

BACKPACKING ADVENTURES: EUROPE I

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NOAH LIEBERMAN

Backpacking Adventures: Europe

Part I

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Noah Lieberman

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For those who have travel on their bucket list

CONTENTS

Part I

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Pre-Departure

Chapter 3: London

Chapter 4: Dublin

Chapter 5: Amsterdam

Chapter 6: Paris

Chapter 7: Venice

Part II

Chapter 8: Florence

Chapter 9: Rome

Chapter 10: Ios

Chapter 11: Santorini

Chapter 12: Barcelona

Chapter 13: Conclusion

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About the Author

Hi, I'm Noah, the author. This is my third book, and my first about adventure. I'm passionate about sports, traveling, and studying the universe, but nothing gets me going like a good hypothetical. I play floor hockey in the winter, and baseball in the summer. I also graduated from business school in 2022.

In reality, I'm just a dude who's crazy enough to envision a new world. One where you NEVER have to pay for another book. And if the writing thing doesn't work out, I'll get a real job. But with your help, we can build this dream together. All you need to do is keep reading. You can also check me out here:

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1. Introduction



Welcome to *Backpacking Adventures: Europe*. I'll admit, in my head, this seems like a weird pivot for my third book. Most authors generally stick to one subject or try to stretch out one expertise to 10 different books. Why profit from one text when you could do so from 10, right? Especially when you're using acquired knowledge from your field. But am I doing that? No way, José. I'm covering genres like a lawnmower cuts grass. One line at a time until the entire area is mowed.

So, what is *this* book about? It's a travelogue comprised of tales that I feel ANYONE can enjoy. Some have laughs, others have lessons, and a few provide just the right amount of drama to keep you on the edge of your seat. It's a compilation

of my greatest stories from traveling Europe.

Each chapter will focus on a different destination and the adventures I experienced there. It will detail excursions, accommodations, and those wacky one-in-a-million stories that every traveler inevitably picks up. In fact, the structure is revolved around stories. This is to give you a better understanding of my point of view. I want you to picture yourself in the same situations I encountered. Use that big lump of grey mush in your head to imagine yourself in my shoes.

Furthermore, all the stories in this book are personal. The experiences I discuss can either help you learn something, or make you laugh in my face. Either

works. You'll read about some of my smartest AND dumbest moments.

However, I wasn't traveling alone for any of these trips. I had some help along the way. And by "some help," I mean lots of help. Although, I *did* navigate the entire Barcelona airport by myself at age 17. Considering how oblivious I once was to the world, it's one of my finest accomplishments.

I also recognize that I haven't traveled everywhere around the planet. As of this publication, I've been fortunate to explore four different continents. North America, Europe, Oceania, and Asia. It's a good start, but there's plenty more to see... and much more to write.

I think travel is an extremely important part of our existence. Every

culture has a different way of life, oozing with history and knowledge. I wholeheartedly believe that if you can understand other cultures and use their wisdom to better yourself, it will enhance your life. If you don't understand the world, you'll always be trapped in a singular way of thought. A little bit of diversity never hurt anyone. And it opens our minds to expansive views.

They say in business that a diverse boardroom is a great boardroom. I 100% agree with this statement. Incorporating ideologies from different cultures will offer ideas that would have never presented themselves otherwise.

And while diversity is helpful, learning about different cultures for yourself is necessary. There's no substitute for an

enhanced understanding of the world. And traveling is one of the best ways to acquire this profound wisdom. We should always look to extend our horizons and expose ourselves to more lifestyles. Too often, we're trapped inside our views when the answer could be outside the proverbial cave. You know what I say? Screw the cave. Let's go exploring instead.

I hope these stories inspire you to start traveling or continue further. When you do, feel free to send me a message to tell me about it (hint: handwritten letters are my favorite). I love hearing people's travel stories because it makes me want to experience that new corner of the world. There are always new places to see and new people to learn from. The more you

travel, the more you realize how true that last statement is.

Everyone has that one unique travel story that consistently blows people's minds. It might come from almost missing a flight, a chance encounter with a stranger, or an unexpected adventure. But what we have in common is our ability to thrive through the stories we tell. And what is travel, if not the vast accumulation of excellent tales? It may be important to *tell* these stories, but it's even more important to *hear* them. So, without further ado... let's get into some of mine.

2. Pre-Departure



Before we get to specific destinations, we'll start with the pre-departure phase. This is because a well-thought-out plan (or lack thereof) can significantly impact the trip. However, it's not always necessary to have a detailed plan. They say that preparation is the key to success. While that's true, it can vary when it comes to travel. You want a general idea of what to do and where to go, but having flexibility can be crucial.

You may find places you want to stay longer. Or, on the flip side, places you can't wait to leave. Most of the locations we'll discuss in *this* book are major tourist destinations, which means they're relatively safe in terms of enjoyment. For example, you may not enjoy everything in Paris. But overall, you'll probably enjoy the city. Still,

it's a good idea to plan your trip with some flexibility if you're going for an extended period of time.

Structure

This book will be split into two different sections. The first, which spans from London to the end of Rome, will be focused on a trip that I completed in the summer of 2019. The stories feature myself and my brother Josh when we backpacked around Europe. We were lucky enough to travel before the COVID-19 pandemic spread throughout the world. There are loads of people who had similar types of trips planned for 2020 but couldn't go due to the pandemic. As we've moved on from the pandemic, hopefully

those people traveled as they were once supposed to.

The second part of the book will be about a trip I completed after high school in the summer of 2017. This was a graduation trip that I completed with eight of my friends I attended high school with. It starts from Ios and will conclude at the end of Barcelona.

Planning

This brings us to the next part of the chapter, planning. Sometimes the most difficult part of planning a trip is deciding which places to visit. This can be especially true if you're traveling with others, as you all have to agree on the locations. When my brother and I backpacked

Europe, most of the planning was dedicated to selecting where to go.

This is why you must FIRST decide what kind of trip you're looking for. If you want to see major cities and iconic landmarks, Europe is perfect. You can travel from city to city inexpensively and see spectacular sites along the way. Some of the most incredible attractions in the world are located in Europe, and on a global scale, they aren't too far apart.

Once I have decided on an area of the world, I split my planning into two categories: external and internal.

The external plan details where you want to travel and for how long. For example, a list showing your travel schedule could look like this:

Days 1-4 in London

Days 5-7 in Dublin

Days 8-10 in Edinburgh

This type of schedule is a good idea if you only have a month or so. In Europe especially, there are so many great places to see! It makes sense to create a rigid external plan. This doesn't mean you need to book every flight and accommodation in advance, but creating a general itinerary like the one listed above will keep you on track. As the trip progresses, you can adjust the itinerary when needed.

I also like to put my "top hits" (the places I want to see most) first on the external plan. When I backpacked around Europe, I knew I wanted to travel to London, Rome, and Barcelona. These were

almost non-negotiable locations for me. I recommend putting your non-negotiable stops on your external plan FIRST and then figuring out how they fit. This is perfect in Europe because travel is easily accessible. You'll always find a way to go where you want. Create your external plan, and make sure your top locations fit all nice and snugly.

This type of external plan is less important if you have time. When you're traveling for three months or more, you'll have opportunities to improvise. If you're solo traveling, you can always abruptly decide where to go next. You can even choose your next destination on the fly.

When I talk about internal planning, I'm referring to everything you're doing in one place. This includes the day-to-day

planning, excursions, and activities. For example, if you're traveling to Rome, the internal plan would dictate which day you visit the Colosseum.

The internal plan shouldn't be set in stone. Instead, it should serve as a general guideline for approaching each day. The nice thing about making this plan is that it forces you to research each place before you arrive. When you're traveling, it's easy to miss something because you never thought to research it beforehand. While you'll never see everything, this will at least make you aware of what's possible during your stay. It will also help you plan financially, as most excursions have an associated price you can find online. It's never a bad idea to approximate the cost of activities beforehand.

I should also mention that I've always been more of a "planner" than the average backpacker, especially when deciding locations. My philosophy is that it's smart to plan major decisions... while leaving room to change the schedule here and there. Therefore, I try to plan my destinations in advance.

Packing

I'll never understand how some people pack for a trip. It seems like there are things people haven't used in years, but when it comes to vacation, they're like, "Oh, I can't leave without my ____." It almost always makes sense to pack light rather than heavy. I understand that it seems like there are things you need to take. But the essentials basically boil

down to clothes, money, and identification. Obviously, you'll take more than that, but it's important to remember what the term "essential" means. On one of the trips in this book, I made the crucial mistake of packing too heavy.

My biggest error was assuming that I would wear socks every day. This was for a 28-day trip that included Israel, Greece, and Spain, all in the SUMMER. I packed 15 pairs of socks! Since it was always above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, I wore sandals constantly. By the end of the first week, I realized that socks were taking up too much space in my limited storage. Long story short, a homeless man in Israel now owns 10 more pairs of socks than before.

The thing I forgot to factor in when packing was the following: you always

want to leave space for things you buy. I wanted items for myself, plus gifts for loved ones back home, which meant I needed more space than I initially thought. I filled my backpack to the brim for that trip, a mistake I won't make again. The only exception is if I plan to discard items as I progress.

However, it's important to remember that every traveler has different priorities when packing. My mom, for example, will always take a suitcase with her wherever she goes. Regardless of the length of the trip, she will use a suitcase, be it a short weekend getaway or a long flight overseas. I, on the other hand, rarely take one.

To me, it makes more sense to prioritize flexibility over space. It's not like one method is inherently better, but you

should recognize what type of packing is needed. Do you need more space? Or would you rather be able to grab your luggage and go in a flash? Give me a backpack and I'll be fine. And if you're on a road trip, you can always throw everything in the trunk! Now *that* is my personal favorite.

The Agents

This brings us to an important question among travelers: to use, or not to use, a travel agent (imagine that in the *Romeo and Juliet*, "To be or not to be" voice).

The internet has made travel information much more accessible for the average consumer. You can research flights, accommodations, excursions, and other relevant details yourself. Nothing is stopping you from finding the information.

But this means that it's easy to fall into the trap of planning everything yourself. I've booked trips both through agencies and independently, and it's always much more organized through the agency. The reality is that you're not a professional traveler. Even if you can use the internet for research, you don't have the experience to know what REALLY works.

Agents do this for a living. It's their full-time job to know exactly where to go and what to see. They'll make sure you don't miss anything important, stay at a lousy accommodation, or mess up the transportation. The internet is great for finding information, but sometimes the source isn't always reliable. An agent will know what works from experience. You don't want to miss out on a great

adventure because you planned everything yourself.

