

SHOESTRING

Exploring the world - on a budget

Issue #5 | Free
August 2011

Fun in the desert

Burning Man Festival in Nevada

Save the turtles!

Conservation project in Costa Rica

Kendal Calling

The beginnings of a festival

On the Northern Trail

Overland from L.A. to NYC

Cheap thrills

The Low-down on Londontown

Plus:

Australian Outback Trip ★ Wwoofing ★ Malawi ★ Turkey & Iran



G' Day! →

Summer, sunshine, and most importantly freedom - summer is the perfect time for roadtrips, festivals and self-discovery.

Shoestring spoke to the organiser of Kendal Calling, a festival in rural England that is going from strength to strength, to find out how it all came about.

Sonja gave up home comforts for a week in the Nevada desert, and celebrated the Burning Man with everything the festival has to offer.

Our intrepid travel-writer Erik is back on the road, and has crossed from Europe into Asia to discover the culture and heritage of Persia. Gio is continuing his kickstarted musical journey through the United States, while I have gone on two very different roadtrips in two very different countries to find out what Australia and America are like beyond the big smoke.

Shoestring is a voluntary project, and all the experiences and advice published on its pages is genuine, from backpackers, for backpackers.

Happy Travels!

C ornelia

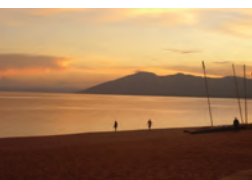
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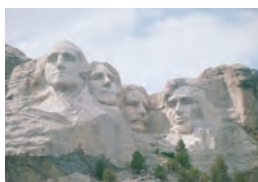
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ISSUE #5

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Cornelia Kaufmann

PICTURE EDITOR: Cornelia Kaufmann

DESIGN & LAYOUT: Cornelia Kaufmann

CONTRIBUTORS: Cathy Fenton, Sonja Kaufmann,
Erik Jelinek, Malin Nyberg, Ayman Abdel Jaber,
Gio Andollo

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Cornelia Kaufmann (CoKa),
Sonja Kaufmann (SoKa), Gio Andollo (GiAn), Erik
Jelinek (ErJe), Cathy Fenton (CaFe), David Lude
(DaLu), Zechariah Nichols (ZeNi), Madleine Rhosius
(MaRh), Nico Alba (NiAl), Henriette Fischer (HeFi),
Ayman Abdel Jaber (AyJa), Pooneh Ghana (PoGh),
Tom Martin (ToMa)

CONTACT: editor@shoestring-magazine.com

WEBSITE: www.shoestring-magazine.com

TRAVEL NEWS & DEALS



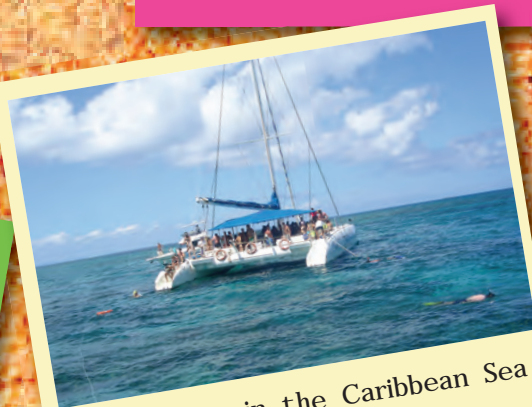
Sign in Parachilne, South Australia, announcing the Coal Train

Learn a language online

Online language learning community Babbel.com has launched new apps that will help you learn even more languages. They have just added Dutch, Indonesian and Turkish to their list of available apps. Check them out at www.babbel.com

Australians love Lapland

It seems that the cold reaches of northern Finland and Sweden are a preferred travel destination. Activities Abroad noticed an increase of travellers heading past Father Christmas and exploring more rural Lapland to see the Aurora Borealis. www.activitiesabroad.com



A catamaran in the Caribbean Sea off the shore of Cuba

8th Iroquois Art Biennial

On August 27, the 8th Iroquois Contemporary Art Biennial opens at the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, New York. The exhibition will feature the work of four young women from the Haudenosaunee: Lauren Jimerson (Seneca); Awenheeyoh Powless (Onondaga); Leah Shenandoah (Oneida); and Natasha Smoke Santiago (Mohawk).

New tiger for Safari Park

West Midland Safari Park has introduced Sumatran Tiger to their extensive collection of rare and endangered species. The five-year old female tiger arrived at the Park from Arnhem in Holland and is now in quarantine. She is called 'Hujan' meaning rain in one of the dialects spoken in her native Indonesia. www.wmsp.co.uk

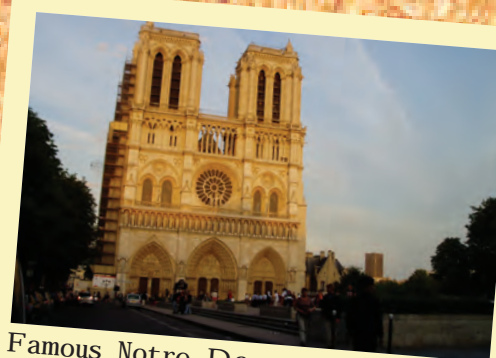
Check out previous issues of Shoestring on www.shoestring-magazine.com



Edinburgh Castle at the top of the hill, seen from Georges Street

Mosque added to UNESCO list

The Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, Turkey, has been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Built in the late 16th century, the magnificent mosque takes pride of place at the centre of a complex which comprises a medrese, libraries, hospitals, baths and a cemetery. Situated some 235km west of Istanbul, the two-and-a-half-hour drive is easily manageable by day trip.



Famous Notre Dame cathedral on Île de la Cité, Paris

CALLING ALL TRAVEL WRITERS

Fancy yourself a travel writer? Do you have an amazing gap year or backpacking experience you would like to share with the world? Have you taken photographs that are too good to be hidden away in a drawer somewhere? Then **SHOESTRING** would like to hear from you!

SHOESTRING is a travel magazine aimed at students, backpackers and gap year travellers who are looking for inspiration and advice when it comes to planning the next big adventure. It lives on voluntary contributions from

Preparing for a trip can be hard work, especially when there are many options to choose from. This is why Shoestring is looking for experience reports, introducing projects and how to travel on the cheap.

If you want to introduce a city that you know well, get in touch! I'm also always looking for simple (and I mean fool-proof), tasty recipes from around the world.

Shoestring should also feature outdoor stories, active stories, including extreme sports - but on a travelling angle. This could for example include travelling to New Zealand to bungee jump from the bridge where the sport was invented or crossing China on a pushbike. There are no real limits, as long as it has to do with travelling and is of interest to the target readership. Stories exploring different cultures are also welcome!

Have you recently read a really good (factual) travel book? Seen a great documentary? Want to explain why David Attenborough / Michael Palin / Ray Mears (delete as appropriate) is your travel hero? Tried a new travel app on your phone? If so, I'm looking for short reviews.

Your story should have a clear angle and be written in British English. Please don't send an email saying „I can write about India“ - let me know what experience in India you have in mind. Also, please don't elongate words for emphasis or add smilies, this makes it harder to edit your story.

Please send your stories to editor@shoestring-magazine.com. The full contribution guidelines can be found on the website www.shoestring-magazine.com

Into Australia's Red Centre

How much is there to see along a straight road through barren land? Quite a lot, as **SHOESTRING** editor **Cornelia Kaufmann** discovers while travelling into the Outback

One of the first things you learn when you venture into the Australian outback is that there is dust. A lot of the stuff, and it's bright red. Next to that there are few other things you'll have to worry about, except for the fact that all those other little things can kill you.

Our overland tour with Adventure Tours Australia started early. 6am, packed and ready in front of a backpackers

in Adelaide. The early starts are another thing to get used to while travelling. The people Down Under seem to have this sense that there are too few hours in the day and that you could get punished in some horrible way if you stay in bed past sunrise.

So once we all got on our bus, we did not loose any time to make our way north. We had six days and a total of over 2700 km including detours to

cover in order to get from Adelaide all the way to Alice Springs.

On of our first stops was 60 km to the north, at Freeling. The small town was used as some of the set for popular Australian drama "McLeod's Daughters", and the town's Railway Hotel on the corner of Gray and Stephenson has been repainted as the "Gungellan Hotel". After snapping a few pictures on set and bumping into one of the main characters preparing for a scene, we set off again for Melrose.

There, surrounded by some

very odd-looking motor-homes (trucks with an actual house built on them) and one of the oldest licensed hotels - proudly first tapped in 1854 - we set off on our first little hike. Our destination was Mount Remarkable and its Alligator Gorge. It was just a short stroll through the gorge, and mostly shady but still good to get out of the bus and stretch our legs a bit.

It also gave all of us a chance to get to know each other a bit better. Crowding back into our bus, we still had a while to drive to reach our first over-night stop in Parachilna.

Driving through the sleepy town of Quorn, we all got this sensation of being on another film set. And as we were still trying to figure it out, our guide cracked a joke about Wolf Creek.

Further down the road, we stopped at a few old crumbling ruins. These turned out to be the former Kanyaka Homestead, an abandoned cattle and sheep station at the foot of the Flinders Ranges. Founded in 1852, this station was once one of the largest in



Background: Uluru during the sunrise base walk. Left: Signpost in the middle of the Outback. Right: Feral Meal advertised in Parachilna (CoKa)



Left: Lorikeets in Australia.
Right: Sunrise over the Breakaways (CoKa)

the district, before it was left to fall to pieces after severe droughts in the area.

Although this part of Australia is fairly dry, the Flinders Ranges are still considered “bush” instead of “outback”.

