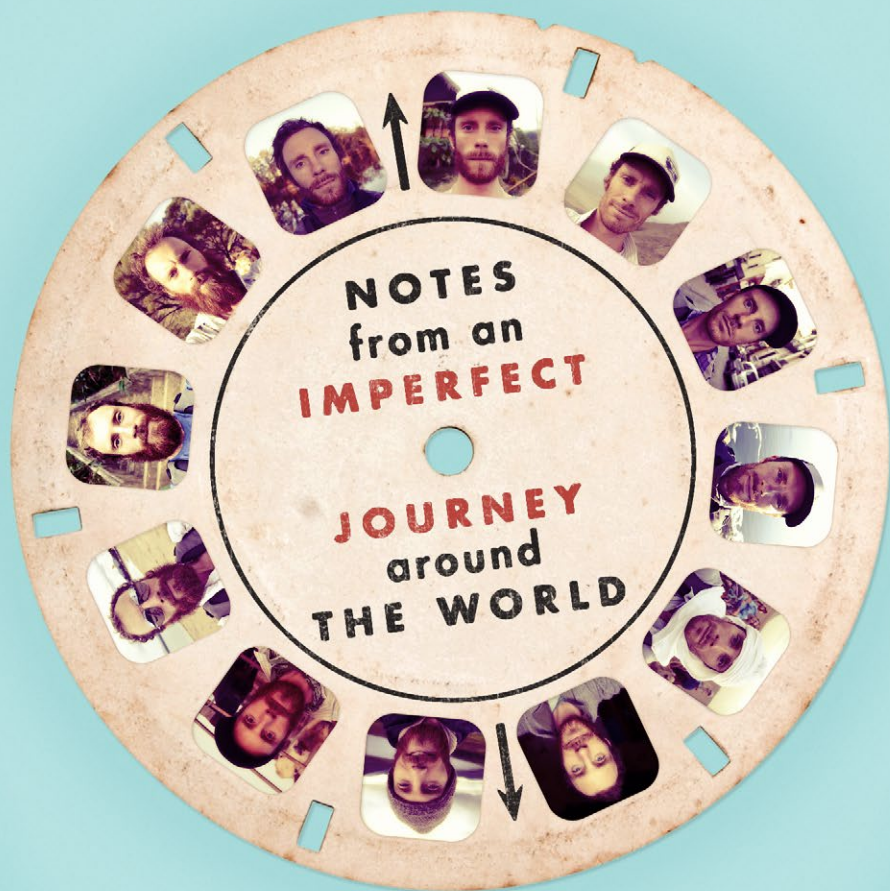


THE
TRAVELLER

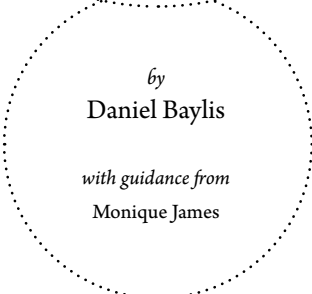


DANIEL BAYLIS



THE TRAVELLER

NOTES
FROM AN IMPERFECT JOURNEY
AROUND THE WORLD



by
Daniel Baylis

with guidance from
Monique James

The Traveller: Notes from an Imperfect Journey Around the World

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*“Believe in a love that is being stored up for you like an inheritance,
and have faith that in this love there is a strength and a blessing so large
that you can travel as far as you wish without having to step outside it.”*

— RAINER MARIA RILKE

This project is dedicated to my four teachers

Mom,
Dad,
Cathy
& Lisa.

I have been to the far corners of the world.
Yet I have not been to a single place
where I could not feel your love.

Thank you.

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PROLOGUE

*What compels a person
to embark on a year-long journey around the world?*

I suppose there are several reasons. Some people want to gargle wines from the most distinguished vineyards across the globe. Others are interested in getting fresh blisters from hiking the world's tallest mountains. More romantic types set out on a quest for love (or maybe just lovemaking) in exotic locations. And then there are those who are simply running from the law.

For me, however, it was plain old curiosity.

I will elaborate.

But first, let me go back and tell you a bit about me. We are, after all, going to be spending some time together. And, heck, I want you to know who I am — or at least how this trip came to be.

I was born in the northern city of Prince George and grew up in a typical Canadian family. On Sunday nights, we ate roast beef for dinner, usually accompanied by a dish of microwaved creamed corn. On weekends, my father took pride in maintaining a green lawn, while my mother tended to carrots in the garden. My only sibling, an older sister, consistently made the honour roll while collecting MVP awards at soccer and volleyball tournaments. I was a less notable child. I enjoyed mud puddles and took piano lessons (but I progressed little further than an unremarkable version of “Für Elise”). As a family, we would take

the truck and camper to a nearby lake, where we'd paddle our red canoe and play card games while listening to country music. If we deviated from the other households on our freshly constructed suburban block, our "rebelliousness" came from the fact that the fifth member of our clan — a German Shepherd named Kinda — was a lesbian. That's about as weird as it got.

