

Le Bon Journal

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Volume 1 Issue 6: Journey of a thousand miles begins

Wanderlust – the urge to travel. So many of us, once bitten by the travel bug, cannot resist the temptation of far away places. Here are tales of journeys a thousand miles long. But the first step begins with finding the right flight and hotel. *Bon voyage, Bon Journal!*

Flight search

Before the Internet became such an essential highway, I depended on travel agents to help me find a flight. I would often be tempted by newspaper ads, only to find that the offers didn't exist.

Nowadays, I visit various Web sites to find a benchmark for a destination. I'd still call travel agents to get variations from the main theme.

I wonder if travel agents can ever become extinct. They are super searchers. I can ask a travel agent, "What's the penalty for changing? Can I make a stopover? Can you hold the ticket until I call my friend to see if I can visit?" Web sites just aren't that intelligent yet.

Different types of hotels

When I was a child, I used to love staying in hotels. Now as an adult, I love staying in hotels because they are (usually) cleaner than my own home, more conveniently located, and better serviced. My goal is to upgrade my own home such that I would never want to stay in a hotel again. The other possibility is to stay so long and so often in hotels that I get sick of them.

The longest stay I've ever had was two and a half months in a five star hotel. Back in those days the occupancy rate was only 40% in Singapore. This gave me the liberty of moving to different rooms to enjoy different views. The equatorial view was my favourite as I could wake up to the sun glistening on the sea. A bell boy (about 9 years old) would bring my letters on a silk pillow. In the end, I became so lonely that I used to wait

for the maid to turn my bed so that I could chat to her.

Packing to go

My life these days consists of packing and unpacking. It's not a simple matter of putting things into my suitcase. It's a ritual.

First I have to clear up the clutter in my home. Until all the piles of literature have been sieved and trimmed to nothingness, I can't even fathom what to pack. This is probably the only time that I pay attention to my bills and other dreaded admin. After clearing comes cleaning. Only after that is my mind free to think about what to pack.

Coming back is another arduous process. Thankfully, unpacking is much easier than packing. However, this very act usually leaves my home in a mess, which means that my mind gets muddled up as well. Everyday, more magazines, newspapers, bills, and other "readable" material get piled on top of each other. Until ? Until my next trip. Then the ritual begins again.

Living out of a suitcase

Like minds meet. Two travellers, displaced in time and space, met in the twilight hours of an international exhibition. The bearded man showed me his Texas driver's license to prove what he normally looked like - without a beard.

Over a sequence of German dishes designed by the Tunisian waiter, the bearded man told me that he had been travelling for the last six months, back and forth, between the US and Europe.

I was starting to feel the weightlessness of my two months of continuous travel. I had started on 19th December, from London to New York. Now, I'm in Germany, the last leg of my three country stint. I'm getting tired of wearing the same old turtle-necks.

He was on his way to London. By now, he didn't care about the fact

that he had no hotel reservation. He wasn't even sure if he had his airplane ticket. The beaches of Costa Rica still lingered in his mind, for it was twenty-four hours after coming back from this vacation that he had to repack for Europe.

The glamour of jet-setting

At an energy conference in Milan, I ran into an old colleague by sheer coincidence. Although we had exchanged only one meaningful conversation four years ago, it was enough to want to renew our acquaintance. The essence of a person is quickly felt.

He told me about his year-long commute between London and Italy. To many people, staying in a five star hotel and flying business class was a glamorous affair. But he got sick of it. Eventually he met a woman in Italy and married her. Only recently, having become a father, he's decided to settle in Milan.

Once upon a time, I wanted to live the life of a jet-setter. In the air, you sit with other business executives and occasionally have inspiring conversations. On the ground, you either stay in luxury hotels and dine in fine restaurants or you're at home, packing or unpacking. The truth is, you give your life to your company. You have no personal life at home. Indeed, some high-flying jet-setters treat their homes as storage places.

After a year of back-to-back meetings on both sides of the Atlantic, I've come to the realisation that the life of a jet setter is anything but glamorous. There is no continuity in my personal life at home. One chief executive told me that he was always sick with a cold. Another said that the only time she's at peace was when she was in the air, disconnected from her mobile phone and emails.