Nobody knows exactly where the bush ends and the outback starts in the Australian backlands - the edges have been somewhat blurred - but the general assumption is that the outback starts when the soil turns red and the vegetation becomes scarce except for some scrubs and gum trees.

From Kanyaka, we pushed on to the Yourambulla Caves Historic Reserve, an aboriginal site. This was the first time since I got to Australia, that I actually experienced parts of the indigenous culture. There are cave paintings at Yourambulla, and a sign offers an interpretation, but whether this explanation of the drawings is accurate is anyone's guess.

‘The sunrises in Australia are just too spectacular to be missed’

When we reached our first night's destination Parachilna, our guide went to the trouble of giving us a driving tour past all the sights. Because Parachilna is a town with only five permanent inhabitants and one street, the tour of the town was pretty quick.

It was a “blink and you'll miss it” affair. The police

station and school building have been converted into homes. Parachilna's main building is the Prairie Hotel, which offers a feral meal for its visitors. So that night, we dined on camel, emu and kangaroo, all of which were new and exciting flavours for me.

The highlight of the night at Parachilna, is the passing of the Port Augusta - Leigh Creek coal train. This colossal train has 180 trucks and is almost 3 km long. Because the land is so flat, you can see its lights coming for miles. It takes a while for the train to reach the settlement, so we all put small coins on the tracks, grabbed a cool beer and then sat beside the railway waiting for it to pass.

Personally, I am not a morning person most days, but in Australia, I definitely became one. The sunrises are just too spectacular to miss. After a hearty breakfast, we made tracks into the Flinders Ranges and to a geographic feature called the Wilpena Pound.

We spent the whole day hiking through gorges and enjoying the vistas of endless land stretching before us and kangaroos hopping by. While some chose to climb up to the rim, I opted for a walk into the Pound itself and around the old homestead. Not only was this an easier hike, but it also kept me out of the hot midday sun.

Australia is the first country I bought sun cream in a 1-litre-bottle and used it all within a week. One of my wisest investments was the cowgirl hat I had bought weeks before.

That night at Rawnsley Park Station, the boys in the group

decided to sleep out under the stars. First, we all got a lecture about Aussie creepers, most of which can seriously harm you. The redback spider, brown snake, huntsman spiders, funnel-web spiders and white-tailed spiders are the ones to look out for.

‘I was set on getting my swag out and watching the night sky for shooting stars’

Sleeping in swags looked like fun but I waited to see what the boys had to say about the experience. Needless to say they all loved it, so my mind was set on getting my own swag out and watch the night sky for shooting stars at the next stop.

Another early start and we headed south again, back onto the main road to make our way north on the Stuart Highway.

We called at Woomera, a military town for replenishments and then stopped at the wide white expanse of Lake Hart, a salt lake that looks massive but is dwarfed by some of the other salt plains in the area like Lake Gairdner just across the road.

Pushing on to Glendambo, we only passed a few cars all day. Giving that this is Australia's major North-South Highway, I had expected more. At the roadhouse in Glendambo, we did come across a road-train though. With its five trailers, it did take a while to get around the corners.

Even at Glendambo, our day

on the bus was still not over. We still had 250 km of straight road through dry and barren land ahead of us until we would reach Coober Pedy.

The sky got bluer, the air hotter and the ground redder. Somewhere along the way, we had entered the outback without even noticing. Coober Pedy is world-famous for dugout homes because it is simply too hot to live above ground. Not for the faint-hearted or claustrophobic, the hostel rooms are all underground caves, no windows, just thin air shafts and solid rock as walls.

We explored an opal mine and had pizza above ground before retreating into our dugout accommodation for the night. My swag experience would have to wait.

The next morning we got up before sunrise and drove out to a very Australian feature: The dog fence. Running from Jimbour to the Nullarbor Plain, it is 5,614 km long and was designed to keep dingoes out of the good pastures in the south-east of the country.

We had breakfast at the Breakaways, and saw one of the most amazing sunrises I have ever witnessed. After the sun had risen high enough for us to continue our journey into the outback, we set off to the place all of us longed to see: Uluru.

We had driven through all of South Australia, and passed into the Northern Territory. Past Ghan, we turned off the Stuart Highway and onto the Lasseter Highway at Erldunda Roadhouse. While we enjoyed our last chance to stretch our legs, we did encounter a few

emus on the side of the road roaming free.

Stocked up on water supply and beef jerky, we started to keep our eyes on the landscape, scanning it for massive monoliths.

Hundreds of long and dusty miles and several hours later, we were finally within reach of the red rock we all came to see, and our guide lost no time.

Arriving just as the sun started to set, we were all surprised to see busloads of people flocking around the sunset viewing area. We all “uhh-ed” and “ahh-ed” as the rock started to change colours from vibrant red-orange to purple. Returning to the camp at Yulara, I made my decision to go waltzing Matilda and sleep in the swag under the stars.

The first thing that really struck me when I rolled out the swag was the sheer endlessness of the Outback night sky. I had never seen so many stars before! Eventually, I even found the Southern Cross and learned which two pointer stars to look out for in order to find it again amongst the millions of tiny dots.

The swag was surprisingly comfy and warm, not necessarily what I had expected. But if a hybrid between sleeping bag and tent can make it to Aussie icon status, it has to be good.

◀.....▶
‘To hike round Uluru, we had to start walking at sunrise to avoid the unbearable midday heat’
◀.....▶

The next morning, we got woken up at 4am - well before sunrise - by Robin Williams’ voice shouting “Good morning Vietnam” through the camp. The aim for the day was to hike around Uluru, but we would have to start walking by sunrise or the heat would get too unbearable halfway around.

Up close and personal, the rock is much more ragged than it looks. The base walk alone is 10 km long. Apparently there is a water tank at the halfway point where you can fill up your water bottle, but I somehow managed to walk right past it.

We did the shorter Mala

Walk as well before retreating into the Cultural Centre to get out of the heat.

Later that day, we continued on to our last over-night destination, at a camp near Kings Canyon. Rolling out the swags again - this time all of us - we watched the sky get darker and darker around us.

In the middle of the night, we were surprised by rain however, and hurried to grab our gear. Luckily, there were stationary tents in the campsite, so we threw our things into the next-best tent and claimed one of the bunk beds. My inflatable pillow was blown away by the wind and now serves as a new toy for some lonely dingo out there.

Kings Canyon was a fabulous hike. Steep at the start to get up onto the rim, it is a 6 km flat walk from there on in. Eucalypts are growing in the gorge below and the view is just astonishing, just as the fact that for the movie *Priscilla - Queen of the desert* Hugo Weaving had to scramble up to the rim in high heels.

When we finally arrived in Alice Springs, it was raining. It was a torrent, which caused the river Todd to swell. Even locals don’t say that they are from Alice until they have seen the Todd flow at least three times.

The trek came to an end there, but with half a day left in Alice before my flight left for Sydney, I took one last opportunity to learn about Australia by going on a bush tucker trip, where I learned from an Aboriginal community which fruits and insects are safe to eat. Granted, some looked gross, but I gave it all a try.

No trip into the outback should be complete without sleeping in a swag and trying bush tucker at least once.

My six days on route into the Outback opened my eyes and I fell in love with rural Australia, its people, landscape and culture, as well as the sense of freedom I gained.

WEBSITES

Adventure Tours Australia
www.adventuretours.com.au

Contiki Australia
www.contiki.co.uk/australia

Aussie Adventures
www.intrepidtravel.com

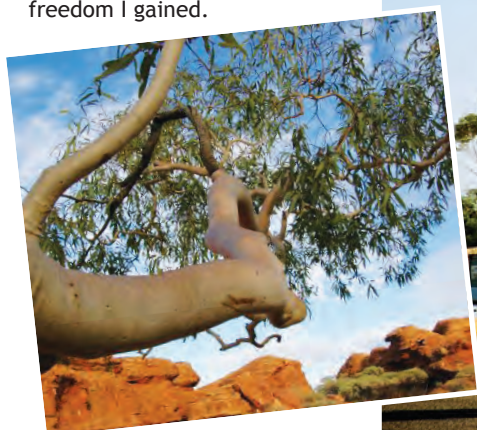
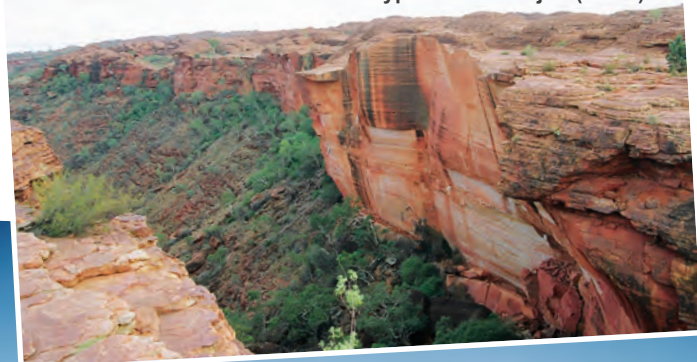
OzXposure
www.letstrekaustralia.com

SWAGS

Swags are a mixture of sleeping bag and bedroll, and the more luxurier versions even convert into a very cosy tent. They are a waterproof canvas bag with a thin mattress inside and ideal for sleeping outside. A swag is quite expensive and weighs around 7 kg, but if you plan on camping in Australia a lot then a swag might be a great investment.



Top: Desert golf course in Coober Pedy. Above: Emu at the roadside. Kings Canyon from the Rim Walk. Below: Ruins of Kanyaka Homestead. Bottom right: Prairie Hotel in Parachilna. Bottom left: Eucalypt near Kata Tjuta. (CoKa)





From a little-known musical gathering on a Lake District farm, Kendal Calling has prospered into one of Britain's favourite summer festivals. **Malin Nyberg** met up with organiser Ben Robinson and asked him how it came all about.