It also depends on your stage of life. An older traveler will want most of their vacation planned for them. The last thing an 80-year-old with arthritis needs is to get stranded because they skipped using a travel agent. But then again, how many 80-year-olds are going to read this book? They're probably not the target audience. My grandparents will probably be the only ones, to be honest. And to them, I say a special hello.

However, there are also advantages to using a travel agent if you're younger. If you prioritize simplicity, then it makes perfect sense. Especially since there isn't an additional cost to use an agent most of the time. There might be some version of

a "consultation fee," but it's minimal. So, if you're traveling on a budget, it's not going to hurt your wallet. If you're planning a trip and don't want to worry about every detail, use one.

Even if it's a smaller trip, agents can still help. You can call your agent and say, "Book me a trip to New York from June 24th to 30th with a budget of ____" and the agency will get it done. No hang-ups, issues, or worries. One conversation and it's all taken care of. That's a great convenience to have in your back pocket.

Anyway, these are some tips I've learned about the pre-departure stage of the travel experience. I figured that before we get into the fun stuff, it might be good to give practical advice to anyone who might want it. Especially because

inexperienced travelers can become anxious about planning something incorrectly. So, here are some of my tips and tricks. Now, we'll get into the fun stuff.

3. London



Would you believe me if I told you I was almost killed twice on my first day in London? Unfortunately, it's true. Both times I didn't look both ways before crossing the street; in a country where they drive on the other side of the road.

The first incident happened while I was heading across a roundabout. Josh and I were walking in the area surrounding our hostel. As we approached the beginning of a new street, we looked to our left and saw a manor in the distance. It was difficult to see the entire structure as an entranceway was blocking the castle, but as determined tourists, we decided to explore.

We walked through a long driveway that preceded the castle-like building. As

we made our way through the outer entrance, we finally saw the manor in all its glory.

It was white a 4-story building, lined with iron clad windows and a brown roof. The assembly was wide and filled three sides of our directions. In the middle of the driving area, right in front of the manor, was a roundabout.

The circle was designed with green shrubs as the base. Lining the scenery were yellow and white flowers planted atop the greenery. And in the middle, a six-foot egg stood tall as the centerpiece. The egg was constructed with thin wiring and displayed butterflies on its surface. Laced around the egg was an orange bow, tied with precision to complement the art.

As I saw the magnificent display, I went to admire the art. Before crossing, I looked the wrong way, saw there were no cars, and started to cross. Suddenly, I felt my brother's arm smack me in the chest as a car whizzed by from the other side.

It felt like a scene from the movie, *The Blind Side* starring Quinton Aaron and Sandra Bullock. In the film, there is a scene where Michael Oher (Aaron's character) is in a car crash with his brother CJ. Michael is driving, with CJ in the passenger seat. As the car crashes, Michael throws his arm in front of his brother to protect him. I felt like CJ when my brother stuck out *his* arm to save me from being flattened on the streets of Elephant and Castle.

The second time I almost died that day was a similar experience. However,

instead of a roundabout, it was a regular street. We were about to cross the road, and I looked the wrong way for traffic before crossing. If Josh didn't hold me back, I would have been splattered one day into my European trip.

Thankfully, these were the only two instances where I was almost turned into European roadkill. After the second time, I caught on quickly, and always looked both ways before going crossing the street. As you can tell from this book being published, I made it back alive and well. I should call my brother and thank him for not letting me die multiple times.

Attitude

Our first destination is one of the most historic cities in the world: London,

England. I chose London as the first chapter because it was the first place we visited. As we move from chapter to chapter, you'll notice that the sections progress chronologically based on the order of our travel locations.

We arrived in London around 8:00 AM local time. Since London is six hours ahead of Central Time (CT) in North America, it felt like the middle of the night. But if I can give you one piece of advice about overseas travel: DO WHATEVER YOU CAN to stay awake until your regular bedtime.

If you arrive in London at 8:00 AM, as we did, try to stay awake until 10 or 11:00 PM, and then you can go to bed. You'll sleep for about eight hours, and when you wake up the next day, you'll be adjusted to the local time. If you fall asleep at strange

times, it'll prolong the process of adjusting to the new time zone. So, on our first day in London, we tried to walk around as much as possible. We figured it's easier to stay awake if we're walking. We would have fallen asleep if we relaxed in the hostel.

We didn't plan too much for our first day. As we walked around the city, we strolled through different parks, went to the city centre, and took in the vibes of the UK. Then, we saw a structure that looked like a castle and decided to investigate. You don't see many castles back in Canada. As we approached, we saw a sign for free tours of an area called "Somerset House."

After entering, we were greeted by an administrator who placed us on the next

tour. This was the first time we met our tour guide. He was an elderly citizen filled with energy and passion. His role was to guide unsuspecting visitors through the halls, and he served as a volunteer. He truly loved Somerset House.

We walked throughout the castle, seeing every nook and cranny. There were rooms designed for dinners, thrones, art, etc. The house clearly held historical significance. At the end of the tour, the guide led us to a room deep within the bowels of the castle, hidden below everything else. Judging by our guide's excitement, this room must have been guarding an ancient relic. He made it seem like we were the lucky few allowed to see the holy grail of England...

It turned out to be a boat. I'm sure the boat has historical importance, but it was just a medium-sized boat. He got our hopes up, and then let us down in dramatic fashion. Not worth the hype.

Even as the tour's climax was underwhelming, I still remember enjoying the experience. And the reason was the tour guide. He was fun, youthful, and full of life. And yet, he was just a simple man who loved what he was doing. Others were leaving the tour as it progressed through the castle, but there was no way we could leave him. I think the best way I can describe him is to imagine David Attenborough with the energy and enthusiasm of Eddie Murphy.

The point of this story is that a tour guide, or the facilitator of any program,

can make a big difference. It didn't really matter to us that the tour was boring because he sold everything exceptionally well. I'm sure he knew that no one cared about the contents of Somerset House. But he still managed to make everything engaging, at least for the duration of the tour.

Looking back on it, I don't remember the specific details of any items we saw, except for that boat. And the only real reason I remember the boat is that it was underwhelming. But I remember HIM... and enjoying the experience because HE did a great job. Josh and I can still tell you his name today.

This reminds me of when I was a counselor at a summer day camp as a teenager. We would always run activities for the kids during the day. Sometimes

they were inherently great activities, but other times they were just there to fill space. The counselor's job (in addition to keeping the kids safe) is to approach the programs with excitement to ensure that each child has fun. Some days I would open the binder, see the schedule for the day, and see the laziest activities. But if you, as the facilitator, approach the program with enthusiasm, others will too.

In fact, we used to have weekly competitions with the kids, and the groups that ALMOST ALWAYS WON had the counselors who were most excited about the competition. This wasn't because the counselors were competing, but because the kids saw their leader's excitement. They decided it was cool to be on *that* team. The same thing happened with the

tour guide that day, which showed me that this isn't just a phenomenon amongst children, but an observation that can be made with all people.

Greenwich Dogs

I've always been a big fan of boat tours. For some reason, I think time passes faster whenever you're on a boat. When we were in London, we did a boat tour on the River Thames that took us to Greenwich. If you've heard of Greenwich, it's likely because the town is the worldwide center of time. It's located on the earth's 0-degree line of longitude, and the term GMT stands for Greenwich Mean Time. We only had about 30 minutes to stop and check out the town. Meanwhile, the boats picked up more people to return to

London. Greenwich was used as a stop gap in the middle of the boat tour.

We absolutely made the most of those 30 minutes. We went into Greenwich Market, which housed many street vendors in a small rectangular area. Some vendors sold food, others had tourist-focused merchandise, and a few sold fun little trinkets. Overall, the atmosphere was fun, hip, and vibrant. It's possible Greenwich *seemed* like a paradise because we were only there for 30 minutes, but that's the impression it gave.

The Greenwich stop occurred over lunch, and we hadn't eaten yet. So, we decided to buy hot dogs from a street vendor. I generally like hot dogs, but we bought them because they were listed on the menu as "Greenwich Dogs." Maybe

that's just good marketing, but it convinced us to purchase them.

After we purchased the sausage delights, the woman at the market took two hot dogs and put them in two buns. As we reached to take them from her, she grabbed an unlabeled squeeze bottle containing mystery sauce. She drizzled the sauce all over the hot dogs and then put the bottle down.

Once again, as we were getting ready to receive our food, she picked up ANOTHER sauce and drizzled *that* all over them. Standing there confused, we watched as she opened FIVE different types of sauce, none of which we knew, and drizzled them one by one all over our hot dogs.

Whenever you're given mystery food, it's always a question if you'll enjoy it. Often you're hoping that it agrees with you, but it's no guarantee. This time, we were lucky.

I am not exaggerating when I say that might be the best hot dog I've ever had. It was absolutely delicious! The sauces combined perfectly with the meat to give immense flavor. The bun complemented the arrangement of textures beautifully. I couldn't have asked for a better hot dog.

In fact, when we got home from our trip, we tried to recreate the Greenwich Dog by using different combinations of sauces... But we were never able to get it right. We tried different combinations over and over but could never replicate it.

The Greenwich Dog was meant to stay in Greenwich.

However, maybe there's beauty in the inability to recreate the best hot dog. I mean, obviously you want the hot dog. But it's nice knowing that in the perfect moment, in the perfect place, I had the perfect experience. And since I don't know how to recreate it, the moment will never lose its glory. Both Greenwich and the hot dog will stay perfect, and nothing will change that. It will live on as a flawless memory.

Museums

We visited three museums in London: The British Museum, the Museum of Natural History (not the one from *Night at the Museum*), and the Science Museum.

Here is my honest take on all three of these museums:

The British Museum is interesting, but not the most exciting. Just like anything else, it has its pros and cons. Upon entering, you'll see some stunning architecture in the main foyer. The ceiling's design, coupled with its dome-like structure in the center, is remarkable. It's very pleasing on the eyes.

The museum also holds one of the most significant archeological discoveries in modern history, the Rosetta Stone. The stone serves as the first known translator in human history. It's inscribed with multiple languages, serving as a cultural bridge for those who came before us. The artifact is in a room to your left after walking into the foyer. As it is the most

renowned artifact in the museum, you won't miss it. Both the architecture and the stone are very impressive.

However, the rest of the museum has a weird tone. If you're a history buff, it's fantastic, but walking through felt unnatural. It's because many of the exhibits display items that the British stole from other cultures. It serves as testament to Britain's ability to conquer other nations.