Sure the company foots the bill. But who will foot your health? And who will reimburse your personal time when flights are delayed?

Trams, bikes, and canalboats

Here's a trivial pursuit question.
Where am I?

I got off the plane at the airport which is also a major train station. I got off the train and took an above ground tram to the hotel. When I walked outside to find a place to eat, I had to look left to check for taxi, bicycle, or bus. Later I took a boat ride in the canals.

This is not my first visit this year. It's nice to know a foreign city as if I am living there. I know exactly which streets to walk, to avoid the traffic. Thanks to geometry, I know how the streets merge into the squares and out again radially.

I see more men than women walking in the streets. I wouldn't come here window shopping. The famous coffeehouses have now doubled up as Internet cafes. The waiters and waitresses are multi-lingual.

It's a city that does not sleep. So where am I?

Jet and time lag

The seven hour flight from Baltimore to London was not long enough for a decent night's sleep nor short enough to watch two movies. This full flight was full of teenagers and loud Americans. As the ear plugs I requested never arrived, I sat there trying to daydream of better things in life.

Dawn broke on the horizon slowly. Above the clouds, I could see the sun crescent upon the surface, reminding me of the gentle sunrises in the heart of Africa only a year ago. Yes, I became fascinated by sunrise and sunset in Kenya. Now, above the earth, I see a familiarity that's comforting.

The captain informed us that we've landed into a typical London fog which would clear and warm up later. At 6:30 am, I could hardly stomach a breakfast, but instead tried to get home as quickly as possible. After a fast train and a slow taxi, I got home by 8:30 am. Home was a cold house with no sign of my ginger cat.

Having only twenty-four hours to unpack and repack for my next trip, I was keen to multi-task as much as possible. While my first load of laundry was being washed, I hopped into a full bath to soothe my aching joints. Afterwards, I lay down to take a short nap - which became a long four hours!

The chores of unpacking, clearing up, organising, etc were boring and daunting. Compared to the momentum and excitement of my travels, these house tasks were punishment for having fun. How can I minimise the things I acquire so that I have less to unpack? The thought of having to sort through my expenses and notes put me to sleep. And sleep welcomed me on the fold-out futon in the living room. I slept until the sun went out.

Tomorrow we shall lose an hour due to daylight saving's time. However, I will lose yet another hour flying eastward. Two hours gone - and I will still crave for sleep to get over this transatlantic jet lag!

After holiday blues

After a holiday and before a deadline - that must be the worst place to be.

How can I remain in a holiday mood when the tempo has changed?

The looming deadline has also changed the dynamics of daily life. The *sforzandos* (sudden loudness) dominate what was previously a tranquil melodic piece.

Everywhere there are people wanting my attention. After unpacking the car, doing the laundry, and opening two weeks of post and email, I am left wondering if I should ever go away at all. Either that or never work again. It's so exhausting to accelerate to *allegro*.

Is it really the *after holiday blues*? No it's not a slow dance, but a fast tango. It should really be called the after holiday panic attack!

Vacations and holidays

Americans call it "vacation" but the English call it "holiday."

There is a good reason why Europeans get at least 5 weeks of holidays a year. Income tax is so high that it's not worth rewarding your employees with more money.

Apparently the French have a way of making sure their employees don't work more than 35 hours a week.

Here in Europe, people lament about their last vacation and talk about their next. In the US, it's not the done thing.



Editor's note:

These stories are extracted from analyticalQ's platform for self-expression and passion for world travel. There's a separate section on travel stories, which will appear in the next travel issue of *Le Bon Journal*.

Anne Ku spent two years as a London-based magazine editor, travelling to the US and various countries in Europe. During this time, she attended more than three dozen industry conferences and events.

Feedback from readers:

Washington: *I enjoy your photos and stories of travelling as well. I found a way to see so many places I know I will never go to through you.*

California: *I have gotten a fair amount of advice from you indirectly in the form of the musings on your Web site, which has proven quite valuable. If you ever get tired of your current job, you could have a bright future writing travel guides!*

Michigan: *What do you do for a living? How did you manage to get to travel the world? Travelling the world is just one of my dreams.*

Taiwan: *You have written about your travel in China in a quite humorous manner. It always makes me laugh to read them.*

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