

Wednesday, Jan 23rd, 2008

Backpacking Around the World

by: Bill Benson



Guest writer [Bill Benson](#) is a Realtravel blogger who spent six months traveling the world. His voyage took him through six continents: Europe, Oceania, Asia, Southeast Asia, North America, and Africa. He captured his reflections and photographs in his travel blog.

Flashpacking those Middle Aged Blues Away

Backpacking around the world was always a far away, unattainable dream to me. I met someone who did it once but he was in his twenties and British. He might as well have been from a different planet. Then a friend 'in his 30's' took the plunge and the seed took hold. Could I actually take time away from my career and endure the hardships of budget travel at 38 years of age? Some research and the overwhelming answer was yes. There was even a label for me, Flashpacker (older backpacker with some money and tech-toys).



So I said good bye to the familiar and off I went. Six months, six continents, nary a scratch. Not too shabby huh? Sure my knees ached a bit more than the average wunderkind but being 'seasoned' allowed me a greater appreciation of all that I encountered. Fifteen years ago the trip would have been a long 'meet n greet the ladies beerfest'. Sure you want to have fun but extended travel should be more than just a long vacation. The journey can also become a soul stirring extended excursion. Without even trying the person traveling might just become the person you always wanted to be.



But is such a trip really affordable? It's easier and cheaper than ever and you don't need to camp outside the pubs or be a hostel dweller. Budget long-term travel has become a targeted business. Round the world tickets are plentiful and reasonable. About five grand lets you travel all year through a few continents, stops in Africa and South America increasing the fare. As far as getting around, gone are the days of 18 hour bus rides. With bargain airlines all over the same trip can be done in two hours costing just a little more. For \$350 the [Bangkok](#) Airpass let me fly from China to Cambodia to Thailand and Singapore. Can't beat that.

Lodging? In Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America you can easily get by on \$25-30 a day for meals, land travel, lodging and basic activities. A bungalow right on the beach in Kendwa, Zanzibar cost \$10. Okay there's no electricity and it has a sand floor, but the experience of reading 'Heart of Darkness' under a mosquito net by candle light, as the Indian ocean crested yards away was priceless. I found clean, safe, single rooms with a bathroom for around \$15 a night nearly everywhere. And here's the key to budget travel, eat and drink where the locals do. I guarantee a good meal and a beer for five bucks off the tourist trail anywhere beyond the West.

One way to really reduce lodging costs is couchsurfing. By searching on the internet for couchsurfing sites, you will find a barter 'program' that pairs like minded travelers with free accommodations to change the world to one big sleepover. Hooray! Not only do you get a free 'couch' for a few days but you meet some really great people. I couchsurfed several times and all my hosts were amazingly trusting, gracious and kind. It was like having a built-in friend as they showed me around their home town. Excellent, but conscience dictates that you return the favors after the trip.



Tours? I avoid them like the plague but if necessary try a little research beforehand, comparing trips on a website like Realtravel.com. Then book in person. I saved \$900 off the out of country price on my Serengeti safari. What about the language barrier? Yes, you end up ordering chicken feet by accident on occasion. Understanding the locals can be tough but [New York City](#) folk say the same thing about those of us in Brooklyn. Crime? No issues. Terrorism or unstable governments? Not a problem. The good in people far outweighs the bad. Like the older gentleman who missed his own train in order to walk me to the right platform in a packed [Cairo](#) Metro, or when I forgot my I-Pod on a street vendor's table in Lovina, Bali and found it waiting for me several hours later.



The world is safe, cheap and accessible. Most people are truly happy to meet visitors. "Welcome to Egypt" still rings in my ears. It brings the same warm feeling I found wherever I traveled the world. And it's not just tough guys like me. I saw every type of independent traveler imaginable. Senior citizens hiking in Peru, solo women on safari in Africa, a couple with a newborn on a dive boat in Indonesia. It doesn't matter your age, gender or if you're on your own. Take the time, find the resources and see the world. Your experiences will become a part of you like nothing else. You'll return wiser, more self reliant, stronger, and maybe even ready to face life after forty.

Land Ho!

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- [Adventure](#) (15)
- [Africa](#) (61)
- [Antarctic](#) (3)
- [Around the World](#) (36)
- [Art & Architecture](#) (20)
- [Asia](#) (103)
- [Australia](#) (39)
- [Autumn](#) (7)
- [Beach Holidays](#) (26)
- [Canada](#) (22)
- [Caribbean](#) (5)
- [Central America](#) (24)
- [Cook Islands](#) (1)
- [Cruise](#) (5)
- [Destinations](#) (360)
- [Europe](#) (226)
- [Family Travel](#) (28)
- [Featured RealTravelers](#) (99)
- [Featured Travel Stories](#) (169)
- [Festivals and Holidays](#) (23)
- [Fiji](#) (8)
- [Food & Wine](#) (17)
- [French Polynesia](#) (3)
- [French Polynesia](#) (2)
- [Hawaii](#) (5)
- [Hiking and Trekking](#) (31)
- [Hotels](#) (10)
- [India](#) (9)
- [Italy](#) (1)
- [Itineraries](#) (11)
- [Mexico](#) (18)
- [Middle East](#) (11)
- [Music](#) (6)
- [New York](#) (8)
- [New Zealand](#) (46)
- [Off the Beaten Path](#) (5)
- [Parks](#) (12)
- [Pet Travel](#) (5)
- [Relaxation](#) (6)
- [Road Trips](#) (24)
- [Romantic Getaways](#) (8)