That may be part of their history, but it still feels wrong to proudly celebrate their prizes from colonization. To me at least, it felt like walking through someone else's trophy case. Plus, it's quite repetitive. When we left the museum, our conversation revolved around seeing dozens of similar pots and plates. There was

nothing that really held our attention for very long (other than the Rosetta Stone).

Considering that the British Museum is known as one of the best in the world, we were surprised with our dissatisfaction towards it. Perhaps you'll enjoy it more than we did, but I thought it was overrated.

On the other hand, the Natural History Museum was spectacular. As soon as you walk in, you're welcomed with a massive escalator leading you through a red, rocky version of the earth. As you ascend, you see the world decorated with constellations on both your left and right. The entrance is visually enthralling.

The museum also carries some of the rarest gemstones in the world, including the Centenary diamond. The gem is the

largest modern top-color flawless diamond in the world. It's 274 carats! Also, the massive scale model replicas of dinosaur skeletons will amaze you. As we strolled through it, we were constantly impressed by the exhibits. It's a fantastic museum.

Lastly, the Science Museum is also worth visiting. I'm biased because I love learning about space, but their exhibit on the history of space travel, featuring detailed holograms of each planet in our solar system, was top-notch. The science was modern, relevant, and engaging.

As a result, I think the average person would find the science museum more fascinating than the British Museum. This might have been the problem with the British Museum, as it seemed like

everything was outdated relative to what we care about today. If the choice is between old pots or revolutionary space capsules... I'm choosing space.

Remember, an experience like a museum is clouded in personal preference. Just because *I* liked something, doesn't mean you will too (and vice versa). I know others who loved the British Museum and were shocked when I told them how I felt. So, keep an open mind when visiting.

As the author of this book, I'll always give you my honest, unadulterated thoughts on the subjects we discuss. Although, this fragment is an outlier in comparison to the rest of the book. Almost every section in this book is a story, not an honest take on if an experience is worth it.

I gave you my museum thoughts to build some trust between us. Some writers would feel obligated to compliment everything they saw, even if it wasn't worth complementing. You'll learn pretty quickly that I'm going to be real with you. If you're spending your free time reading my book, I have to give you the good stuff. And that... is the Noah guarantee.

ELIZABETH!

On our second day in London, Josh and I planned on visiting Buckingham palace, the home of the royal family. Josh was in charge of the internal planning, and he dedicated the morning of day two for the palace.

We were told before we left that we should watch the changing of the guards, a

ceremony that periodically takes place outside the palace. So, he planned enough time for us to hang around the grounds, take some pictures, and eventually watch the guard changing ceremony.

We had taken transportation to the area of London where Buckingham palace lies. Our idea was to tackle London by area and complete each notable activity within the given sector. By completing different areas each day, we could see the whole city.

When we arrived near the palace, we still had some walking in front of us. So, we took the quickest path to the palace. However, as we were walking on the street, we hit a roadblock. The entire street was closed off and there was no way we could enter. There wasn't any sign of what was

happening or why the street wasn't available, so we tried to find another route.

After walking around to a different road, we were once again on the path to the palace. But after continuing toward the attraction, we noticed another roadblock.

This time, there was a worker guarding the path. We approached the man beside the street and asked him about the roadblocks. He didn't tell us why the streets were guarded, but he did show us the correct route to the palace that would allow entry. We thanked him for the advice and continued forward.

Now on the correct path, we finally made our way to Buckingham Palace. When we entered the gates, we noticed droves of people on the courtyard. We

expected to see many tourists outside the palace, but the obscure part was the direction they were facing. Instead of looking at the castle, everyone was staring the other way, with their backs facing the building.

We shuffled through the crowd, curious to see what everyone was focused on. When we made it to the front, we were surprised at what we saw. A giant track that cut right through the courtyard. No one was on the track, but there were barricades preventing the onlookers from entering.

I turned to a citizen beside me and asked her what was happening. She looked at me like I was crazy, and assumed I was joking. So, I told her I really didn't know, and asked her to explain why there was a track in the middle of the courtyard.

She responded in a thick British accent, “Honey, it’s the London Marathon!”

Suddenly, we look to our right, and see a giant sign that says, “Welcome to the 2019 London Marathon!” We then realized that the race had already started, and the runners would soon pass us in the courtyard. So, we stayed to watch.

About 10 minutes later, a hoard of runners came through the track. As they approached, the crowd at the castle started cheering rigorously, rooting on their famed participants. Some fans were even holding out water, hoping that the runners would take their offer.

After the runners passed, the crowd started to wind down. Everyone was there to watch the runners go by, and afterward, they dispersed. As we were about to go

back to the castle, the same lady beside me stopped us. She exclaimed, "You can't leave yet, you haven't seen all the athletes." Confused, we didn't question her and stayed at the barricade to watch.

A few minutes passed by, and suddenly we started to hear a sound from down the track. We peered our heads over the barrier and notice more participants in the distance. However, they weren't the regular runners. Instead, it was the wheelchair participants rolling through. At wicked speeds, each of the athletes rolled past us and played to the crowd that had quickly depleted.

It didn't occur to me until after, but I totally underappreciated the physical strength it takes to compete in the wheelchair competition. Their upper bodies

need to be in peak physical form to do a whole marathon. My arms would've given out less than five minutes into the race if that were me.

After they passed, Josh and I finally went back to the castle on the other side. We stayed at the gate and watched the changing of the guards, engaged in conversation, and even waved to the queen (the ruling monarch at the time, Queen Elizabeth II, wasn't actually there, but it posed as a funny picture).

As we were getting ready to leave, one of the strangest things happened. We started hearing shouting from the distance, so we turned around. The entire crowd looked in the same direction, too.

Behind us, a man in his twenties started screaming at the top of his lungs,

“ELIZABETH! ELIZABETH! ELIZABETH!” Standing around him in shock, we started laughing quietly to ourselves. Quickly, the rest of the crowd started chuckling. After he continued screaming for the monarch a few times, he stopped and let everyone else enjoy their day.

The yelling man had an attitude that showed he was joking. He was trying to be funny by screaming the queen’s name for all to hear. He was clearly a tourist, trying to have fun and do something memorable.

I deeply appreciate when people do this. The crowd loved it, he was having fun, and no harm was caused. That’s the sign of a perfect joke in my book. I applaud him from standing out from the crowd, and doing something that he probably still talks about till this day. “Dude, remember

that time I screamed for Queen Elizabeth?”

Arcade Dinners

Apart from museums and classic touristy experiences, some of the best travel times come from random moments. For example, Josh and I were looking for something to do on a budget one night in London. We walked to the London Eye (a Ferris wheel in the city center) and planned to ride. Unfortunately, that plan changed when we saw the price. I don't remember the exact price, but I remember my reaction to it. In reality, it's just a Ferris wheel. Our only draw to the eye was the view of London from the top.

Instead, we decided to stand outside the attraction and find dinner. Across

from the London Eye, we found a random arcade that is definitely NOT one of the main attractions to visit in London. The arcade itself is fine. But how often are you across from an iconic landmark and skip it for an arcade?

We went inside and tried to find dinner there. Luckily, the arcade operated a restaurant, AND the restaurant was American-themed. It was perfect because, in the first couple of days of our trip, we were still craving the taste of North American food. In fact, you could tell that they were trying to be extremely American. Their choice of menu options and vocabulary said it all. The featured item was the "Texas BBQ Platter" which included ribs, wings, and fries. Obviously, I ended up getting the Texas BBQ Platter. How could I

turn down a combo of ribs, wings, and fries for \$15?

We liked the arcade dinner so much that we returned two nights later. Sometimes random stops produce the best experiences, and traveling opens those doors. Don't shy away from the unexpected because it might surprise you.

You're a Wizard, Harry!

Another random moment came when we visited King's Cross Station. This station has become a tourist attraction because, in the first Harry Potter book/movie, Harry famously travels through Platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$ to travel to Hogwarts. As a testament to the story, they've set up the scene by positioning a shopping cart halfway through the famous wall.

Tourists can line up to take pictures as if they're pushing the cart through. That's exactly what Josh and I did.

We reached the photography area and noticed a line that started 100 people back. So, we took our place and waited as we observed others getting their picture. We then scouted the process.

Once it's your turn, you approach the cart, and they give you a Gryffindor scarf to wear. Right when the photographer is ready, they flip up the scarf off camera as the picture is captured. This way, it looks like you're traveling through the wall.

They have a strict no-picture rule because they employ a photographer. They want to sell the picture *they* capture instead of letting you take your own. Once the photographer snaps your picture, you

can go to the shop and purchase it afterward.

Obviously, there was no way that Josh and I were paying for a picture. Instead, as I went up to the cart, I stalled for a few seconds by tying my shoe. Meanwhile, Josh got in position behind the photographer. Right when my brother was ready behind him, I got up and went to the cart. I looked at Josh's phone as he quickly pulled it up when the photographer was ready. I smiled, Josh took the photo, and we got what we came for. Did the photographer then yell at Josh? He might have... but it was totally worth it.

The Imperial March

When you visit different places, you soon realize that the people you interact

with, whether it's for a long time or just a moment, make a huge difference. On our very first night in London, the first of our trip, we were walking back to our hostel at night. We used landmarks multiple times on our travels for navigation. In London, we found a skyscraper with a red light flashing at the top, three minutes from our hostel. This guided our way back since we had no idea where we were going. Once we hit that building, it was two blocks straight to our hostel. Using milestones like this can be crucial when walking through foreign areas.

As we walked past the skyscraper, we encountered a strange man walking toward us. He was disheveled, with a scraggly beard, holding a cigarette. As he walked forward, he slowed down, stopped

us, and started to sing. He could have picked any tune, but what was he singing? "The Imperial March" from *Star Wars*. Perhaps the most intimidating song in movie history. Utterly confused, we tried to continue walking past him. When his singing didn't leave our earshot, we turned around and realized he was following us, singing louder and louder.

Eventually, we walked as fast as we could away from the man. Thankfully we heard his singing growing softer and softer behind us in the distance. He didn't say a single word, and we never learned his name. But he will always be known as the man who sang "The Imperial March" in our faces and chased us down the street. AND... this happened on our first night in London. Welcome to Europe, indeed.

4. Dublin



When you drive through Ireland, you notice how green the grass is. When we got off the plane and left the airport, we needed to take a bus from the airport to the area we were staying. The bus ride was about an hour and took us through some of the countryside to Dublin. I'll always remember peering out the windows on that bus ride and seeing a new shade of green, unrecognizable from the grass back home.

It's almost as if the grass brings the iconic Irish character to its people. The green of Ireland brings life to the country and its citizens. It has one of the most energetic cultures I have ever experienced. Admittedly, there may not be as much to do in Dublin compared to other major European cities. But what it lacks in

attractions, it makes up for in energy. The citizens power their country's uniqueness more than any other place I visited.

