, England. It's a hard to believe a road so unmistakably rural

lies just a stone's throw from Macclesfield in the north west of England - but that's exactly why the A537 proves so popular with bikers and drivers alike. The eponymous pub at the top is also well worth the trek, offering miles of unspoilt views on the menu. The high number of accidents on this twisty climb towards

Buxton have left the local police little choice but to keep a close eye on your drive - stick to the 50mph speed limit or you'll run the risk of a hefty fine - but even with the constant nuisance of motorbikes in your rear mirrors this Peak District mountain pass still offers dramatic backdrops and a healthy sense of danger.



Writer Profile



Name: David Simister
Age: 24
Motoring journalist who just loves to take various cars around the countryside under the pretense of a story

3: BUTTERTUBS PASS

North Yorkshire, England. Track down the remote Yorkshire Dales village of Thwaite and in return you'll be rewarded with the start of the Buttertubs Pass, a rollercoaster ride which tantalises and terrifies you in equal measure.

With a sheer drop of more than 500 feet and a weak-looking fence always on your left hand side, it's not a drive for the faint-hearted, but play it sensible along this route and it proves an irresistible mix of powerful landscapes, driving challenges and occasional geological titbits (the Buttertub rock formations, about halfway along the route, are well worth the stop).

Carry on past the end of your route along the Cliff Gate Road towards Settle and you'll also get to discover the grandeur of the Ribbleshead Viaduct, jewel of the Settle to Carlisle Railway.

4: HARDKNOTT PASS

Cumbria, England. A real car killer of a road, but treat both your vehicle and the hard climbs of this part of the Lake District with respect and what you'll get in return are some epic views from the ceiling of Cumbria.

Approaching from the A590 in western Cumbria, both the Hardknott Pass and equally



Even a classic Mini can survive the Wynrose and Hardknott Passes if driven carefully, as this picture taken at the top of Wynrose proves. (DaSi)

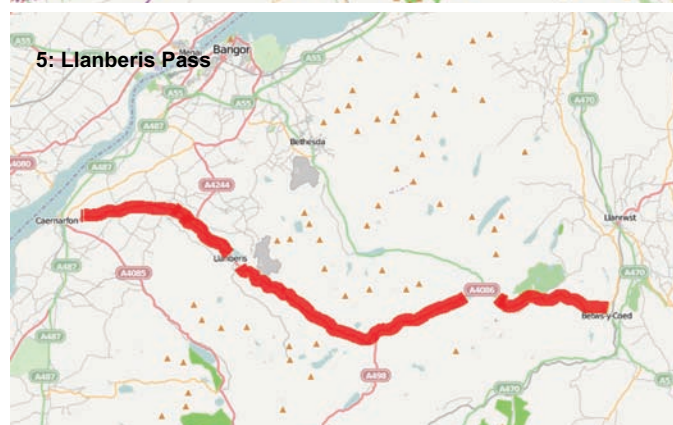
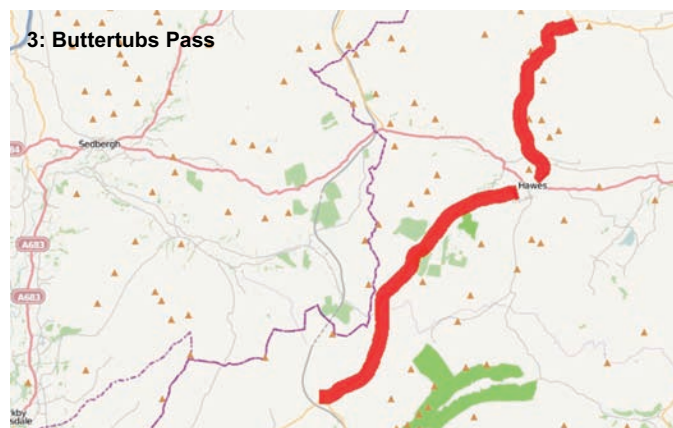
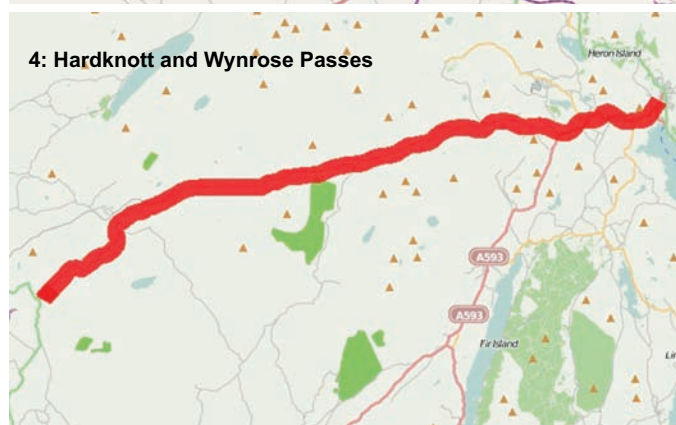
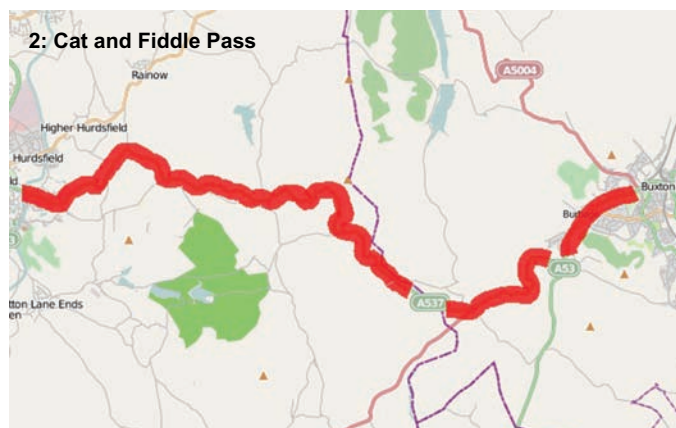
scenic Wynrose Pass come in quick succession. In fact, once you've climbed one, you won't have a choice but to scale the other one too. The Hardknott proves the much harder of the two with 30% inclines, but get these roads right by keeping an eye on brakes and engine temperature and Ambleside, in the heart of the Lakes, is only a short and scenic drive away.

5: LLANBERIS PASS

Gwynedd, Wales. A simply stunning snake of tarmac through the heart of Snowdonia, although it can get crowded in the height of summer with ramblers, cyclists and rock climbers.

Finish off your ice-cream in Betws-Y-Coed, leave the A5 at Capel Curig and head up the mountain route towards

Caernarfon, watching out for brake fade on the steep way down again. Beware that you might not be able to stop at the top, though, as the parking lot is often full. With everything from lakes, mountains, valleys and villages crammed into less than 15 miles, it's a truly unforgettable driving experience in breathtaking scenery.





