



# **Follow Your Heart Around the World!**

A Handbook for Extended Travel

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# **You CAN take the trip of a lifetime!**

You've always dreamed of a long journey, a trip around the world, your very own grand tour. Now here's a book to show you how to turn your dream into reality!

In "Follow Your Heart Around the World," the authors explain how they made the decision to set aside their middle-aged work-a-day habit for just 365 days — and how you can, too. They also tell the stories of other travelers who decided to follow their hearts and travel for extended periods of time.

In this book you'll learn everything you need to know to prepare for extended travel — from setting aside the money, to preparing your personal business; from researching around-the-world airline tickets to finding apartments in wonderful foreign cities; from tips on taking buses and trains to advice on how couples can maintain healthy and happy relationships during long-term travel.

Besides expert tips, advice and suggestions, the book is filled with entertaining stories of people and places around the world.

Above all, the book proves that it's possible to live your dream!

### **A note to readers**

Although this book describes a mutual journey, not all of the experiences encountered by two people traveling together can simply be described by using the pronoun “we.” The book is a joint creation, but the bulk of the writing was done by Joseph — that’s me. When referring to my partner, I use her name, Maggie.

We discussed the matter of how to use personal pronouns at great length. Using “we” as much as possible, and using “I” occasionally, seemed to be the best and easiest way to tell this story.

# 1

## **Making The Decision To Follow Our Hearts**

We had talked about traveling around the world numerous times. The idea seemed to arise when we were on weekend trips or vacations when our heads were clear and our spirits were calm. Each time, however, those conversations seemed to lack the deep drive necessary to start planning such an adventure.

The conversations usually drifted to details, and we'd start to wade into the questions of money and time and jobs and paperwork and on and on. Discussing those logistical issues flattened our enthusiasm.

So I was taken fully by surprise on a summer morning in June of 1997 when Maggie walked into my office and popped the question. My wife's eyes were bright, but her tone was serious, and she offered no prefatory remarks. "How about if we stop what we're doing and travel around the world?"

This wasn't the sort of question I was expecting, but I knew right away that it required an absolute answer. Any suggestion of "talking about it," or discussing logistics would have shattered the sweet but definitive moment. She posed a once-in-a-lifetime question that begged a once-in-a-lifetime answer. I paused for perhaps five seconds before replying, "I've always dreamed of a great adventure. I want to do this. Yeah, let's go," I said.

My answer stunned us both. I've not always been known for quick declarations of certainty. Yet in that moment, I knew I had no other choice.

We stared at each other for a few moments before I broke the silence, "I've got an appointment. I've got to go. Let's start planning tonight."

## Clearing the path

That two-minute conversation set in motion an astounding chain of events that took us from the office of our banker to a language school in Spain to a Buddhist retreat in France to a 17,700-foot pass in the Himalayas to the rice terraces of Bali and to a thousand places in between. For 12 months, from March 1, 1998, through Feb. 26, 1999, we traveled around the world on a journey that proved to be as much of an adventure into our souls as it did an exploration of foreign lands.

On that June morning we learned a great lesson. In our previous conversations our dreams were stopped when we started talking about the “hows” — the details, the logistics. What we did that morning was something completely different. We didn’t analyze it or talk about it, we made a decision. We decided what we were going to do, then we figured out how we were going to do it. As a wise old friend of mine says, “Start at the end. First set your intention. Everything else will follow.”

That decision created a path that led us to the airport gate for the initial flight from Denver to Frankfurt. When we decided to make this adventure, we created a vision in which we saw ourselves getting on that airplane, we didn’t see the thousands of steps in between. And that made all the difference.

## First steps

Of course, there are a thousand steps in between making the decision to leave and stepping onto the airplane. Our purpose in writing this book is to provide a service to dreamers and travelers who want to take their own Grand Tour. We will not tell you how you “should” do things. We’ll explain how we planned, what worked for us, and some tips about traveling for extended periods of time in foreign countries.

Preparing for a Grand Tour is an adventure in itself, complete with the exhilaration, surprises, disappointments and mind-numbing boredom that can accompany the travel itself. This information, we hope, will help you clear your path for adventure.

So, who are we?

We don't fit the standard demographic profile of vagabond travelers. We are firmly middle-aged — ages 44 and 49 on the departure date — and we've both been on career paths for more than 20 years. We aren't retired, we didn't inherit trust funds. We saved our money, set aside careers for 365 days and followed the best guide we could find — our hearts.

## 2

### **Stories From Travelers Who Followed Their Hearts**

We met Mike and Mary at a lodge near the village of Tal in the Himalayas of Nepal. Like us, they were hiking the spectacular trail around the Annapurna mountain range. The trail starts at about 1,000 feet in the jungle and climbs eventually to a forbidding high-mountain moonscape at 17,700 feet. The circuit is one of the world's great treks.

Mike and Mary had walked away from good jobs to travel for a year. They'd started in the Canadian Rockies with a summer of backpacking and camping and were continuing with an extended tour of Asia. Mike explained that he had been given a leave of absence by his employer — General Motors. We were surprised. GM is the world's largest corporation and has long set the standard as a button-down business. Mike, in his mid-30s, was sick of his job and went to his boss one afternoon to tell him he was quitting. The boss talked him out of it by offering the leave of absence.

Mary simply quit her job as a speech therapist at a hospital in Ohio. She explained that she really enjoyed her work but longed for new adventure. "I'm not worried. I won't have any trouble finding a job when we get back," she said.