As soon as you walk into an Irish pub, you learn what the people of Ireland are like. It's a carefree culture that prioritizes enjoying life, not stressing about things they can't control. It's the kind of culture that would rather enjoy a pint with friends than worry about tomorrow's problems. We could all learn a lot by adopting some Irish culture in North America. From my experience, everything in North America is about tomorrow. Our tendency to always look at what's next impairs our ability to enjoy the present.

I agree that we need to think about the future, and I do it subconsciously every day. But being in Ireland taught me

the importance of enjoying the moments as they pass. We're lucky if we get 85 years on this planet, so let's live and laugh with those we cherish while we still can.

Giant Jenga

Josh and I stayed in a hostel in Dublin known as Generator. Little did we know it was part of a network of European hostels. We later discovered this as we planned our travels to Rome and Barcelona. Here we found other Generators belonging to the same company.

One night, the hostel hosts a party in its main lobby and activity area. Drinks are flowing, people are dancing, and songs are being sung. Josh and I join in on the dance floor, and that's when we notice a giant set of Jenga lying neglected in the

corner. Who would want to play board games when the party is in full swing just a few feet away?

Being more observers than drinkers, Josh and I set up the giant Jenga game. And when I say "giant," I mean it - the blocks are nearly five feet tall! It takes us a while to stack the blocks. As we do, we start to attract a crowd of onlookers. The other guests were from all walks of life - an elderly Chinese couple, a middle-aged German man, college students from Seattle, and more.

The game is impossible to ignore, as the towering Jenga blocks sway precariously with each move. The crowd grows larger as people can't resist the thrill of seeing the blocks stay upright. Soon, half the people there are cheering for Josh,

while the other half root for me. As the game progresses, every time Josh or I remove a block without the structure collapsing, there is a collective sigh of relief from the spectators.

The game's climax is a moment of pure excitement - Josh is facing certain defeat. Looking at the structure, there is no way he can remove another block.

He seeks advice from his new coaches and friends before identifying a target. Little by little, Josh slides the block ever so slightly as he wiggles the wood. It starts to seem possible. As he approaches the crucial point, the crowd is watching in disbelief. As the block is almost out, he pulls swiftly, risking it all on one maneuver... but lo and behold, the tower stands tall. It's an incredible feat. Alas, on my next

turn, with virtually no options left, I try to remove a block that has no business being removed, and the whole thing comes crashing down.

The best part about that story is its simplicity. It was just a game of Jenga. And yet, it brought people together who might never have talked or interacted otherwise. For that brief moment, we weren't at a crowded party. We were friends, teammates, and competitors. And, most importantly, we all had fun as a group. Although, I do wish I found a way to beat Josh. I have no idea how we pulled that last block.

The Gool

Once, I escaped from an Irish prison. OK, I'll admit, that's a pretty misleading

way to start this story, but I'm hoping it catches your attention. Good one-liners are always a fun way to reel someone in. It's like a trailer for a movie. You get to see part of the apex without learning the details. It draws in the viewer and makes them want to watch the movie or listen to the whole story. This tactic works because it tugs on our curiosity strings just enough to say, "Tell me more." If you're looking for a tip to improve your storytelling skills, try teasing the audience with a little bit of the ending before you start.

This is why television shows and movies sometimes show glimpses of the end result. Then, they cut to the past to tell the story. *Better Call Saul*, a spinoff of *Breaking Bad*, did this for six seasons. The opening scene of each season would show

a fragment of how the story ends in the future. As you continued watching the show, each opening season scene would reveal more about the future. Forgive me for using the same tactic, but at least you learned a great new way to tell a story.

While in Dublin, Josh and I decided to tour the Kilmainham Gaol, a former prison turned museum (similar to Alcatraz Island in the United States). However, we had never actually heard anyone say the name of the prison out loud, so we had no idea how to pronounce it. And if you're looking at the prison's name, I wouldn't classify it as easy to pronounce. We looked at the ticket for days and created our own pronunciation... "Kill-a-mane Gool."

This was partly because we didn't read it correctly, and partly because we

had no idea how to pronounce "Gaol." We told our parents and some other travelers how excited we were to visit "Kill-a-mane Gool" and see the former inmate cells.

We figured out the route behind the word "Kilmainham." It stems from the name of the area where the prison is located. Makes sense. But for the life of us, we couldn't figure out what "gool" was. We would joke that we were excited to go to the gool in Dublin. People must have looked at us like we were nuts. This is what happened when we went to the prison:

The day of the tour arrives, so we walk to the prison. They scan our tickets and sit us down in a waiting area, formerly a chapel room. Our guide walks into the chapel and gets ready to address us. The

very first thing she says is, "Hi everyone, welcome to Kill-mane-um jail." My brother and I look at each other, both briefly confused. Finally, it clicks in our heads. The word gaol, which we were pronouncing "gool," was just a different spelling of the word jail. Simultaneously, we loudly exclaim, "Ohhhhhhhh!" while completely interrupting her speech. Everyone, including the guide, glares at us like we are crazy. She then returns to the orientation.

We go through the tour, which includes visiting cells, seeing the main prison room, and stepping onto the courtyard where they used to conduct public executions. I recommend going to the prison if you're in Dublin, especially if you like true crime. Standing in the same spot

where prisoners were once executed is an eerie experience.

After the tour ends, we're told we can explore the courtyard, which has been turned into a green space. So, that's what we do. We walk through this massive, beautiful, luscious garden. It has everything you'd want in a garden, including flowers, hills, archways, and ponds. And that same shade of green I romanticized earlier.

As we finally reach the end of the garden, we're ready to leave the prison. However, because this *was* a prison, there aren't exits in the courtyard. Instead, we find an endless stretch of 10-foot wall peering over us. As we continue walking down the end of the courtyard, looking for an exit, we see more wall. We walk and

walk and walk, but there is seemingly no way out. At this point, we're lost in the giant courtyard, unsure how to return to the main area, and stuck in the Irish jail. We had been wandering for 30 minutes through mazes of gardens and ponds to get there, and getting back would be a challenge.

So, Josh and I look at each other, the barrier in front of us, and consider attempting what many prisoners contemplated while this prison was in operation: escape over the wall. As we traverse around the prison walls, looking for an area where the barricade might be easier to climb, we find one spot where the wall is thicker on top.

At this point, Josh climbs onto my shoulders, his legs wrapping around my

neck. His maximum reach appears to be about 10 feet (the same height as the structure). He places his hands on the wall, fingers bashfully gripping the stone. I watch in awe as he forcefully pulls himself up to sit on top. With a careful maneuver, he positions himself with one leg dangling on either side. One step closer to freedom.

While sitting up there, he reaches his arms back down. I look him in the eyes as the next step doesn't need to be verbally communicated. He is going to try to pull me up. On the first attempt, we fail. Our hands are too sweaty from spending the day outside in the heat. The second attempt also fails. We can't grasp each other tight enough.

After minutes of struggling and failed attempts, our grip connects. Through sheer determination and strength, my brother finally pulls me up. We are both sitting on top of the Irish prison wall.

The next challenge is getting down. It might seem easy to jump down from the wall and land on the sidewalk, but the perch is high. We don't want to risk breaking our legs while traveling.

Josh, braver than I, decides to take the plunge. He slowly positions himself to climb down the wall, moving both legs to the outer side. He keeps his hands on top, slides his feet down until he's vertical, and holds on by his fingertips. He points his eyes at me atop the wall, looking for final approval. With us both in agreement, I give him the nod to dismount (it reminded

me of Mufasa from The Lion King, in the scene where Scar lets him go from the cliff... which partially ruined my childhood).

With a dash of courage, he finally lets go and falls to the sidewalk. Thankfully, his landing is smooth. Once he is on the other side, I do the same thing, except for one crucial detail. As I'm hanging, I make him stand underneath and wrap my legs around his shoulders. In my head, it looks like we're getting ready for an old-fashioned chicken fight. And even if it may look cowardly, I know it's the safest bet. After I wrap around him, he puts me down safely, and we're both back on the ground.

That is how we escaped from an Irish prison. See, it all comes back around in the end. I wonder how many people in that

jail's history have successfully climbed over the walls? I'll never know for sure, but two Canadians were added to the list that day.

King in the North

My brother and I were big fans of Game of Thrones. In 2019, when we took this trip to Europe, the final season was airing. On several Mondays during our trip, we watched the new episodes that had premiered the previous night. The only exception was the season finale, which aired the day before we were set to come home. We decided to turn off our phones, wait until we returned, and watch the finale in Canada.

Since we loved the show, we looked into taking tours of some of the filming

locations. We already knew some of the show was filmed in Northern Ireland, which wasn't too far from Dublin. So, we thought it might be possible to visit these locations.

It turns out that there WAS a tour available! A bus would leave from Dublin at around 7:00 AM and drive two hours north to Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland. From Belfast, the tour took you to various filming locations.

Northern Ireland has been a disputed territory between the British and the Irish for a long time. It's currently considered part of the UK. One consequence of this is that the official currency in Northern Ireland is the Pound Sterling, not the Euro.

However, when you go to Belfast, you realize that while it's technically part of

the UK, it doesn't really feel like you're entering a new country. In fact, on the bus, the tour guide (who was also an extra on *Game of Thrones*) asked us to look out the windows at one point. He built suspense as if we were supposed to see something spectacular. All we and everyone else saw was grass. Same as the previous five miles, same as the next five miles.

He then announced that we had just crossed the border from Ireland to Northern Ireland. There wasn't a checkpoint, border security, signs, or anything indicating crossing from one country to another. If you drive through the countryside long enough, eventually, you end up in Northern Ireland.

As part of the tour, we saw some filming locations from earlier seasons in the

morning. We walked through Tollymore Forest, used for multiple scenes, including the very first AND last of the entire series. When we went, there was still paint on some of the trees the crew used as queues. At the time, no one knew the last scene was filmed in that forest. But since it looked like the forest was used recently for filming, the tour members became suspicious.

I feel bad for our tour guide. He accidentally let it slip that they were shooting there for the last season (he was an extra in that scene). Although, I don't think he knew it was for the final shot of the entire show.

One of my takeaways from the country is its beauty. The scenery in Northern Ireland is gorgeous. It extends from

Ireland and is where the green landscapes stand out. If you visit either country, I highly recommend doing a trek that takes you through the natural environment. If time permitted, we would have considered staying in Belfast longer.