TRANSDNIESTR: EUROPE'S LAST KID ON THE BLOCK



Travelling under Lenin's watchful eye

Travelling to the world's youngest communist state is a curious, challenging and utterly unique backpacking experience. Best of all, it's just a stone's throw away.

The year 1989 was a watershed moment for Europe. It was the year when Poland, after 44 years of stringent Soviet rule, finally turned its back on the communist ideal.

This act of defiance was the spark that lit the fire of revolution across Eastern Europe, and within the next three years East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania and more than a dozen other socialist states - including Russia itself - had overthrown their respective governments and entered a new era of capitalist democracy. Communism in Europe was dead and buried.

Well, almost buried. For as the world watched Poland and co. march towards a bright new dawn, no-one seemed to notice that one tiny piece of the

Eastern Bloc had been left behind.

SOLE USSR SURVIVOR

The bus creaked as I stepped on board. It was old. Old, cramped and charmless: a remnant of a communist age gone by... and a fitting mode of transport for my journey back in time. For one day only, I was going to leave behind the comfortable consumerism of Europe and venture into the breakaway socialist republic of Transdniest: the sole survivor of the USSR.

My first challenge came before I had even set foot in the country. As I arrived at the (technically non-existent) Moldova-Transdniest border, one of the most stringently controlled in Europe, I was ushered off the bus and into a

dark, windowless coffin of a room. Two border guards sat me down and began asking me questions in Russian, to which I replied in English.

This language exchange lasted over an hour, and was punctuated with many attempts to empty my pockets of cash. Luckily, I had prepared for such a scenario and kept the bulk of my funds hidden, offering an "entry visa fee" of 100 Moldovan leu (around £5).

Although the meagre sum was far from gratefully received, I eventually convinced them a fiver was better than nothing, and was permitted to rejoin my fellow passengers. I was in.

LENIN STATUES

The moment I stepped off the bus in Tiraspol - Transdniest's capital or

Moldova's second city, depending on your viewpoint, and the most Sovietistic metropolis left in Europe - I was struck by one thing. The silence. Tiraspol, I thought, may be the quietest city in the world.

I spent the first part of my day seeing the 'tourist sights' - as much as you can use such a term in the least-visited city in Europe. First of all I went to the stoically socialist Heroes' Cemetery memorial, where an eternal flame burns for all those who died in the 1992 conflict with Moldova (in which Transdniest cemented its self-proclaimed independence).

I then nipped over the road to the Presidential Palace, from which long-time communist president Igor Smirnov oversees his half - a - million - or - so subjects.



From top left: Statue of Suvorov - the founder of Tiraspol; a Soviet tank on the main street of Tiraspol; a shop window supporting Che Guevara and Putin. Previous page: A statue of Lenin outside the Presidential Palace (JoRe).

Writer Profile

Name: Joseph Reaney
Age: 25
 A scriptwriter and journalist who caught the travel bug at the age of sixteen and has yet to discover an antidote.



Finally I took a trip to the once-widely-renowned Kvint factory, which has been producing some of Europe's finest brandies for more than a century.

But I soon came to the conclusion that Tiraspol is a city to be enjoyed not for its individual attractions but for its overall impressions: from the brash and bold isolationist overtures to the minute Marxist details.

Walking around Tiraspol is akin to wandering around Leningrad in its heyday, with stunning spectacles of a Cold War era on every corner. From severe-looking statues of Lenin and haphazardly-parked Soviet tanks to anti-imperialist graffiti and home-owned hammer and sickle flags; this is a city that is proud to be keeping the socialist end up. As one local man, Viku, put it: "We are happy to be from Transdnistr. Here is it the true communism."

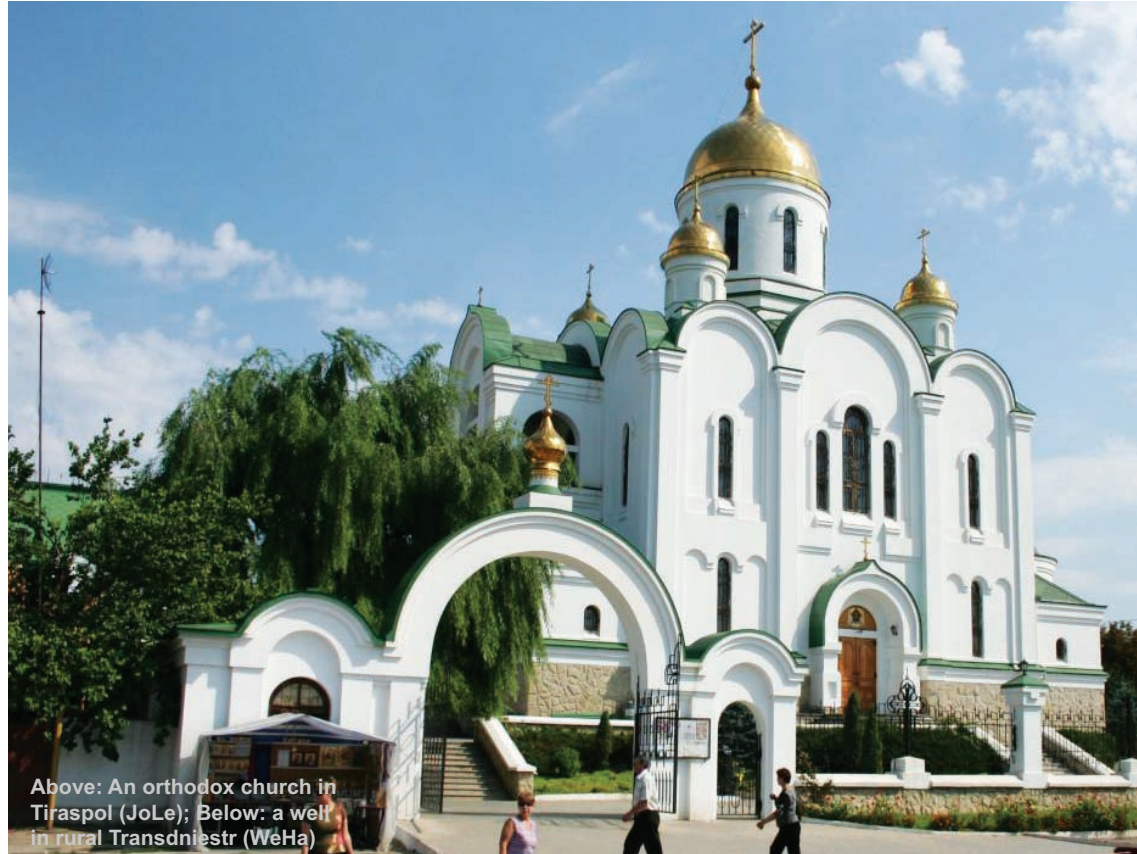
So, having come to the conclusion that the city is best seen at an unhurried pace, that's precisely what I aimed to achieve. After a leisurely lunch on the banks of the divisive Dniestr river, I spent my afternoon shopping in the clothes market, ambling through the leafy Culture Park and sipping coffee in closed-off cafés.

