

RUN AWAY NOW

5 Hideouts
7 Possible Paths
14 Steps To Liberation
1 Decision To Make

By Leif Harum

Authors Note:

I am not extraordinary, but I'm not quite ordinary either. I am assuredly not without faults, shortfalls and inconsistencies. I don't have the answers or know the meaning of life. I only have a perspective, an unorthodox skill set, and a strong desire to share this to help others.

My name is Leif Harum. I come from an ideal suburban town just north of New York City. The scenery is heaven like and the people are well to do and friendly. There is a great long pier that seems to exist for the sole purpose of evening strolls. You've got your typical Deli, where it's always "how's ya motha, ya fatha, ya sista, ya brotha, you want SPK on that?" in a heart warming New York accent. It is in every way a suburban paradise, a near perfect community, and a place anyone would be happy to call home.

My childhood was more or less normal. I had a healthy curiosity with poo but it was always limited to the occasional flinging (sorry David). Other than being called Leaf my whole life (thanks every teacher I've ever had), there really wasn't much to complain about. Me: "No, not leaf. Leif. It rhymes with safe." Teacher: "O I see, like Leaf Garette." Me: "yea, ok, fine, like Leaf Garette."

Nevertheless, I did something no friend, parent or sociologist would have foreseen.

I ran away from home.

*However, I didn't just run away to the neighbor's house or to New Jersey. I ran to Europe, the Middle East and even North Africa. I did it all without a cent to my name. **I was 16.***

Although such travels might sound incredible, most of the time it was anything but. I went hungry for days, slept under countless cold down pours, fell victim to various vicious drugs and spent weeks in solitude not talking to or seeing a single soul.

Ultimately, I suffered.

But, through my suffering I grew. I was forced to comprehend the truths of travel and life. I became grateful for my privileged upbringing. I began to see everyone as siblings; connected beings. I came to realize the power of travel as a medium for change, growth and happiness. I also came to understand the limits of this growth and happiness when you run away for the wrong reasons.

*So eventually, I returned home. And while I didn't stay for long, I stayed long enough to ensure that **the next time I ran away, I did it the right way.***

Since that first journey, now over 10 years ago, I have visited over 80 countries around the world. During this time, travel enabled me to thrive. I transformed from a beatnik backpacker able to survive on the smallest of budgets into an online entrepreneur purposefully creating a life that I chose to live.

I have written this book with 3 main goals.

- 1) To help aspiring runaways run away the right way
- 2) To help everyone run towards happiness on the road and on the road of life.
- 3) To simplify the practicalities of travel, so that you can run from where you are now to anywhere in the world you'd like to go.

This book is intended for everyone.

It is for those who aren't sure whether to run away or not. It is for those apprehensive about hitting the road. It is for people who are broke or on a seemingly impossibly low budget. And it is for everyone who has ever contemplated the prospects of travel as a medium for change, growth and happiness.

Disclaimer: *The Runaway Guide is meant for people age 18 years or older who want to travel and want to travel now. The term "run away" and this book's underlying theme is a metaphor for going traveling. This guide does not encourage people under 18 to actually run away from home.*

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Through eerie pre-dawn light we speed southwards towards the French capitol.

The driver is a French man, in his late 40's. He drives a new Honda van. It's much smaller than the kind we have in America but looks familiar enough.

In the back seat sits my Quicksilver backpack next to a baby seat. He asked me to put it there when I got in. He hasn't spoken much since the gas station, but I don't think he's crazy. He's just being careful, like me. That is unless the baby seat is some kind of prop. This guy could be a maniac. Who the hell drives from Belgium to Paris at four in the morning?

Twenty minutes pass. I glance over at the Frenchman every 30 seconds. Wait. What am I doing? He's going to think I'm the maniac. Ok, just calm down and stare out the front.

My comedown is rough. Cocaine-laced weed and 5 Adderall pills hit my head hard. As the effects of the drugs fade, the weight of my new situation sinks in. My vision blurs, this time from panic and anxiety. My heart is racing and every cell in my body pulses with self-loathing, shame, and despair.

I am LEIF! I am a good person, a good student, a good son. I love my family, I love my mother, my sister, my farther. What have I done? What have I done!

I pray that I am in a dream. It feels like a dream. It feels like a B movie of some kid who has gotten in way over his head. It feels unreal.

The guilt and regret is unbearable. I need to tell someone. It doesn't matter if I'm caught. I need help.

“I just ran away,” I murmur.

The shame in my voice fills the car and lingers for what feels like an eternity. This is the first time I've said it aloud. And it feels more real now than ever.

“You did what?” the Frenchman replies, distracted by a passing car.

“I just left. I didn't tell anyone. I just walked out the door without saying a word.”

“I don't understand” says the Frenchman, incredulously.

“You know...” I chuckle nervously, the way a crazy person might do while confessing murder to the police. “I just ran away from home.”

A long silence ensues. The relief of telling him is quickly replaced by the fear of being caught and turned in to the authorities.

The Frenchman’s forehead slowly contorts in contemplation.

“Call your father!” he shouts in a harsh and almost incomprehensible French accent.

“Ok, ok, I will... As soon as I get to Paris, I will.” I say, as convincingly as possible.

He hands me his cell phone. My hand are frozen. I clutch my thighs as if they were life preservers.

“Call him now,” he demands.

My muscles tense and I forget how to inhale. The feeling reminds me of that time when I fell into the creek in February. Sinking, frozen, and unable to process the situation.

I can’t call my father, I just can’t, not like this, not this soon.

In an instant, I search my mind for a way out, and devise a plan.

I dial my best friend’s phone number and prepare myself for a mock conversation. After three rings, the Frenchman tears the phone from my grasp and holds it up to his ear.

I wait in silence.

“Yes, hello?” says the French man.

“Uhh, hi?” says Jonah, his words barely audible.

“Yes, this is Leaf’s father?”

“Uhh, what the fuck are you talking about? Who are you?”

He hangs up, looks at the road for a moment, exhales loudly, and looks back at me.

“This cost me 4 Euro!” He yells, “You must call your father now!”

“Yes, ok, I will call my real father,” I say, the taste of guilt thick in my throat.

My dad picks up.

“Leif! What the hell is going on?” The worry in his voice is sickening.

“Hey Dad, ummm....I’m sorry. I don’t know... I had to get away. I’m sorry.”

“Well, when are you going back to Amsterdam?”

“...I don’t know. I just need some time.”

The Frenchman takes the phone from me.

“Your son is okay. He is with me, we driving to Paris. I drop him by the train station so he can return to you and your family.”

My dad thanks him and asks to speak with me again.

“Leif, when you get to Paris Gar Du Nord station, book a train back to Amsterdam. Give the ticket booth my number to call if you have any problem with money.”

“Ok, thanks Dad,” I reply, knowing I will not return. Not after what I had done.

I sit in silence again, still gripped by anxiety. I stare blankly at the yellow road markers zipping by. The world as I knew it, a world that had been all that I had known for the past 16 years, is dissolving with every passing kilometer.

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An excerpt from “Chasing Life.” Coming Spring, 2018!

Part 1: Run Away The Right Way

I learned the hard way, but you don't have to. You can bypass most of the stress and suffering. You can avoid sleeping in feces, eating from dumpsters and getting in fights with territorial homeless guys. You can become the person you want to be, and live a perpetual life of travel if you so choose.

Run away the right way from the get go.

Here's how!

- ∞ **Step 1:** Make The Right Decision
- ∞ **Step 2:** Face Your Fears
- ∞ **Step 3:** Get Over Them
- ∞ **Step 4:** Be Who You Want To Be
- ∞ **Step 5:** Don't Worry About Money
- ∞ **Step 6:** Check Out These Lessons
- ∞ **Step 7:** Run Away The Right Way

Step 1: Make The Right Decision

"If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading"-Lao Tzu

Should I stay or should I go now. That is the question. If I go, there will be trouble if I stay, there will be double. Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows...

Alright, that's enough of that. However, The Clash and Shakespeare do make some good points. That being said, when it comes to a decision with as many variables, implications and unknowns as this one, the choice isn't easy. Thankfully, it's also not as hard as we often make it out to be.

To make the right decision, it all boils down to one question.

Are you running away for the right reasons?

My Reasons

***My experience won't apply to many of you directly, but most of you may be able to relate in some way or another.**

For me, it was either run or die. I felt like I didn't fit in anywhere, not at school, not with friends and not in society at large. I was so depressed that I started experimenting with drugs. The result was a disastrous feed back cycle, where the more drugs I did, the more insecure and depressed I became.

My high grades, the only positive pillar of my life left standing soon crumbled. All hope for the future dissolved. In the growing black hole of despair, running away became the only option that seemed to offer a glimmer of hope.

I left a loving mother, father and sister. I left the comfort of home. I threw myself into the world without a plan, and with the mindset that if I died, life would go on without me.

Did I Make The Right Decision?

Instead of uncovering my true problems and facing them, I did everything I could to avoid them. I continued drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and doing anything else that came my way.

I desperately searched for happiness, traveling from one country to the next. While at first I felt the euphoria of being in a new place, those feelings quickly dissipated after a few days, and I was left with the same despair as before.

Adding to this depression was the guilt I felt for actually running away. I saw the sad faces of my family in the shapes of moonlit clouds. I heard my mothers voice crying out in the cacophony of voices that filled a busy train station. The longer I was away the more ashamed I became, and the more I thought I could not return.

But I knew I had no choice but to eventually return. And return I did. Not as a truly confident and enlightened person, but as a runaway full of guilt and still fairly lost.

Do I Regret It Now?