Throughout my childhood, both of my parents worked as teachers. My mother taught at an elementary school and my father at a secondary school (instructing math and physical education). Their salaries provided the family with enough means to own a home, to drive an imported car (Subaru!) and to even vacation in Disneyland. If you ever need snapshots of middle-class Canada from the 1980s, look no further than my family's photo albums.

After graduating high school, I did what was largely expected of me: I went to university. There I toyed with new lifestyle choices such as vegetarianism and novel concepts such as alcohol. Unfortunately, my grades were below par due to my inability to understand what on earth was occurring in my Economics 101 course, paired with a general lack of passion for my program (recreation and leisure studies). Consequently, I did what confused kids do: I dropped out. I didn't know what in the blazes to do with that term everyone seemed so focused on — "career."

For nearly a decade, I drifted and tinkered. I tried my hand at a variety of activities that were eye-opening but didn't necessarily lay a foundation for a clear future. I improved my music skills at a community college, worked as a barista at a café and spent a string of summers planting trees in the mountains of British Columbia. Eventually, I moved across the country to Montreal. It was there where I successfully failed at a couple of romantic relationships, learned to speak a bit of French (albeit with a really bad English accent) and made a few great friends along the way. Midway through my twenties, with a deeper sense of resolve to explore that notion of "career," I returned to school to finish a university degree. I wanted to make something of myself. ◉

THE SEEDS OF this journey — and subsequently this book — were planted on a rainy April afternoon. I was at a café with a latte in hand and all the intentions in the world to study diligently. With only a few final exams remaining, I was mere days away from actually graduating. To the detriment of my grades, however, my attention refused to focus on the class notes strewn in front of me. Instead, I was lost in daydreams about the future.

At that point, I could only see a few months in advance. I had confirmed a summer job as a community service tour director for a group of teenagers. But what would happen after that? I had no idea. September would bring a new abyss: no more classes to attend yet no professional life to gracefully transition into. Unlike training in nursing or engineering, the degree I was about to acquire in Human Relations did not equate to a job or even a specific profession. The unknowns of the situation were both exciting and daunting.

Between sips of coffee, I flipped my notebook to a blank page. And then I asked myself a small question (one that all those university credits still hadn't managed to solve): *What do you want to do with your life?*

That afternoon, I gave myself the go-ahead to think big and not sensor myself — to keep my feet on the ground but also to shoot for the stars. A bunch of ideas came out of that brainstorm, some more realistic and achievable than others:

- *Travel the world*
- *Improve my French language skills*
- *Record an album*
- *Run a marathon*
- *Get a motorbike*
- *Open my own café*
- *Write a book*

I knew it would be helpful to choose one thing and start working toward it. So I selected the first thing that had come to mind, the top item on the list: *I was going to travel the world.* ☉

SO THERE I was, a twentysomething kid with a dream to see the world — how precious! Despite my lofty desires, however, I knew I wasn't actually ready to ride a donkey across Chile or meditate on a Nepalese mountain. For starters, I didn't have any money. Sure, it wouldn't necessarily take exorbitant amounts of cash to explore foreign countries. But at that stage, my financial worth was a two-figure savings account and a rusty 10-speed bicycle.

Even if I had been blessed with a trust fund, I had a more pressing reason to defer an adventure. If I took off to travel immediately after school, I'd only be prolonging the "career" question that remained unresolved: *How will I contribute to this world?* Travel, I feared, wasn't going to give me the sense of greater social involvement that I craved.

I was done with being a drifter.

I was sick of being a student.

I wanted to contribute.

Fortunately, my expectations of what it meant to "contribute" were low. I was relatively confident that the cure for cancer was *not* residing inside my cranium. My goal was just to get a job. Basically anything beyond slinging coffee would suffice. I was certain that I could be, at minimum, a non-inept administrative assistant or even a mildly entertaining flight attendant. I wanted to support myself. To stand on my own two feet. To become more than an overgrown zygote feeding from the umbilical cord of society. So I got to work getting work.

After a few months of botched interviews and too much time spent alone in my underwear, I finally landed a job and began my professional career in a cubicle at McGill University. For days on end, I gazed into Excel sheets, talked about my weekends around the water cooler and became a master at alphabetizing stuff.

A half-year later, I caught a bigger break. Based on my previous experience writing for my university's student newspaper and maintaining a personal blog (yeah, before it was even cool!), I landed a job as a content producer with the Montreal tourism bureau. For the next two years, I threw myself into my role by writing articles, taking photos and creating videos about a city

that I loved.

Were my contributions to society great? Well, if you value cutting-edge online tourism articles — such as “Montreal Museums Matched to your Personality Type!” — then, yes, my contributions were great. Perhaps more importantly, I got a sense of my capabilities: I could meet deadlines, I could pitch ideas (and get them approved), and I could entertain people. Ultimately, the bigger breakthrough had nothing to do with contributing. Instead, I learned that I had the ability to step up to a challenge and accomplish something. With that in mind, I could now wrap my head around a bigger goal. ◉

AS THE MONTHS hurried past, thoughts of travel marinated in my mind. In my everyday life, I began to exhibit the symptoms of a person dreaming of international adventures. I spent working hours covertly opening tabs of various travel websites. On the weekends, I browsed through outdoor adventure stores for the sole objective of ogling backpacks. Maps of the world became an increasing source of arousal. The more I entertained the notions of travel, the more I began to ponder my own game plan. If I were to set off into the world, what type of trip would I take?