After we return to the bus from our first stop, the tour guide announces that he'll conduct a quiz about *Game of Thrones* knowledge. He will ask us 10 questions, and we're supposed to write down the answers as he continues the test. Once the quiz is complete, we pass our tests to the people behind us and vice versa, so we can grade someone else's quiz. After the winner is revealed, they will receive a reward to be announced later.

During the test, I thought the questions were difficult. To be fair, the test *is*

being administered to a bus full of people who like the show enough to come on a tour. Everyone would get perfect scores if it was too easy. I knew some of the answers, but I ended up guessing three questions. I figured someone would get 10/10, so I didn't like my odds.

After I got my paper back, I saw that I had gotten 8/10 correct. The tour guide says, "Everyone raise your hands." Everyone raises their hands in the air. "As we go through the results, lower them when applicable. If you got four or less correct, lower your hand." To my surprise, over half the bus lowers their hands! And then he does it again for five correct answers, then six, and more people continue to drop. He gets to 7/10, and only three people keep their hands up, myself included.

When he says 8, I look around nervously and realize I'm the only one left. I won the quiz.

It's difficult to write the next section without giving any spoilers. The show has been out for a long time, so I'll assume that if you were going to watch *Game of Thrones*, you would have already done so (although you know what they say about making assumptions). But just in case you haven't seen it yet, I'll give you a spoiler warning until the end of this story.
SPOILER ALERT

To my surprise, it turns out that the reward for winning this quiz is that I would be named the "King in the North" for the duration of the tour. Why is that significant? Because our next stop is Inch Abbey. This is the exact location where

Robb Stark was proclaimed as King in the North on the show.

We arrive at Inch Abbey about 30 minutes later. When we step off the bus, we're given fur robes, like the ones they wear on the show. But then, the tour guide opens the cargo door below and reveals something totally unexpected. Real swords.

When you go on a tour, usually, you're not given any weapons. Swords may be common in *Game of Thrones*, but we were shocked when he handed us sharp blades. Just because you sign up for a tour doesn't mean you're equipped to handle a sword. I would never swing it at anyone, but you never know about everyone else. Maybe they're thirsty for some medieval vengeance. Although, everyone

else has a sword, too. Maybe that's what eliminates the risk.

He explains that about 90% of the swords are standard blades without real significance. However, the other 10% are replicas of the famous swords from *Game of Thrones*. This includes Jon Snow's Longclaw, Arya Stark's Needle, and Joffrey's Widows Wail, amongst others. They even have the Mountain's massive sword, standing six feet tall!

However, for the person who wins the title of King in the North, they reserve House Stark's ancestral sword, Ice. This is the same sword Ned Stark carries in season one (and is ironically used for his beheading in King's Landing).

As I'm buckling the clasps of my robe, I notice a large shadow in front of me. I

turn around, and there stands the tour guide; waiting to hand me Ned Stark's sword. I graciously accept the gift and move toward Inch Abbey with the group.

Once everyone gets their swords, mine being Ice, we crowd around to the exact area where Robb Stark was proclaimed King in the North. It's time to start the official ceremony.

I stand on a rock platform about three feet tall and perch myself above the group. I watch as the entire tour, about 40 people, wearing cloaks and wielding swords, get down on one knee. They point their swords toward me. In unison, they start chanting the same phrase over and over again... "King in the North! King in the North! King in the North!"

Standing over this group of enthused *Game of Thrones* fans, I raise my sword as high as possible. I cheerfully accept their proclamation and rise for them as their newly appointed monarch. For this brief moment, I am the King in the North. It wasn't nerdy at all, I swear (wink wink).
END OF SPOILER

If you want to see what this actually looks like in real life, check out the picture at the beginning of the chapter. The tour guide used my phone to take pictures of the coronation, creating a lifelong memory.

For the rest of the day, we continued seeing other *Game of Thrones* sites and filming locations. We visited Winterfell, the Twins, and other locations where specific scenes were shot. We even met two of

the direwolves! When the tour was completed, we took the bus back to Dublin. As a *Game of Thrones* fan, it was a fantastic day.

The Storehouse

As I mentioned earlier, neither my brother nor I drink very often. I'll maybe have the occasional beverage if it's needed in a social setting, but you won't find me casually drinking. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, I don't necessarily feel the need to indulge. Drinking doesn't help me enjoy myself or my experiences, so I'd rather keep a clear mind. Plus, my sober thoughts are crazy enough; no need for any extra kick in the pants.

Second, since I'm larger than the average person, I need to drink more to feel

anything. When you keep drinking, the bill adds up quickly. I understand that people pay for the alcohol, but if it doesn't do much for me anyway, it's almost the same as drinking soda. Why would I pay \$7 for a shot that lasts three seconds when I could pay \$2 for a Coke that lasts all night? The hilarious reality is that it's too expensive for me to justify getting wasted. By the way, I'm telling you about my drinking habits (or lack thereof) for context.

On our last day in Dublin, we toured the Guinness Storehouse Factory. This is where they produce Ireland's most famous drink, Guinness. Before going to Ireland, I had never tasted Guinness in my life. By the time I left Ireland, it was my favorite drink. This factory is part of the reason why.

The itinerary of the tour takes you through the different stages of production. You witness how the drink is taken from individual ingredients to the final concoction beloved by millions. After going through several rooms and seeing the beverage's complicated production, they finally give you two things. First, a voucher for a free pint of Guinness on the Skydeck. This skydeck is at the top of the factory and is a great way to end the tour. You and your party can sit and enjoy a pint of Guinness while seeing the entire city of Dublin. Plus, you're with other people relishing the tour, so you can sit, chat, and make friends while enjoying a drink.

In one of the last rooms you visit, they also give you a shot of Guinness. Why is this shot special? Because it is the

FRESHEST brewed Guinness on the planet. They bring you to the taps directly connected to the final stage of production. The liquid travels straight from the machine into your cup. Once they teach you how to drink it, you're free to indulge. I can still remember how impeccably delicious that one shot of Guinness was. It makes me want to fly back to Ireland for another taste. Nowadays, if I do drink, I usually go back to Guinness. It doesn't taste the same as in the factory, but perhaps I taste nostalgia in the Irish delicacy.

Even outside the Storehouse, Guinness tastes different in Dublin than in North America. I presume it's because it hasn't been sitting in a container for weeks before getting to your mouth. As a

result, here is the official order for the most delicious places to drink Guinness:

1. Guinness Storehouse
2. The rest of Dublin
3. Anywhere else.

This story is an example of how culture can influence experience. Even though I don't drink often, it felt like I was missing out by not sipping a pint of Guinness at dinner. If that seems like I'm perpetuating a stereotype, I would disagree. I'm demonstrating that it's better to embrace culture instead of ignoring it. The old expression "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." also applies anywhere in the world. It's just about finding different versions of Rome to enjoy in each place.

How to Drink Guinness

I figured that since they taught me how to drink Guinness properly, I'd teach it to you. You've been gracious enough to read this far. I might as well give you a new skill.

The first thing to do is wait until the drink turns "jet black." Their terminology, not mine. After it's poured, it starts brown as the bubbles settle. LET IT SETTLE FULLY. Only once the drink is black can you then start indulging.

When you *do* finally take a drink, you need more than just the foam at the top. Tilt the glass back and let the Guinness enter your mouth until it has "filled your cheeks." Once again, their words. When the drink has filled both cheeks, you have enough to put the glass down. Anytime

you go for a sip, you must fully commit to it.

Don't treat Guinness like a shot. Shots are meant to be swallowed quickly. And most of the time, you're avoiding the taste. To properly drink a pint of Guinness, you should let every sip rest in your mouth until you've captured the flavor. I don't recommend letting the drink sit in your mouth for 30 seconds, but don't swallow it immediately. Let the tastes penetrate the buds of your tongue. Once your senses are satisfied, you can finally swallow.

Last one for the road: When we went to Temple Bar, a famous pub in Dublin, we expected to party to classic Irish music. Or, at least rock out to something from a European artist. Instead, they had a live band

Noah Lieberman

playing *Take Me Home, Country Roads* by John Denver. I guess you win, Murica'.

5. Amsterdam



Do you remember the bus ride Josh and I took from the Dublin airport to the hostel? There were no problems on the way there. But going back to the airport was an issue.

Our flight to Amsterdam left at 7:00 AM. We didn't realize when we booked our tickets, but the last bus to the airport left at midnight; there wouldn't be another one until 6:00 AM. This left us with a difficult decision between two options. Option one (we'll call it the expensive option) was to stay an extra night in the hostel and then take a taxi in the morning. Option two (the cheaper option) was taking the midnight bus to the airport and sleeping there overnight.

I want to clarify that Josh and I are not necessarily penny-pinchers. However, we

were traveling on a budget and trying to squeeze the most out of our resources. While we ate budget-friendly meals and stayed in hostels, we didn't let cost dictate which attractions we visited. My philosophy is that while you can find good food anywhere, there's only one Colosseum or Mona Lisa. If you can save money without sacrificing experiences, that's the smart way to travel.

Given this, we decided to go with option two. We hopped on the midnight bus, which arrived at the airport around 12:45 AM. The first thing we did was find a secure spot on the floor. We needed a place where we could sleep without worrying about our safety. Next, we wrapped our backpacks around ourselves and securely fastened the straps. Our biggest concern

was getting robbed while we were sleeping. We needed to be careful that our bags couldn't be opened without disturbing us. Our goal was to wake up with all our belongings intact.

I managed to sleep soundly on the floor of the Dublin airport, but Josh struggled to doze off. He was worried about two things, theft, and oversleeping. So, he didn't get much shuteye. Fortunately, I slept like a baby.

A few hours later, Josh woke me up when it was time to check-in. Still groggy, I followed him through security to our gate, and we made our flight.

A Peddler's Town

Amsterdam is a truly unique city. What stands out to me most is the

abundance of bicycles. Bikes are available for rent everywhere, and a large percentage of the population uses them as their primary mode of transportation.

Our first morning in Amsterdam, we left our hostel at 8:30 AM. Immediately, we were shocked by the sight of hundreds of people on bikes. And most are commuting to work or school, not just riding leisurely. This is quite different from where I'm from, where biking is less common due to the spread-out nature of the city.

One of the characteristics of Amsterdam is its density. The city contains over 900,000 people, mostly being built upwards. The benefit of a densely populated area is that it's possible to get around by bike. This means fewer cars on the road,

particularly during rush hour, providing a peaceful and calming atmosphere.

Instead of honking horns and engines roaring, the sounds come from people. Biking is a more intimate experience than driving a car. As a bicycle passes, you hear someone chatting on the phone, listening to music, or simply saying hello. In car-dominated cities, it's hard to interact with locals. But in Amsterdam, where bikes rule the road, there's a real opportunity for communication.