'Transdnistr is not for everybody'

I investigated the alleyways, the back streets and the residential areas. I chatted to the hesitant locals. I explored; taking in the minutiae of this oddest of capitals at every turn. I even took a trip to the small satellite city of Bender - a short hop over the river and another bastion of socialist being.

In the evening I tried and failed to find a restaurant, and then tried and failed to find a pub. Finally, sadly, I had to admit my day was at an end. It was time to return to the 21st century: to iPhones and space tourism; democracy and capitalism. So I hopped back on that old, cramped and charmless bus to Chişinău stuffing what was left of my money into my socks.

Let me clear this up now: Transdnistr is not for everybody. It is not a country renowned for its sweeping landscapes, gourmet food, romantic restaurants or pulsating nightlife. It is, in a



Above: An orthodox church in Tiraspol (JoLe); Below: a well in rural Transdnistr (WeHa)



very real sense, a challenging travel destination. The UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office advises caution to travellers as "British consular services may be limited in their ability to help," while many visitors recount feeling as though they were under constant surveillance. I personally found that speaking English was often met with a frosty reception and that taking photos on the street is a major faux pas. In short, travelling in Transdnistr is no picnic.

In fact, it is something far rarer and far more wonderful than that: an utterly unique travel experience. Where else on the continent can you see heavily-armoured tanks parked on streets and anti-imperialist murals daubed on walls? Which

other European nation must you bribe your way in and out of? A trip to the world's youngest communist state is the closest that young backpackers like me will ever get to a journey behind the Iron Curtain. It's our sole chance to experience a little of how life once was for hundreds of millions of Europeans.

Since 1989 communist states across the world have corrupted or crumbled into ubiquitous capitalist societies, where Ronald McDonald - not Vladimir Lenin - rules the roost.

But not Transdnistr. Transdnistr has survived; a frozen socialist bubble at the centre of an ever-changing political landscape. A true continental oddity and a truly unique travel adventure.

TRANSDNISTR

- A BREAK - AWAY COMMUNIST REPUBLIC THAT DECLARED INDEPENDENCE FROM THE MOLDOVAN SSR IN 1990. INDEPENDENCE IS NOT RECOGNISED BY THE UN OR THE EU.

- LOCATED ON THE DNIESTR RIVER BETWEEN THE EAST OF MOLDOVA AND THE SOUTHWEST OF THE UKRAINE.

- HAS ITS OWN FLAG, NATIONAL ANTHEM, PARLIAMENT, CONSTITUTION, CURRENCY, POLICE FORCE AND MILITARY

- CAPITAL - TIRASPOL; LANGUAGE - RUSSIAN; CURRENCY - ROUBLE (£1 = TRI2); ALSO CALLED TRANSDNISTR

- GET THERE BY BUS FROM BĂLŢI AND CHIŞINĂU IN MOLDOVA OR FROM ODESSA AND KIEV IN THE UKRAINE

WALKING AMONG LIONS ENCOUNTERS IN ZIMBABWE





This African trip is only for the fearless

The words “Africa” and “safari” usually go hand in hand. Tourists being driven through the savannah in 4x4 vehicles, hoping to spot wild animals from the safety of their cars. **SHOESTRING** editor **Conny Kaufmann** decided to get up close and personal instead.

The handler calls out one single word. “Lion!” It’s enough to make all 15 of us immediately turn around.

The call means that one of the lions had gotten behind the group, and was sizing us up for dinner.

In the scrublands surrounding the Masuwe Estate lodge, I find myself eye to eye with the kings of the savannah. Or princes, rather, because The Lion Encounter would be too dangerous with fully-grown adult lions.

Located just outside of Victoria Falls on the Zimbabwean border, The Lion Encounter is home to an ever-changing number of lion cubs which will be released into game reserves once they are a year old.

Opposite page: Lion cubs Nduna and Nala playing at the Masuwe Estate. **Above:** Conny gets close and personal with a lion; Nala checks out her surroundings. **Right:** Nduna feels playful. **Photos:** CoKa

Most of the cubs there have been left by their parents or been born in captivity. Because they are used to the handlers, the cubs cannot be released directly into the Wild.

Once they are old enough, they will be released into National Parks and game reserves, where they can be traced and their behaviour supervised. But before that, they have to learn how to hunt and where it is safe to roam. These walks through the bush are training sessions for the lions, and visitors are permitted to come along, watch, study and sporadically even interact.

This is stage one of the African Lion Rehabilitation & Release into the Wild programme, which is supported

by ALERT, the African Lion & Environmental Research Trust.

We gather at a small gazebo in the bush, where our guide explains what is going to happen. Before the encounter with our furry friends can begin, we watch a short video about the programme.

◀.....▶
‘We each got a stick to keep the lions at bay’
 ▶.....◀

Our guide explains that the handlers take the lions for a stroll three times a day. Although the cubs we walk with are only eight months old, they are getting big and strong

enough to do some serious damage if we are not careful.

We have to keep behind the lions - if they sense that nobody is watching them and they get behind us, they might attack. The handlers will keep a constant eye on the movement of the lions - if one of them shouts out “lion!” then we have to turn around immediately.

For protection, each of us gets a long, thin, wooden stick to keep the lions at bay. And while we still wonder whether this twig will really help us if a lion attacks, the encounter begins.

Two curious cubs, siblings Nduna and Nala emerge from the scrubs, sniff the air, look at us. Then they pick up the pace, run ahead, and tackle each other. ”



Writer Profile



Name: Cornelia Kaufmann
Age: 23

This travel writer Turned into a proper globetrotter during her Gap Year and has had itchy feet ever since

We watch them play with each other from a safe distance.

The grip these lions already have with their teeth is enormous. We let the lions play for a while in order to get them tired, all the way staying behind them and watching them getting to know their surroundings. And then the handler begs us over. One by one, we are told to crouch down behind the lions and stroke their backs.

A DIFFERENT SAFARI

It takes me a while to come to terms with this. I am in Africa and so close to such a majestic animal that I can feel it breathing and the fur tickles my hand with every movement. Just walking with the lions would have been enough for me, but to actually get to touch a lion is a safari with a difference.

We have to be quick, however, because the lions might turn around and attack if we leave it too long. Just like their domestic tabby cousins at home, these big cats can be

just as vicious - one moment they purr and love the attention, but they will undoubtedly show you when they have had enough.

The walk continues, and once again we let the lions lead us through the bush. Nduna and Nala keep playing, climb on logs and run head-first into bushes. While one handler distracts them a bit, the other handler begs us over and touches one of the lion cubs on the tail, walking along as if the wild cat was on a lead.

