



The Truth About Travelers

I've been lucky enough to be able to ride motorcycles in Europe and all over the US, and even luckier to meet and befriend a wide variety of riders. I've met fascinating people from different countries, with many different stories, among them were those people we all envy: they quit their jobs to travel for a few years, or took a year off work to ride a continent or two. They had the guts to "break out," as so many of us yearn to, and are living their dreams.

A common thread I've found is that the travelers I've met were not all necessarily great risk-takers, as one might assume, but rather people who took hold of an idea and committed to it. They said "I'm doing this," and then methodically (or often not so) went about doing it. Generally, they were willing to give up some old beliefs, some old comforts, in order to gain much more. Almost everyone I've met that's on the road for an extended period of time has greatly simplified his life.

It's not universal, but most travelers I've met have sold off much of their excess stuff. Gone are

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the canoes, the Pez collections, the 40 pairs of shoes, and sometimes even the IRAs. Travelers on the road for extended periods (six months plus) often have given up apartments, telephone lines, and furniture, stashing the essentials with friends or family, or in a tidy storage unit. There's usually someone back home entrusted with the minimal amount of mail and access to bank accounts in case there is trouble.

My cousin Ken left his lifestyle and a lucrative job in Cleveland, last year to follow his dream of running a motorcycle-friendly campground out West. Friends and family shook their heads and did not completely understand, but supported his decision. I rode out to his going-away party. He had a fabulous idea: it was a giveaway party, and everyone that came to say goodbye had to take something of his away.

It's quite liberating, actually, to throw off the shackles of stuff. For some it can be quite painful to shed things; culturally we place a lot of emphasis on the things we accumulate. These items tell us that we've made it, that all that hard work we did was valuable, and give us something physical and tangible to show for our efforts. For many, selling it off or giving it away is like passing out small pieces of our souls. We are so identified with the hard work we do, we equate the stuff we bought to

reward ourselves with our true selves.

Most of us don't have practice stepping off into the unknown; we are much more comfortable with the here and now, the familiarity of the things surrounding us, no matter our degree of dissatisfaction with it. Stepping into foreign cultures, navigating unfamiliar streets, eating food we cannot pronounce — it's all very discomfoting. Terribly alluring, but discomfoting nonetheless.

For some, a yen for the road comes as a calling from the heart (as in my case); sometimes it's a long-held dream, and sometimes it's literally a matter of life and death. An idea gets planted, and depending on the fertile soil of the imagination, the correct life circumstances, and the gumption to go, these extended journeys can be solidified over a period of years or simply in a matter of weeks and days.

In Nelson, British Columbia, last year, Andreas told me that every year his company published a calendar of scenic places. In his cubicle, the pinned-up pictures served as a fresh reminder each month of all the places he yearned to ride. After

three years of dreaming, he found an ideal travel companion, bought a suitable motorbike, quit his job, and shipped his bike to Buenos Aires to begin his year-long adventure.

Wherever one travels, there are outstanding people whose stories make an impression. I met Anya last week in Moab, Utah, and she told me how she got downsized at the Danish television station she worked at. In her charming accent, she related how she decided to take advantage of the break between jobs to "have a fun summer" instead of being depressed. She flew to the US, bought a Suzuki DRZ400, and when we met, she was a month into her four months of riding on- and off-road out West.

It's not so much how one plans a trip, or even where one chooses to travel, but rather the willingness to break out of what is comfortable and step into the rhythm of the unknown. So often in my travels, I hear "Gee, I wish I could do what you're doing." I try to share the stories I've heard and let the tales spark ideas in others. See you on the road. **RB**

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