Red-Light District

Walking around Amsterdam's city center at night offers a vastly different experience. Compared to the bustling streets during the day, particularly in the renowned Red-Light District, the

atmosphere is poles apart. As Wikipedia states, a red-light district is "an area within an urban location with a high concentration of sex-oriented businesses, such as strip clubs, sex shops, and adult theaters." (I figured I would give you the Wikipedia definition of a red-light district rather than trying to explain it myself. I didn't want to use my own words for that.)

I had prior knowledge of this district before my visit. However, Josh didn't, which led to a funny realization when I directed us towards it at night. The streets are lined with small storefront rooms, each with a red light illuminating the entrance. These rooms each have a glass wall facing the road. As we walked by, we either saw women standing behind the glass or curtains blocking the view. If the

curtains were drawn, it indicated that the rooms were occupied.

I won't comment on the morality of the district, as others who are more knowledgeable have likely discussed it at length. However, the economic aspect of the industry is intriguing, especially when considering supply and demand. Who has more leverage, the buyer or the seller?

In this situation, I think that the buyer has more leverage. When an average person walks down the streets of the Red-Light District, they'll see many workers offering their services. There are always options for potential customers, indicating the supply exceeds the demand at any given point.

However, the fascinating aspect of this service, as opposed to any regular

product, is that the seller may not want to sell the service to any customer. In this business, consent between both parties is critical, and it takes more than interest for a deal to come to fruition. If they were selling lemonade instead, there's a high chance they would sell to any customer. But this isn't lemonade. So while the buyer technically has more leverage in the Red-Light District, the seller still controls the situation.

You could argue that any business has the same control. In our lemonade example, the seller has every right to refuse a sale to the customer. But a lemonade seller declining business is rare. If you walk into a lemonade shop and offer to buy a drink, they'll sell it to you.

I imagine that the excess supply is one of the most challenging aspects of the job for red-light district workers. While I'm sure they frequently refuse customers, it could be tough to say no if they're not attracting consumers. If demand was in excess instead of supply, the workers could carefully select their customers without worrying about potential income problems. That's just a hypothetical, of course. But I think it would optimize the district to empower its workers if the practice should continue.

How would that work? By splitting the workers into different regions and creating mini-districts in more areas. This way, when people walk through each mini-district, they only see a few windows, and the demand should exceed

supply in each location. By populating one district with all the workers, it creates the problem of too much supply. This would help ensure that demand exceeds supply in each area, allowing workers to gain more control over their work and who they choose to serve.

Of course, you must consider the potential drawbacks of this approach. Although, it stands to reason that a city might not want mini red-light districts all over the place? I don't know if it would be the BEST look for that town... but there are always trade-offs.

The Sexiest Museum

While wandering the streets of Amsterdam, we unexpectedly stumbled upon a sex museum. Despite not planning to

visit, we were curious and decided to peek inside. A few of my friends went a couple of years prior, but I didn't think about it until we passed by. We were like, "A sex museum? We have to check this out."

As we entered, we were immediately struck by the abundance of paintings, models, and molds depicting genitals of all shapes and sizes. The museum was dedicated entirely to exploring the intersection of sex and art.

Giant fake penises towered over us. Intricately designed molds of vaginas seemed to stare out from every corner of the room. Although it was difficult not to feel a sense of amusement, we treated the museum with respect. It's the same as any other cultural institution. Ultimately, it's art. That's why you have to respect the 6ft

dildos. It was a surreal experience I never thought I would write about, but here we are.

Of all the museums I visited, this was undoubtedly the most unique. I should have taken more pictures while visiting, but I still remember it, at least. While other cultures tend to shy away from the topic of sex, it was refreshing to see the Dutch celebrating it so openly. This boldness made Amsterdam stand out among other major cities, and I couldn't help but appreciate the change of pace it offered.

The Hague

During our trip to the Netherlands, we ventured to The Hague, a city in north-west Netherlands. Both the International Court of Justice and the International

Criminal Court reside there. Notably, The Hague serves as a site for trials of individuals charged with particular offenses, such as genocide or war crimes.

We saw both the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. The ICC has a beautiful architectural display, much like the rest of The Hague. When you walk up to it, you'll see an assortment of blue and black tinted glass lining tall rectangular-shaped buildings. The inside is sleek, with glass prominently featured throughout. We were lucky to set up a contact with someone who works at the ICC, and he met us there and showed us around a little bit.

Although we went to the International Court of Justice, we didn't get the chance to see inside. They only have

visitation on certain days and our schedules didn't align. However, you can find pictures of it on Google.

My favorite part of the experience was seeing the wishing tree in the Peace Palace. Under the leaves of the small tree, on the branches, were papers attached by clasps. On these papers were notes written by everyday people wishing for peace. It was a touching moment to see in front of the most influential international court in the world. If you're interested in the law, you'll enjoy visiting The Hague.

Other than the courts, The Hague is a great town for walking around. We strolled for hours and saw magnificent architecture that combines modern engineering with the city's history.

Live and Learn

Planning a trip in advance has several advantages, such as ensuring you don't miss out on activities. If you're aware of wait times, securing tickets, etc., you can figure out how to make everything work. However, despite our efforts to plan our trip to The Netherlands, we still made a couple mistakes. One of which was missing out on the International Court of Justice, as we didn't plan our visit on the days it was open.

Another mistake was assuming we could walk into Anne Frank's house without securing tickets. Unfortunately, tickets need to be booked about three months ahead of time. We were also there on the worst possible day to try to get in without tickets, May 5. Why is this day busy?

Because it also happens to be the anniversary of the Netherlands' liberation from the Nazi Regime in 1945. It turns out you can't just go to the house of Anne Frank on liberation day and expect to get in.

The lesson learned here is that while not everything needs to be planned, it's essential to understand what must be booked in advance. Sometimes, relying on spontaneous decisions can backfire. It's best to avoid such disappointments by preparing beforehand. Learn from our mistakes if you can.

6. Paris



Our next destination on our European backpacking trip was Paris, the city of love and lights. After a quick flight from Amsterdam, we landed in Paris at around noon. We navigated through the bustling streets of Paris to reach our boutique hostel using the Paris Métro, which seamlessly connects the entire city.

With our trusty backpacks accompanying us whenever we traveled from place to place, we had to adjust for comfort during our travels. For instance, we often placed them on the seat beside us when no overhead storage was available on a train. On this ride, we were fortunate to have two empty rows with two seats each, so we occupied both and placed our backpacks on the adjacent seats.

As the train made its stops, it began to fill up with more passengers. Eventually, a middle-aged Caucasian man approached the seat next to me, where my bag was placed. I put my backpack on my lap to make room for him, and he sat down. Shortly after, an early forty-something black woman boarded the train. She looked at Josh, sitting there with his backpack on an empty seat, and stood by a nearby pole rather than asking him to move his bag. I glanced at Josh, trying to convey that he should move his backpack, but he failed to comprehend my signal. After a few more stops, he eventually caught on and shifted his bag onto his lap. He gestured to the woman to sit beside him if she wished.

And that's when things took an unexpected turn. The woman looked at Josh and said, "Why would I want to sit beside you, you racist?"

Josh was taken aback and stammered out, "Excuse me."

She went on to say, "I see you racist Americans all the time. You wouldn't move your bag for me because I'm black."

I watched the entire conversation unfold from across the row, trying not to laugh. To be honest, I thought it was funny to let Josh be accused of racism when we both knew he obviously wasn't racist. The last thing I wanted to do was interfere.

The two of them went back and forth as Josh pleaded for her to sit down, but she wouldn't have any of it. He tried to reason with the woman, showing her the

Canadian flag on his backpack, but to no avail. She was convinced that he was a 'racist American' and refused to sit next to him. The rest of the train ride was unbearably awkward, with no one daring to speak. This incident was our first experience in Paris... and not the kind we had envisioned. Welcome to France, I suppose.

My Dolce and Gabbanas

Walking into Galeries Lafayette in Paris left me awestruck. The sheer size of the department store and the high-end brands it housed, such as Armani, Balenciaga, Dior, Chanel, Givenchy, and Louis Vuitton, was simply mind-boggling. As someone who isn't usually a big shopper, I was surprised at how much I enjoyed the

experience. If you *are* a big shopper, this is the place to spend hours upon hours.

However, the mall is split into two buildings, one for men's shopping and the other for women, a fact that we were unaware of initially. We walked around for about 45 minutes, admiring all the beautiful clothes, before realizing we had been in the women's department store the whole time. Eventually, we approached an employee at Givenchy and asked, "Where are the men's clothes?" He looked with disgust and said, "The other building." Once we finally found the men's section, it was a lot more fun, and we marveled at all the men's high-end brands.

Despite not intending to buy anything, we came across an 'on-sale rack' that featured Gucci clothing. This rack had

the most inexpensive items in the entire store. Whether they were defective or just out of style, who knows? I picked up a shirt, hoping it would be reasonably priced. Unfortunately, it cost the same as my flight home - a steep \$750 USD. It was hard to justify the purchase, given the exorbitant cost. Shockingly, it stayed on the rack.

However, a pair of Dolce and Gabbana sneakers caught my eye. These sneakers were some of the fanciest shoes I'd ever seen. The saleswoman noticed my interest and offered to let me try them. After she left to find the right size, her colleague started talking to us. She asked us about personal details. Inquiring about who we were and why we were there (to determine if we could actually afford

them). We tried to keep it vague to appear like there was a slight chance we could buy them.

As I slipped them on, I couldn't help feeling nervous about scuffing them in any way. It felt like walking on eggshells. It gave me a new perspective on wearing expensive clothes and shoes - I would always be nervous about ruining them, which isn't a feeling I enjoy. I can't imagine leaving the house wearing a combination of clothes/jewelry/shoes that exceeds \$10000. I would feel terrified of wrecking them.

It's no wonder wealthy individuals like Zuckerberg, Gates, Bezos, and Musk don't walk around in Gucci belts and Balenciaga hoodies. Those clothes are for people who want to FEEL wealthy, rather

than actually achieving that upper status. Wearing expensive clothes makes non-wealthy people feel rich.

In the end, high-end fashion isn't for me. If I had exorbitant wealth, I would probably still wear the same T-shirts and shorts as I do now. However, I would likely spend the money on travel instead. After all, experiencing different cultures and seeing the world is an investment that lasts a lifetime (hey, that's kind of the theme of the book).