If someone had told me a few years ago that I'd be booking gig with bands I really admire, speaking to BBC producers and partying with the Arctic Monkeys, I'd never have believed them."

This is what Ben Robinson, owner of music festival Kendal Calling, says when looking back on his achievements.

Growing up in the small village of Brough, the 29-year-old spent most of his time in his room, listening to the Smiths and Oasis, wishing he was a part of the music industry.

"Music was my world back then and it always has been. I dreamed of being in a big rock band." As a teenager he went to school in Kirkby Stephen and became friends with people very similar to himself.

"We'd stay up late at night, analysing lyrics and smoking weed, complaining about how we had grown up in the wrong

place, that there was absolutely nothing here."

In 1999 Ben moved to Middlesbrough to start a degree in computer animation but it turned out it was not for him. "I failed absolutely everything," he says. "It was all about getting high at that time."

.....
'I arranged gigs in local venues around Cumbria'

Three years later he moved back to Brough, saying he felt like complete failure. "I had let my family down and felt incredibly embarrassed. All I wanted was to work and earn some money." Spending his days glazing windows he spotted a job ad for Barclays Bank.

"I could never see myself in

that sort of environment but dad said it would be good for me so I applied and got it."

Ben says the job at the bank was like theatre. "I remember sitting in my room, looking at the suit hanging on my door. It was such a contrast from who I actually was." He was however a good actor and went from cashier to general manager within three years.

"I started to earn loads of money but hated every second of it. I lived for the weekends and often used to arrange gigs in local venues around Cumbria.

It was however all falling at my feet with weak turnouts and band cancelling in the very last second. So I decided not to do it unless someone was helping me. It was simply too stressful to do it all by myself."

"Then something happened. A man called Andy Hasley walked into the bank where

Ben worked. "He was a customer and when I looked, his ID read Music Links and I started to ask questions."

It appeared Halsey was working for a charity project involving local bands in Cumbria and he invited Ben for their next meeting. "That was the door in for me, the coincidence of meeting Halsey," Ben says, adding "If it wasn't for him I would never have met Andy Smith."

Smith, originally from Kendal, had just like Ben a big passion for music. "I met Smith at the meetings we had with Music Links and he was very productive, arranging gigs in the local area too."

Smith was interested in the two of them arranging something together. "I could tell he wasn't a talker and that he wanted to get things going."

"Their first event was a great success. "We arranged a

two night music festival on a cricket pitch in Kirkby Stephen called Nine Standards. 400 people showed up each night, it was packed! That's when I realised it was really worth doing it, and all the hard work was finally paying off."

.....>
'At the beginning of Kendal Calling, we took a chance. Luckily we sold out'
>

In 2006 Ben and Smith decided to do the same thing they had done with Nine Standards but in Kendal town, which is what came to be the beginning of the music festival Kendal Calling.

"It was really scary. We risked a few thousand pounds each and took a chance. Luckily, we sold out!" Earlier that year, Ben's dad had died. "It put a whole new perspective to things and I started questioning what I was doing at the bank."

When the first Kendal Calling was over Ben and Andy counted the money in the pot.

"Suddenly, I saw a career in this." The duo decided to do another Kendal Calling and to make it even bigger.

In 2007 they upped the stakes and moved to Grate Farm. Suddenly life became very hectic. "I remember Smith saying 'There's no way we can arrange this festival and work full time'. So, I sat down one day and worked out the figures, realizing exactly how much money we could make."

Kendal Calling 2007 was a success and Ben could hand in his notice to the bank. "I went straight to Solfest festival after that. I remember standing in the audience listening to The Levellers singing:

"There is only one way of life and it's your own, your own, your own," feeling so incredibly happy."

Today Ben lives in Leeds with his band Deathretro and has started a production company called Calling Productions with Smith arranging gigs and events all over the country. Kendal Calling has also moved up in the world and is now taking place at Lowther Deer Park.

"My best memory is when we were arranging a gig for the

band British Sea Power. We set it up in Tan Hill Inn, the highest pub in England. When I got a request from the Arctic Monkeys to come and join us.

I couldn't believe it! I was going to party with the Arctic Monkeys!" Being a man from the country is nothing Ben sees as a bad thing anymore.

"These days I take pride in being from Brough. People at music conferences are often impressed by our passion and find it refreshing as the business is very much about people in suits and money these days. We are there for a different reason. We are there because we love music."



www.kendalcalling.co.uk



Above: Revellers at Kendal Calling 2011 (PoGh). Big names coming to Lowther Deer Park (ToMa)

SHOWING THE FAMILY AROUND MALAWI

Scottish **SHOESTRING** contributor **Cathy Fenton** decided to up sticks and move out to Malawi. Now the family is coming to visit for a cheap African adventure.

Of course I researched Malawi before I accepted a job here.

Yet nothing I could find online really gave me a concrete image of the country.

Any mention of idyllic beaches in the (scant) literature was overturned in my mind by my own hazy perceptions of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Pictures of kayaking to little islands or descriptions of honeymoon chalets were eclipsed by learning the fact that it is the third poorest country in the world. I worried about my decision to move here and wondered if I might end up leaving early.

As it turned out, as soon as I arrived I was overwhelmed by the reality of Malawi- the lush green mountains, vivid red roads and perfect beaches.

And, six months in, I felt I had grasped enough of the country to invite out my mother and brother for a travelling holiday here; confident that I could show them my beautiful new home on their low-ish budget.

I wanted them to see for themselves the beauty and the potential of this little-known country.

We met in the capital Lilongwe, an emotional reunion as I hadn't been in the same country as my brother for

almost two years. Lilongwe is astonishingly developed in comparison to the North (my base), however I expect that sophisticated westerners will be less impressed by the ice cream and the giant supermarkets than I currently am.

We stayed at Mabuya camp - a friendly, lively hostel with good meals (they passed my high lasagne standards), and the only one with a swimming pool. My only quibble?

After a night out dancing I woke up covered in ants and had to evacuate my tent to squeeze in with my poor, slumbering brother.

Although I wanted to show my family around Malawi, my mother is an avid safari goer, and so we first hit Zambia for some Big Five action.

We travelled to South Luangwa National Park with Land and Lake, who picked us straight up from our hostel and drove us in a comfortable mini-bus through the Zambian border to the park. Our lodge (Croc Valley Camp) was right beside the beautiful river - which was teeming with hungry

looking crocs and half - submerged hippos.

.....>
'Open savannah, some bush, some beautiful river, for sundowners'
.....>

The lodge bar, lounge and restaurant were made up of several arching African buildings which were stylishly decorated and perfectly furnished, clustered around a small swimming pool.

My family like to eat and we were all very happy with the meals- a small breakfast before our early game drive, then when we returned a varied, filling brunch.

After several hours lounging in camp we'd then be served afternoon tea with cake, and head out excitedly for our second drive of the day. On our return - a delicious three course meal.

The park itself is beautiful, some open savannah, some bush, and the beautiful river where we'd stop for our sundowners. We saw elephants,

lions, giraffe, an aardvark, buffalo, all sorts of antelope and, to top it all off, two leopards up a tree making short work of an impala. For the money we paid (approx £300 each for a four day trip inc. driving there and back), the whole family felt the safari was astoundingly good value.

After a short return to the capital, and my frenzied shopping for supplies, we bussed up to Nkhata Bay. I hadn't looked forwards to a long journey on an African bus with my mother but was pleasantly surprised this time (this was partly luck): the bus was large, comfortable and relatively fast, and my mother was tough and uncomplaining about minor discomforts.

We acquired some brunette girls going to the same place as us, which quickly became a pattern on our trip, and provided a buffer from the intensity of three weeks travelling with family (oh how quickly your 16 year old self tries to resurface in these situations).

Our motley crew arrived at Mzuzu in the dark and bargained with a taxi driver to

Left: Sunset at Kande Beach on Lake Malawi (CoKa). View of Lake Malawi, which is nicknamed Calendar Lake for being 365km long and 52 km wide (CaFe).





take us the final stretch. He had to stop for fuel on the way (This is Malawi, my friend, where no one ever has any bloody fuel) but we to the lakeshore after an hour or so.

Travelling here is hit or miss - you can be squished in a rusty mini bus or stretched out on a big coach - but with a bit of tolerance and patience you always get there.

◀.....▶
'I was blown away by my first dive and was giggly for hours'
 ▶.....◀

In Nkhata Bay I always stay at Mayoka Village, which I consider an exceptional hostel, for setting, atmosphere, service and food. My mother opted for Butterfly Lodge next door - which is far quieter and more laid back, and which offers many volunteering opportunities.

However they were always sneaking over for the delicious meals at Mayoka - the best being the famous Friday night barbecue which offers an amazing selection of vegetable as well as beef skewers and marinated chicken.

The downside of Mayoka? If you stay in the main dorm - chances are you'll be falling asleep to pumping Zambian tunes, or Rhianna...

On to an excellent scuba dive taster session at Aqua Africa - where for about £30

you get taught the basic theory, get comfortable with the practise in shallow water and then go for a fifty minute dive with friendly, professional instructors.

I was blown away by my first ever dive and was giggly and high for hours afterwards, apparently that's partly due to Nitrogen build up in your blood.

The rest of the time we spent Nkhata Bay style: sunbathing, snorkelling, relaxing, and then socialising in the evenings.