Although I could not realize my true self and find contentment, I did grow to an extent. I understood the mistakes I had made by running away in the way I did. I also realized things about life and the world that has had a profound effect on my person till this day.

Looking back now, it seems as though the path had been preordained. It's almost as if I had no choice in the matter. I'm not saying this in an attempt to free myself of blame, but it truly does feel like some kind of destiny. I had to run away to learn why I shouldn't have. I had to run away to become the person I am today, The Runaway Guide.

So How Should You Decide?

Ultimately, *you* are the only one who can make this decision. And this requires looking within, and analyzing your underlying motives and intentions.

In the end, this is the primary denominator:

- ∞ **If you're running away to ignore your problems or avoid life in any capacity, you should probably wait. True happiness must first be discovered within yourself and that can only be done if you are free from regret and guilt. Running away from your problems and into the unknown makes realizing this very difficult.**

BUT

- ∞ **If you're running away with the intention of overcoming fear, exploring the world, gaining new experiences, and improving your life, then you need to go for it. Fear or a lack of money is not an excuse. Move on to step number 2 and let's conquer our fears.**

Step 2: Face Your Fears

"Fear is like feces, you got to get rid of it." – Anonymous

You might die in any number of horrific ways on your travels. You could come down with Dengue fever, cash into the Atlantic Ocean on Flight 1234, or you could even drown in feces after falling into an Indian porter potty. Death could come at any moment and in any number of uncomfortable ways.

With travel comes the potential for terrible accidents, diseases and even death, but this is not what truly worries most of us.

True fear lies in the emotional change inherent to travel.

Home is comfortable. We have schedules, routines and habits. We understand how our society works. We know the customs, language, moral codes and social boundaries. We also know that no one is going to drop trough in the middle of the street and take a dump without consequences (a likely occurrence throughout India).

We can chow down on the same food that we have had all our lives. At anytime of night we can buy a burrito from Taco Bell to get the bowels moving, a triple bacon cheese burger from Wendy's to induce constipation or the greasiest grilled cheese from any diner to help induce a heart attack.

We have our friends and family who love and support us. They aid us when we're in need. They provide comfort to our lives. Most importantly, we see ourselves in their eyes, and through them we maintain our identity and purpose.

But to run away and travel the world is to lose all this. We lose our understanding of society, our comfort foods, our routines, our sense of purpose, and most distressing, our friends and family. The predictability and knowledge of life is lost, and with it a part of our identity.

Step 3: Get Over Them

“Fear not what is not real, never was and never will be.” – Bhagavad Gita

I know what you’re thinking. This sounds awful. Not only will I unwittingly fall into feces but I’ll be struggling with an identity crisis as I sink, and no one will understand me when I cry for help. Perfect. Sign me up.

Ok, I admit it, traveling can be frightening. Even I feel a bit nervous after setting back out on the road after a long hiatus. There are just so many unknowns, and none of them can be planned for. Plus no one will be able to help me through them but myself.

But just how bad could it really get? That’s the question I often ask myself.

As stated by Honore de Balzac, “Our greatest fears lie in anticipation.” In other words, most of our fears have no basis. They’re simply misconceptions derived from sensational media reports, and internal fabrications enhanced by black holes of unknowns.

Stop worrying altogether. Leif Erikson didn’t discover America on a sailboat powered by fret. Ibn Battutah didn’t walk the world stressing over corns, blisters and bunions. Nothing was ever accomplished by worrying about what is not yet real, never was, and never will be.

The most rewarding endeavors of life are those with hundreds of unknowns inspiring thousands of fears. Because it’s only after you overcome do you gain the confidence required. Running away is one of these endeavors. It forces one to experience, learn, overcome, and eventually thrive.

Get on the plane and go. I guarantee that you’ll realize that there really wasn’t anything to fear in the first place. Even if your destination is Darfur, after a few days of desert life, you’ll end up laughing with your Bedouin hosts, wondering how you could have ever been so scared.

To help quell some of your anticipatory anxiety, below are a few practical and emotional truths you should know about traveling abroad.

1) The World Really Isn’t Too Different

As a result of globalization, the world is more connected and similar than ever before. Cultures and peoples are merging. English is the language of commerce and

spoken more widely than any other language. McDonalds is everywhere. And you can buy the same Chinese made souvenirs in New York City as you can in Cairo.

Essentially, traveling is less dangerous and less difficult than it has ever been, especially for English speakers.

2) Western Food Is Everywhere

Just today I ate some of the best KFC of my life, and I'm in northern Thailand. Western fast food chains are literally everywhere. Not only that, but in developing countries, where only the rich can afford fast food, it's quality is remarkably better than back home. Plus they usually offer free Wifi, so you can get in touch with home while satiating your fast food cravings.

Even if there are no fast food chains in sight, given the number of ex-patriates and tourists around the world, you can easily find restaurants with "American" and "Full English" breakfasts on the menu. However, I definitely recommend eventually eating local more than not. Not only is local food cheaper but it's always more fun, even if you do get a bit of diarrhea (just kidding, you probably won't get diarrhea....hopefully not)

So, if you're really not digging the local fare, you'll almost always find a homey cholesterol-raising alternative.

3) English Is Spoken Widely

Nowadays, no matter where you go, you can almost always find someone who speaks English. Practically everyone who works in the tourist industry will speak English, and many of the ticket office workers, border guards, and hotel staff do as well. In addition, most college-aged kids around the world will have had some training in English.

Between English, body language and instinct, you'll always be able to find a bathroom in the nick of time.

4) You Will Make Friends Everywhere

Whenever I get lonely while traveling, I talk to other travelers. Other solo travelers are in the same boat, and most are either down for a chat or to hangout for the day. Some of these encounters have turned into 2 month travel companions and others into life long friends.

When there are no travelers around, I simply make everyone my friend. I talk to everyone as if we had known each other for years. I talk to the homeless people outside the train stations, shopkeepers and ticket vendors. People are people no matter where you are, and most are open to making new connections, especially with adventurous nomads like us.

As long as you are willing to connect with others, you will always make friends.

5) Most People Actually Like Americans

Even in the Middle East during the Bush years, being an American traveler would still make you popular among the locals. And even today, with the unfortunate Trump presidency, he still makes for some interesting political dialogue.

Almost everyone can recite a Disney song or Arnold Schwarzenegger line. A person's government doesn't define them. You will hardly ever have a problem with people.

However, you will inevitably meet a few travelers and locals who subscribe to the stereotype of Americans being ethnocentric and ignorant. Fortunately, this doesn't happen too often. And if it does, just prove them wrong.

The truth is, due to American "Soft Power" or "Cultural Power," most people around the world welcome Americans with unparalleled hospitality.

6) You Will Find New Purpose

For many of us, it's our jobs that define our purpose. For me and many perpetual travelers like me, it's something different.

It might sound cheesy, but I often derive my self worth and purpose through the little things; spreading good energy, helping locals and new travelers, sticking to my budget, and trying to appreciate everything the world offers me.

7) You Can Adapt To Anything

Life itself implies change. In the words of Lao Tzu, "If you realize that all things change, there is nothing you will try to hold on to. If you are not afraid of dying, there is nothing you cannot achieve." Effectively, in order to stop stressing, you simply have to accept the change inherent to travel, and trust in your ability to adapt.

Because in truth, you will always be able to adapt to whatever the world throws at you. It may be difficult and you may suffer in the process, but you can overcome anything, and will grow stronger in the process.

The fear of the unknown and change is only as strong as you allow it to be. Don't allow it to overpower you or your decision to run towards travel.

As a wise motorcycling mad man coffee guru in the Guatemalan highlands once told me, "God, Buddha, Vishnu, Allah or whatever you want to call it, smiles on men & women who live without fear."

How Do I Overcome My Fears?

When I start to feel the fear of the unknown creeping into my chest and churning my bowels,

I remind myself that:

- ∞ Most of my fears are baseless and lie in anticipation rather than reality
- ∞ The more I feed my fear, the more it will dominate my consciousness
- ∞ Fear is only as strong as I allow it to be.
- ∞ If anything goes wrong, I can always return home.
- ∞ People are people no matter where I go.
- ∞ If I need to, I can order a Big Mac nearby.
- ∞ I have old friends everywhere but I just haven't met them yet.
- ∞ I have trust in something greater than myself.
- ∞ I can adapt to anything and will grow stronger as a result.
- ∞ All I need to do is envision the world traveler that I want to be and I will become that.

“Sure Leif, all this is easy for you to say, you’re The Runaway Guide and have been doing this your whole life.”

Admittedly it’s probably easier for me, but it’s only because I’ve had a lot of practice.

Yes, it will be difficult in the beginning, but you can free yourself from anxieties and fears as well. You just have to believe that you can, and truly want to.

The unknown is scary, but is it not more terrifying to continue living in a world you’re unhappy in? Isn’t it worse to be somewhere and someone you never wanted to be? I hate to sound so preachy, but since you’re reading this now, isn’t it time to live the life you want to live and be who you know you really are?

Step 4: Be Who You Want To Be

“The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.”— Jack Kerouac

“When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be.” – Lao Tzu

I didn't want to be that goofy kid who no one took seriously and no one liked. I didn't want to be afraid of who I was and what others thought of me. I just wanted to be cool, confident, happy, loved, worldly, and in charge of my own life. This is one of the reasons why I ran away the first time, and why I continue to do so today.

Unfortunately, back when I was 16, there was no way I could have become the ideal me that I sought to be.

I simply didn't run away the right way. I was too afraid all the time. It felt like everyone was after me, preying upon my weaknesses, and mocking my insecurities. It wasn't just that I was worried kids my age wouldn't like me. No. I was worried for my very survival. I was fearful in the most primal sense of the word. It completely dominated my consciousness.