"Africa" and "safari" are two words that are often mentioned in the same sentence. Images of open plains and jeeps are conjured up and of travellers perched on the car roof with binoculars in hand hoping for a glimpse at the varied wildlife. All animals are observed from within a car which is parked a safe distance away.

.....>
**'We have no fear.
We have walked
with lions!'**
.....>

Not so at The Lion Encounter. It is one thing seeing the King of the Savannah from a car window, but being able to cuddle up with a lion is another thing entirely. Although the Estate the encounter takes place on is not as open or wide as the Serengeti, you do still get a feeling of being in the bush. And with the work on the lions being supported by ALERT, you do get the sensation of doing something good for the environment.

It's hard to believe, that these lion cubs we're walking with will someday be free in a National Park and only approachable by car. Maybe the handlers are right in saying that we have no fear. After all, we've walked with lions!

USEFUL WEBSITES

African Lion & Environmental Research Trust
www.lionalert.org

The Lion Encounter
www.lionencounter.com

African Lion Rehabilitation and Conservation
www.africanimpact.com



All photos: CoKa





Located in southwest Colorado where the desert meets the mountains, this historic little mountain town has a bit of everything: hippies, cowboys, wilderness, and as many restaurants per capita as San Francisco. **Emily Johnson** shows us around!

WHERE TO HANG OUT

Magpie's Newsstand Café
707 Main Ave.

Magpie's - and its extensive magazine selection - is smack in the center of town across from the famous Strater Hotel. Sit on the patio, have an ice cream cone or sip a latte, and watch Durango go by. Heaven.

THIRSTY THROATS

Durango Coffee Company
730 Main Ave.

Plenty of tables for studying and over 30 types of tea.

Orio's Roadhouse
652 Main Ave.

If you like dives where you can smoke indoors and play pool with bikers, this is your bar. No visit is complete without a taste of their trademark drink, the Purple F*%\$!er. Try it. It tastes purple.

El Rancho Tavern
975 Main Ave.

Carouse at night, but be sure to come back in the morning - you can have a Bloody Mary and order brunch from the Durango Diner next door.

WHILE IN TOWN

The Breweries

They take their beer seriously in Durango; four microbreweries isn't bad for a town of 15,000 people. **Steamworks** on Second Ave. is a laid-back brewpub where you can eat free peanuts at the bar and chuck the shells on the floor. **Ska Brewing** in Bodo Park has some of the best beer you've ever tasted and their new facility includes a tasting room and an outdoor beer garden. **Carver Brewing Co.** on Main has a fantastic breakfast and a sweet outdoor patio. **Durango Brewery**, also on Main, has bluegrass every Wednesday and a grill where you can cook your own hot dogs.

The Summit
600 Main Ave.

Durango's best live music venue, The Summit consistently attracts solid up-and-coming bands for minimal cover charges. Wear your dancing shoes - things get crazy.

Trimble Hot Springs
6475 Cty Rd. 203

Located seven miles out of town, Trimble's piping hot pools will banish the most bone-deep chill in minutes. At \$14, it's a bit pricey for the budget traveller - but bring a friend on Two-For Tuesdays or Fridays.

CASE OF THE MUNCHIES

Himalayan Kitchen
992 Main Ave.

Yak for dinner? Yes, please. At lunchtime, score a bottomless buffet every weekday for only \$8.99.

Bread
42 Cty Rd. 250

The most unassuming name for the most mouthwatering bakery. Visit near closing and you might score some free cookies.

Home Slice Pizza
441 E. College Dr.

This hippie establishment knows their pies. As they say, "Make me one with everything."

ADRENALINE JUNKIES

The Animas River

Full name Rio de las Animas Perdidas, or "River of Lost Souls," the Animas runs right through town. With class 3 rapids, it's ideal for true river rats and lazy booze cruisers alike.

Durango Mountain Resort

Just a half hour's drive from town, you can hit the slopes of the mountain formerly known as "Purgatory." After a long powder day, Purg's bar and restaurant will warm your toes with live music and hot food.



Top: Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad (DATO); Diamond Belle Saloon in downtown (EmJo).
Below: Nearby Mesa Verde National Park; Magpie's Newsstand Café (DATO)



Writer Profile



Name: Emily Johnson
Age: 25
Emily is a wilderness guide - turned - journalist based in New York. Her favourite thing to say is "Here goes!"



MASTER THE FINE ART OF NOT GETTING RIPPED OFF



Tourists should pay the same as the locals

It is unfortunately a well-known fact wherever you travel in the world: As soon as you can be spotted as a foreigner, opportunists will try and cash in on your lack of local knowledge. There is only one thing to get around it: Learning to haggle.

Let's start with a basic idea - you're not doing any good for the world if you're getting ripped off.

Overpaying for goods and services when travelling is bad for you, as your shrinking wallet shows. What's less obvious is that it's also bad for other travellers and bad for local people.

The more Westerners get a reputation for being gullible and overpaying, the more unscrupulous people will try to take advantage and cheat people. That creates an unfriendly vibe and bad relations between visitors to a country and the honest local people.

No, getting ripped off is no good. Don't rationalize it by saying, "Well, they could use the money more than me." It's true that people in emerging countries could use money, but you should absolutely pay the same or similar rates that local people pay for taxis, transportation, and food, and then set aside a budget to tip honest people well and show appreciation for any hosts you stay with.

If you want to contribute above and beyond to a local country, give money to a respectable charity or orphanage. Plenty of people can use your money - and the least deserving are the people who try to rip tourists off.

That's step one - decide not to overpay for things too much or too often. It's bad for you, bad for future travellers, and bad for honest locals who could use the money more and would be happy to do honest work for it.

Step two is doing a little research. You should know what things roughly cost before you go somewhere. Absolutely

the best place to find rough costs and get an overview of a country is wikitravel.com - it's a community built and run website that has sections on transport, eating, drinking, sleeping, and buying souvenirs, among other things. A quick skim of Wikitravel will save you lots of money.

Okay, so now you know what it's bad to get ripped off and you're firmly committed to paying the same or similar price to what locals pay. You know roughly what things should cost. How to negotiate?

If you're buying a small item, offer first, and offer slightly less than you want to pay. If you know a short motorbike ride in Vietnam should cost 15,000 VND, offer 10,000 VND.