Merci Jérôme

The food in Paris is excellent. There's a great crêpe stand right outside the Eiffel Tower we visited twice. Once after a long day of walking and another when we needed a satisfying snack. You can learn a

lot about a country through its street food. Each country has unique options that can become famous worldwide if they're good enough. In Paris, it seems that crêpes are the go-to street food. My personal favorite was the ham and cheese option, while Josh enjoyed a chocolate spread.

I think street food reflects the heart and soul of a culture. And in general, you can see the diversity of its people through the local restaurants.

Sometimes we would walk down the street and pick up a baguette from a bakery or pastry shop to eat on the go. Baguettes and crêpes are some of the most classic French delicacies, but an underrated one is the cheese hotdog. Alright... cheese hotdogs aren't a real delicacy in France, but they were for us.

There's a chain of French bakeries in Paris called Merci Jérôme. One was quite close to our hostel, so we stopped there for lunch a few times. Along with classic French pastries, they also had delicious-looking cheese hotdogs. As you know from my Greenwich story earlier, we *do* like a good hotdog. They'd take the hotdogs from below the glass counter and warm them when ordered, like getting a cookie warmed up at a restaurant. It would melt the cheese perfectly on the sausage. These hotdogs were delicious and made for a good lunch multiple times.

The name of the restaurant, Merci Jérôme, translates to 'Thank you Jérôme' in French. Since we were raised to always say thank you after enjoying a meal, it only seemed appropriate to yell that line on our

way out. Each time we left this bakery with our food, we would shout at the staff, 'Merci Jérôme,' and they immediately burst out laughing.

By the third time we did it, the staff – the same people working each day – knew what was coming. As they anticipated our 'Merci Jérôme,' the employees eagerly replied, 'De rien,' which translates to "You're welcome." I didn't expect the staff at the bakery to respond to our shout of "Merci Jérôme" as we left, but it was great that they played along. I hope it brought as much of a smile to their faces as it did to ours.

The Climb

By now, you've probably noticed that this book is a mix of stories, lessons, and

recommendations. In this section, I want to share a suggestion from one of our experiences in Paris.

At the Eiffel Tower, there are two options for the ascent; stairs and elevator. Originally our plan was to take the elevator to the top. But when we arrived, we decided to skip the elevator and walk up the Eiffel Tower instead. Looking back, it was quite the climb, but the experience was unforgettable. We didn't know how long it would take to reach the top, but we were determined to make it. After all, the tower is massive, with several levels to explore before reaching the summit. We also underestimated how long the climb would take.

We began our ascent in the late afternoon, around 5:30 PM. There are three

levels for walkers: first, second, and top. We didn't plan it this way, but the timing worked perfectly. Because as we climbed, we saw Paris from three different perspectives. Daytime from the first level, sunset from the second level, and nighttime from the top. The stairs were crowded but not too chaotic, allowing us to appreciate the tower's intricate structure.

As we made our way down, we were the only ones left. The tower was illuminated in all its golden glory, making for some of the most stunning pictures of the trip. I still look back on those photos as some of my favorites.

I should mention that climbing the Eiffel Tower is not for the faint of heart. It requires a certain level of physical fitness,

so don't push yourself if you're not up for it. But if you have the time and energy, I highly recommend trying. The views from the top become more gratifying and will stay with you for a lifetime.

A Small Thievery

When visiting major cities as a tourist, one of the best and most convenient ways to get around is through hop-on-hop-off tours. Despite their reputation, these buses are not just for older travelers. We found them to be a great way of exploring London, Paris, and Rome. The beauty of these tours is that they offer different lines that take you through various routes. If you want to visit attractions A, B, C, D, and E, one line will take you there, and another will take you to F, G, H, I, and

J. This way, you can select the spots you want to see without visiting the ENTIRE city on each bus ride.

Several hop-on-hop-off companies operate in each major city, but they all take you to the same attractions. Most use double-decker buses, providing the option to sit on either the top or the bottom. We found it best to sit on the bottom when we just wanted to get from one point to another and sit on the top when we wanted to explore the route. The large companies also provide guides with a narrated tour of each attraction. However, it's worth noting that these buses are more expensive than regular ones. So, if the city has an efficient subway system, it might be a cheaper and quicker option for transportation.

I don't know if I should be writing this in a book, but we did find a way to get the hop-on-hop-off free one day. To understand how, you need to know how they check your ticket. Once you buy your pass, you use the receipt as your ticket to show the bus driver. It shows the company's logo and the day(s) you purchased on the receipt. They'll let you on if the days purchased match the current date.

We purchased a two-day pass that expired on the 6th of the month. On the morning of the 7th, we realized that if we could turn the 6 into an 8 on the receipt... the bus driver might let us on. So, Josh grabbed a black pen and carefully drew the 6 into an 8 by connecting the line from the top of the 6 back down to the middle. When we got to the bus, the driver quickly

looked at our receipt and thought it was an 8. We got free transportation. Although this story may seem devious, it demonstrates the importance of resourcefulness when traveling. While finding such opportunities can be difficult, it's worth evaluating your options to utilize your time and money.

Even if the options seem apparent, considering alternatives can help you develop a habit of looking for opportunities. From my experience, looking for opportunities is a skill that needs to be developed. The brain needs to be trained to look for things others might miss.

For example, two grocery stores are near your house, stores A and B. A is more expensive with better quality, and B is less expensive but has worse quality. These

are your two options. However, what isn't presented yet still worth considering is store C across town. It's much further away, and the prices and quality are similar to grocery store A.

In this situation, since A and C are similar, yet A is much closer, it wouldn't make sense to choose C (unless there is an unknown variable, like store C has a \$1.50 hot dog and drink deal). But even though you're going to choose grocery store A or B, considering C will train your mind to consider other alternatives that aren't readily apparent. If you keep training yourself this way, you'll eventually see real opportunities that others won't. It may only be relevant 1/100 times, but it'll pay off. And as history teaches us, you can

have 100 failures, but people will remember the one you got right.

While that philosophy is more applicable to life in general, it is beneficial when traveling. When you're in a foreign land, it's hard to find all the available options. That's why you must be resourceful and try to see EVERYTHING before making decisions. My two cents, it will help you at some point.

Grec

During one of our last nights in Paris, the rain was coming down hard, a common theme throughout our trip. As we sat in our hostel at 8:30 PM without dinner, we decided to brave the rain and head out for food. Reluctantly, I agreed, and we set

out in the pouring rain, me dressed in a t-shirt, shorts, and slides.

After we started walking, Josh decided that we should try something local. In my beach attire, we continued strolling through Paris in the rain. After passing five more restaurants, we finally stumbled upon a Middle Eastern shawarma joint that caught Josh's eye.

The restaurant was tiny, with just one man working behind the counter. When we asked him what he recommended, he yelled back, "Grec. Grec." Perplexed, we asked him again. He confirmed, "You get grec." and motioned for us to sit at a table. So, we sat down and waited for our food. The last thing we wanted was to walk for another 15 minutes in the rain.

A few minutes later, the man brought over two plates, each piled high with French fries, a white sauce, and a long sandwich filled with some mysterious meat. We looked at each other and wondered what we had gotten ourselves into.

We began by devouring the fries, thinking they couldn't be that different from fries elsewhere. Then, we tentatively tried the sandwiches, with Josh taking the first bite. Josh's reaction to his first bite, "Chewy, but good." he said. With his nod of approval, I then go for the sandwich myself.

It took us an entire year to finally solve the mystery of grec. We never thought to research what we had eaten that night in Paris. A year later, we went through a smoothie phase in our house.

Along with fruit and juices, we bought yogurt to thicken the consistency. In Canada, because the country is bilingual, the food packaging has English AND French on the label. While looking at the "Greek Yogurt" label, I noticed that the French version said, "Yaourt Grec." The mystery meat we were eating, grec, just meant Greek... We were eating gyros.

Tippies

If you're planning a trip to Paris, I'll give you a couple can't-miss recommendations. First, I highly recommend taking a boat ride on the Seine River. It's a fantastic way to explore parts of Paris that you wouldn't be able to see otherwise. When Josh and I went, we were lucky enough to see Notre-Dame, which had just suffered a

devastating fire. Although we couldn't go inside, the boat ride allowed us to appreciate the cathedral's beauty from afar.

Second, make sure to visit the Louvre. While the Mona Lisa is undoubtedly the most famous attraction, the rest of the museum is equally impressive. Specifically, the sculptures throughout the gallery are breathtaking. However, be warned that the Mona Lisa room is one of the most dangerous pickpocketing locations in Europe. The room is always overcrowded with tourists, jostling to glimpse the iconic painting. Therefore, it's critical to stay alert and keep your belongings close. Nevertheless, don't let this deter you from seeing Da Vinci's masterpiece. It's true what they say about the painting – the eyes follow you.

7. Venice



Before my trip to Venice, my only knowledge of the city came from romanticized movies and stories I'd been exposed to. In my imagination, it was the playground of love. Gondola rides, romantic restaurants, and scented candles abundant. How couldn't you fall in love with such a paradise?

However, our trip was marred by rain. It didn't rain *all* the time, but it poured for most of our visit. Even St. Mark's Square, perhaps the most famous place in Venice, was flooded. I'm surprised Venice doesn't flood every week, considering the island is banded by canals. The water is so close to the Italian infrastructure! I'm not an architect, but it seems to me that as sea levels rise, the buildings could eventually be in trouble. I'm sure

there are smarter people than me working on the problem.

During our stay, we decided to visit the centerpiece of St. Mark's Square, the St. Mark's Campanile. This bell tower allows visitors to pay to go to the top deck, where you get a beautiful view of Venice and its neighboring islands, Burano and Murano. We didn't know you could go to the top of the tower, so when we saw the sign advertising it, it was a blessing. We were getting drenched for hours, and this was a welcome escape.

Even if we *had* only gone up to escape the rain and wind, it was well worth it. It's the only place to see the entire island, and the view is incredible. Looking from the Eiffel Tower, there weren't any discernable patterns or colors in the Parisian

infrastructure. But seeing Venice from above, you notice the uniform reddish-brown roofs that give the city a strong sense of personality. It's impressive that the island still values its architectural history, as all those structures were built that way over 1200 years ago.

This makes me appreciate the longevity of Venice's architectural heritage, especially since you don't get the same historical significance in North America. I once visited Boston and stood in one of the oldest structures in North America. For reference, that structure was built in the 1700s, which pales in comparison to anything in ancient Europe. While Indigenous people were already in North America during that time period, it's a shame their infrastructure wasn't built the same way.

It would have been fascinating to visit long-standing Indigenous structures if they had been constructed with better technology.