I skipped out on the local meal that my family opted for one evening (and greatly enjoyed); you can also get Nsema and fish for a tiny sum at a shack on the shore. Nkhata is a strange mix - part fishing village, part tourist hot spot, with all sorts hanging around there- but it is undoubtedly

beautiful and friendly.

◀.....▶
'Ten hours of unspoilt mountain scenery and tiny villages'
 ▶.....◀

We left the Bay, towing hangovers, carvings and a new brunette friend, on the Steamer; a ferry that circumnavigates almost the whole lake shore every week.

We only travelled on it for a day but this section of the trip is rumoured to be the most beautiful - ten hours of unspoilt mountain scenery and tiny villages on perfect golden sand. The ferry is no luxury cruise - but if you splash out for 'First Class' you can sit on the top deck, beer in hand, and watch the world go by.

The sunsets can be spectacular, and more than make up for the tiny inconveniences of an African ferry. I have met people who spent a whole week on the Steamer, which I wouldn't recommend, as you get little chance to explore any of the pretty port towns, and surely one day of sitting on a slightly dirty ferry is enough for anyone?

Late that night we pulled into my home village, Chilumba, where my family stayed in my house with me. There is only one real lodge in this area, Sangilo Sanctuary (run by an acquaintance of mine) which is less budget conscious than everywhere else I stay but has lovely rooms and good food.

Here my family had to deal with the reality of being rich



Top: Nkhata bays dogout boats. Below: Leopard in Zambia (CaFe)





Top: Malawian flag on a boat.
Below: On a walking safari in
Namibia. (CaFe). Right:
Sundown over Lake Malawi
(CoKa).

Mzungo (white person) in a subsistence economy - a situation which requires constant consideration, and, sometimes, compromise.

◀.....▶
‘Malawians have a reputation for being friendly - you always get a joke and banter’
◀.....▶

However here they also experienced the best of Malawian hospitality - everyone from my life here welcomed them with open arms and ensured that they had a fantastic time.

Malawians have a reputation for being friendly, and although this can sometimes mean a little unwanted conversation, it also means that you always get a joke and a bit of banter, wherever you are.

After a week showing my mother and brother around my area we caught an extremely over-loaded pickup (sorry again, Mum) down to Chitimba Beach Campsite - a well-planned, large campsite with reasonably priced dorms and a stunning stretch of lake shore.

There we tried to arrange

lifts to Livingstonia; with little luck until one of my friends drove past and told us (my family and interchangeable brown haired chick) to hop in. Last time my friend and I tried to hitch a lift up we ended up doing the whole five hour hike; if you're a little less adventurous then make sure you arrange a lift at Chitimba instead of setting off and crossing your fingers.

Livingstonia is the big mission centre of the North - where Robert Laws settled in the late 19th century. As such, it's an odd town, curiously clean and organised and full of different aid people.

Laying aside that whole aid argument, there are a couple of interesting things to see - the Stone House museum and the Church, but you only really need to spend a couple of hours in the town itself. The real draw here is the view - which stretches all down the lake shore and is breathtaking.

I have stayed at the Mushroom Farm before, which is well-marketed and well-run by a real character, but my heart lies at the lesser known Lukwe Lodge.

Built by a Belgian who still runs it, the veranda / bar area looks out over lush

green valley dotted with occasionally with tiny huts. You can spend hours there admiring the view and chatting, a perfect way to catch up with loved ones.

From there to Mzuzu, the big Northern town in Malawi, which has some good restaurants and plenty of shops to stock up in. Then it was time to wave off my mother and brother on the bus, and to reflect on a long, tiring and lovely holiday. They'd stuck to a decent budget, as a bed in a hostel here costs about £4, ditto a nice evening meal, and of course we hadn't hired a car, which can make quite a dent in one's purse.

I do like to think that our varied experiences on public transport added to their overall adventure, especially as I hear that there was an exciting arrest on their bus back to Lilongwe.

So Malawi might not have the big animals of some countries, and you might not know much about it yet: but it's a spectacular place to holiday, honeymoon; or for the lucky, to live.





The British capital can be an expensive place to visit. But with a day ticket for the underground and no fixewd itinerary, London can be a surprisingly cheap destination to explore.

London can be rather expensive, and for someone on a budget it's either having fun or surviving.

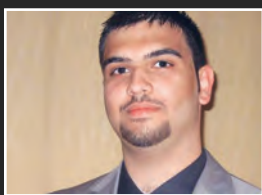
Some choose to attend those plays, musicals, and shows that cost up to 50 pounds per ticket.

But frankly, it isn't a very feasible amount... especially if you choose to spend every weekend lounging around Leicester Square.

Every now and then, it feels good to put on your fanciest outfit and attend one of those shows. But for a casual weekend, what can one do in London?

Last Saturday, I took the liberty of hopping on the District Line and discovering the city by tube. I spent the combined total of 3 hours and 40 minutes, forking up the total amount of approximately 20 pounds. And, surprisingly, I had a great time!

Writer Profile



Name: Ayman Abdel Jaber
Finance student at Richmond The American Intrenational university in London. freelance writer in Dubai and cofounder of the Richmond Stag

Here's my suggestion to all of you poor-student-budget-souls, like myself:

1.) Take the underground train to the Covent Garden tube station, exit to James Street, and make your way to the end of the street until you see the Covent Garden's Market.

You will definitely spot a street performance taking place in front of the market; my suggestion: pause, watch, and enjoy. The shows vary in content; some provide visual tricks, others incredible human ability.

The performers are indeed charming, presenting a mixture of humour, entertainment, and teeth-clenching danger. Get involved as you scream with the crowd, cheering the performer on and laughing.

Summary: 45 minutes + GBP 0

2.) Enter the market area and make your way to the Jubilee Market. There are a lot of things to see when roaming around the displays; interesting-looking figurines (quite funny actually), incredible hand-made crafts, and an array of accessories - you can always pick up a gift from there for your loved ones.

Summary: 25 minutes + GBP 0 (Unless you buy something)

3.) Hop on the West-bound Piccadilly line to the Green Park tube station. Exit to the main street and carry on forward. You will see your destination: Hard Rock Cafe.

On a typical Saturday, at around 6 pm, the average waiting time is an hour and a half for a table. Change of plans? I think not. Simply, put your name on the waiting list and find a way to kill time.

The Vault, a former bank, is located in the basement, and I suggest you take this tour (it's free!).

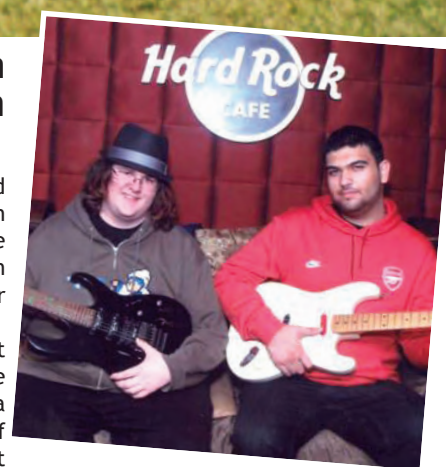
It showcases legendary instruments that have contributed to the making of musical history. From Jimmy Hendrix' guitar, to Elvis Presley's coat... The Vault is filled with Rock & Roll memorabilia.

You can have your picture taken while holding (and pretending) to play one of the four legendary guitars; Oasis', Gene Simmons', The Who's, and Slash's.

Your table is finally ready, take a seat and look through the menu. The cafe offers an array of selections: burgers, ribs, steaks...etc.

And since you barely spent any money to enjoy your time, I suggest you treat yourself to a nice dinner.

Summary: (90+60 minutes) + GBP 15 - 20



Top: Lounge chairs in Hyde Park (CoKa; Above: Matthew Kleyla and Ayman Abdel Jaber playing the guitars in the Vault (AyJa); Below: Covent Garden tube station. Bottom: Clock face on Big Ben (CoKa)



Burn, baby, burn

During one of the world's artiest festivals, the Nevada desert comes to life and everyone is welcome to join in the fun. Black Rock City is what the revellers at Burning Man call their home and for a week, **Sonja Kaufmann** became one of its citizens.

In my last year in school, there was only one question I was thinking about: what do I want to study?

There was no doubt that I would study, but I needed some more time to decide on the subject. I had several ideas like architecture, geophysics or hospitality management. Well, this is why I took one year off between school and university; I needed time to have a look around - A look at universities and the world.

Because my sister's godfather lives in Reno, Nevada, USA, I stayed there from the middle of August 2010 until the end of September 2010.

I even went to the university as a guest auditor in astronomy, geophysics and atmospheric science.

I combined travelling with finding out if geophysics could be my preferred subject to study - Now I know it is. But this is not what made my trip to Reno unforgettable.

When I came to Reno, I

only knew my sister's godfather and his son, who is four years younger than me, and university hadn't started yet.

Reno can be quite boring if you don't know anyone to hang out with, so I searched for couchsurfers at my age in Reno and on the next day I met Zach.

He was working in the best coffee shop in the world which I really recommend: The Purple Bean! While I was drinking my coffee he started talking about this "Burning man festival" he was going to for the next week and this was the first time I heard about it.

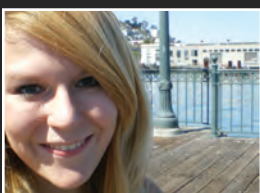
Zach asked me if I would like to join him and one week after this I found myself on a truck (yes, one of the very big ones), going to Black Rock Desert.

„I'M NOT A VIRGIN ANYMORE!"