Fear inhibited my personal growth. I didn't understand the limits of self-change, and so I believed that any kind of change was totally impossible.

Today, after years of suffering through cycles of fear, delusion and depression, I've come to realize a few important truths about primal fear, the self, and transforming through travel.

1) Fear Is A Good Thing

The fear associated with traveling often provides the spark that ignites self-analysis. The moment you step out of your front door, everything changes. In a sense, it's like being a child again. You return to a familiar state of mind when the world around you was constantly new and mysterious.

It's exhilarating yet terrifying, and you're forced to question everything that you know and all that you are. You're forced to either hold on to your old self, or become the person you know you truly are.

2) Fear Can Be A Terrible Thing

If you desperately grasp to your old self, and perceive and react to your new environment in the same manner as you did back home, then you will stay the same as you were at home. You will not uncover and face your true self and fears. You won't be able to love yourself or give that love to others. You will instead see others as a threat.

The more you fear, the more you will attract further fear, and the more it will define you. You will get stuck in an endless cycle in which you constantly question why you are not happy.

In an attempt to cope, you might try and become a different person altogether. You might believe, as I did, in the power of travel to transform you into a completely different person but...

3) Travel Can't Change Who You Really Are

Travel cannot change the very foundations of who you are. Your own culture and upbringing can never be truly replaced or forgotten no matter how far you run or what culture you immerse yourself in. There is no running from it. You will always essentially be who you are.

4) But It Can Change The Way You See Yourself

Fortunately, travel can change the way you perceive the world and in turn, yourself. And this is the only true path forward.

When you travel, you experience life at a faster pace. You have to navigate and overcome obstacles 10x faster than you would at home. You suffer both mentally and physically more often and in more challenging ways. To quote myself, "Travel is like being on a binge of red bull and crack cocaine. You experience faster than you can comprehend and your outlook on life changes entirely." (Not that I've tried it or recommend trying it but I can imagine it's similar...)

This high-paced reality coupled with new challenges offers you the chance to slowly alter the way you perceive the world, how you react to the challenges, and ultimately the way you see yourself.

5) It's A Process

Becoming who you want to be, the person you truly are, is a process that can take years and even a lifetime.

Inherent to the process are setbacks. You're going to fall off the horse and forget the path. You're going to lose sight of your true self and fall back into fear.

But the important thing is that you keep moving forward no matter what.

To me, this is what life is all about. You fear, you go for it, you suffer, you overcome, you gain confidence, and finally become who you truly are. Rinse and repeat while avoiding actual red bull and crack cocaine along the way, and the good life, the content life, the enlightened life awaits us all.

6) Start Being Who You Want To Be Now

This probably all sounds a little overwhelming. So for now, the best you can do is try to stop mulling over your fears and instead focus on your fantasies.

Imagine the cities you will discover, the local parties you will attend, and that exotic lover you're going to meet.

Envision the person you want to be. See yourself as confident, happy, easy going, adaptable, and as a world traveler that can survive through anything.

Plant these seeds of who you want to be now. Make it a habit. The sooner you begin, the easier you'll be able to adapt on the road, and transform into the person you truly know you are.

Still Worried?

If you're still feeling nervous and insecure, below are a few truths you should keep in mind:

- ∞ Everyone is worried too. In fact, everyone often worries so much about their own insecurities that they hardly ever notice those of others.
- ∞ Most people are struggling just as much as you are. Even if it seems like your struggle is worse than others, it's simply not true. Since all we know is our own struggle, we have nothing to compare it to. In other words, "de struggle is relative mon."
- ∞ The more you suffer, the stronger and more confident you will become. Because suffering always leads to growth. It's always the travelers with the most difficult backgrounds that are the most intriguing, interesting, and confident.
- ∞ Suffering leads to compassion. And compassion leads to love. Love for others and love for oneself.

- ∞ The only way to get love is to give it.
- ∞ Genuinely smile at anyone long enough (as long as it's not in a creepy way) and they will smile back.
- ∞ Always focus on the positive and forgive yourself of any negative inclinations.
- ∞ You have the power to be who you want to be and create whatever reality you want, so long as you believe it.

“Running away offers a chance to redefine and improve upon who you are. Although at first it will be difficult and anxiety ridden, you will learn to adapt and become the person you’ve always wanted to be; free from fear, full of confidence and full of love for others and for yourself. This is what running away *the right way* is all about, and why I continue to run till this day.”

Step 5: Don't Worry About Money

"The cornerstone of our capitalist culture, the constant quest for happiness and self worth through this thing or that many Facebook likes is merely a temporary fix, a fleeting gratification, and can never lead to true happiness but conversely to an ever increasing abyss of selfishness, individualism, and isolation. Our journey to enlightenment, is and has always been to suffer and grow, to explore and expand our perspectives, and to make meaningful connections and see, if only for a moment, the reflection of the warmth of the spirit that resides within each of us. It is only through this, and not our smart phones, cars, and computers, that we can strive towards true contentment and it is this that travel can and will provide." – The Runaway Guide

"I just don't have enough money right now. I have to pay rent, car loans, magazine subscriptions and the rest of it."

After repeating this travel inhibiting mantra so many times to others and to yourself, you now totally believe it. It's your go-to excuse for not pushing yourself. It's how you justify staying home while others go traveling and run towards life.

But, maybe you *are* struggling financially. I too am often struggling more than I care to admit. My bank account sometimes gets down to just a few dollars. But somehow, I make it happen. I harness the pressure and pull through.

In order to run away the right way, money definitely helps. But you don't need as much as you might think. And even if you haven't got any, it still shouldn't stop you from running away.

Here's why:

1) Traveling Is Cheaper Than Living At Home

Every month I spend abroad, I spend significantly less than what I would at home in New York. Sure this doesn't apply to Norway and Japan to name a few but that's why I don't spend much time there. Instead, I base myself in countries where the dollar goes a long way.

In Guatemala, I spend approximately \$500/month & in Thailand I spend around \$600/month. This covers food, rent, and all my living expenses.

If you run away to developing countries, rent long term and cook at home, you can run away and live much cheaper than at home.

2) You Can Make Money Anywhere

There are loads of off the books / cash paying jobs around the world. While some gigs can be lucrative and painless, others can be backbreaking and pay next to nothing. Nonetheless, whatever the pay, they are sure to make for some awesome experiences.

When I first ran away, I left without a dime and hopped from job to job.

I worked on luxury yachts, cleaned a hotel in Jordan, taught English to rich Japanese kids, and worked a farm in Norway to name a few.

Today, I harness the internet. I make money from my travel blog and in E-commerce.

(If you're interested, you'll find more ways to make money abroad in Part 2 of this guide.)

No matter where you go, you can always find ways to make money and continue traveling for as long as you want, just so long as you have faith in a universe that will provide.

3) You Can Always Rough It

Worst comes to worse, you can always rough it. This means sleeping on park benches, asking for leftovers at cafes and hitchhiking. It's the way that I used to travel, and the way that countless more with low to no budget travelers have made their aspirations a reality. Because there is nothing more liberating, both financially and spiritually, than laying your head down on a beach, bench or concrete slab for the night.

It is still possible to travel like Kerouac, McCandless and other broke backpackers. Although it's definitely tougher, if you're up for it, it can be that much more rewarding.

4) Money Will Come

There's no better motivation to start new projects or apply for new jobs than when you're down to your last dollars. You become creative, industrious, innovative and willing to take chances in ways you never were before. In fact, part of me actually enjoys nearly running out. Because it's in those moments that I always come up with the best ideas and work the hardest.

The best ideas always come when you're down to your last buck.

Do You Need Money To Run Away?

Speaking very idealistically, no. You could leave like I did, with nothing. It's not going to be easy though. You will suffer immensely. For most people, myself included, it's not the right way to run away.

A much better way to start your trip is with a few thousand dollars. If you're going to Central America, this will be more than enough to keep you going for at least a few months.

When the money runs out and you decide you still want to travel, you will inevitably devise a plan or find a unique job to sustain yourself. It's how I've been traveling all my life, and how I plan to continue to travel in the future.

Money, or a lack thereof, is only as travel inhibiting as you believe it to be. You will find a way so long as you want to.

Step 6: Hard Earned Lessons

The first time I ran away from home, I made a lot a mistakes. I did too many drugs, stole from others, became angrier, and hated life most of the time.

But through these mistakes and hardships I grew. Overtime I came to realize a few important things.

To help you learn from my mistakes and shorten your path to a more confident, happier and enlightened you, here are my top 10 lessons learned from a year alone on the road at 16.

1) Drugs Are Evil

Being alone at 16 with no responsibilities, I had no reason *not* to experiment with drugs. As depression grew, so did the drug-intake. I allowed my mind to spiral down into an ever-increasing abyss of unhappiness. Although it took a while, I finally realized that drugs only provided an artificial, transient happiness.

Drugs prevented me from discovering true happiness on my own.

2) Karma Is Real

I never truly believed this until two birds simultaneously crapped on me shortly after stealing a cell phone. After a few more similar incidents, such as having my bag stolen while hiding in the train bathroom avoiding ticket agents, I stubbornly accepted the truth of Karma. That being, though cliché...

What goes around comes around.

3) The Poorest People Have The Biggest Hearts

The poorer the country, the more welcoming and giving the people. Countless people from Syria to Egypt invited me into their homes to offer me food. Although they hardly had enough to go around, they always made sure I was well fed and warm.

They know what it's like to be cold, to be hungry, and to suffer and so they know compassion.

