

The Travelers End

If a journey of a lifetime begins with the first step, there may be a time when you begin to see the end of the trail...The exotic distant shores seemingly all too familiar.

Push-pins placed on a map of future travel, slowly removed over years of exploration. You run your finger over the hole where the pin was once pushed, remembering what it was like to NOT know a place, now you feel the edges of that hole, the little dimple taking your mind back to your time there. The names of places get garbled with the passage of time; such is the traveler's lot.

The *Travelers Life*, or perhaps just a life full of travel generates a myriad of thoughts and emotions as one moves along the trail. It's uncertain whether one chooses this life, or whether this "life" chooses us, but there is no denying the gravitational pull of the open road to those who seek it.

Strangers meeting across a coffee, departing as comrades, facing an unknown "out there"; united as in "we".

We traveling nomads are from locations both distant and distinct, like tattoos, yet sharing a common quest, to explore, to see a difference and revel in its existence and our ability to get there in the time allotted.

This *life* has changed over the years; where once road-weary travelers huddled around a coffee pot in search of the wisdom of their peers, the coffee pot is now a wifi router, and a majority of the questions are asked on-line with faceless peers of digital origin. Not that there isn't still a bond between us, it's just that the electronics have reserved a spot at the table; and music videos replace the sing-alongs.

Where once we asked where the closest shop was, we now just need the wifi-password.

But this *life*, does seem to age well with its participants. The glories of summits past, revelations taking on a patina with each retelling; one might wonder if the thrill of the doing can be outdone by a clever oration later.

The way forward is rarely downhill, but with experience comes acceptance of certain realities when you punch your ticket to "go out there":

- There is never a mint on the pillows where we stay, so if it's small and dark, it's a bug.
- You will literally walk thru your shoes, and wear thru your clothes in this life. Folks of nominal dimension can replace that worn stuff; we of a larger size can not – this may explain why the backpack never gets any lighter.

- The presence of electronics in your life necessitates the need for cables and chargers. At the moment, phone bits are replaceable while camera bits generally are not, so you bring two of every important camera bit - just in case

- The bottom bunk is hallowed ground, reserved for those first thru the door or too aged to climb the rungs up top. Bottom bunk with an outlet is as close as you'll get to nirvana on this side of the grass, so count your blessings and get there early

The march of the traveler, always on the move; undulating like a shark under the weight of an overstuffed pack, towards the next great thing.

And always the night bus, carrying a great unseen migration of carcass and cargo from point to point; resetting for the coming dawn.

As the adventures mount, you develop a set of skills over time – this is the *Travelers Way*

- Plotting the distance from bus to bed with an eye on where to eat

- Ordering food can require a bit of language skill, a dash of pantomime and a pinch of interpretive dance, but you usually won't miss a meal in any case

- Knowing which hostel is “right” for you; how long to stay, and more importantly, when it's time to go

- Figuring out where to leave the bulk of your pack, so you can flit away with a much smaller load on your back will save you a lot of hassle

The approaching shore causes a stir amongst the travelers, who are a restless lot; anxious for the change of venue, cautious to leave nothing behind, ever thankful for the good company and safe passage.

The traveler's life is often valued by the places they've been rather than the adventures they've had. Check-boxes are easier to categorize, I suppose. A look back by any traveler, rewinds the spool of events that got us to this point, and gives us the confidence to seek out the obscure. For the way forward is always less certain; teetering footfalls as you look out towards a new horizon and not where you're putting your feet. This is also a great way to battle sea sickness.

But you WILL move forward, applying what you know, to greet each coming morn as a new opportunity and not more of the same 'ol song.

Eventually the list of “*been there's*” starts to exceed the list of “*not yet's*” and your beard seems older than the travelers you're bunking with; leaving you with the impression that it's OK to pick up a tail wind, and head for home. Your spot will be filled with a younger version of yourself:

With the same (or more) curiosity you had

With better technology and new ideas on how to connect to this new world

And (Most likely) with better and/or more hair

This *changing of the guard* is met not with a shaken fist nor growl of “YOU KIDS!”, but rather a smile; acceptance that you have accomplished what you set out to do, not for them or those back home, but for yourself. Everyone has their own voyage to make and there should be no regrets for choices made as the final bell tolls. You will always hear that bell toll...denoting last call for alcohol...but I digress.

Adventures come in all shapes and sizes and “fitting in” among non-travelers can be just as exhilarating as taking off, and perhaps a little softer on the bottom line.

An explorer will always be curious, with questions that go unanswered. But with age comes the wisdom that there is nothing greater in life than a well-timed siesta.

And upon that final approach, the familiar squeal of the tires meeting runway tarmac, the air of finality...