Everything we needed was on the truck: about 50 gallons of water, Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwiches, bikes, tents, sleeping bags, couches, a BBQ, some other things the survival

Background: The Lady at Black Rock City. Top: The camps seen from the top of an Art Tower (next page) (DaLu). Above: Nico Alba and William Doolittle riding in the truck (ZeNi)

Writer Profile



Name: Sonja Kaufmann

Age: 20

This German girl used a break between school and university to travel to North and Central America

h!



guide recommended and beer.

We were a group of couch surfers who all stranded at Zach's house in Reno coming from Germany, Switzerland, Canada, Nevada and Massachusetts. The nine of us started driving Sunday night at 9pm, because the gates of Black Rock City opened at 12pm.

It took us 12 hours to get there although it was usually a three hour drive. But in this night, there were 51.000 Burners on their way „Home“.

Home, that's what we, the ones who rang the bell at the gate, call Black Rock City.

When you have been there once, you got „playafied“, you lost your playa virginity.

➤.....➤
'In the middle of the camp is the man, everywhere else is Art'
 ➤.....➤

The playa is the Black Rock Desert, or during the last week of August it is Black Rock City, the third biggest town in Nevada for one week of the year.

Without a bike, you walk about one hour from side to the other. The formation of the town is quite easy because it is built like a watch.

From 2'o clock to 10'o clock are the camps, at 12'o clock the temple, at 6'o clock is center camp with stages and coffee, in the very middle the Man and everywhere else is art.

If you would give me just one word to describe Burning Man, I would give the word "art" a try, but it is much more than this.

Art is everywhere on the playa: People dress up in costumes, art cars are driving around and hundreds of sculptures and artworks are presented and a lot of them are interactive.

The Man who gives the festival the name burns on each year on Saturday. The temple burns on Sunday, and takes all worries and orisons which had been written on its walls with it.

The art combines freedom of expression and self-discovery; this contains meditation, music and dance as much as visual art.

The process of individual fulfillment in a selfless community makes Burning Man



Top: View of Centre Camp from the top of one of the towers (MaRh). Above: A Butterfly Art Car (NiAl)





The Man at Black Rock City (SoKa), Center: Playa Art in the desert (NiAl). Right: The Man Burn 2010 (SoKa). Below: Some of the Art you will encounter at Burning Man (niAl)



unique. There is no selling on the playa, there is only giving. The only exceptions are coffee and ice for coolers.

But if you need anything else and you forgot to bring it, you have to trust that the community might give it to you. The best way to participate is bringing some things to give away.

First it sounds weird, but it works if you just try it. We didn't have a lot to give away, but we had a big game of flunky ball going on and gave beers to everyone who joined the game, so there were about twenty Burners playing and having a good time.

A good time is always a good gift. I also got a lot during the week. A ring made out of a

spoon, some bracelets, a lot of food and drinks.

When the nights start at Burning Man, everyone is going out of the shades that you really need during the days either against the dust or the sun.

Even during the nights you might need goggles and dust masks because of dust storms, but they are usually in the afternoon. When you leave your camp, you can go to the Esplanade, the inner circle with bars and "clubs" like the Nexus

playground or you just hop on an art car which drives you over the playa. These vehicles can be everything. A school bus, a rickshaw or a yacht on wheels,

I even hopped on a 60ft sailing ship driving around in the desert.

The Captain of this

ship taught me, that if you love someone you should always hug him with your left arm lifted, heart to heart. Every time I hug my friends, I have to think about these words and it feels

immediately wrong to hug the other way around. Well, that's just one little step how Burning Man can change your life.

The music played in the club camps can be dubstep, rave, roots, drum and bass or just different from everything else you usually dance to.

Most Burners are great dancers who feel the rhythm, but some of them think it is necessary to take psychedelic substances to have a good time. This scene is very common on the playa, because it is a place where no one judges, although there are still police patrols.

The biggest party during this week in Black Rock City is the Man Burn on Saturday night (if there is no dust storm). Ten

‘Just hop onto an art car, which drives you over the playa’





thousands of Burners gather up around the Man in the middle of the city.

Close to the Man are fire jugglers, behind them the big crowd, around the crowd are all the art cars with music playing and people celebrating and behind the art cars are about 10.000 bikes lying on the ground.

When the Man starts burning, everyone goes crazy and celebrates until sunrise or even longer. The atmosphere during the temple burn on Sunday is totally different. Everyone is sitting down and remaining silent while the temple burns, some even cry.

Monday is the saddest day, because everybody has to leave except for the volunteers who clean the playa and abolish the sculptures and so on.

But before we left our camp, we were invited by our neighbours to enjoy an awesome breakfast with pancakes and fresh coffee. We packed up our truck, gave some Canadian Burners a ride and left Black Rock City together with 51.000 others. It took us about 7 hours to get out of the Desert because of the long queue waiting to enter the highway.

But we had a good time waiting there. We made a production line for Peanut Butter and Jelly crackers and gave them to everyone who liked some and checked out some more art cars which also waited to drive on the highway

- God bless America for that!

There is so much more I could tell you about Burning Man, but there is even more for every playa virgin to discover in Black Rock City. This week in the desert was just incredible. If you have the chance, you should go to Black Rock City. Go Home.

www.burningman.com

**Burning Man 2011:
29th August - 5th September**

FLUNKYBALL:

You need:

Free, open space, two teams, a ball (or something else to throw), an empty bottle and as many beers as players

Getting prepared:

Place the empty bottle in the middle of the playing ground.

The teams line up about 5 meters from the bottle (midline) each facing the other team.

Every player places an open beer can in front of him.

Play:

Team A has the ball and tries to make the bottle in the middle fall.

If the bottle falls, all players of Team A drink their beers until a player of Team B jumpstarts and puts up the toppled bottle and shouts "stop" when he arrives at his team again.

Now it is Team B's turn.

The team that finishes all the beers first is the winner.



Top left: Rings made out of spoons which were given away by another Burner (SoKa). Top Middle: Art Car (NiAi). Top Right: Nico and Sonja trying to escape a dust storm by bike (NiAi). Left: Art Tower near Center Camp from which the aerial photos were taken (MaRh).



Sonja, Madleine, Nico and Zechariah in front of their truck and camp (ZeNi)



Center Camp at Sunset (NiAi)



FOLLOW THE TRADE ROUTE TO PERSIA

SHOESTRING's intrepid correspondent **Erik Jelinek** is on the road again, this time leaving Europe behind in Istanbul and crossing into Asia on the ancient trading routes.

The classic hippie trail once led from Istanbul to Kathmandu, via Iran, the opium dens of Afghanistan, the Khyber Pass and the ashrams of Haridwar and Rishikesh.

Those halcyon days may be long gone, victims to political instability, autocratic Islam and over-commercialisation.

Nevertheless it is still a fascinating route to travel and discover very different cultures for the careful traveller. I will, however, only be covering the first half of the route up to (and including) Iran.

The first thing any traveller must do is to leave preconceptions and media-formed opinions at home. Any images you may have of

fanatical Islamists and anti-Western vitriol will be immediately shattered by the legendary Middle Eastern hospitality.

The Iranians have a saying: *meihmun habib-e khoda*, which means "the guest is a gift from God", which pretty much sums up the philosophy of the entire region. And so even if formal couchsurfing opportunities are less widespread, you are almost guaranteed to be invited into someone's home.

These are golden opportunities not only to ease your budget and try some superlative local food (despite Iranian cuisine being one of the best in the world, you will be hard-pressed to find anything

Opposite: Persian mosque and madrassas. This page left to right: Bosphorus Bridge and Ortakoy mosque. The Lut desert in Iran. Ani, the medieval capital of Armenia is one of the world's most atmospheric ruins. ErJe



other than kebabs, pizzas and sandwiches in Iran's eateries), but, more importantly, to interact on a more intimate level with locals who may otherwise be reticent to discuss more sensitive issues in public spaces.

Be aware, however, that people often make such offers without being able to afford to, so it is always polite to refuse any initial offers and wait until they are repeated several times before accepting so as to give them the opportunity to back down and save face.

Once both Turkey and Iran were dirt cheap, but over the past decade that has changed dramatically as the economies of both countries have expanded rapidly. Petrol in Turkey costs as much as in Western Europe and in Iran the government has recently slashed subsidies causing it to jump by 600% in one go, having a knock-on effect on all consumer prices throughout the country.

Nevertheless both are still very much affordable destinations for the budget traveller.

Hitching is easy in Turkey, with their truckers being legendary within the hitching community, although single women should exercise extra caution.

In Iran it's not so common, but still doable, although a small contribution is generally appreciated. If you're taking paid transport then both countries provide 3 options: planes, trains and buses. The latter form the backbone of

intercity transport in both countries and are of a standard that generally surpasses bus travel in Europe, being clean, quick and comfortable.

Trains are your cheapest option but the networks are limited, especially in Turkey, where if you miss your train to Batman (one of the best names ever for a city, and deserving a visit for the comic photo opportunities alone) then you'll have to wait a couple of days for the next one.

.....>
'Iranians love the out - doors and will take every opportunity'
 <.....

As for planes, well I would personally never recommend them for internal connections, but if you are pressed for time then there are numerous budget airlines within Turkey (such as Pegasus and Anadolujet), but as for Iran, despite the cheap cost of internal flights you are playing Russian roulette there as international sanctions have stopped Iran's airlines from buying spare parts to service their ageing fleet of air-bound rust-buckets. Iran has the worst domestic air safety record in the world. You have been warned.

Camping is also more feasible than you might imagine. In Turkey you will need to take the usual precautions when free camping, discretion being

important so as not to draw too much attention, whereas in Iran anything goes.