4) Not All Homeless People Are Crazy

When I was living in a squat in Southern France, I first believed that all my tent mates, Steve, the other Steve, Wizard, Rasta, and Peppy were completely insane. While it turned out that half of them were actually nuts (specifically Wizard, a cross-eyed schizophrenic with Tourettes), the other half were simply victims of some terrible event, like the car crash that killed Steve's family.

The sane ones took care of me, and for that I am forever grateful. Love first, judge second.

5) Life Is Relative

I had not ingested anything for three days straight. I was exhausted, dirty and down on life. Out of nowhere, a kind shop owner offered me a Coke. The sensation of this high-energy life-sustaining beverage that tantalized my tongue and surged through my veins offered me an indescribable happiness. It was then that I realized the relativity of life. I understood that without sadness I could never know happiness.

I accepted the bad times always knowing that things would get better. Things always get better.

6) People Are People No Matter Where You Go

It was the height of the war in Iraq. The media and Western perspectives had left me confused about what to expect from the Middle East. While I tried to enter Syria with an open mind, fears of anti-American Muslim extremists dominated my consciousness. However, the more I got to know the people of Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, the more I realized our shared humanity.

We all share the same needs and desperately seek to connect with one another. In doing so, we ease the pain of our lonely life paths. Talk with everyone and you'll no doubt find friends everywhere.

7) Happiness Comes From Within

I naively believed that happiness would lie in a specific place. And so, I kept traveling to different countries with the hope of finding the elusive happiness I so desperately sought. After crossing each border, I was greeted with an initial burst of euphoria, but as the days past, I always reverted back to my old depressed routine. Eventually, I learned the truth of the old saying, "The grass is always greener..."

If you're not happy where you are now, you're not going to find it no matter where you go.

8) Trust In The Universe

In the beginning, I was always worried about what I would eat next and where I was going to sleep at night. However, after a few weeks on the road, I realized that I was on a path, and that everything I did and everywhere I went was meant to be. Food and shelter would always come when I most needed it, and things always tended to work out.

I stopped worrying, began to trust and that's when I truly began to enjoy life on the road.

9) Save Money, Eat Behind Supermarkets

Thanks to another runaway, I learned that depending on the time of the week, dumpsters behind supermarkets can be filled to the brim with pre-packaged sandwiches, juices, fruits and other perishables that are only a few days past their expiration dates.

If you're looking to save money or are in a serious pinch, don't discredit the dumpster.

10) The West is Blessed

Upon returning home, I was able to comprehend the relative wealth I was blessed with. I was determined to make the most of the resources at my disposal. I started a delivery business, got an education, and later began my blog, The Runaway Guide.

I felt unbelievably grateful for my relative good fortune in this world, and in turn, felt more happy than I ever had.

Step 7: Run Away The Right Way

"A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." — Lao Tzu

In order to run away the right way, you have to *want* to run away the right way. I know it's cliché, but you really have to pack the right state of mind. Not only that, you have to consistently make an effort to maintain that state of mind.

If you embark on your journey for the wrong reasons, with fear in your heart, or with financial worries, well then you might as well stay home. Chances are, you aren't going to grow, solve anything, or enjoy yourself very much no matter where you go.

On the other hand, if you focus on your fantasies, envision yourself with confidence, smile at everyone, and trust in your ability to shape your own reality, only good things will come.

Imagine the freedom and potential for change that could arise when removed from your habitual environment. You could be free. Free from the constraints of society and social obligations. Free from your reflection in the eyes of others and free to imagine yourself in anyway you want.

Throw yourself into the unknown, where nothing is set and anything that you want to happen will happen. You will suffer through hardships in the beginning, but you will adapt to everything that comes your way. You'll grow from these experiences and in return, you will become a more confident, intelligent, and happier person.

If all that sounds good to you, then let's get going.

Let's run away NOW.

Part 2: Run Away Now

It's life or death. Now or never.

You've chosen life and you're ready to run away now.

If you literally want to leave now, feel free to skip to Step 4 to make sure you've got everything you need.

If you have a few days or weeks to plan, here's how to begin:

- ∞ **Step 1: Make A Plan**
- ∞ **Step 2: Choose Your Destination**
- ∞ **Step 3: Find Your Hideout**
- ∞ **Step 4: Pack Your Bag**
- ∞ **Step 5: Prepare**
- ∞ **Step 6: Get There**
- ∞ **Step 7: Run Away Now**

Step 1: Make A Plan

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, not the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." - Charles Darwin

I've spent the greater portion of the last 10 years living and working abroad. During the first few years, I seriously roughed it. I slept on the streets and ate from dumpsters. I did everything I could to stay on the road. But, after one too many days without food, I realized I needed a plan, purpose, and some kind of direction. I wanted a way to not only survive, but to thrive.

So, I went back home. I took advantage of the fact that I had food, a roof, free time and most important a laptop with internet. I took nothing for granted and made sure I made the most of every hour of every day.

Today, I fund my travels through projects surrounding my blog, The Runaway Guide. I sell books such as this one, offer [Runaway Tours](#) to Thailand, Guatemala, Scandinavia & Japan, and help others start their own travel sites. While I don't make a fortune, it's just enough to sustain my travels and the life that I choose to lead.

If you're planning to run away and want to do so indefinitely, you may want to consider a plan to sustain your travels as well. Although you don't need to figure this out just yet, it's good to know what's available. It might also help you decide, if you don't already know, where you want to go.

With this in mind, below are some of my favorite paths towards a life of travel. They are solid opportunities that I have either had experience with first-hand, or known of someone who has.

1) Work At Hostels, Resorts, Or Bars

If you have experience in the service industry (or even if you don't), it's fairly easy to find an under-the-table job at a number of different hotels, hostels, restaurants, resorts and bars around the world.

In Central America and Eastern Europe, hostel jobs are everywhere. In Southeast Asia and Malaysia, you might want to check out resorts for lifeguarding or bartending gigs.

The best way to get these jobs is to show up in person. If you want to research some options in advance, check out [helpx.net](#) or [workaway.org](#).

2) Teach English

If you're a native English speaker with a Bachelors Degree, you have the opportunity to work in almost any country as an English teacher. Even if you don't have a degree, you can easily take a 2-4 week course called, TEFL.

Although you can teach just about anywhere, I recommend Korea. Known by economists as one of the "4 Asian Tigers", Korea's economy is growing at rates similar to that of Japan in the 1970's. With more and more businesses going global, there is a growing demand for English teachers. Salaries are generous, housing is usually included, the cost of living is low, and the food is delicious albeit spicy. Check out the [Seoul Global Center](#) for job listings.

3) Volunteer At An NGO/Humanitarian Organization

Throughout the developing world, there are myriad NGO's who accept volunteers. The large ones like US Aid, the UN, and Oxfam are competitive and require degrees. If you don't have a degree, your best bet is to look for smaller and more local NGO's. While some of them offer living stipends, many do not. However, if you volunteer long enough, there's always the possibility of it turning it into a job.

For this option, it's best to save a bit before you go. The best times to apply are at the end of summer, when students return to school, and right before the holiday season, when people return home to their families.

If you're interested in going to Lake Atitlan, I highly recommend Mayan Families, Mayan Traditions, or Mercado Global. All three aim to preserve the Mayan culture and improve local lives while generating money through fair trade projects.

4) Become A Dive Master

Dive masters have the freedom and opportunity to work in some of the most beautiful places in the world. If you love the water and want to live in the tropics, this is your option.

The cheapest place in the world to get your driving certification is in Utila, Honduras. For just 250\$ you get a week long course with accommodation in Caribbean paradise. Though it takes a few more bucks and some extra courses to become a full-fledged dive master, the entire process isn't too difficult. Just remember to put on some bug spray as those sand flies are unforgiving.

5) Work On A Cruise Ship

Working on a cruise ship is a great job for any first time runaway. It's safe, the pay is stable, and since room and board is included, it allows you to save for your next adventure. Plus, it lets you travel the world for free.

Although I've never worked a cruise ship, I do have a few friends who have. While they say the work can be tough at times, their overall view is that it's totally worth it. No one knows more about this than *Wandering Earl*. Definitely check out his book called [How To Work On A Cruise Ship](#) if you're interested.

6) Become A Deck Hand/Maid

If you long for the sea, you can always find work on private yachts around the world. If you don't have a lot of experience, some good places to start are, 1) The charter boats in Eilat, Israel or 2) the 5-day ferry [boats from Panama to Colombia](#).

If you already have some boating experience and want to make some real money, you can apply for a [deckhand position on a luxury yacht](#) in Ft. Lauderdale, France, or Spain.

If you follow my blog, you know I promote this option a lot. Having had great experiences on 7 different under-the-table boating jobs, it's an option that I can definitely recommend.

7) Become A Travel Blogger

If you like to write, have a decent knowledge of computers, and want the freedom to go anywhere at anytime, you might want to consider [becoming a travel blogger](#). It gives you the chance to share your experiences while simultaneously funding your travels and the best part is, you never have a boss to answer to.

If you want to become a travel blogger, [send me a message](#), tell me you own this book, "Runaway Now," and I will do my best to help you get started.

A Few More Options

- ∞ Become an Au Pair anywhere
- ∞ Tutor kids in Japan or Saudi Arabia in English
- ∞ Translate documents online
- ∞ Become a Yoga Instructor
- ∞ Work on a Sailing Felucca on The Nile

- ∞ Clean/Paint houses anywhere
- ∞ Work on farms in Scandinavia
- ∞ Work construction for private contractors in the South Of France
- ∞ Become a model in Asia (there's always a need for western models)
- ∞ Become a day trader online from anywhere with internet. Check out WanderingTrader.com
- ∞ Make jewelry and sell it around the world
- ∞ Import unique goods and sell them online in the USA

These are just a few of my favorite options. Definitely don't limit yourself to these. There are countless ways to make money around the world and sustain your life of travel. And chances are, once you're out there, some cool job will find you first.