Fair winds and following seas for those travelers I have met and left “out there”. You’ve heard my tales, seen what I’ve seen out there, so go out and have your own adventures...I’ll be waiting to hear how far you get.

The end of a voyage, but the voyager goes on

The end of a chapter, but not the book

Just this Traveler’s End.....

This Travelers End..

The end of a voyage, but not of my vision,

Where and when, that was my decision,

What began as a dream, push-pins in maps,

Was delivered thru shoe-leather, planes, busses and tramps,

"To See the World" thru less cynical eyes,

Produced a life just full of surprise.

From trail to tarmac , toward wind-swept peak,

To towns with names too twisted to speak,

The hostel bed beckons at the end of the day,

A 9.1 rating, reserve your stay!

A world view I sought, all full of wonder,

From the NorCap of Europe, to the world "Down Under",

From Uyuni to Ushuaia, Ulaan to Uxmal,

From Balmaceda to Barcelona, I tried to see them all,

From Darwin to Denmark, Sumatra to Sweden,

I've walked all those miles shootin' and eatin',

And all those road miles kept me inspired,

Those late night busses left me more than just tired,

The best of Africa, in a truck called, "*Over Land*"

Be part of a group, join in the *band*,

You have to go along to get along, or so they say,

Easier said than done, living on a truck every day,

To ramble thru Mongolia was really the best,
But to smile while doing it was really the test,
They called it an "Adventure" and we didn't know why,
But away we went, let's give it a try,
Over hill and thru dale, even got stuck in snow,
Sleeping in sheds, without beds, and away we'd go,
There are Reindeers to herd, and camels to out run,
Eagles are big birds, drunken Mongols are such fun,
Peru by bus, stopping once a day,
Sand Dunes and Nazca Lines along the way
Where the pavement ends, nothing but gravel,
But you don't always need roads to travel,
Boots and a pack, stove and tent,
Never look back, all days well spent,
Your eyes take it all in, your boots do the walking,
Meet a friend along the way, and you get to talking,
Where you've been, and where you're going,
Sometimes you rushing, sometimes you're strolling,
But forward you go, the end not always certain,
Go while you can, delay that final curtain,
Movement for the sake of what you'll learn,
New things to see around every turn,
Some days the biggest decision, is it sandals or boots,
Long sleeves or short, or even bathing suits,
How to get there, is there a late bus?

Lots of routes, plenty to discuss,
As day rolls to dusk, all the late night banter,
After lights out, batteries for the lantern,
Some nights actually welcome the the morn,
All night discussions just seem to be the norm,
When friends are made out on the trail...

And Finally:

What Do I Know About Eating Out There?

The “Burping” List of Global Culinary Highlights

The Aussie Barbecue

The Scandinavian Hot Dog Thing

The Swedish Salad-for-the-Train Thing

The Chipati of Africa

The Mongolian Mutton and Fried Noodles

The Hakken Mi of Kuala Lumpur

All the Burgers of New Zealand

The Dhal Bhat of Nepal

The Blue Lasi of Varanasi, India

The Dhaba of India

The Makloub of Tunisia

The Tajine of Morocco

The “Guitar Hero” in Hungary

The Shawarma at Kazaz of Egypt

The Falafel and Hummus at Hashems in Amman, Jordan

The Gypsy Sarmale of Romania

The Blueberry Dumplings of Bratislava

The Pilsner in Prague (master's program graduate in tasting)

The Zapiekanka of Krakow

The Greg and Tom Beer Hostel of Krakow

The Kielbasa Man with his Kielbasa Van in Krakow

The Adano Donar of Istanbul

The Chicken Kottu of Sri Lanka

The Proper British "Fry Up"

The Pre-Match Breakfast at Wetherspoons, Leeds, England

The Most Beautiful Buffets of the British Isles

The Belgian Chocolate Chip Cookies at Sainsbury's "Local" all across the UK

The Deep Fried Haggis of Scotland

The Salchipapas of Ecuador

The Carnepapas of Ecuador

The Chuletapapas of Ecuador

The Carne Assado with Muestra in Galapagos

The Cuy of Ecuador

The Parilla Grill of Boca, Buenos Aires, Argentina

The Empanadas of Santiago, Chile

The "Terremoto" at La Piojera, Santiago, Chile

The Cuban Sandwich in Havana, Cuba

The Panuchos and Salbutes of the Yucatan

The 3-peso Tacos of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas

The Meat Palace in Oaxaca. Mexico

Something Called a Tlayuda - All Across Mexico

The Mexican/Chinese Buffet of Mexico City

BienThere.com Travelogue