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TRAVEL WITH 

The Passport blog

Forms of identification: Alex Berger

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Alex Berger, at the Perito Moreno Glacier in Patagonia, Argentina.

Irreverent responses from our favourite travel ninjas.

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Born in: **Cortez, Colorado**

Currently living in: **Copenhagen, Denmark**

1. Where would you rather be right now?

Right here! I arrived in Copenhagen, Denmark from Scottsdale, Arizona two weeks ago. I'm about to start a two-year Masters program in communication and cognition. With dirt-cheap flights to the rest of Europe and an incredible city to explore (before the move I had only spent a total of three days here) life is pretty darn good! Wish me luck!

2. You'd be mortified if people knew you did what when you travelled?

I guess this lets the cat out of the bag! I only wash my jeans once every month and a half while on the road unless there's a bad spill, run in with mud or they're genuinely starting to develop their own cologne. I pack light and usually only take one to two pairs of jeans, and one pair of shorts. If I need a quick overnight "soft" cleaning, I can always put them in the freezer overnight to kill bacteria/smell. I find that by the second week my jeans usually sport that distressed designer look people pay hundreds of dollars for back home!

3. Your most stranded, "oh-my-[deity]" travel moment:

There have been a few great ones (like having my ferry run aground six times in the dark in Belize), but the best was during my first multi-month solo trip. I had just arrived from the UK/Netherlands at the Berlin train station. It was raining. I didn't have a guidebook, know any German, have a map, a phone or hostel reservation. However, I did have hand written directions to a hostel jotted down on a small piece of scratch paper.

I must have asked eight people for help, and not a single one spoke English (just a run of odd luck). This was a huge culture shock after being in the UK/Netherlands. I had no idea where my bus left from, what ticket I needed or how I was going to fix things. I was hungry after a six-hour train ride and it was getting dark. As I started to freak out, I saw a McDonald's and did what any American would do. I went and ordered a Big Mac meal! I sat in familiar surroundings for a few minutes allowing myself to re-centre, then set out into the rain to tackle my problem. Before long I found my bus, found my stop, wandered until I found the hostel and got a room. It all worked out and taught me an important travel lesson. So long as you don't panic, you can tackle anything.

4. Strangest meal abroad:

While doing a multi-day sailing trip along the Belize Barrier reef, one of the crew was cleaning the fresh conch, lobster and fish he had just caught when he pulled a long, clear tube out of the conch he was cleaning. It looked like a piece of clear spaghetti about four inches long. Without a thought he tossed it in his mouth and slurped it down. I honestly have no clue what part of the conch it was. When he pulled another out of the next conch and offered it my way I couldn't help but grin, shrug and slurp it down. As odd as it sounds, it actually tasted like a heavily salted, undercooked piece of pasta. Not half bad!

5. If someone was visiting your town, what's the one thing you'd show them?

While the 17th-century Nyhavn or "New Harbour" in Copenhagen is stunning and found on just about every postcard you'll see of Copenhagen, one of my favourite spots is the

Vor Frelsers Kirke. A baroque church with a corkscrew spire, you can actually climb all the way up the spire as it wraps around the church's bell tower. The walkway gradually narrows until it is impassable at the top. It offers a wonderful view of the city, and its canals as well, as a unique experience that will leave your heart racing.

6. Travel-related invention you wish existed:

I am a firm believer that the journey is half the adventure. Still, it sure would be nice to have a site-to-site transporter and my own personal Scotty for some of the longer flights.

7. Your most embarrassing travel faux pas:

I find that when I spend more than a few hours with other travellers or locals with heavy accents (Australian, English, Scottish and Irish especially), that I unconsciously start to emulate their accent. Especially if we're out at the bars. While it's a form of social engagement subconsciously meant to build commonality I find it terribly embarrassing when I notice myself doing it.

8. Material thing you miss the most when away from home:

My own bed. I'm a rather tall guy. As a result, it is not uncommon for my feet to hang off the end of the bed as mosquito bait, or for me to have to sleep on my side. There is also something comfortable and relaxing about sleeping in your own bed with your usual pillow.

9. Most unique souvenir:

Know how some kids collect sports cards? Well I had an a-typical childhood and spent a year backpacking through Europe with my family when I was 11. I forget how it started but my brother and I began collecting used telephone cards (many of which had postcard quality photos on them at the time). While I no longer collect them I still have (and treasure) the considerable collection we gathered during our yearlong trip through Europe.

10. The place you don't want anyone to know about but are willing to divulge here:

In Europe: Plitvice Lakes in Croatia, best visited in early October. I've never seen anything quite like it. With a wealth of waterfalls, absolutely gorgeous turquoise waters, stained glass coloured trees in fall and raised wooden boardwalks, it's an often-overlooked paradise.

In Scandinavia: Preikestolen or the "Preacher's Pulpit". Featured in a lot of photos, very few visitors actually make the trip from Stavanger to Tau in Norway. Even fewer make the 3.8km hike up to the pulpit to enjoy the 600m view, straight down to the fjord below.

In South America: Iguazu Falls in Argentina, best visited in the early morning. Easily one of the most spectacular places I have ever been. These falls and the national park as a whole have a wild, alien beauty to them that will leave visitors changed. If you time it right you can also take a quick dip in the falls!

In North America: The San Juan Mountains located near Durango and Vail in southwestern Colorado. The mountains are home to some of the most gorgeous wildflowers, rock formations, small waterfalls, incredible fly-fishing and stunning

summer hiking in the world.

11. Travel-related film or book that inspires you to pack your bags:

I absolutely loved The Long Way Down with Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman. My other favourite is the Planet Earth series. Every time I watch a piece of it I find myself itching for the road to seek out and explore amazing new destinations.

12. Lay on us a priceless bit of travel advice or wisdom:

Instead of making a print copy of your passport, credit cards and other key documents to keep in your bags, make a digital scan and then save that scan in a free e-mail account (gmail, yahoo, hotmail). This way you're not giving your key information to whoever may find/steal your bag. Internet and Internet cafes are so widespread, you'll have very little issue accessing your documents from the road if disaster strikes.

The second piece of advice I always tell my friends is to be open to travelling solo. Often it is better to start a trip solo than skip it because you can't find a travel partner. I also see friends get desperate and travel with someone who is not a good fit as a travel partner. Ultimately, this can really ruin a trip. With hostels, couchsurfing and other ways to meet people on the road, solo travel can lead to a more social experience and is just as safe.

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