Step 2: Choose A Destination

The beauty about this predicament is that you can literally go anywhere you want to. On the other hand, you have over 200 countries & territories to choose from.

Where Would I Go?

Guatemala

Guatemala is my favorite country in the world and I've become a resident there for 4-5 months every year. I chose Guatemala as my hideout for a few reasons. 1) It's as cheap as chips. 2) Maya people are endlessly fascinating & friendly 3) There's a unique expat (US & European immigrant) community. 4) It's easy to get a side job as a hotel manager or bartender. 5) If I want to adventure, I can easily travel through one of the best backpacking regions of the world, Central America.

Thailand

I would recommend Thailand to anyone who loves the tropics. This country is steamy, cheap, and full of expats and backpackers (although sometimes too much so). It's an ideal starting country for those who want to travel through Southeast Asia, or for those who want to rent a 200\$/month bungalow and enjoy easy island living. In addition to this, it's a great place to learn or teach diving, especially on the island of Koh Tao among others.

Japan

Japan is one of my favorite countries because of its cheap and delicious food, its quirkiness, and overall comfort. Although it's expensive to travel through, it's not too expensive to live in for a few months at a time. And if you're interested in teaching English, you can make a small fortune teaching "Business English" to corporate salary men.

Sweden

Sweden is super safe, comfortable, naturally stunning and relaxing. Unfortunately, it's one of the most expensive countries in Europe. Fortunately, you can easily find a small studio in a student city for the summer for as little as 400\$/month. More, thanks to "All Mans Rights", a law ubiquitous across Scandinavia, you can technically camp anywhere you want to; making it perfect for broke runaways.

So Where Should You Go?

If you're not sold on any of my recommendations, below are a few things worth considering while trying to make your decision.

- ∞ If you've never left your own country, you ought to go somewhere that is different but not too different. You don't want to be too bored, or too shocked right from the get-go. It's best to ease into the runaway lifestyle and leave the really intense countries for later. In other words, it's best not to start in India or Egypt.
- ∞ It's also a good idea to travel somewhere that you know very little about. If you have no preconceived notions, you won't be too surprised or disappointed. You can look at your first destination with unbiased eyes and without illusion. You can appreciate what you like and discard what you dislike.
- ∞ Relatively cheap countries are never a bad idea to begin in either. It's hard not to appreciate a 1\$ box of Pad Thai. It will also help you maintain your budget and keep you on the road longer.
- ∞ You should pick a country that is in a good region of the world. This way, if you get fed up with it or just want to move on, you can easily do so. Most travelers agree that the best regions for budget backpacking include Central America, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Check out this article for a complete run down of these 3 regions, [The Best Regions For Budget Travel](#).

Ultimately, the country you choose depends on you and the kind of journey you want to have. If you're still unsure, check out a few of my hideout recommendations below.

Step 3: Find A Hideout

For many years, I never knew where I was going to stay next. I would simply show up in a new city or country and play it by ear.

Sometimes I would get lucky and a fellow traveler would recommend a great hostel.

Sometimes that hostel would be totally booked and I would be forced to sleep in bus stations or under bridges.

You could run away without pre-booking a place to stay, sleep rough, and save some money, but life is a lot more enjoyable with a clean bed and like-minded travelers or eccentric expats around.

That's why I recommend reserving at least one place to stay before you hit the road.

When searching for your first accommodation, don't worry too much about finding that perfect place. And don't be too disappointed if it turns out the place you booked is a dump. Like much of life, it's only temporary, and you will surely find your perfect hideout eventually.

Below you'll find the cheapest short-term and long term options for budget runaways, as well as a few of my favorite hideouts around the world.

Short Term Hideouts

Hostels

Hostels were developed specifically for travelers on a budget, which means they are almost always your cheapest option. Dorm beds go for about 25\$ in Europe and even as little as 4\$ in places like Cambodia. You can stay for just a few days or as much as a few months.

Budget Tip 1: Take advantage of the hostel kitchen and cook-in. My favorite low budget hostel meals include 1) A cup of noodles with an egg cooked inside. 2) Pasta drenched in butter, salt, and pepper. 3) A bean sprout salad.

Budget Tip 2: It's not uncommon for the hostel owner to be a former traveler. So, if you can't afford your bed, talk to the owner. There's always a good chance you can work in exchange for your bed or pocket change. Never hurts to ask!

Budget Tip 3: Online booking sites charge a commission per booking. As a result, many hostels, especially smaller ones, prefer if you make a reservation directly on

their website. If it's the low season or you're planning to stay 5 days or more, try asking for a discount.

To research and book cheap hostels I recommend using [Hostel World](#).

Other search engines for finding cool hostels include: [Agoda.com](#) & [Booking.com](#).

Budget Hotels

In most of the developing world, the cheapest places to stay at are generally budget hotels. By budget hotels I'm referring to those, you get what you pay for, small room, questionable mattresses, in a funky part of town kind of hotel.

While there are some great budget hotels out there, the truly funky ones are always the cheapest, like the Obama Hotel in a truck stop in Ethiopia. It was a 12 by 9 foot box with a used condom in one corner and a dying finger long cockroach in the other. Price: 1\$/night.

Budget Tip 1: Budget hotels, specifically those in popular tourist spots, love to overprice their rooms on online booking sites. So if you find a hotel you like, try and find their website and reserve there instead.

Budget Tip 2: Many budget hotels offer some kind of breakfast, albeit a questionable one. Nevertheless, try and get breakfast included in the price.

Budget Tip 3: Just rocked up to a dingy looking back street hotel? Don't forget to haggle down the price!

For budget and higher-end hotels in Asia, check out [Agoda.com](#)

For budget hotels in the rest of the world, check out [booking.com](#)

Couch Surfing

Couchsurfing connects travelers with locals who are willing to host them. It now has members all over the world, which means you can literally find a free place to stay anywhere. Just be sure to use caution before Couchsurfing, especially if you're a gal. To get in on the free couches simply register on [Couchsurfing.com](#) and contact a host.

Camping

In the USA, you can “technically” only camp on designated camping grounds, which usually costs between 10\$ and 20\$ a night. However, as long as you don’t bother anyone, stay off private property, keep hidden, and clean up after yourself, camping in the US is a cheap or sometimes free option. Homeless people and broke beatnik backpackers do it all the time.

If you’re in Scandinavia, you’re in luck. Allemansrätten or “All Mans Rights” states that all land, whether it be private or public, is open to all. This means you can camp and roam through any land as long as you do not disturb or destroy it. It also means you can enjoy wild blue berries, raspberries, and strawberries when you find them!

My Favorite Short-term Hideouts

Below are a few of my favorite hotels & hostels and are the perfect places to start any journey.

1) “Posto Rojo Hostel” – Nicaraguan Jungle

In the hundreds of hostels I have visited in the world, none can compare. It seems to float among the trees. It’s a place where you can find both peace of mind and epic rum punch-fueled parties. It’s where you go when you want to escape the world for an isolated jungle paradise. Dorms are just 8\$/night and you can even volunteer in exchange for room and board.

2) “Dahab Hostel” – The Heart of Cairo, Egypt

Dahab Hostel is a rooftop hideout with dozens of unique little private rooms. It’s the perfect place to explore the Pyramids from, and hangout with travelers from every corner of the world. Oh, and it’s only 7\$/night!

3) “La Iguana Perdida” – Lake Atitlàn, Guatemala

This hostel is located in a small Maya village, right on the banks of Lake Atitlàn, in the Guatemalan highlands. Needless to say, this place is epic. The views are stunning, the restaurant is addictive, the backpacker/diving crowd is extremely friendly, and dorms are just 6\$/night. It’s a great base to explore all the Maya towns around the Lake. Like Posto Rojo, you also have the opportunity to work in exchange for room and board.

4) “Travellers Hostel Ujezd” – Prague, Czech Republic

This is an awesome hideout to start off an Eastern European backpacking journey. It's grungy, the beds creak, and the whole place is actually a gymnasium basketball court. It's how European hostels used to be before they got commercialized and turned into budget hotels. It's where you can really hangout and learn from other backpackers. It epitomizes a “backpacker hostel” and I love it every time I visit. This hostel is 9\$ a night.

5) “Wattana Resort” – Koh Pha Ngan, Thailand

Envision that exotic island paradise you've seen in your dreams and magazines. You're lounging in a hammock in a beautiful bungalow overlooking a private beach. At anytime you can order a plate of Pad Thai, a pork sandwich, or a ripe coconut. If the tranquility becomes overwhelming, you can jump on your scooter and head to Had Rin for the biggest Full Moon Party on earth. Or you can take a stroll to the small, nearly tourist-less fishing village of Chaloklum. The best part is, your private bungalow is only 12\$/night.

Long-term Hideouts

In the old days, finding a long term place to stay abroad meant going to a local real estate agency.

Today, it's all about AirBnb. AirBnb is arguably the easiest and quickest way to find and book affordable long-term hideouts around the world.

Below you'll learn out how to use and take advantage of AirBnb. You'll also find a few of my **favorite long-term hideouts** around the world.

**I'm not in any way sponsored by Airbnb, I just find their website to be extremely useful for short & long term accommodation.*

AirBnb

AirBnb is essentially paid Couchsurfing. It too connects travelers with anyone willing to host them.