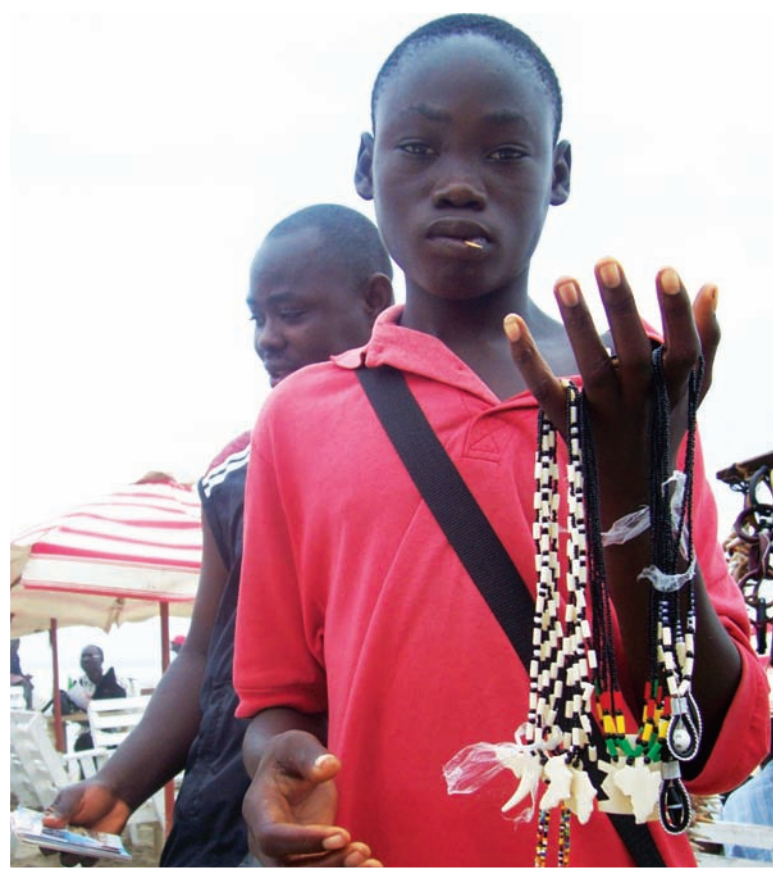
Why? Because people want to barter you up. They feel better if they do. No matter what price you offer, whoever you're negotiating with is likely to ask for more. If you hold firm to your offer, they might accept it, but they'll actually be less happy than if you offered lower than what you want to pay and came up.

This might seem strange to someone who doesn't like to haggle - but surprisingly, the person you're buying from will likely feel better about the transaction if you "came up in price." So offer a little bit less than the going rate and come up once to the price you know is right, then hold firm there.

If you're buying something larger, go get bids from multiple people before buying. Beware! If the price is similar all along a small street or area that has a bunch of shops in a row, it's probably not a fair price. Oftentimes the same person owns all the shops and has them collude, and you'd be paying 400% or 500% more than what a local person would pay somewhere else.

Once you've checked prices at a few different places and you're ready to buy a large item, walk into a store and say, "The best price I got was XYZ. I'd rather buy from you - can you beat that?" They'll likely go lower.

Have exactly the amount of cash you want to pay - it's essential to keep a mix of small bills and coins. >>



Opposite: Art seller on La Palmroyal beach in Ghana's capital Accra. Above: Beads seller looking for buyers (CoKa). Below: A cloth stall deep inside of Tabriz Bazaar in Iran (YoTa)



Writer Profile



Name: Sebastian Marshall
Age: 28

He's travelled through around 40 countries over the last 5 years and spent extensive time abroad



From top: A market in Mexico; food stalls in Morocco and Asia. Right: Massai jewellery traders in Tanzania (Coka)

Lots of times people won't have change, or they'll try to renegotiate if you take out a larger bill.

One mistake I've made is paying upfront for a package deal without specifying exactly what I'm getting. You need to be careful especially when you pay upfront for package travel. I scheduled to take two buses and one taxi from Bangkok to the Cambodian border. Halfway through, I was told my next bus wouldn't leave for five hours - or I could more pay to go right away. Oh, and I might miss the border crossing if I waited five hours.

After doing that once, you'd think I'd never do it again, but I made similar mistakes two more times before wising up.

Nowadays, I prefer to piece my travel together stop by stop if I'm not buying from a trusted broker. But if you do have to buy from an untrusted broker, write down exactly what the package seller said, clarify details and write those down too, and pay by a credit card if possible.

When you pay by credit card, you can walk away halfway through the trip if they try to extort you and call your credit card company and tell them to reverse the charges because the provider refused to deliver. This is a hassle, but it means you stay protected. If you paid in cash, you just have to hope you're dealing with honest people.

Finally, if you're on a shoestring, turn down going premium. Lots of time "premium" travel is actually worse - it separates you from an authentic experience and you get nickel and dimed for a little more money all along the way. If you want to find hearty food for a good price, look where the labourers eat, especially construction workers.

They know where good, cheap, hearty food is. Be especially careful taking a "luxury bus" or

"premium bus" - one of the biggest mistakes I made was taking a "luxury bus" in Cambodia. The only difference was that it had Cambodian

sitcoms playing loudly on a television. The bus actually broke down in the mountains, but instead of being able to sleep, I was now being kept awake by loud Khmer comedy. And I paid extra for that.

◀.....▶ 'Negotiate the price down - only give extra as tip' ◀.....▶

Resist the temptation to overpay everyone by 20%, 50%, or 100% - it might seem like it's a small amount of money to you, but if you really do have excess funds, make contributions at respected temples, to charities, and tip honest hard working waiters, servers, cooks, cleaners, and guides.

If you do want to pay a little extra, still negotiate the price for your guide or taxi down to the going rate, but then give them a little extra as a tip. They don't respect gullible Westerners that overpay, they think you're stupid with your money and it makes them think people from your country are wasteful.

But if you give them extra and say "thank you for the good service, this is a tip" then they think you're doing a good thing and people from your country are generous. It's a huge difference.

THE RULES OF HAGGLING

1.) Always negotiate to near what the locals pay for the same service. This is better for you, better for future travelers, and better for honest local people. Getting ripped off is no good.

2.) Know what things cost beforehand. Wikitravel.com is a great site for this if you don't know anyone locally.

3.) Offer slightly less than you want to pay and come up to your desired price. This leaves the person you're haggling with feeling happy that they got you to compromise, and is usually better than just naming the price and holding firm. Naming the price and holding firm works, but usually leaves the seller less happy.

4.) Get prices named for bigger items at a few different places, then name to a shop the best price you've got and ask if they can beat it.

5. Have the exact amount you want to pay for something separate from your other money. Try to carry a diverse mix of small and medium sized bills and coins. Larger bills only can cause problems.

6.) Be careful buying package deals - if you pay all upfront, you're at their mercy. If you do pay upfront and it's not a very reputable broker, try to use a credit card and write down the exact details of what you're getting.

7.) Usually avoid going premium - at the very least, ask what the difference with premium is. Paying money to be kept awake by bad sitcoms is no good.

8.) If you do want to pay more, still negotiate down to a fair price, and then pay extra and make it clear it's a tip for good service. Locals appreciate courteous and generous people, but don't respect gullible and wasteful tourists.