Their stories illustrate possibility. Leaving a career for a few months or even a year does not sound the professional death knell.

Besides Mary and Mike, we met about 30 people from all over the world who recently had quit their jobs, closed their businesses or taken extended leaves. In general, they talked about being dissatisfied with work and careers — too much stress, too few rewards, no spiritual satisfaction. We found, however, that what formed a stronger common link among fellow travelers was the desire to explore the world, explore themselves and change their lives. Many of them said that they'd put their careers first for too long and had taken too little time for themselves.

Three primary traits freed them from worries:

- trust in themselves,
- the desire for change,
- the desire for adventure.

## Priorities

The people we met were not worrying about future employment. They were more concerned about the quality of their lives. They were confident in their abilities, had always been able to find good jobs and were convinced they'd find them again.

Doug, from California, was a salesman for a major software firm. He'd worked for about 10 years after college and couldn't resist his need to travel. He told his boss that if he couldn't get a leave of absence he'd quit. The boss granted the leave.

Sunny, in her late 40s, worked as a corporate trainer in Florida. "My clients owned me," she said. During the previous three years, several members of her family had died. Even with those events, Sunny said that she'd barely stopped to breathe. One day, however, she simply crashed, experiencing a full emotional breakdown. The stress, which she'd barely acknowledged, brought her down spiritually and physically. At that moment she vowed to make significant changes. A short time later she sold her live-aboard sailboat and took off, expecting to travel for at least two years. When we met her she said, "I don't know when I'm going back, and I'm not thinking about what I'm going to do when I get back."

John and Jason had traveled in South America for eight months immediately after they graduated from college. They returned to the Atlanta area and started careers. After six years of working, they couldn't resist the call of travel, so they went around the world.

"Most of our old friends can't understand what we're doing. I can't understand what they're doing. They're buried in their careers and their houses." John said. "Having a big house and a big car just isn't a priority for me."

When asked to give his reasons for taking an extended trip, Ken from Australia said simply: “Sanity!” Ken, 47, his wife Helen, 45, and their 13-year-old daughter, Kate, took 13 weeks to travel around the world. As a family they decided it was a good time to go. Kate was still young enough not to be repulsed by the idea of traveling with her parents; and her school did not object that she would miss a semester. Ken knew he could secure a leave of absence, and Helen was self-employed. They also received encouragement from Helen’s brother who had traveled for a year with his 12 year-old-son.

On their trip they spent just over \$22,000, and of that they borrowed \$14,000! They made it a priority, and they did not regret the expense.

Charles, then 32, lost his job as a regional sales manager for a retail firm when the company was sold. Instead of getting back on the corporate bandwagon, he decided to spend six months and \$6,000 traveling throughout South America. He now operates his own Internet company in the United States. He’s adamant that more Americans should take the time to travel.

“It would really take me too long to explain the value and the reasons for traveling — but everyone should do it. In short, I believe it’s important to see the world, and get a different perspective on what is really going on outside the very protected USA.”

Leslie and Bob, school teachers from Australia, took a four-month sabbatical to trek in Nepal and travel in India. It was an ideal time for them to travel because their 18-year-old twin daughters were going to school in Japan at the time.

Mona from Colorado got on board a growing company after graduating from college and was transferred to Australia. She worked until she was 30 and decided she needed a new adventure. She quit to travel throughout Asia, India and Europe.

Having a 7-year-old-son didn’t stop Scott and his wife, a couple from Iowa from traveling — they took him along. For five months they traveled in Egypt, Tanzania, Zanzibar, India and Nepal,

## Our Reasons

Not everyone leaves for travel because they're stressed out or dissatisfied. Maggie enjoyed her work as a conflict-management consultant. She earned a respectable income, didn't work too hard and had built a strong client base.

"A lot of people would have said, 'That's not the time to leave.' But I knew it was a time for change, time to wipe the slate clean," she said.

For me, leaving to travel represented responding to a deep personal longing. I'd always dreamed of creating a great adventure and traveling to strange places, and I knew I didn't want to wait until I was 65 or 70 to do it. Travel held much more importance for me than career. I knew there would be plenty more days for work. When the opportunity for adventure was presented to me, I could not consider any other option.

Both of us recognized a window of opportunity. The timing felt right.

## Consider the numbers

Now, for all of those who like numbers, consider this. During a year, most people will work about 240 days — taking into consideration weekends, vacations and holidays. It is not uncommon for people to work for 35 years before retiring. To be on the conservative side, it's fair to say that most people will put in about 8,400 days on the job during their lives. So, 365 days represents just 4 percent of the working days during a person's lifetime.

We'll admit that calculation is a bit esoteric; but it illustrates a couple of points. First, it shows that we're on the planet for a puny amount of time; second, 4 percent is an insignificant percentage of that time. Other than perhaps a few movie stars or sports stars, few people make or break their careers or their incomes in one year.

None of the people we met was independently wealthy; but money was not the primary issue in their lives. Like us, they felt a deep need for change and experience. Adventure, not career, provided the security they needed at the time. All of them knew their own track records, and knew they would

someday return to jobs. They understood that in the big picture, traveling for one year — or even two years — was far more important than an extra year behind the desk.

During our travels, we were asked many times about our jobs. Maggie provided this answer: “Right now this is our job. This is our priority. A year from now we’ll have different jobs and different priorities.