First, make an account on their website. Next, search for private apartments, entire houses, igloos, yachts, or bungalows around the world.

Some hosts will only allow you to stay a few days while others will offer reduced rates for longer-term stays.

Although there are tons of expensive vacation rentals, there are also be plenty of incredible deals.

Budget Tip #1: Sign up using this link and get 25\$ Off your first reservation. [Leif Sent You 25\\$ AirBnb Credit.](#)

Budget Tip # 2: It's often cheaper to rent by the week or month.

Budget Tip # 3: Since AirBnb charges a service fee for the host, it's cheaper to book a few nights, then book more with the host in person. Just be sure to contact the host in advance to make sure he/she is ok with that.

My Favorite Long-term Hideouts

All of these places below are ideal for chilling out, writing, reading, and thinking. They're all both budget friendly and comfortable.

1) "Lake Atitlan Hideout" – Guatemalan Highlands

Although AirBnb has a lot of great listings, sometimes the best hideouts can only be found the old fashion way, in person.

The first time I found this place I fell in love. I decided that it would be my winter hideout. The complex consists of 8, 2 room studio apartments, located on a volcanic crater overlooking a lake surrounded by 3 volcanos.

If you're interested in hanging out, learning about travel blogging, online entrepreneurship, the Spanish language, getting in shape, practicing yoga/ meditation, eating healthy, volunteering, or simply relaxing with volcano views and eternal spring weather, get in touch! I'm usually there between November and March and I can help you make it happen. TheRunawayGuide@yahoo.com

2) "Villa Augusta" – Sicilian Countryside

Villa Augusta is set about 40 meters away from a quiet road nestled between orange orchards and palm trees. Aside from the birds and the breeze, this place is quiet. It's perfect for meditation, yoga, gazing out at the Mediterranean sea or the snow covered peak of Mount Etna. The retired couple that owns the joint will bring you lots of fresh oranges and insist you join them for a proper home cooked Italian meal. Just be sure to brush up on your Italian first. Price: 26\$/night.

3) “Room 1410” – Chiang Mai, Thailand

This apartment is located 10 minutes by scooter from downtown Chiang Mai. Although it's not so convenient location wise, it's an incredible value. 90 sq meters, AC, Cable TV, Wifi and it's on the 14th floor with views of the mountains. It's got everything you need to live comfortably for an extended period of time.

Chiang Mai is considered the digital nomad capital of the world. So, if you're interested in learning from travel bloggers and other online entrepreneurs, this is the place to do it. 29\$/night.

4) “Student Studio” – Uppsala, Sweden

The best places to find cheap apartments during the summer months are in University towns. Not only do University towns tend to be the most fun, but since most students leave on vacation and don't want to continue paying rent, they are willing to rent out their apartments for sometimes half the price. This means you can often find beautifully furnished studios, anywhere from \$300 to \$500 per month.

Check out the Swedish equivalent of Craigslist, [Blocket.se](https://blocket.se) for listings. First, specify the county on the map, then choose the category, “Blocket Bostad” (living place), and finally, select UTHYRES (rentals).

My favorite University town in Europe is Uppsala. It's just 20 minutes north of Arlanda Airport and 40 minutes north of Stockholm. The city, like most Swedish cities, offers the perfect blend of urban life with the natural world. It's full of great restaurants and bars and offers some sweet running trails through the nature reserve. Plus the summer sun doesn't set until at least 10:30pm.

5) Loppa Guest House, Norway

If money is less of an issue and you're looking for a place to truly escape it all, look no further than Loppa Island. It lies at one of the northern most points of Northern Europe at 70 degrees north latitude. Aside from this remarkable guest house, there are no shops and just a few holiday homes. It's a place to skinny dip on isolated white sand beaches and stay up all night watching the midnight sun. For more info, check out my full review, [Paradise On Earth: Northern Norway](#).

Step 4: Pack Your Bag

When packing for any length trip, it's tempting to bring as much as you can carry. Understandably, you want to be prepared for anything. You end up packing extra shoes, massive amounts of toiletries, and a big towel.

The truth is, you don't need half the stuff you think you do. You can pack light and still be prepared for anything the world throws at you. And, if you arrive and realize you forgot something, you can almost always buy it when you arrive. Except for sunblock in the Ethiopian highlands & a lot of Africa. Definitely don't forget that!

Below is a list of everything you'll want to pack and nothing more. It's the essential list for both guys and girls for anywhere from a week to a year-long journey.

Pick Your Backpack

First things first, you need a backpack.

The smaller the backpack, the less you'll pack, and the lighter your life will be. I recommend anything under 45 Liters.

A 45 liter backpack is carry-on sized, which means you can avoid budget airline baggage fees.

Below are my top picks for both guys and girls:

Pacsafe Venturesafe 45 Liter: This bag is carry-on sized and just big enough to fit everything you'll need. It has a dedicated laptop sleeve and opens like a traditional suitcase. It's essentially a portable safe with an ingenious locking mechanism and a built-in steel web. Although it's expensive, the peace of mind it gives me is worth it. It's currently priced at \$180.

Guerilla Packs: Samurai 50 Liter: I used the Samurai 50L for many years. It's perfectly sized and designed efficiently. It's built for all-weather hiking, which means it's shoulder and waist straps are made for extended comfort. At around \$80, it's an excellent value.

Tortuga Outbreaker 35L: This is my current backpack and my all-time favorite. It fits under any airline seat and is made from waterproof sail fabric. It has a ton of organization while looking sophisticated and sleek. Although it's a bit pricy at \$224, for me, it's definitely worth the price.

Essential Packing List For Guys

What you pack is largely dependent on where you plan to run away to. If you're going to the tropics, you can pack extremely light. If you're heading to Scandinavia, you're going to need layers. Nevertheless, below you'll find an ideal combination of warm and cold weather clothes for any kind of trip.

- **Socks:** 4 pairs for warm and 8 for cold weather countries.
- **Underwear:** 6 pairs of underwear is usually sufficient.
- **Light Jeans / Cargo Pants:** Light weight and dark colored jeans or cargo pants are all you need. You can go ages without washing them and no one will notice...hopefully.
- **1 Pair of Shorts:** One will do. If your shorts can double as swim shorts, that's even better.
- **1 Bathing suit:** For swimming (and pajamas in hot hostel dorm rooms).
- **1 Pair of Long Johns:** Lightweight and breathable long johns are a must no matter what climate you are in. Even in hot and humid countries, it gets chilly at night. I love the heat-tech long johns from Uniqlo.
- **2 T-Shirts:** This is usually enough. Chances are, you'll buy one or two on the road. Darker colors hide dirt and sweat stains.
- **1 Long Sleeve Shirt:** A long sleeve shirt is a perfect layer to add to a t-shirt when it gets cold.
- **1 Sweater:** A thin, light cotton or fleece sweater makes a warm and comfortable inner layer.
- **1 Wind Breaker:** When it's really cold and rainy, putting a windbreaker over your long johns, long sleeve shirt, t-shirt, and sweater will provide the outer layer of protection and warmth that you will need. I wear the **Tropiformer Vest** because it has loads of stealthy pockets and the sleeves are removable. I also love any eco-shell from Fjällräven, but it's pretty pricy.
- **Toiletries:** In terms of toiletries, you should be able to find anything you might need. If there is something specific, like contact lenses, make sure your liquids and gels are airport security sized, and packed in individual plastic bags.

- **Tent:** A tent is up to you. If you're traveling through Europe or Japan, you probably won't use it too much. In general, you shouldn't travel with a tent as you'll more often stay at hostels. However, if you're taking advantage of "All Mans Rights" in Scandinavia, I would recommend the [Kelty Mesa 2](#). An effective and lighter alternative is a Tarp and small rope, which can be easily fashioned into a makeshift shelter.
- **Sleeping Bag:** A sleeping bag is never a bad idea if you have space. You can use it as an extra blanket or as a sheet to protect you from a funky hostel bed. A good alternative is a wool blanket, which is equally versatile and smaller/lighter in size.

Comfort Extras

- ∞ **Earplugs:** For noisy hostels.
- ∞ **Eye Mask:** For sleeping late or for your flights.
- ∞ **Headphones:** To walk to your beats on noisy city streets.

Wilderness Extras

Whether you're going into the wilderness or not, here are a few small and lightweight items you might want to consider bringing.

- ∞ **A headlight:** For finding your toothbrush in the bottom of your pack.
- ∞ **Pocketknife/Wallet Knife:** For the unexpected.
- ∞ **Waterproof Lighter:** From lighting the hostel kitchen stove to outdoor survival.
- ∞ **Lifestraw Purifier:** For quickly filtering, questionable water.
- ∞ **Space Blanket:** For extra warmth on a surprisingly cold hike.

Gadgets & Tech

Below is a list of essential travel tech and gadgets that I always carry with me while traveling.

- ∞ **Backup Battery Bank:** For long train or plane journeys.
- ∞ **Multi Country Adapter:** A must have in order to charge your devices.
- ∞ **Nook eReader:** For endless entertainment.
- ∞ **Sony Rx100 M3 Camera:** Incredible quality for a pocket sized camera.
- ∞ **Macbook Air:** Unless you're a blogger you really don't need a laptop. In fact, traveling is much better without one.

A Packing Guide For Girls

by Adventurous Kate (AdventurousKate.com)

There are three main rules to remember:

- 1) Whatever you forget, you can buy it there (with some exceptions like prescription medication) so don't stress if you forget something.
- 2) It will be cheap and easy to do laundry on the road (it's as easy as dropping it off with a laundry lady and picking it up the next day), so don't worry about packing a different item for each day.
- 3) Bring nothing you would be devastated to lose (family heirlooms, your birth certificate, etc.).

