

2015: Year of Travel

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WHY TRAVEL?

My passion for travel was a gift from my parents. My dad loves to tell me unbelievable stories about when he travelled the world while enlisted in the Navy. My mom, an avid armchair traveler longing to be more, pushes me to leave home at every opportunity.

They began introducing me to travel little by little by sending me on trips to Mexico with my grandparents in middle school, then a school group tour to Europe in high school. In college, they were enthusiastic when I landed an internship in Romania and told them I planned to backpack through Europe afterwards. Because of their support I have had incredible adventures across the world, such as spelunking in Hungary, rafting in Bosnia, and eating goat-brain tacos in Mexico.

I'll be graduating at the end of this year and although I am eager to start a new chapter in my life, my biggest disappointment is that I'll be trading the many months of vacation time we are given as students for a meager two weeks of vacation at a full time job.

I want to see the world and with the generous vacation time I have left, now is the time to do it. I want to make 2015 my year of travel. I particularly like to visit countries with cultures that are nothing like my own. My plan is to visit as many countries as I can before I start a full time job next January. To do this, I'll use all of my school breaks to travel.

I started the year off with a bang by visiting Mexico, Belize, and Honduras during the winter break. This March I am visiting China and Thailand

during spring break. I have an internship set for most of summer break, but am planning to use my earnings from the internship to visit Machu Picchu and the Amazon Jungle in Peru during August. It is too early to plan for after graduation in December, but I have decided I'll visit either Petra, Jordan or the Pyramids at Giza, Egypt. These trips may sound extravagant but careful planning has helped me budget these trips at \$2,500 or less per trip.

There are many clichés about what travel teaches you or how it changes you, but one of the most relatable quotes I've heard about travel is this: "Travel is extraordinary conversations with ordinary people. Travel is wishing for one more bite of whatever that just was. Travel is 'Maybe I don't have to do it that way when I get back home.'"

Every time I have left the country, the experiences I have had are embodied by that quote. Occasionally luxury travel such as cruises are nice, but I much prefer immersive, college-kid budget travel. I don't want to just see the sights, I want to eat something mysterious looking along with the local beer while I'm there, and get lost on the trolley lines and try to find my way back. I prefer to rent a bedroom in local homes over hostels because it is often cheaper, and I have learned so much about everyday life in other countries this way.

Budget travel is incredible because it challenges you to think on your feet just to get by. I once learned to drive a standard car in a few days because it meant saving hundreds of dollars on a car rental, and once slept on the floor of a hostel's TV room in Austria, only to befriend an Irish family in

Croatia a few days later and stay with them in their luxury resort.

I realize the time to travel is now and believe I embody the true globetrotter spirit of desiring to discover the world outside my own. There is so much left to do and experience, I can hardly wait to embark on my next adventure.

CHINA AND THAILAND

Friday, March 13

I'll depart Houston and settle in for my 14 hour flight to Beijing.

Saturday, March 14.

Once I arrive in Beijing I have an 8.5 hour layover. From the airport I'll take a 1.5 hour subway ride directly to the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square on a self-guided tour, and the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong if time permits. Later this same day I'll arrive in Bangkok.

Sunday, March 15

On my first day in Bangkok I'll visit the temple Wat Pho to view the Reclining Buddha, one of the largest Buddha images in the world. I'll also take a walking tour of the Grand Palace and a boat tour through the many klongs, or canals, that snake through the city.

At the end of the day I'll board an overnight train to Chiang Mai.

Monday, March 16

Early in the morning I'll tour the Doi Suthep temple, a sacred site to many Thai people, then spend the rest of the day at a cooking class. At night I'll visit the Night Bazaar to sample snacks and barter with shop owners.