It can be a joy to see how people in other cultures live, but remember to be smart, protect yourself, and treat the best people well who take care of you. A lot of travellers wind up paying extra to scammer types, but don't take the time to tip or get a small gift for the people who make your trip wonderful. Do the opposite - negotiate to a fair price with everyone you deal with, and then go out of your way to take care of the people that do right by you. Safe travels and happy adventuring!

www.sebastianmarshall.com



RELAXING YOUR MUSCLES WHILE BEING ON THE ROAD

During long-haul flights and endless bus journeys in uncomfortable positions, our bodies can become stiff and sore. Some easy stretches can help to keep you flexible.

It can start with stiffness, pain, discomfort and eventually atrophy.

Whatever the case, it's never a good feeling when we experience anything but comfort, relaxation and optimal levels of movement. Here are some tips on what to do when travelling.

IN-FLIGHT RELAXATION

Whether long or short flights, it doesn't matter. When the body stays in one position for too long, especially thousands of meters up in the air, the blood circulation is poor, the muscles can tense up and we can feel a lot of discomfort anywhere or everywhere in the body. To prevent swelling, pain, stiffness, tension, fatigue and discomfort in the body here are some tips to follow:

1. Try to get up and walk around on the plane as often as you can to keep the blood circulating. Minimum of 2min.

2. Never stretch on cold muscles as this can encourage tiny muscle tears. Warm up first before stretching. Either massage yourself using your knuckles, palms, fists or finger tips and apply pressure or squeeze, compress or pound the muscle. This warms up the area and also helps to release tension in the area.

Remember: Always make sure to breath in through the nose and if possible out through

the mouth. If you do not breath you may cause potentially more tension and problems in the area. Breath deep. And try to hold each stretch for a minimum of 20sec (approx. 10-15 deep breaths)

3. To warm up you can also rotate the joint.

For the neck: gently and slowly rotate your neck in a 360 degree motion, both clockwise and counter - clockwise direction, about 10x per direction.

Gently shake your head no, and nod your head yes, 10x per direction. If you feel dizzy or nauseated stop immediately and breath deep. Drink some water.

Shoulders: Lift your shoulders up and down minimum 10x. draw circles with your shoulders. If you need more room, get up and do it in the aisle or in the bathroom. Don't worry so much about what others think. At least you're maintaining your health and preventing problems. Maybe you'll even inspire others to follow.

4. Massage the shoulders, legs, back, neck, really anywhere on the body that you feel tension.

5. Here are some techniques for you to try and stretch your neck:

UPPER TRAPEZIUS

"Listen to the shoulder" (stretch the upper trapezius):

Put the right hand over your head to touch the left ear. Take a deep breath in and as you exhale you pull your head to the right shoulder while bringing your left shoulder down. Feel the stretch. If you feel pain, this may indicate that you are pulling too much. Reduce the stretch a little. Hold for minimum 20sec (approx. 10-15 deep breaths).



Two typical stretches: "Listen to the shoulder" (top) to stretch the upper trapezius and "Smell the armpit" (below) to stretch the levator scapula



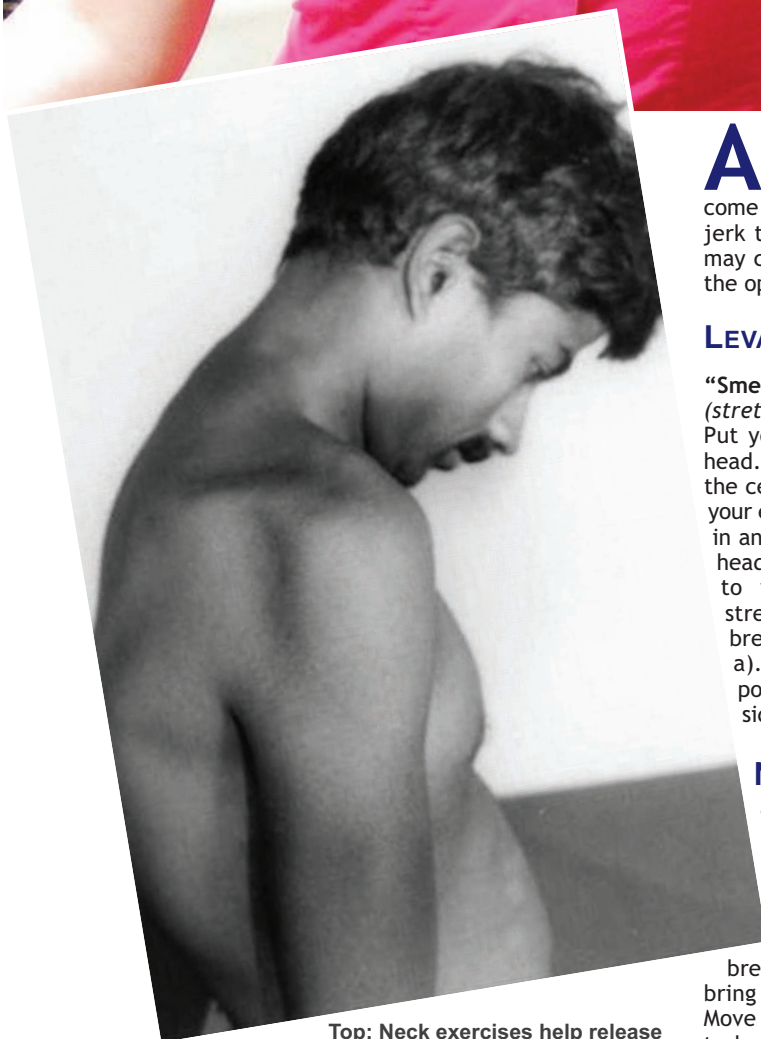
Writer Profile



Name: Doris Fin

Age: 22

There are no risks, just opportunities when I'm open to all that unfolds along my path.



Top: Neck exercises help release the tension. "Look at the chest" (above) stretches the neck extensors

As the muscle relaxes, increase the stretch a little bit at a time. Slowly come out of the stretch, never jerk the head up quickly. This may cause a spasm. Repeat on the opposite side.

LEVATOR SCAPULA

"Smell the Armpit"

(stretch the levator scapula): Put your hand on top of your head. Turn your head to look at the center of the inner part of your elbow. Take a deep breath in and as you exhale pull your head down to bring your nose to your armpit. Hold the stretch and continue to breathe the same way as for a). Slowly come out of the position and do the other side.

NECK EXTENSORS

"Look at the chest"

(neck extensors): Cross both hands behind your head. Tuck your elbows into towards your ears. Take a deep breath in and as you exhale bring your chin to your chest. Move slowly, gently. Continue to breathe the same way as in the previous exercises. Come up slowly.

Drink water throughout the flight, even if this means you have to get up frequently to go to the bathroom. It is better to be hydrated than dehydrated. This helps the blood move as well. Your water consumption should depend on the length of your flight.

Whenever possible, avoid eating plane food. It is the full of preservatives, chemicals, white sugar, white salt, hydrogenated oil, often over cooked, nonorganic, and not the best quality of food. If you do choose to eat the food, opt for a vegetarian meal and skip the dessert.