CLOTHES

- ∞ Six tops that you can rotate; whether short sleeved or sleeveless, more if you'd like.
- ∞ One three-quarter or long-sleeved shirt, can be one of the six tops.
- ∞ Three sets of bottoms: skirts, shorts, or pants, your choice.
- ∞ One pair of jeans or comfortable pants for cold nights.
- ∞ One pair leggings for layering.
- ∞ Dresses: If you'd like (instead of tops/bottoms), bring whatever you want, short or maxi.
- ∞ Two bras
- ∞ 10 pairs underwear (believe me, even with laundry, you want a lot of clean underwear)
- ∞ Two bathing suits
- ∞ Four pairs of socks
- ∞ One fleece jacket or hoodie
- ∞ One large scarf or pashmina
- ∞ Some kind of pajamas (or just wear a comfy pair of shorts/pants and tank top from items you packed above)

SHOES

- ∞ One pair sandals – flip-flops or sports sandals are fine
- ∞ One pair either sneakers or boots – your choice

OTHER

- ∞ One towel (or one beach towel and one bath towel if you'd prefer)
- ∞ One drybag (to protect your valuables when on boats)

TOILETRIES

- ∞ Soap
- ∞ Facial soap
- ∞ Shampoo and conditioner (Lush makes great solid shampoos/conditioners)
- ∞ Hair products
- ∞ Razor and blades
- ∞ Moisturizer/eye cream/skincare products
- ∞ Sunscreen
- ∞ Insect repellent
- ∞ Nail clippers
- ∞ Tweezers
- ∞ Contacts and solution if you need them
- ∞ Enough tampons/pads for one cycle, or a menstrual cup like a DivaCup
- ∞ Any makeup you want to bring

MEDICINE/FIRST AID

- ∞ Any prescription medication you take or equipment you need
- ∞ Pain reliever: Advil, Tylenol, etc.
- ∞ Cold medicine: Nyquil, Dayquil, etc.
- ∞ Pepto-bismol tablets if you have an upset stomach, nausea, or diarrhea
- ∞ Motion sickness medication: Dramamine, etc.
- ∞ Band-aids
- ∞ Bacitracin or Neosporin

IN YOUR DAY BAG

- ∞ Passport
- ∞ Wallet
- ∞ Prescription medication
- ∞ Smartphone and charger
- ∞ Camera and charger
- ∞ Enough SIM cards and/or a photo backup system, whether it's your laptop or through external drives
- ∞ Kindle/eReader and charger if you want to read
- ∞ Sunglasses
- ∞ Any jewelry you want to bring (keep it simple and minimal, like a pair of cheap earrings and a necklace)

Pack With Purpose

Packing for your journey is a transformational and liberating process, and it helps to think of it as such. Like so many wandering nomads of the past, you can only bring what you can carry on your back. This means you need to decide on only the necessities.

Packing light is key. You really don't need all the junk you think you do. And you will find that you will be much happier without it.

Step 5: Prepare

Now that you're all packed, it's time to prepare for the practicalities of travel.

Although you could try and prepare for everything the world will throw at you, it's neither realistic nor is it necessary.

As my mother always says, "you can cross that bridge when you get to it." No expression has ever served my nerves better, especially when preparing for a trip.

In that vein, below you'll find all you'll need to do to prepare right now.

Get Your Passport & Necessary Visas

Passport

The most important document you'll need if you plan to runaway abroad is a passport. A passport is official identification from your home country that allows you to move freely within and across the borders of other countries.

If you are an American citizen, you can apply for a passport at many USPS offices. All you need to do is go to the office, present identification, submit their form, and pay 110\$. For more detailed information refer to, [First Time Applicants](#).

Visas

Visas are essentially hall passes that allow you to move freely within a country for a certain period of time. Before embarking on any trip, you'll want to familiarize yourself with the visa requirements of the countries you wish to visit. For US citizens, check out [The Visa Requirement World Map](#).

How Do I Get A Visa?

There are many countries around the world, particularly those within the Schengen Zone of Europe, that don't require a visa. In this case, all you need is your passport.

However, there are many other countries that *do* require some kind of visa. Most countries provide you with a visa, with or without a fee, when you arrive at the airport or at the border. Some countries require that you fill out an online form prior to arrival. Other countries require you to apply for a visa in advance at one of their consulates in a neighboring country or sometimes, only in your home country.

For example, it is generally very difficult, if not impossible, to receive a visa to Russia or China if you're not applying from your home country. Additionally, there are some countries (like Bhutan, Iran and North Korea) that will only give you a visa if you are part of a sanctioned tour group.

How Much Do Visas Cost?

Visa costs are based primarily on a system of reciprocity. In other words, the cost of a visa for a foreign national to get into your home country is similar to, or the same price as what you will pay to visit their country. While most visas generally cost between 10 to 60 dollars, there are some countries, in particular the Congo, that charges as much as \$300.

Stay Healthy

Get Vaccinated

When it comes to maintaining health, the first thing you can do is get vaccinated. Fortunately, most of us in the developed Western world (the U.S., Europe & Australia, to name a few) already have sufficient vaccinations. This means most countries will allow you to enter without showing proof of vaccinations. However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't receive additional vaccinations to protect yourself.

Head to the CDC's ([Center For Disease Control](#)) website. Here you will learn which diseases to protect yourself from for the countries you'll be visiting. Just remember, as a governmental website, they're required to list every disease, even if it's an extremely rare one. If you're not sure whether or not to get additional vaccinations, consult with your local physician.

Note: I have never received additional vaccines and have never fallen seriously ill. Perhaps I've just been lucky, but I believe that unless you're going into the dense jungle where a Malaria outbreak is happening, you should be alright. But remember, I'm definitely no specialist in tropical diseases, so consult a physician if you're worried.

Avoid Travelers Diarrhea

Diarrhea is arguably the greatest risk to your health while traveling abroad. Between eating out frequently and drinking tap water ridden with foreign bacteria, it's usually not a question of if, but *when*. This is especially true while traveling in countries in the developing world.

Below are a few of my top tips to avoid diarrhea:

- ∞ If it smells like poop, it probably fell in poop. Don't eat it.
- ∞ Never drink the tap water unless you boil it first.
- ∞ Don't eat ice cream from street vendors.
- ∞ Wash your hands often.
- ∞ Don't eat pre-sliced/chopped fruit in the developing world. Knives and cutting boards may be cleaned using dirty water.
- ∞ Use your best judgment and trust your senses.

Get Travel Insurance

I'm an optimist. I hardly ever think of buying travel insurance before an adventure. It's expensive and chances are I won't ever need it. I would much rather invest in travel gear than drop a few hundred dollars on insurance.

But— then I look back, back to those times when insurance could have saved me a great deal of pain and suffering.

Like that one time I got Gangrene in Israel and suffered countless nights of severe hallucinogenic fevers.

Or that other time I nearly died of malnourishment and blood loss from hemorrhoid inducing diarrhea (forgive the description).

My point is, even if you think of yourself as a resilient and healthy person, with travel often comes unforeseen illness, broken phones, and stolen bags. So, no matter how tough or confident you are, it's never a bad idea to invest in a little insurance.

World Nomads is my favorite travel insurance for one main reason. Every time I need to make a claim, they pay out fast and painlessly. Not only that, but they're designed for budget backpackers, which means it's affordable, and covers just about everything travel related.

Be sure to read the fine print carefully to make sure you know exactly how much you're covered for.

When my backpack was stolen in Italy, World Nomads reimbursed me (over 500\$) for the value of the pack and its contents quickly and without hassle. It was the first time I had ever bought travel insurance and I was glad I did. Protect yourself, your things, & get yourself some travel insurance. You never know.

Step 6: Get There

Get from where you are now to wherever you want to go, by any means.

Walk

Walking was once the primary means by which people got around. Thousands of people have walked countless miles, from city to city and from nation to nation. Some, such as the infamous Moroccan explorer, Ibn Battuta, walked as far as 75,000 miles from Morocco, zigzagging all the way to China. While you might be thinking that walking as a means of travel is a thing of the past, there is no reason why it still can't be done today.

It may be tough at first, but if you can stick it out, you will adapt to the walking life. More so, you will meet a countless number of enlightened people from all over the world. You will have an abundance of time to contemplate life and you will surely become a wise world citizen. Last, but not least, it is totally free.

Hitchhike

Hitchhiking is one of the most exciting and cost-effective means of transportation. Like walking, it provides a great opportunity to converse with local people. Sometimes, you'll end up in cities and towns you've never heard of and get the chance to really explore them with your new driver friend. Below is a brief overview on how to turn your hitchhiking dreams into reality.

- 1) Where to find a ride:** In order to get picked up, you will need to position yourself strategically. You'll need to make sure that wherever you are, drivers will be able to see you from a distance, and have enough room to pull off the road, should they decide to stop for you. Good starting points are gas stations, highway on-ramps, and local low-speed roads.
- 2) How To Get Your Ride:** Finding a willing driver is often a difficult task, and usually depends on the country you are in. In the UK for example, you might have to wait a few hours. In Ethiopia, it is easy to score a ride in just a few minutes on the back of a truck. Getting a lift also greatly depends on how you advertise yourself. No one is going to pick you up if you look dangerous or unfriendly. So it's important to smile and wear decent looking clothes. If you're at a gas station, your best bet is to go up to someone and strike up a conversation. On the road, the best you can do is look unthreatening. Don't get discouraged if you don't get picked up immediately and don't take it

personally. Keep your spirits up and your positivity brimming, and you will be sure to get your ride eventually.