Iranians love the outdoors and take any and every opportunity to head to any piece of greenery they can find, pitch a tent and start grilling kebabs. On the other hand they also like their little luxuries and so, instead of heading to the top of a mountain, are more likely to head to their local park; even a suitably grassy roundabout at a major intersection will do.

No-one bats an eye to this as it is one of the few permissible pleasures in the Islamic Republic. So just go crazy: pitch your tent in the middle of a city park in the afternoon and within half an hour you'll be the epicentre of a party with kebabs, shishas and little kids running around. The ideal way to break the Iranian stereotype.

Turkey is by no means off the beaten path when it comes to tourism. Its island-studded coast, crystal clear waters, secluded beaches and ancient Greek ruins have been a big draw for package tourists for decades. The resort towns of Marmaris, Antalya and Bodrum are more than used to tourists, especially of the package variety; and Istanbul is, quite rightly, one of the world's great cities.

Just be warned that Turkey has a sneaky dual-pricing policy for the majority of its attractions, and so the entrance fees for the main sites in Istanbul alone can set you back £30 or more.

The Turks were never much of a sea-faring nation though, and the true gems lie within the Anatolian Plateau. The Seljuk grandeur of Erzurum and Divrigi, hidden Georgian and Armenian churches in the northeast around the superb Khatchkar mountains, the hospitality of the Kurds in Diyarbakir, the Assyrian monasteries of Turabdin (where they still speak Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus), and the towns of Harran and Urfa where the prophet Abraham spent some time are all imbued with millennia of history.

.....>
'Leave the coast to the Club Med and head east'
 <.....

As a general rule the further east you head in Turkey, the more exotic the cultures, the more stunning the landscapes, the fewer the tourists, and, more importantly, the cheaper everything becomes. So leave the coast to the Club Med masses and head east where you will get a chance to experience the real, traditional Turkey that still moves to its own, particular, beat.

Iran, by contrast, receives but a trickle of tourists, due to the dual curses of demonisation by the Western media which scares off most potential visitors and an unhelpful bureaucracy which makes getting a visa problematic, though far from impossible.

If you get past these two obstacles then you'll find one of the most welcoming and fascinating countries in the world. In polls of veteran travellers Iran consistently tops the list for the hospitality of its people.

The educated, urban middle-class always surprise first-time visitors with their liberal attitudes and openness to the West - you're just as likely to have a conversation about *Desperate Housewives* or Lady Gaga's latest single as the current political situation or the difference between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

◀.....▶ 'Iran consistently tops the list for the hospitality of its people' ◀.....▶

But it's not just Iran's present that fascinates, but its past as well. Iranians are proud to claim to be the oldest country in the world, with an unbroken cultural history going back over 2500 years that, despite repeated invasions and conquests, has remained intact and resilient throughout it all.

Greeks, Arabs, Mongols and Turks have all conquered Iran throughout the ages, but eventually it was always Persian culture that ended up gaining the upper hand over the conquerors and seducing



them into becoming Persian themselves.

From their architecture to their poets, by way of their artists and even their contemporary film makers, Persia has been the dominant cultural force in western and central Asia and has the goods to prove it (for example, the Taj Mahal is, to all intents and purposes, a Persian building).

Due to its large size and rich history, Iran cannot be thoroughly experienced in a single visit, but there are certain must-sees. Esfahan's meidan-e imam square, is considered by many to be the greatest ensemble of Islamic buildings anywhere; the ancient ruins of Persepolis, Pasargadae, Firuzabad and Bishapur all near Shiraz offer 1000 years of history and can rival almost anything in Greece or Italy; and the desert towns of Yazd and Kashan give you a taste of the world of 1001 Nights.

Whilst these three are the touristic gems in Iran's crown there are so many facets to Iran that every type of traveller will be satisfied. For adrenaline junkies you have the best skiing in the Middle East (and perhaps all of Asia outside of Japan) in the Alborz mountains less than an hour from Tehran where you will not believe that you are in the Islamic Republic as dress codes and hejab are blithely ignored, not to mention white-water rafting, ice-

climbing and some spectacular mountains for treks, from single-day trips to serious week-long expeditions.

◀.....▶ 'Ethnic groups each with their own traditions, language and culture' ◀.....▶

For culture vultures there are ruins aplenty, sublime silk carpets, mosques with unbelievably intricate tile mosaics, bazaars to spend days in, and serene Persian gardens; and even amateur anthropologists will have a ball with the mosaic of different ethnic groups each with their own distinct traditions, language and culture, as well as one of the largest populations of nomads in the world with whom, if you are lucky, you can spend some time. The biggest problem travellers have when visiting Iran is a surprisingly mundane one. Due to the country's pariah status Iran's banking sector is isolated from the international banking network, meaning that credit cards, ATM cards and even money transfer services like Western Union are useless or ineffective.

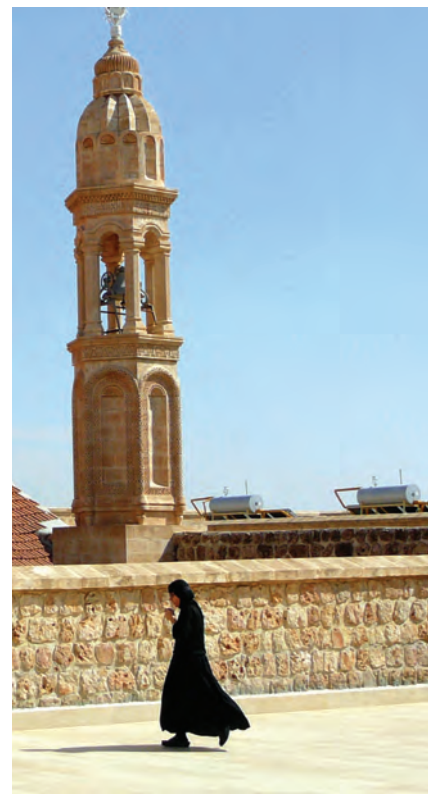
Cash is king and you need to take all the money that you will need for your entire visit along with you (of course, there are

ways of using credit cards and wiring money should there be an emergency, but the processes are convoluted and potentially expensive).

A final note, for the more intrepid, or those with a little more time to spare; rather than travelling directly from Turkey to Iran (or vice versa) you can add a detour to your trip; either north through the Caucasus, or south through Iraqi Kurdistan.

The former is potentially a major trip in its own right, but the latter is surprisingly hassle-free with a free, 10-day visa at the border. Attractions include some gorgeous mountain scenery, friendly people, millennia of history in the capital Arbil, the intriguing local Yezidi religion with its spiritual centre at Lalish, and a sobering visit to Halabja, where Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons on his own people.

Plus there is the added kudos of being able to boast that you have travelled to Iraq.



Clockwise from above: Cappadocian landscape in Göreme. Christian monastery Dayro d-Mor Gabriel in Turkey. Ishak Pasha Sarayi, a spectacular palace built in the shadow of Mount Ararat. Atatürk's mausoleum in Ankara. The Kurdish region of Hawraman in Iran. ErJe



TREKKING AMERICA ON THE NORTHERN TRAIL

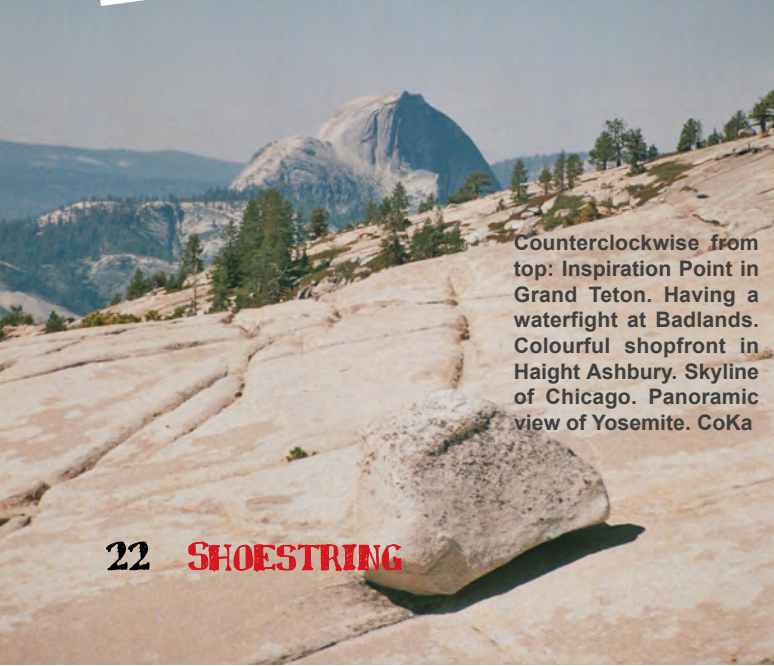
Going cross-country from Los Angeles to New York City through the northern United States means you get to see big city lights and wide open spaces while feeling the wind in your hair. A perfect country for a roadtrip.

Writer Profile



Name: Cornelia Kaufmann
Age: 24

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



Counterclockwise from top: Inspiration Point in Grand Teton. Having a waterfight at Badlands. Colourful shopfront in Haight Ashbury. Skyline of Chicago. Panoramic view of Yosemite. CoKa

Big and bright city lights, mile-high skyscrapers and over-crowded subways. That is America.

Wide open spaces in a multitude of National Parks, the Amish driving horse-drawn carriages and cowboys riding into the sunset. This is America as well.

So when I ventured into the United States for the first time, I wanted to see it all.

Early on a July morning, I therefore found myself outside a hotel in Los Angeles about to climb into a Ford van to start the TrekAmerica Northern Trail, all the way from L.A. to New York City.