I think it's essential to promote Indigenous culture more than we already do. I've always felt that there isn't enough education on the traditions of Indigenous peoples. They were here long before any Europeans, yet other cultures in North America are celebrated far more frequently. For example, St. Patrick's Day celebrations are WAY more prevalent than any Indigenous festival. I just think it would be both beneficial and genuinely fascinating to promote indigenous culture more.

Lost in Venice

Back to Venice. The only time we can escape the rain is at night. It becomes our only chance to walk around the island comfortably. However, the problem with casually strolling around an island comprised of different bridges is that it can be easy to get lost.

On our first night, we decide to go for some gelato after dinner. After we get our dessert, we walk around instead of eating it in one place. Since we don't know where we're going, Josh and I quickly get lost throughout the island. We don't recognize that we're off our path until after finishing our dessert. But once we do, we look up and realize we don't know how to get back.

For reference, I am horrible at directions (as you may have learned already). If you put me in a room, spin me around three times, and tell me to point North, the best I could give you is a $1/4$ chance. I don't know why I can't tell up from down, but that's how my brain works. Instead, I have an excellent sense of time. I can look at the sun and determine the time of day, but can't separate east from west. Of the two natural forces that make up our natural world, space and time, I'm good at one and VERY BAD at the other.

The consequence is that as we're lost in Venice, I am basically no help. We try to retrace our steps the best we can, but we keep running into bridges that take us in the wrong direction. The real issue is that we don't have Wi-Fi since we're just

walking through the streets. Almost every establishment is closed, so even when we try to stop in a shop or a restaurant to get internet for a second, it's not possible.

It takes us about two hours before finally returning to the right path. From there, we recognize where we are and find our hostel.

Even though this wasn't how we planned to see Venice, getting lost was a blessing in disguise. Maybe I'm just making the best of a difficult experience, but there's at least one positive. By walking around aimlessly throughout the entire island... we saw the *entire* island. I would have preferred seeing everything intentionally, but sometimes it takes a toad to turn into a prince. In this situation, the

"toad" is my lack of direction, and the "prince" is exploring all of Venice at night.

Snail Shopping

Sometimes education pays off in unexpected ways. Josh, now a lawyer, was in law school during our trip. I, now an author/entrepreneur/disappointment to my parents (lol), was in business school. Both of these programs incorporate negotiations into their curricula, which, as we found out, can be useful in everyday life.

One such instance happened in Venice. We were walking down the streets looking for local shops to visit. We passed a few chocolate shops, gelato stands, tourist stores, etc. However, one thing that makes Venice unique is the island next door, Murano. Murano is known for its

world-famous glass. You can find it world-wide, but it is only authentically produced here. Its designs, rarity, and forming process make it special, as every piece of Murano glass is individually blown.

As Josh and I are exploring Venice, we walk into a small shop that sells Murano glass and other accessories. Due to our budget and limited space in our backpacks, we aren't going to buy the big, expensive pieces. What we do want are smaller pieces. It would be the perfect give for our mom to display back at the house. Our plan is to buy her one piece. They have this small elephant made of Murano glass that would be perfect for her.

But then we look at one of the displays and see sets of snails. There are four snails in each package. A bigger one,

meant to represent the head/parental figure of the group, and three smaller ones. These snails would be perfect since my mom is the head snail, and her three kids (I have a sister) are the smaller snails. But we realize that even though the number of small snails is accurate, neither of our parents would be happy if our dad was left out of the snail equation. This means that we need an extra big snail.

Since Josh and I are the only customers in the store, the woman working behind the cash register isn't occupied. She is also the only employee working there. This woman is about 5'4, brunette, and looks to be around 19 or 20 years old. Josh and I go up to her and start explaining our situation. She doesn't speak perfect

English but is trying her best to understand everything we are saying.

We begin by telling her about our family and its makeup. We have a mom, a dad, and three children. Then, we start talking about our mom, who would love it if we could bring back Murano glass all the way from Venice. Once we establish a good conversation and bring up the context of our family, we point her to the snails on the aisle.

We show her that this snail collection only has four, but we need five to work with our family. Unfortunately, she says she isn't allowed to sell individual snails since they all come together in groups. If we want five, we would have to buy two packages of four, or eight in total. Each package is already pretty expensive, so we

don't want to buy two if we only need one extra snail.

We take the big snail from another package and ask if we can take that one instead? We would be leaving a package of three, but perhaps we could convince her that this is a good thing. Our rationale is that maybe a person would come into the store with a three-person family, and they could sell that snail group to them. If you only have three people, you only need three snails. She laughs at our story and our attempt to take another snail.

We continue to talk to her more about the store and her life in Venice. It turns out that her family owns the shop, and she is actually from a family of three since she is an only child. Once we find this out, we laugh at the coincidence and try to

use it as leverage to convince her. Full disclosure, I'm also trying to flirt with her a little. She *is* about my age... I figure it can't hurt our chances.

Regardless of the snails, we have a great conversation inside her store for about twenty minutes. After a long chat, she finally agrees to give us another snail from the other set. But it can't be the big one. Since each package has a parental figure, we can't leave the set of three without one. After some deliberation, Josh and I agree.

Even though we aren't going home with two parental snails, we had gone as far as we could. Plus, this is how negotiations work. You have to find a solution that works for both parties and compromise a little.

Now, if you see my parents' living room table, you'll find five snails made of Murano glass. One big and four small, which at least represents everyone in our family by number. Sometimes we'll joke that there are four small snails and one big because my dad acts like a child (my mom's joke, shoutout to her).

Looking back on this story, I'm reminded of the importance of negotiation skills. Negotiation is not just about bargaining and getting what you want; it's about finding a solution that works for everyone. We wanted an extra snail, but the store policy didn't allow it. Instead of giving up, we negotiated with the woman working there, explained our situation, and found a compromise that worked for both parties.

In our everyday lives, we negotiate all the time, whether it's with coworkers, friends, or family members. Strong negotiation skills can help us achieve our goals, build better relationships, and resolve conflicts effectively.

So, the next time you're faced with a situation where you must negotiate, remember that it's not just about winning or losing. It's about finding a solution that works for all parties, just like we did with the snails.

The Beauty of Venice

Venice was my first experience without cars. I talked before about Amsterdam's bike culture and how there's less traffic than in most cities. But Venice is a different animal. There are zero cars on

the island; they're banned from Venice. There aren't even roads to drive on. Instead, you can walk or take water-based transportation, such as a water bus, gondola, or, if you're unlucky, a police boat.

While we were in Venice, we had an interaction with a police boat. We were walking down a canal at night (the same night we were lost in the previous story). The police boat stopped by us, and the officer inside warned us to be careful about walking around the island at night. We thanked him and let him continue, but in my head, I wanted to say, "Yeah, we've been trying to get back to our hostel for the last hour and a half." However, getting into a disagreement with the police of a foreign country was the last thing we needed, so we kept quiet.

As tourists who enjoy walking, Venice was a perfect fit for us. Everyone is walking all the time, so you can see and interact with everyone on the island. If you want to hang out in the middle of the walkway, you can because there are no streets. The people are approachable, and the entire atmosphere is friendly.

One thing we realized is that you can leisure anywhere. One day, Josh and I ate at a pizza parlor for dinner. They made pizzas from scratch (like all good Italian pizzerias do). We watched the pizza maker toss the dough up in the air far above his head, creating a thin but stable crust. He spun it around faster than a frisbee, making the process look like art. His hands were closed, punching the pizza dough up and down midair like his fists

were trampolines. It was my first great Italian pizza, a ham and mushroom delight.

After we got our pizzas, we looked around the small restaurant for a table. There was only one, and it was already occupied, as the place was fairly busy. So, we took our pizzas outside and looked for somewhere to eat. Right outside the parlor, we noticed 15 people sitting on either the sidewalk or the adjacent bridge, eating pizza from the same place. Since there are no cars, people sit anywhere they want. They eat, drink, talk, and enjoy the night. So, as we saw others doing it, we joined in by sitting on the bridge with our pizzas. As we ate, we heard conversations and made some of our own. Meanwhile, we got a

gorgeous view of the canal while sitting on its bridge.

While other cities have similar spots, like sitting in a park or going to a pond, Venice is different. It's acceptable to lounge anywhere and enjoy life because there are no transportation systems pedestrians must accommodate. Although this structure can only work in small (preferably island) locations, it's still fascinating. I'm not suggesting that mega-cities abolish their roads, but creating "walking only" areas would be a wonderful enhancement to city life. Instead of roads, you could have pathways like the ones in Venice.

In this hypothetical neighborhood, it would make perfect sense to have a mix of shops, apartments, and restaurants

compacted into a relatively small area to minimize distances. The idea is to create a pedestrian-friendly environment where people can walk around and interact with each other instead of relying on cars. By including the basic necessities within the neighborhood (schools, grocery stores, emergency services), you could live there without a car. Of course, you'd want to leave the community sometimes, but not *enough* to justify owning a car. Instead, you could take alternative forms of transportation to get around.

Aside from its potential impact on climate change, this community promotes a more dynamic way of living. It's reminiscent of the Venetian way of life, which is much more engaging than a typical North American city filled with cars. This

community could become a kind of island, separate from the perils of modern city life. Furthermore, a pedestrian-friendly environment would make for an extremely active neighborhood. If you have to walk everywhere, it'll benefit the average person's physical well-being.

However, it's worth noting that this concept won't work as well in colder climates. Being forced to walk in zero-degree Fahrenheit weather isn't ideal. But if we created this community in a place like Texas, I think it could work exceptionally well. After all, it's worked for Venetians for over a millennium, so why not in North America? I'd imagine the big car companies wouldn't be pumped, but I never promised that EVERYONE wins.

End of Part I

That takes us to the end of *Backpacking Adventures: Europe Part I*. Thank you for reading! I hope you've enjoyed the book so far, found some laughs, and even learnt a few lessons. I want to thank Canada One Travel, the sponsor of this book, once again for their support, and tell you to consider them next time you're planning a trip.

Make sure you download part II to continue reading my wacky adventures... because it only gets crazier. It is action packed with my best stories from Italy, Greece, and Spain. Plus, this is when we get into my other trip after high school, which was a totally different dynamic. Trust me, you won't want to miss

it! Part II is also free, so don't hesitate to download the book. You can find it on my website at <https://noahlieberman.com> or through social media, and the other big eBook platforms. I'll see you there!

You can also see me on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, where I'm the most active. I'm a pretty good Instagram follow, so be sure to check me out. I'll keep you updated with new releases, book wisdoms, travel content, and anything else that's going on. Thanks again for reading... I can't wait for you to see the next one.

Merci Jérôme