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Student Travel – Backpacking In Europe

By: Nomadrick Chapo

For the fortunate few, life isn't complete without a backpacking trip through Europe. This right of passage is believed to further the maturation process of college students, according to sociologists. Of course, others have opined that copious amounts of alcohol, sun and Amsterdam have something to do with it. Regardless of your purpose, you still have to figure out what to take.

Backpack – Getting In Touch With Your Inner Mule

Obviously, the first critical item is your backpack. While one doesn't need to buy the \$10,000 Himalaya Turbo Pack, you should also avoid the \$12 blue light special. So, how do you pick a happy middle ground?

The best method for picking a backpack involves three phone books. Select/swipe/borrow three yellow page books from neighbors/friends/enemies and hit your local sporting goods store. With the books, head to the backpackalozza section of the store and pick out a few sturdy/cool/outrageous rigs. Stuff the phone books in, adjust the straps and go for a walk. Now break out into a run to simulate future dashes for trains/ ferries/ toilets and make the sales people nervous. These steps should quickly reveal the perfect pack.

Now, you may have read other publications suggesting highly technical ways to select a backpack. Trust me, until you have run for the last ferry from Italy to Greece, you have no idea how to pick a pack. The three phone book test solves this nicely.

What To Take

There are a few mantras that every person should chant before packing for Europe. These chants were developed originally by the little known, Oh-My-Back Monks of Southeast Asia. The "OMB" Monks were known for traveling half way to far off cities, turning around, returning home and then traveling the full way to said cities. Religious experts opined as to the deep metaphysical meaning of such trips. They were later embarrassed when the monks revealed the back and forth nature of the trips was due to forgetting something, often whether they had turned off the iron. Nonetheless, such chants have become the guiding light of experienced backpackers.

Let us slowly and clearly chant together,

“I will pack only that which will not result in me being hunched over like a Sherpa.”

“Remember, I can pick it [(lower voice) toothpaste, book, soap] up over there.”

“I will not stuff thy pack to the point of bursting, for thy damn zippers always break/get snagged/refuse to work.”

“I will learn humility through wearing incredibly wrinkled clothes and shall not bring an iron.”

“I shall bring only one guide book, not one for each country that I MIGHT see.”

“I accept that I will come home wearing something I didn’t take and will have lost/traded/burned much of what I did take.”

For female travelers and, okay, the occasional male,

“I will not bring high heels or a gaggle of make-up.”

Admittedly, chanting these mantras will not bring you immediate enlightenment. Fret, not. You can always throw items away or send them home in a box to your parents/friends/parole officer. For the resourceful backpacker, it is not unheard of to send particularly smelly/discolored/toxic clothing to an ex-girlfriend/ex-boyfriend/little brother. Follow these practical guidelines and you will soon happily be speaking in a loud voice to make foreigners understand you.

The Evidence

This is the hard part for most travelers to wrap their minds around. You will forget those special moments of your trip when you met the hunk Sven or babe Svenetta from Sweden and had a romantic evening/danced the night away/got arrested in los/Ibiza/the airport. Maybe not immediately, but you will eventually forget.

You will also forget or lose the contact information of people you meet, despite meticulously writing it down on the back of a coaster/napkin/your hand in a bar/poetry reading/jail at three in the morning. Surprisingly, said coaster/napkin/hand often survive the night/day/weekend and get deposited in your already trashed backpack. Of course, their presence is often forgotten when you later put a Oktoberfest mug/wet towel/toothbrush in. The extra padding at the bottom of your pack is specifically designed to deal with the decomposing result. Still, the information is gone and so is your future with Sven/Svenetta.

To properly record the magical moments of your trip, you must take a diary or journal. Don't worry, you can burn it later before you get married/your parents get noseey/you have kids. You want a journal in a water/beer/sweat resistant case. Of course, I prefer a Nomad Travel Journal, but just make sure you take something. When you have some extra time in the bus/train/jail cell, you can record how you got there and the people you met.

Trust me, when you, Sven/Svenetta and your nine children are sitting on the porch 10 years later, you will greatly enjoy reading your journal. Of course, that assumes you didn't burn it.

About the author: Rick Chapo is with <http://www.nomadjournals.com> - Preserve the experience with writing journals for traveling, hiking, rock climbing, fly fishing, bird watching and more. Check out <http://www.nomadjournaltrips.com> to read more travelogues and articles.

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