We started out with a city tour of Los Angeles, walked down Hollywood Boulevard. From there, we continued to the Universal studios and theme park for a bit of fun.

Then we hit the 101 and headed north to Buellton for a campfire and to get to know each other a bit better. After celebrating Independence Day at Marina with all the S'mores and fireworks you'd expect, we made our way to that hippie city San Francisco.

I don't know what it is about San Fran, but I immediately fell in love with the place. Victorian houses, parks, a colourful and vibrating community and so many cultures interacting. I spent hours wandering through the streets and taking it all in, from the Pier to City Lights Bookstore to hippie Haight Ashbury.

From the Pacific coast, we finally headed inland to Sequoia National Park and Yosemite National Park.

Acclimatising ourselves and wearing our walking boots in, we hiked a short loop through Sequoia. The redwoods grow so big that you can even walk

through some of them. We camped in Yosemite National Park - for the first time we had to lock away food and shower gels because bears had been spotted wandering through the campsite a few days earlier.

◀.....▶
'We grew so fond of our Ford, that we called it Harrison'
 ▶.....◀

We got even further into the wilderness the next day, when we hiked parts of the Mist and John Muir trails, through streams and past waterfalls of crystal clear water. Some of the others went for a swim in the icy water, some fell asleep in the shade. I for one just enjoyed the sunshine and fresh air.

Leaving the wilderness, we headed for Nevada and crossed the first stateline at Lake Tahoe. While we would have a few days of hiking and other outdoor activities, we spent several days on the van as well, just to get from one place to the next.

We grew so fond of our Ford, that we called it „Harrison“ as it soldiered on through the vastness of Nevada and into Idaho. All the way, the 14 of us played various games and kept ourselves busy with origami and singing.

In Wyoming, we had one last pit stop before heading back into the wilderness of the Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks. We saw Old Faithful erupt and hiked along the Canyon of the Yellowstone. In Yellowstone we once again had to lock all food and gels away, so that black bears couldn't get to them. Surviving a truly ferocious thunderstorm,



www.trekamerica.com

Clockwise from top: Hiking through Badlands National Park. Bear on the road in Yellowstone. Stretching our legs at a covered bridge. The entire group fits into a Sequoia tree at Yosemite. Crazy Horse Monument in South Dakota, face and arm completed. CoKa



we spent the next day soaking up at a hot spring in Montana and even saw our first and only bear cub just as we were leaving Bear Country.

You get an appreciation for just how vast the United States are, when you can drive 750 km in one day and you still have not left Wyoming. The drive to Devil's Tower got us much nearer to where we needed to get to the next day though. Entering South Dakota, we went straight to the Black Hills to see Mount Rushmore.

‘Mount Rushmore will fit into Crazy Horse monument five times’

To be honest, I was not too impressed. The faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln are much smaller than I thought they would be. So we left the presidents behind and headed further into the Black Hills, to another famous stone face: Crazy Horse.

Still far from completion, Mount Rushmore will fit into the Crazy Horse Monument five times once the Lakota warrior's statue is finished.

The trek led us further east, past the town of Wall, with its famous Wall Drug Store, and into the Badlands, where we went out for a walk in 45°C and no shade in sight. It is weird to think that you can go from coastal sequoia forests to semi-arid land within such a short time.

That night, after a well deserved water fight to cool down, I took part in a bonus activity I had been waiting for: A sunset ride on the ranch we

were staying that night. Luckily it had cooled down enough and the light breeze as we were cantering across a plain was very refreshing.

So when we found out that we would have to spend another day just driving 750 km to Albert Lea we were all pretty happy to escape the heat and watch the landscape fly past.

We stopped in Mitchell where we visited the Corn Palace - the façade is completely made out of corn - and then we started overtaking horse - drawn carriages. We had entered Amish Country at last. Pushing on to Chicago, all of us were glad to be sleeping in a normal bed again.

The Windy City had much to offer us, from decent pizzas to a bird's eye view of the city and Lake Michigan from the top of Sears Tower (now known as the Willis Tower). The rest was well needed, as was the chance to stretch our legs properly and have a coffee. After all the hiking and wilderness areas we had been through over the previous days it was good to be back in a city and catch up with the world.

‘On our last day, we walked across the bridge and into Niagara Falls, Canada’

It also gave me the opportunity to go sightseeing, as Chicago had always been on the list of cities I really wanted to see. Somehow, we had gotten across most of the USA and the next day, we were rewarded even further when we got to spend the evening at Cedar Point Amusement Park.

Our last full day on the

PLAYING MUSICAL GIGS WHILE TOURING ON A BUDGET

In the previous issue of **SHOESTRING**, **Gio Andollo** explained how he put together a tour of the USA by using fundraising-platform Kickstarter. Now, he is showing us, that a tour is possible on the strength of Couchsurfing and good mates.

In October 2010 I tapped a talented friend and colleague, Lauren Rogers, to design the promotional poster for the impending Eagles & Snowbirds Winter Tour 2010.

"I don't really have any great ideas for what I want. Probably something cartoon-y, featuring birds (eagles at least) and possibly old people on the beach?"

For the past few weeks I'd kept busy organizing this tour with a couple Florida natives, Noah and Amber Eagle - the former a young singer songwriter who dons a strumming mandolin, sharp wit, and great sense of humour; and his older sister, a free spirit and perpetual smile, volunteered herself and her vehicle to drive us around between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

And I, a singer songwriter, busker, activist, and performance artist based in New York City - I was the snowbird.

I had met the Eagles a few months prior via couchsurfing as I planned my summer tour. Amber brightly offered to host a show at her house in Cocoa Beach, FL, which turned out to feature both me and Noah, the two of us having comparable DIY sensibilities.

So when I set out to find a Florida-based tour partner - someone who would play living rooms, thrift stores, and fireside shows, someone who would couch surf, dumpster dive, busk, and/or share minimal expenses with me throughout our journey - Noah was a shoe-in!

As we began booking shows for late November and most of December, we hoped to play as many as twenty southeastern US cities within three weeks and a fluorescent orange Dodge

Neon. So there was no taming our excitement as we looked over our 24 city itinerary, sharing vegan pastries at the venue just hours before our tour kickoff show in Orlando.

.....>
'An alternative world where money, power and privilege are not chief aims'
.....>

The legwork - booking, fund-raising, couch searching - was largely behind us; up ahead was the open road and nearly a month of adventure.

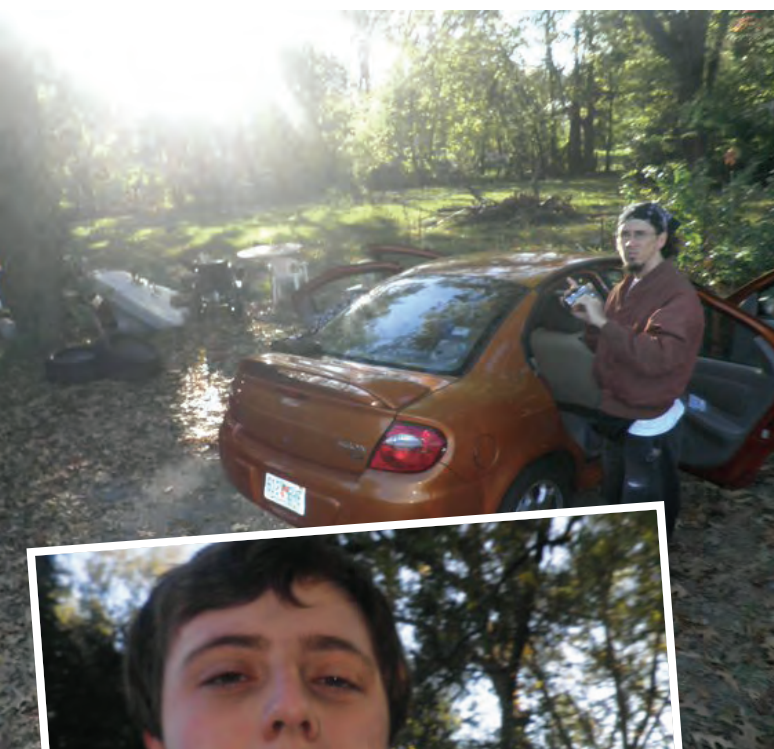
We had raised funds via Kickstarter, an online platform for creative people, with the objective of piecing together a tour documentary.

We hoped to explore an alternative world where money, power, and privilege are not the chief aims, achieved by violence and (ironically) apathy; but instead to document a DIY movement marked by generosity, hospitality, peace, and responsibility.

We could use CouchSurfing.org to find free lodging. We could seek out the help of remote musicians to set up small shows with local support in distant towns. The Kickstarter fund - raising platform itself would enable friends and fans to financially support our mission directly.

And we could make our own contribution by playing free shows (donations encouraged) all around the country, giving away our recorded music with a smile, sharing meals with our hosts, washing sinkfuls of dishes, and capturing all the action on video.

So we kept the camera



rolling as we talked with the above people, ate local food, listened to those remote musicians, danced around campfires, and engaged in all kinds of other shenanigans.

All in all, the tour was great fun! We three travellers became great friends and made many more along the way. There was only one city where we had trouble securing lodging (so we spent the night jumping on hotel beds in Middle of nowhere, Tennessee) and all of our scheduled shows went off without a hitch (or at least no hitches worth remembering).

Still, there were lessons - profound existential truths - to be learned and still more questions to be asked.

We learned that folks in post - industrialized societies like ours seem to have developed unhealthy, even counter-productive, dependencies on technology.

