

After college graduation, I left the States on a year-long experiential gap year program traveling to ten countries around the world. After that, I moved to Zurich, Switzerland for a year to work on my writing and explore Western Europe.

Recently, I've been thinking about the things I've learned along the way. Traveling has offered me experiences and lessons that sitting in an office just couldn't. Here, some insights that may help inspire an extended trip of your own.

1. Use uncertainty as fuel.

I never felt entirely sure about what I was doing while traveling. Do we ever feel entirely sure of anything in our lives? It's true that the comfort of home and what we know tends to hold us back, but use the uncertainty of exploring a new place fuel you instead. Become obsessed with the details of the unknown, rather than becoming afraid of them.

2. Life is not easier on the road.

Just like many other lifestyle choices, traveling involves sacrifice and doubt. I've hit many obstacles along the way, whether it was missing the shrimp tostadas from Trader Joe's or feeling like I couldn't communicate with anyone in my native tongue. It gets messy.

3. It shouldn't be much harder, either.

The constant stimulus of traveling made it feel like my life was on steroids. For me, the highs of seeing a new place and experiencing what it had to offer always overpowered the lows.

4. Your perspective is not right or wrong; it's yours.

In Jonathan Haidt's book *The Righteous Mind*, he talks about the different ethics of cultures around the world. In the States, the majority of people have the ethic of autonomy, based on the idea that people are autonomous individuals with wants, needs, and preferences. In a culture such as India, the majority of people have the ethic of divinity, based on the idea that people are temporary vessels within which a divine soul has been implanted. It wasn't until Haidt, who identified with the ethic of autonomy, went to India and exposed himself to the ethic of divinity (as a long term visitor, not a tourist), that he began to understand it better. Your perspective is not right or wrong; it's yours.

5. Being alone doesn't mean you have to feel lonely.

I feel most empowered when I am traveling by myself. Whether it is spending a week in Croatia and meeting a bartender who decides to show me around his homeland, or hiking up to Brunnihutte in Switzerland and camping by myself, it feels like I've conquered something meaningful.



Waterfront in Zadar | Solo travel for one week in Zadar, Croatia 2016



Solo camping at Brunnihutte in Engelberg, Switzerland | 2018

6. Waking up with a view from your tent will invigorate your senses.

Don't believe me? Just look.



Day 2 of a 3-day hike to Machu Picchu | Cusco, Peru 2018

7. Not every day will be the best day.

I am thankful for Wi-Fi calling. Whenever I wasn't at my best, my support system was just a phone call away.

8. Do your research.

As I navigated through lands unfamiliar to me, I was forced to be a better planner and smarter traveler. Researching a city before visiting saved me a lot of stress, and I was able to make more efficient use of my time.

9. Leave no trace.

There are a lot of people around the world that care about the well-being of our planet. I learned how badly we need to care from places like [Rancho Mastatal](#) in Costa Rica and the Wind River Range in Wyoming.

10. The right gear will make all the difference.

I brought [Buff Headwear](#) everywhere I went. Sometimes it was a headband; sometimes it was a face mask; sometimes it was a hair tie. Either way, it was always useful.

11. You don't need data as much as you think.

Wi-Fi is easily accessible in most European countries and around the world. I lived in Switzerland for nearly a year without data. I'm not recommending this (it's important in case of emergencies), but I'm saying it's possible.

12. Taking breaks from your phone can help with overall wellbeing.

Opt for limited data and take more breaks from your phone. I wanted to stay present, especially in more high-tourist areas. I would take a few pictures and then put it away. It helped me appreciate the moment.

13. Travelers become great storytellers.

Their own experiences inspire the world's best storytellers.

14. You'll find something you love outside of your comfort zone.

For the first time in my life, I've considered purchasing a city bike to commute to work. A year ago, I would have never said such a thing. I started riding a bike while living in Europe, and even though I was scared out of my mind, it turned into something I love to do.



On a bike (with a baby!) near Lake Constance, Germany | 2018

15. Always have a book on hand.

Need recommendations? The Songlines by Bruce Chatwin. Returning to Earth by Jim Harrison. Einstein's Dreams by Alan Lightman.

16. Street food is worth it.

Have you ever tried fried scorpion in Bangkok, Thailand?

17. You can stay in shape.

Working out at home has never been easier with all of the free online resources. My favorite app is Nike Training for high-intensity workouts. To rest and restore, I opt for Adrienne's bedtime yoga. It's free on YouTube!

18. Download podcasts and audiobooks for long travel days.

I got hooked on The Moth and How I Built This podcasts. For audiobooks, I recently listened to Tribe by Sebastian Junger. Make sure you download them to your phone so that you have access offline.

19. You'll test your strength.

Not just physically, either. Culture shock hit me hard, and I wasn't always comfortable. Jamkhed, India was one of the most intense places I'd ever been. When faced with a culture that is entirely different than you're own, it can leave you with a lot of questions and confusion. These were some of the most impactful moments I had while traveling abroad.

20. Free breakfast is a gamechanger.

I always tried to find hostels with breakfast included. It's convenient and saves money.

21. You'll fall in love.

Whether it was with another person, a city, or a chocolate croissant, traveling made me fall in love many, many times.

22. There are many ways to budget travel.

Check out my article on ways to [budget travel](#) for a gap year. A lot of those resources can be applied for short trips as well.

23. Use a travel credit card.

I signed up for Bank of America's travel credit card before moving to Switzerland. The travel credit card allowed me to keep my bank account active without any international transaction fees.

24. Flea markets are the best souvenir shops you can find.

I found some of my favorite birthday gifts and Christmas presents at local flea markets in the cities I traveled to. It's an authentic way to bring some of the city back home.

25. Make an effort to learn the local language.

This has never been my strong suit, but I've always made it a point to learn basic keywords. Depending on how long you're staying in one place, it's beneficial even to learn some of the language fundamentals.

26. The world will never look the same.

My two years on the road have taught me that the world is much larger than I ever could have imagined. It has made me more self-aware and more aware of others. I'll never look at the world the same, and for that, I am grateful.