



The Evolution of an Independent Traveller

As you get older, the experiences you seek out while roaming the world change. **Lucy Corne** tracks the differences

FROM BOOTSNALL TRAVEL NETWORK

Back in the days of my youth, I used to relish sitting on train floors to save a few bucks, sleeping in dirty hovels to get a good story and wearing the same clothes for weeks on end to cut down on kilos to carry. Not any more. Things have changed. Not that the way we travel differs from ten or 20 years ago – although of course it does – but how each traveller's attitude to travel alters as she gets older.

It's only natural that your travel tastes should change as you get older/richer/less adventurous/more tolerant/more mature. Here's my take

on the evolution of an independent traveller.

Your travel youth...

By travel youth I don't mean those car rides to visit relatives a three-day drive away, or vacation trips during the school holidays where you were herded around like sheep by the tour guide. I'm talking about your first days as an independent traveller.

You know how it starts – you want to see everything and go everywhere, provided there are plenty of hostels, limited danger and a legion of fellow fresh-faced backpackers to share a banana pancake with. You steer clear

of trouble spots, sticking instead to the well-trodden routes of Western Europe, Southeast Asia and Australia.

No journey is too long or too uncomfortable, no dorm is too large or too shabby, and you love your new life as a wanderer, constantly moving to a new destination as though spending more than a couple of nights in one spot is a waste. You like to stick with the pack though, clinging to guided tour groups like a preschooler on their first field trip. And there's nothing wrong with that – how else would you meet likeminded wanderers and find your travelling feet?



If you're in your travel youth

You sleep in: A spartan dorm with 30 other travellers

You carry: An overstuffed backpack filled with every travel novelty your local outdoor store stocks

You eat: Anything that reminds you of home and the occasional bizarre snack, just for the story

You wear: Specially designed travel



clothes, brand new boots that give you blisters

You travel: On organised tours or in big groups

Your travel adolescence...

Just like your teen years, this is the time when you lose it a little. You believe you're invincible and in your quest to fill your passport with weird stamps, you head for every war-torn, dictator-ruled or crime-ridden hot spot on the planet.

The middle years bring with them all the insecurities of real adolescence. What if your bag is too large? What if other people have been to more places? What if they spend less than you or meet more locals? You shun your peers, feeling that travel is only 'real travel' if you speak solely to local people, eat only what the locals eat and live how the locals live.

I loved my travel adolescence – it took me to some of my most bizarre and wonderful destinations and filled me with the tremendous liberation that comes with that admittedly foolish feeling of immortality. But as with my true teen years, while I look back on them fondly, I'm kind of glad they're over.

If you're in your travel adolescence

You sleep in: The cheapest place you can find, and if that means a park bench or a shop doorway, then so be it.



You carry: A sleeping bag and a change of clothes

You eat: Only local fare, usually from the cheapest market you can find

You wear: Tatty combats and local attire, whether it's a Punjabi suit, balloon pants or a sturdy blanket

thrown around your shoulders

You travel: On the roof of the bus or the floor of a crowded train carriage

Your travel middle age...

Sooner or later you realise that you don't care how other people travel and care even less about what they think of you. You sometimes yearn for the early years, but no longer have the energy or the inclination to move on every two days. Your passion to see the world hasn't lessened, but you probably have a decent job back home and you can now afford a private room and a guaranteed train seat.

You realise that travelling first-class is no less 'real' just because it's comfortable and are happy to spend your hard-earned cash on a dose of A/C or more legroom. Your luggage is whittled down to the essentials, which includes a smart outfit or two for those rare fine-dining splurges.

Of course, with the benefits of a regular salary comes the downside – limited time to take your vacation. So

instead of hitting the road for months at a time, you choose a country or two and linger longer in each town. It's no longer about racking up numbers or doing something exciting all day every day – you're happy just to hang out eating, drinking and shopping.

If you're in your travel middle age

You sleep in: Upmarket hostels or budget hotel rooms, with your own long-deserved en suite bathroom

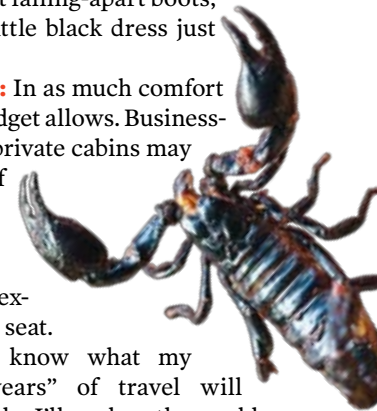
You carry: A well-loved backpack or roller bag filled with everything you need and nothing more

You eat: The occasional scorpion or plate of mystery meat, a meal in each country's top restaurant, lots of market fare and the odd Big Mac if the mood takes you

You wear: Fancy travel gear, your faithful but falling-apart boots, and that little black dress just in case.

You travel: In as much comfort as your budget allows. Business-class and private cabins may be out of reach, but you're happy to shell out extra to get a seat.

I don't know what my "golden years" of travel will bring. Maybe I'll explore the world of armchair travel or join a tour catered to senior citizens. Or maybe, just maybe, I'll finally get around to exploring my own country. n



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