Whenever possible pack snacks of fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts, and your own homemade food. Most flights allow you to bring your food on board the flight.

When your backpack gets too heavy: First of all it's worth it to spend the extra dollars on a really good backpack. Extra support for the low back is a necessity. Try purchasing a bag that is padded at the low back, the mid back, has straps around for the hips and chest, is adjustable at the hips, shoulders and that is easy for you to get in and out of. All you have to do now to stay healthy is to stretch regularly.

GPS TREASURE-HUNTS IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Hunting for hidden treasures is something you can now do on a global scale, thanks to an innovative new game using GPS navigation and your mobile phone to guide you.

Remember those treasure hunts you used to go on as a child?

You had to follow clues and riddles to a location where a treasure was hidden, and you had to find it before the other team did. Now grown-ups can experience the same feeling of curiosity and adventure again, by going on GPS-assisted treasure hunts all over the world.

It's called geocaching, and participating couldn't be easier or more fun. All you need is either a Global Positioning System, or a smartphone that supports geocaching apps. The coordinates of every "cache", containers of varying sizes and shapes from the size of a bolt to that of a tool box, are logged on the internet, and these coordinates can then be downloaded onto the devices to start your adventure.

The device will tell you how far away the next cache is, but once you get closer to it you really have to search for it. When I was introduced to geocaching, I was in the middle of West Lancashire. A friend of mine, an avid geocacher, got her phone out and said: "There's a cache about 150 feet from here, fancy finding it?" and so we went off looking for it. Adjacent to where we were was the ruin of a church.

The GPS system told us that the cache was hidden somewhere around the ruin and that we got closer and closer. Whether they are hidden in hollow trees, under stones or

cleverly disguised and left in plain view, geocaches can be hard to find and you might have to get your hands dirty in order to retrieve some of them. As we were looking around, several male friends began to question our sanity. They soon joined in after being told that we were looking for "treasures". It seems that the childhood pirate inside them survived too.

The GPS told us that we were only a few feet away. It was a plastic container, the size of a lunchbox, cleverly hidden away underneath stones, containing treasures.

.....
'National Parks are discovering the trend too'
.....

Every geocache is fitted with a logbook. Once you find the cache, you sign the log with your name and the date you found the cache. The bigger boxes contain little treasures.

These can be anything from coins, a deck of cards and plastic rings to spoons and bracelets. You can either just leave your treasure in the box, or exchange one for your own trinket. Smaller caches are usually only big enough for a piece of paper.

More serious geocachers might even form teams and have a trinket of choice that they leave behind like the Shoestring team's own, very original trinket: shoestrings.

Geocaching is an outdoor activity, with all caches located in public places worldwide and everybody can join the fun, regardless of age or level of participation. Some people try and find caches on their way to school or work, or use their lunch breaks for some urban exploration. Others like to go on family picnics and look for treasures around the picnic area or holiday cottage.

More and more tourism offices are discovering the



The contents of a typical Geocache; Various GPS devices; Logbook and treasures in a cache (CoKa).

trend as well. This means that all over the world, more and more cities as well as National Parks have actual geocaching routes through them, with caches hidden in important places.

That way, visitors can have fun on the treasure-hunt and learn a bit about the place they are visiting as well.

Many of the smartphone application are downloadable for free, so no special kit is needed to join the fun. There is no minimum or maximum you have to reach - just keep going as long as it's fun!

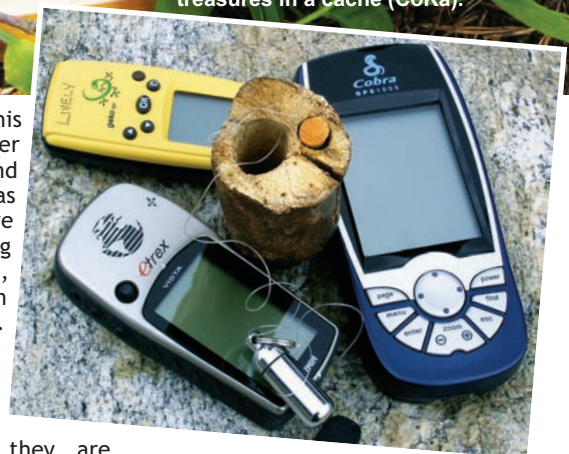
GEOCACHING

Official Geocaching Site:
www.geocaching.com

UK Geocachers
www.ukgeocachers.co.uk

Geocaching Association
www.gagb.co.uk

Fun Outdoors
www.funoutdoors.com



Writer Profile



Name: Cornelia Kaufmann
Age: 23
Enjoys being a child again, going on outdoor treasure hunts and getting her hands dirty in the process.

Festival - Time

Wonder which world festivals are worth checking out?

Here are **SHOESTRING's** top four events between October 2010 and January 2011.



BOUN AWK PHANSA - LAOS - 23. - 24.10.2010

Boun Awk Phansa is the celebration on the last day of the Buddhist lent. Around the country, donations and offerings are made from dawn onwards. In the evening candlelight processions are being held around the temples. Small, lighted banana leaf boats - decorated with candles and flowers - are being sent down rivers throughout Laos.

At night, the Naga fireballs are said to appear in the Mekong River, about 80km south of the capital Vientiane. On the second day of the festival, Vientiane is a blur of festivity when the famous Boat Racing takes place. There is singing and drumming and food stalls everywhere. You'll need to get up early to get a good spot on the river shore, though, as the race starts at 9am.

PIRATE WEEK - CAYMAN ISLANDS - 11. - 21.11.2010

The Cayman's National Festival is in its 33rd year with a week's worth of shiver me timbers fun! With all the family able to participate, it'll be a weeklong blend of activity, culinary heritage, music and fireworks.

There will be Caribbean rhythms dictating the pulse of the islands. The first Saturday of the Pirate Week will see a Pirate Invasion from the sea, complete with old sailing vessels loaded with pirates. Landing in George Town harbour it will be the one spectacle not to be missed. The Pirate Week is the only festival of its kind in the Caribbean. So get your hook and wooden leg out and join the fun!



PUSHKAR CAMEL FAIR - INDIA - 12. - 21.11.2010

Every year, the spectacle of 20,000 camels descending on Pushkar from the desert is one of the sights not to be missed. Farmers, traders and their livestock are drawn to the colours and carnival of one of the last traditional "melas" in Rajasthan. With lots of activities surrounding the camel fair like camel races and competitions, there is never a dull moment at Pushkar.

Next to the camel fair, there are traditionally cattle and horses for sale as well. The bazaars and fairgrounds attract visitors from all over the region, although many come for the colour, noise and social get-together. The last night of the Mela coincides with the Kartik Purnima, a religious full moon festival, during which the pilgrims take to the temples and streets.