Train

Believe it or not, you can actually take trains from London almost all the way down to Singapore. Below are two of the best websites to accomplish this.

1) Eurail / Rail Europe

Both of these companies sell train passes through Europe to non-European citizens. Both Rail Europe's "Select Pass" and Eurail's "Global Pass" get you an equal amount of train travel for about the same price. However, if you purchase a pass over \$499, Rail Europe will waive the \$18 shipping fee, making it the cheaper option. (For booking single train journeys in Europe, definitely head to individual train websites instead.)

2) Seat61.com

This guy rode every train from Hanoi to Timbuktu. On his site, you'll find info on every train journey you could ever wish to take (in anywhere that trains exist). It also offers a lot of info on ferries. This is one of my favorite websites for trip planning.

Ship

If you're not prone to seasickness, traveling by boat is one of the most relaxing and wonderful ways to travel. The crisp sea air, fresh fish, and the rolling sea are just a few of the highlights you can expect. Unfortunately, most people think traveling by boat *has* to be expensive. They envision expensive cruise ships or luxury yachts. However, this isn't always the case. You may have to work for your passage, but boat travel can be very cheap if not completely free.

- 1) Private Sailboats:** If you are interested in sailing from Florida to the Mediterranean or vice-versa, you may want to consider volunteering aboard a private sail boat. Between April and June, countless boats depart from Fort Lauderdale, Florida to boating meccas in the Mediterranean such as Palma de Mallorca, Spain and Antibes, France. While many are large luxury yachts, others are privately owned 30-50 foot sailboats. Often times, these owners are in need of one or two crew members to help them make the crossing. Although having sailing experience helps, it's not required. Check out Craigslist, or if you're near the marina, walk the docks to see if you can work for passage.

- 2) **Luxury Yachts:** Like private sail boats, luxury yachts also make the voyage between Europe and the Americas every year. In order to travel free on one of these grand mega yachts, you must look clean shaven and professional. If you do manage to find passage aboard one of these yachts, you will find yourself living the high life. You will be provided with excellent quarters and will wine and dine at the labor of the yacht's chef. If you're interested in learning more about finding free passage or becoming a full time crew member aboard a private luxury yacht, check out this extensive guide, "[How To Work On A Luxury Yacht](#)."
- 3) **Cargo Ships:** There are a few different shipping companies that offer passage across the Atlantic and Pacific, and even around the world. However, they are often a bit expensive. Fortunately, you can reduce that fare or even avoid it altogether if you offer to work for your passage. To begin, start by e-mailing a few of the myriad shipping companies that can be found on the web.
- 4) **Ferries:** This is perhaps one of the best ways to travel by boat for free. However, this only applies to "car ferries". In order to get on board, simply hitchhike before the car terminal entrance. Since most ferries charge by the car and not the number of people, drivers don't mind giving you a lift. One of the best places to do this is [between Dover, England and Calais, France](#).
- 5) **Cruises:** Like cargo ships, there are some cruise ships and private-charter ship companies that may be willing to offer you free passage in exchange for your labor. If you're motivated, willing to work, and make the right contacts, it is possible to cruise the Galapagos or even get to Antarctica for nothing but the lint in your pocket.

Plane

While in the past, **it was possible to fly for free** or at least very cheap through a courier service, today, with the advent of the Internet and increased security measures, this is no longer the case.

Fortunately, due to the increase of budget airlines and the competition that exists between them, it is cheaper to fly today more than ever before,

- 1) My new favorite search engine is [Kiwi.com](#). It offers an exceptional amount of search options that ultimately help you find the cheapest flight.
- 2) Another awesome search engine is [Skiplagged.com](#). This search engine does what I used to do before this kid-genius developed an algorithm that

discovers cheaper flights by taking advantage of layovers. In other words, let's say American Airlines offers a flight from New York to LAX for \$300, and also offers a flight from New York to Salt Lake City with a layover in LAX for just \$200. On skiplagged.com you can book this cheaper flight and just simply get off at LAX during the layover.

Below are a few of my top tips to find cheap flights:

- ∞ Compare search engines with the airline's website.
- ∞ Search for flights in that airline's home currency.
- ∞ Don't be afraid to piece together multiple one-way flights.
- ∞ Fly on budget airlines.
- ∞ Book in advance.
- ∞ Sign up for my newsletter for flight deals.

Step 7: Run Away Now

“A journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step,” said Lao Tzu the founder of Taoism. Few have spoken wise words so succinctly. You cannot fret over the countless unknowns inherent to each mile. Instead, you must begin with one simple step.

Whether you’re looking at a small step or a huge leap, you’re going to land on solid ground. You just have to go for it, and there’s no better time than right now.

You are prepared.

Your heart is in the right place. You’re not running away from your problems, but rather running towards life. You’re running away the right way.

You have your flight, your first few nights booked, travel insurance just in case, and your bag is packed.

You may not be prepared for everything, but you’re prepared enough both mentally and practically to handle any unknown that comes your way.

You’re ready to Run Away Now.

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My hands are clammy and my legs are twitching, my seat-mate probably thinks I’m suffering from severe airplane-food farts. It can’t be helped. All the unknowns that await my arrival plague my consciousness... and bowels.

How will my mother and sister react? Will any of my friends still be around? Will I be able to find myself in society again? What am I going to do when I get home? These questions swirl around my head, down into my stomach, through my intestines, and back out into the seat cushion.

The sound of screeching wheels brings my thoughts back to the present, away from my meandering mind. At once, I am struck with joy, fear, relief, and apprehension. It is the feeling of a new journey, one I’m not sure I’m ready for.

I exit the plane and walk towards Customs and Immigration.

What the hell am I going to tell the officer? Should I tell him what I did? Should I tell him I am a runaway?

“You’re awfully young to be traveling so much,” I imagine the officer saying while flipping through my passport.

“I just like to travel,” I’d say, unable to make eye contact.

“Holy cow kid, that’s a lot of traveling in just one year,” he’d chuckle.

“Yea...I really like to travel,” my voice nearly cracking.

“You went to Syria? What were you doing in Syria?” He’d ask, with a note of suspicion.

“I was just visiting a friend,” I say, as matter of fact as possible. It was true... well, kind of. I did meet a friend, Atif, he was just a friend I never knew before. There was no way I could tell him about how I practiced and studied Islam at a Mosque.

“O yeah, who’s that?” he asks.

“Atif...from Canada,” I reply, as if he being Canadian makes him less of a threat.

“Alright. And then you went to Israel? They let you in after going to Syria?”

“Yea, I was nervous at first but the border control officers turned out to be quite young. They were IDF (Israeli Defense Force) conscripts. They loved the fact that I was traveling at just 16. I guess they just wished they could be doing the same instead of serving in the army.”

The officer swipes through 10 more pages of my passport, and stares back at me, his eyebrows elevating to an incredulous position.

“Looks like you went to every damn country in Europe. How did you manage to afford all that?”

“Well, to be honest, I didn’t really. I slept on park benches, behind bushes, in alleys, and in airport, bus, and train stations,” I reply, my voice becoming clearer and stronger now.

“How did you manage to eat then?”

“Umm, at first I went hungry. The longest I went without food was about 5 days. But it taught me things.”

“I bet it taught you things. Taught you never to do that again.”

“Well, I learned what it was like to be hungry, really hungry. I learned the value of food and I learned how to find it.”

“So you stole?”

“At first I stole. But every time I stole, the karma came back to me. One time these two birds made diarrhea directly on my head from above as I ate my stolen food. Another time I had some of my things stolen from me. So I decided to stop. As soon as I did, I came across bakers and restaurant owners willing to help, and random strangers offering me a place at their family’s dinner table. Believe it or not, this didn’t just happen in Europe, but it happened even more in Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Jordan.”

“Weren’t you scared, kid?”

“Yea, I was scared alright. I was so scared; a few times I literally shit myself. In France the police tried to put me in a group-home. When I arrived I was greeted with about 100 Tunisian, Libyan and Moroccan fists. I got out of there quick. But as I was jumping the fence, I felt a warm steady stream flow down my thigh and fully coated the insides of my jeans. Not a good day.”

“Not a good day I’ll say, Hahaha” he bellows out.

I imagine smiling back, happy for some comic relief.

Shit I need a cigarette.

“So, now that you’re home, what are you going to do?”

I straighten my back and shoulders. “I’m going to make the most of everything. I’m going to be grateful for all that my parents have given me. I’m going to tell them how sorry I am for everything. And I’m going to take advantage of my privileged position in the world.

“Would you do it again?”

“Yes.” I reply, my voice steady. “I would do it again, but next time I’m definitely going to save some money, come up with some kind of travel sustaining plan, and tell my parents before I leave.”

“Next...”

“Next...”

“Next!”

I keep staring into the distance, my mind continuing to come up with answers to every question the immigration officer might throw at me.

“Next!”

The roar of the officer jolts me from my daydream and I quickly grab my bag and scurry up to the counter.

“Passport please.”

Two fingers fumble into my pocket and pull out my once machine washed, twice shit coated, and thrice stepped on nearly unidentifiable passport. It’s been through so much that the USA emblem has completely worn off the front.

The officer grabs the passport and flips open the front page. His late-night infomercial-watching face contorts. His nostrils flare and his brow furrows, into a look of utter disgust.

“You’ve been away for about a year,” he states.

“Yes, I’ve been backpacking,” I reply, my eyes squinting, readying for the inquisition.

“Alright, well, welcome back,” he says with a grunt and a frown as he stamps the only

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empty passport page with practiced precision.

An excerpt from “[Chasing Life](#)” by Leif Harum. Coming Spring, 2018!