From day one we battled with devices that anyone with a "smart phone" would consider obsolete - a digital camcorder and comparatively outdated PC laptop - even though these same gadgets would have been groundbreaking only, say, a decade ago.

We found them to be unrelentingly distressing yet totally necessary to complete the promised Kickstarter documentary. Perhaps we would not have struggled so much, perhaps we'd have done just fine, with more up-to-date gadgets.

But then where would this cycle of obsolescence, innovation, and consumption end? And is it environmentally, financially, or even socio-economically sustainable? Are we only digging societal graves for ourselves and for those who slave over our consumer goods in developing countries? And, ultimately, who even cares to learn about this world we sought to document?

On the tour we saw that the "real world" we live in day-to-day is either ambivalent to, or simply not-yet-ready for the subject of our documentary.

Otherwise CouchSurfing, freeganism, and busking (playing music publicly for donation) would not be the kinds of marginal side show activities that they tend to be in today's culture.

Moreover people would support DIY music and artists.

It was a great shame that many of our scheduled shows were so poorly attended, that Noah and I played our cherished music night after night to only two or three other people, Amber included.

.....
'What would it take to awaken the imaginations and passions of others?'

It was also a huge struggle to raise money via Kickstarter, even though we offered great rewards and planned to play free shows in the cities where most of our supporters were located.

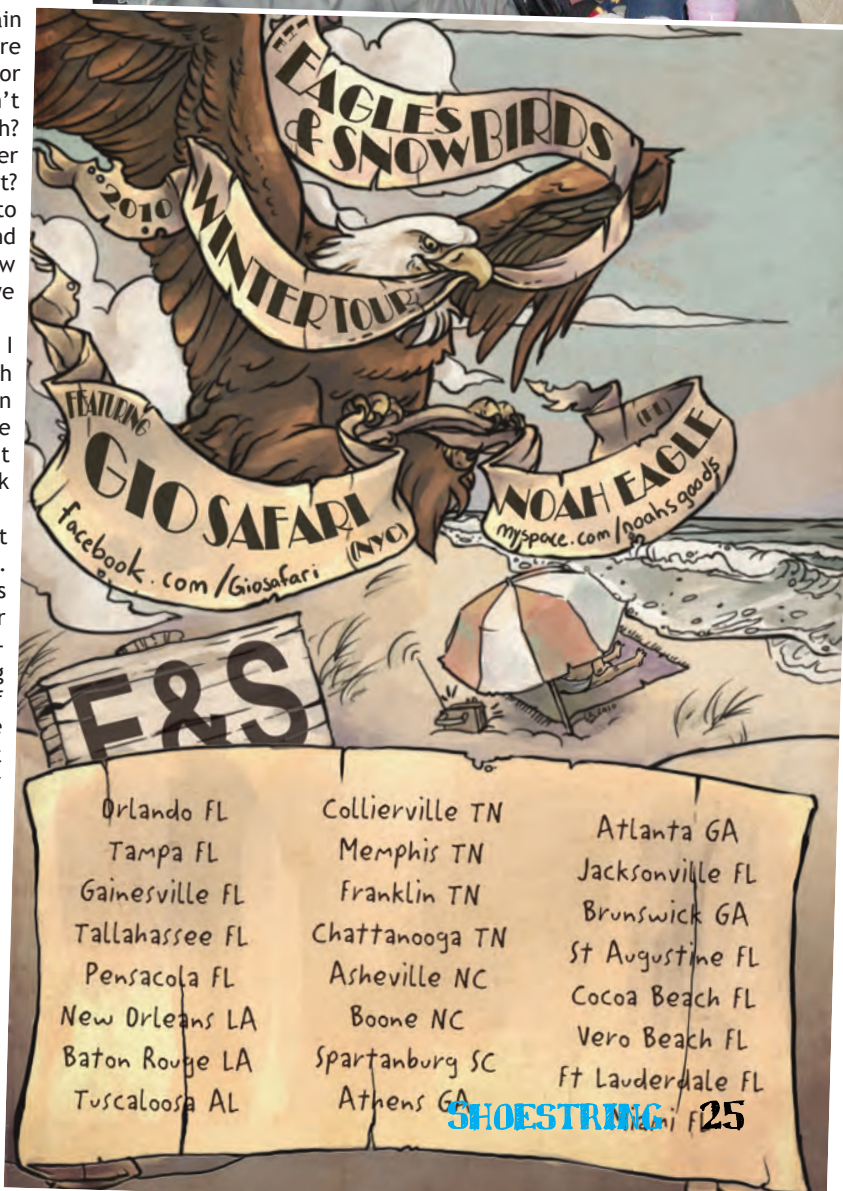
It is doubtful that we would have reached our all - or - nothing goal without an incredible donation from one friend who could not come to any of the shows and wanted no rewards in return.

The questions again cropped up. Was there something we did wrong or just too little? Why wasn't free a good-enough pitch? What would it take to garner support for DIY music and art? What would it take to awaken the imaginations and passions of others? And how could we be the change we sought in the world?

Even six months later I continue to wrestle with these questions and learn these truths. They are among the most important questions we can ask ourselves and each other.

As for me, I refuse to let the questions go unasked. I'll make videos, write songs and blogs, plan DIY tour after DIY tour, and otherwise bust my hump to bring these issues to the fore of our collective consciousness, so that Lauren's vision for our tour poster will be the perfect representation of what we'd set out to do on the Eagles & Snowbirds Tour. She suggested "a picture of some old people enjoying the beach and then this giant roaring eagle swoops down at them."

All photos: On the Eagles & Snowbirds tour with Gio Andollo and Noah Eagle, playing gigs in front of live audiences and capturing every move for a Kickstarter video documentary (GiAn).



Pura Vida, Costa Rica!

Saving sea turtles on the beaches of Caribbean Costa Rica is a major preservation project and for **SHOESTRING** contributor **Sonja Kaufmann** the participation had the added bonus of travelling through Central America and cuddling sloths.



When I came back from my trip to Nevada and California (page 14) my mission for this year “find out what you want to study” was already completed.

But with still 11 months to go until I could finally start to study geophysics, I did an internship in a project for Fair Trade in Düsseldorf and decided that I should go abroad again to do some volunteer work.

I had a look through a couple of brochures of organizations which offer all kind of projects in different countries and finally decided to volunteer in a project for sea turtle protection. I wanted to go in May, so there was more or less no other choice than Costa Rica, because only there starts the turtle season in May.

So I booked my flights and started my trip on the 20th of April 2011.

‘I managed to travel around without a word of Spanish’

On the 1st of May my Spanish class started, until then I had some time to travel through Costa Rica. The Spanish class was part of the organizations programme, it was good because I never had Spanish in school, but I am not that much into languages and I

somehow managed to travel through the country for 10 days without a Spanish word except for “Hola” and “Gracias”.

During this 5-day-class I stayed in a host family in Barrio Jesus, Heredia, about 15 km from San Jose. On 8th May, my project finally started and I drove with several other volunteers to Moin, a small village close to Puerto Limon, the most important harbour of Costa Rica located on the Caribbean coast.

The project was called Paradero Eco Tours and combined a rescue center for all kinds of animals with the turtle protection at the beach right in front of it.

I didn’t know we would also have the chance to take care of other animals but I was the luckiest person alive because I had the opportunity to cuddle with my favourite animal: a sloth!

The rescue center takes care of animals which were abused, ill, left behind or held as pets in unnatural environments. There were monkeys, parrots, raccoons, armadillos, sloths, a deer, dogs, owls and some animals I don’t even know what they are.

The turtle project took place in the evenings and at night because that’s the time when they come to the beach and nest.

The beach in Moin is very long, so we walked about 6 km each night to find Leatherback turtles, the biggest turtles alive. It is quite easy to find turtle tracks, they look like a tractor track in the sand. When we found a turtle we measured it and filled out a form to remember the size, marks (a lot of shark bites on the

Writer Profile



Name: Sonja Kaufmann

Age: 20

This German girl took a break between school and university to travel to North and Central America

Background: National Park Zapatilla Island, Bocas, Panama. Top: Sieving sand in the hedger in Moin. Above: The toucan Sonja fed every morning. Below: The Catholic church in Santa Barbara, Heredia (SoKa)



BEING A WILLING WORKER ON ORGANIC FARMS

Many travellers try a different working experience by becoming a farm hand for a while. Wwoofing is popular worldwide, and offers experiences from fruit-picking to sheep shearing.

How does it work?

The Wwoofing network has lists of all farms currently participating in the scheme. Some might be allotments and personal gardens, some are commercial farming properties.

The lists usually come in the form of a book, that lists all properties and the help they need. Wwoofers pick out which stations they would like to work at and call the owner directly to apply and set dates.

How long does it last?

Wwoofing started as a weekend opportunity. Most farms have a minimum stay of 2 days, some prefer several weeks. This is up to the volunteers and hosts to work out between them.

How much can you earn?

Nothing. Wwoofing is voluntary. Wwoofers work for their room and board, so that there are no additional expenses. Some hosts might offer you insights into a new skill, or offer a bit of pocket money as a reward, but this is not the norm and should not be expected.

What skills are needed?

Farming skills are always welcome, and some farms require a certain degree of horsemanship. A keen interest in organic farming, country living or ecologically sound lifestyles is most important. For extensive work on cattle or sheep stations, a crash course in farming might help.

National organisations

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belize, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hawaii, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea (South), Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States Of America.

There are independent organisations as well.

WEBSITES

Wwoofing Network
www.woof.org

Wwoof International
www.woofinternational.org

Wwoofing in EU
www.woof.eu

Horse yards on Leconfield Farm, Australia (CoKa)