NATIONAL FINALS RODEO - USA - 2. - 11.12.2010

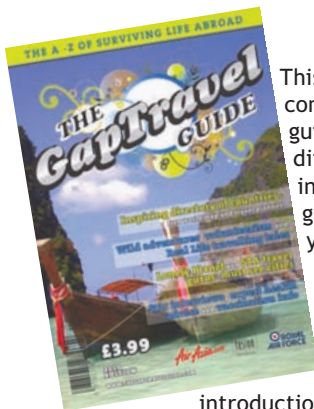
Hold on during a wild ride at the last rodeos of the year in Las Vegas, Nevada. With Cowboy Christmas shows, balls, Miss Rodeo Pageants, horse sales and obviously a lot of bucking horses.

The atmosphere at such an event is electrifying. Most rides last a maximum of 8 seconds, and the falls the guys take are anything but soft. The shows feature the season's top 15 competitors in the events of bull riding, saddle bronc, bareback, calf roping, steer wrestling, team roping and barrel racing.

On the eve of the NFR, the Downtown Hoedown, a honky-tonk party at the Fremont Street Experience takes place for everyone.



The Gap Travel Guide 2010



This tiny book is a thrifty little combination of magazine and guide book, with tips, articles on different Gap Year options, interviews and info on where to get your gear or who to book your trip with.

Calling itself the “A-Z guide of surviving life abroad”, this book gives an overview of each continent and a detailed introduction to various countries on that continent. While the style of the book is a bit chaotic, which could make it hard to follow for some readers, it is very colourful and informative.

If you need any more tips on what to do on your Gap Year after having read **SHOESTRING**, then the Gap Travel Guide 2010 is where you should look. It comes out in annual editions.

GBP 3.99

Flavour of the moment: Lángos



Hungarian fried flat bread

Ingredients

50 g yeast (no powder)
1 table spoon sugar
1 table spoon salt
1 l milk
1 kg flour

Mix the sugar with 0.35l of milk and add grated yeast. Wait for the yeast to rise. Add the flour and salt to the bowl with the yeast mixture and stir. Add the rest of the milk evenly until the dough is sticky. Cover with a cloth and keep it in a warm dry place until the dough rises.

Form the dough into fist-sized pieces and flatten / form them to the desired shape and density.

Fry in a pan with oil and a bit of salt.

The bread goes well with garlic, herbs, grated cheese, bacon and Shoestring's own favourite: sour cream. Feel free to experiment with toppings and combinations, though!

My kind of town: Austin By Sophie Kwong

“Keep Austin Weird.” These three words are plastered all over bumper stickers, t-shirts, and storefronts in a city which prides itself on quirkiness. Texas’ state capital is home to slick politicians, tech geeks, aspiring musicians, progressive hippies, and a staggering 50,000 students enrolled at the University of Texas. With a vibrant nightlife, a gorgeous outdoor setting, world-famous film and music festivals, and ethnic eateries on every corner, Austin offers everything - all on a student budget!

My Favourite Hangout

Colourful South Congress Avenue epitomizes Austin’s funky, artsy culture with vintage boutiques, an outdoor crafts market, a 50’s style candy store, and a fabulous costume shop. A row of airstream trailers provides a unique street food experience, serving everything from crêpes to cupcakes and vegan pies.

Watering Holes

Alamo Drafthouse theatres provide a one-of-a-kind cinematic experience, in which moviegoers are treated to full table-service by waiters. In addition to current releases, they often host theme nights ranging from cult classics to 80’s hair metal karaoke to live lampooning of bad movies. You never know who you’ll run into - homegrown heroes like Wes Anderson, Robert Rodriguez, Owen Wilson, and Matthew McConaughey have been known to frequent their old stomping grounds.

Not to Miss while in town

Congress Bridge houses North America’s largest urban bat colony- 1.5 million strong! Each sundown, a dramatic cloud of bats zooms over Lady Bird Lake, blanketing the city skyline. Visitors can view this nightly attraction from the bridge, from a boat on the water, or from the balconies of nearby restaurants.

Great Food to tuck into

Amy’s Ice Cream is a local institution, with stores spread throughout the city. In addition to serving unusual flavours like Pumpkin Pie, Mexican Vanilla, and Shiner Bock Beer (enhanced by a variety of toppings), employees entertain customers with gravity-defying ice cream scooping stunts.

Can’t Sit Still

Texas is football country. Every Saturday in the fall, the city explodes in a sea of burnt orange to support their local Longhorn team. The Darrell K. Royal Memorial Stadium holds over 100,000 screaming fans. If you are unable to secure a ticket, try tailgating with the rowdy fans who will be barbequing and cheering from the stadium parking lot! Whether it is blues, rock, country, folk, or Latin, the musical tradition permeates Austin, giving credence to its title as “Live Music Capital of the World.” Concert venues range from stadium-seating to makeshift stages in seedy dive bars and cosy cafes. Austin City Limits, a 3-day festival in October, features over 100 musical acts performing at Zilker Metropolitan Park on Barton Springs Road.



The essential pack list

Sticking to the 20kg weight limit most airlines impose, and still managing to fit everything you need into a backpack can be a daunting task.



5 Tshirts: 700g
If you are planning on interning or working in an office, take at least 1 good shirt



Shoes: 1.5kg (3 pairs)
That's the weight for a pair of trainers, hiking boots and flip flops



Underwear/Socks: 740g
Underwear for 7 days and 7 pairs of socks, as well as 2 pairs of warm socks just in case.



3 pairs of trousers: 1.13kg
A pair of jeans, a pair of shorts and a pair of zip-up trekking trousers.



Travel towel: 360g
A travel towel is fast-drying, light-weight and easy to fit into every corner.



First Aid kit: 320g
This can be a small pouch. Fill it with plasters, bandages, thermometer, aspirin, Rennie's and any medication you might need. Bring some sterile needles and syringes if you're travelling for longer. Add **250g for a toiletries** kit. Use small bottles for shampoo when you're flying - less chance of spilling



Trekking backpack: 2.91kg
Backpacks with a 60-70l capacity should not weigh more than 3kg



Sleepwear: 360g
T-shirt and shorts should do the trick

Sarong: 160g
One of the most versatile things you can travel with. Never go anywhere without it! It can serve as dress, skirt, towel, curtain, scarf, bed sheet, blanket etc.



2 jumpers: 1.09kg
1 light jumper and a thicker hoodie for colder days and nights



Rainjacket: 560g
These are lighter when you get one that folds into its own pocket. Heavier, obviously, when you go for the heavy-duty trekking variety.



Total weight: 9.99kg!

At just under 10kg, this pack list leaves you with 10kg to fill with whatever else you want or need to take, such as a sleeping bag and extra gear. To keep the weight down, you could try travelling with these essentials and trade other clothes in second-hand shops along the way!

TRAVEL GEAR STORES

Globetrotter
www.globetrotter.de

Millets
www.millets.co.uk

Kathmandu
www.kathmandu.com.au

Magellan's
www.magellans.com