Tuesday, March 17 - Thursday, March 19

The highlight of my trip is a 3-day trek through the jungles near Chiang Mai to visit various hilltribe minority groups, each with their own language, clothing, and religion. I'll hike 4-5 hours a day and spend the nights at village homestays, likely on the floor of hut. Along the way I'll have the opportunity to visit an elephant sanctuary and bathe the elephants, swim at the base of the Mok Fa waterfall, and take in nature as I float leisurely downstream on a bamboo raft. At the end of the trek, I'll ride a Songthaew (local modified bus) back to Chiang Mai.

Friday, March 20

Around mid-morning I'll be meeting a group for a bicycle tour of Chiang Mai, then joining a food crawl to sample as many dishes as possible. I'll also be scheduling a famous Thai Massage at the city's most highly rated spa, the Chiang Mai Women's Correctional Institution.

Once the fun in Chiang Mai is over, I'll board an overnight train back to Bangkok.

Saturday, March 21

I'll take a stroll through Siam Square, then spend the majority of my day at the Chatuchak Weekend Market. This is the largest market in Thailand with over 8,000 stalls that sell a variety of foods, clothing, and antiques. After the market I will head to the airport for my return flight.

Sunday, March 22

I'll depart Thailand in the middle of the night and arrive in Beijing early in the morning. I have another 8.5 hour layover, so I've arranged for private transportation to and from the Mtutianyu section of the Great Wall. I have about 2 hours to take it all in before my driver takes me back to Beijing to have a special lunch, Beijing roast duck.

Then, when all the adventures are behind me, I'll be sleeping as much as possible on the return flight to Houston because I have class the next day!

PERU

In August after my summer internship, I plan to take a 15-day trip to hike the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu and stay in an Amazon Rain Forest lodge. The dates are not yet confirmed because I am waiting to hear back about official internship dates.

Day 1

Flight departs Austin Bergstrom airport, arrives in Lima, Peru.

Day 2

Overnight bus ride to Cusco.

Day 3

Explore Cusco, night stay in rented room.

Days 4-7

Hike the Inca trail on a guided tour leaving from Cusco. The hike ends with free time at Machu Picchu, then a bus ride back to Cusco.

Day 8

Bus ride to Puerto Maldonado, check into Amazon lodge.

Days 9-12

Activities at the lodge include wildlife-spotting excursions by foot and by boat, piranha fishing, and climbing tree platforms for a bird's eye view of the rain forest.

Day 13

Bus ride from Puerto Maldonado to Cusco, night stay in Cusco.

Day 14

Overnight bus ride from Cusco to Lima.

Day 15

Flight departs Lima back to Austin.

COST BREAKDOWN

Thailand	
Item	Cost
IAH airport parking	\$ 80.00
Roundtrip flight IAH-BKK	\$ 1,048.10
Subway in China	\$ 16.00
Forbidden City entrance	\$ 7.00
Airport transfer to hotel in Bangkok	\$ 40.00
Domestic Transportation within Thailand & Lodging	\$ 649.00
Temple and Bicycle Tours, Cooking Class	\$ 150.00
Meals	\$ 120.00
Great Wall Private Driver	\$ 165.00
Great Wall Entrance and Cable Car Ticket	\$ 19.00
Insurance	\$ 68.00
Total	\$ 2,362.10
Less Personal Savings	\$(1,805.10)
Financial Need	\$ 557.00

Peru	
Item	Cost
AUS airport parking	\$ 98.00
Roundtrip flight AUS-LIM	\$ 650.00
Round trip bus Lima to Cuzco	\$ 98.10
2 night Cuzco private room rental	\$ 60.00
Inca Trail Hike/ Machu Picchu	\$ 690.00
Round trip bus Cusco to Puerto Maldonado	\$ 49.05
5 night stay Amazon lodge in Puerto Maldonado	\$ 599.00
Meals	\$ 250.00
Insurance	\$ 92.00
Total	\$ 2,586.15
Less Estimated Personal Contribution	\$(1,500.00)
Financial Need	\$ 1,086.15
Estimated Financial Need for Both Trips	\$ 1,643.15