First and foremost, a big journey was something I would need to do *alone*. I saw it as my own self-determined rite of passage. Besides, being alone meant that I could call all the shots.

Furthermore, unless a thunderstorm of cash came showering down upon me, any type of long-term adventure would have to be done on the cheap. There'd be no fine dining at exclusive restaurants. Fancy elephant safaris were out of the question. There was no point in dreaming of swanky spas. On the other hand, I had no interest in tormenting myself either. I wasn't going to starve on a fixed “one-meal-per-day” budget or fool myself into thinking that hitchhiking from Berlin to Beijing would make an attractive cost-saving option. I envisioned low-cost flights and inexpensive ways of engaging with people. Yup, practicality would be my ticket.

Perhaps the most pragmatic option for adventure-seekers on a tight budget is to find international work opportunities. If I opted for this approach, I could set up a job teaching English in South Korea. Or I could nab an internship with an NGO doing development work in Ghana. My main concern with these types of undertakings, however, was that I'd be locked into a single experience, at a single location. Is that what I wanted? I wasn't certain. If I were to embark on a trip of a lifetime, I might feel more compelled to cover ground.

Whatever my approach would be, my central objective was to travel in the most basic sense of the endeavour: to see different landscapes, meet new people, taste exotic foods and, in turn, to see how all these things would impact me. I sought adventures that had elements of connection, of insight, of education. Essentially, I was curious, not simply to just see new places but to experience them.

What I really wanted, I realized, was *involvement*. ◉

TWO AND A half years after that fateful April afternoon spent dreaming in a café, my 30th birthday was approaching. Up until that moment, the journey that stewed in my head was primarily a lofty pipe dream, something that I lusted for — but ultimately as real as Santa Claus riding a unicorn across Neverland.

It was one morning in early autumn when an interaction at the office catalyzed a life-changing decision. I was sitting at my desk writing a blog post about the cobblestone streets of Montreal's historic district when the campaign manager approached me and began to discuss next year's marketing plan. Things were scaling up. They had a new and prestigious role with my name on it.

"We've got big plans for you, Daniel!"

I was flattered, of course — what favourable sentiments! I had gone from a lowly non-contributing social leech to having an agency incorporate *me* into their strategy. Wowsers. Who wouldn't appreciate such fawning? However, after the manager continued on his way and the initial ego swelling subsided, I

realized another aspect of the announcement. And I was slightly alarmed. Somebody else had plans *for my life*.

That night I went home and had a long, hard soul-searching session about what these big plans really entailed — and, more importantly, what they meant *for me*. On the verge of entering a new decade, was I at the steering wheel of my own life? Was I putting down the foundation for a future that I'd feel proud of? What about my list of dreams?

The evening's existential crisis made a couple of things clear: 1) the call of travel was not getting any quieter, and 2) I had never been better equipped to respond. To make world travel feasible, countless variables needed to align. My personal health had to be robust. My family's health had to be steady. I needed to be without larger financial obligations, such as mortgages or Mafia debt. As far as I could see, my ducks were all in a row. Left without any big excuses, I faced an unavoidable question.

If I didn't do a trip now, then when would I?

Before going to bed that night, I wrote a sincere email to my boss. If the agency was incorporating me into their strategies (which, again, was terribly complimentary), I thought it was necessary to intervene sooner than later. I expressed my gratitude for the opportunities granted. And then I revealed that I wasn't planning on renewing my contract.

I needed to start planning something else. ☉

AFTER SENDING THE email, I felt like puking.

What the hell had I just done?

As the days went by, little by little, the shock of my career suicide became less pronounced. I even grew giddy. I wasn't going to be a travel writer anymore. I was going to be an actual traveller. As such, it was time to stop dreaming and start scheming. What would be *my* strategy for the upcoming year? Where would I go? How would I get elbow-deep into cultures that were different than my own?

I wasn't so starry-eyed to believe that I could see the *entire*

world. I determined that if I were to allocate one month each to 12 different nations over the course of the year, I might achieve a happy medium between community participation while still seeing a significant amount of the globe. I'd purposefully choose distinct microcosms — with varying geography, cultures and backgrounds — to provide a diverse sampling of the world. This is where it got interesting. If I were to visit two countries (on average) on each of the six inhabited continents, I would need exactly 12 months. The math involved in planning the project seemed rather serendipitous.

I had heard about certain online networks that matched independent projects — farms, guest houses, vineyards, schools and more — with people looking to help. This made sense to me. It was the practical way I had envisioned travelling. I'd exchange labour for room and board. This way, I could engage with local communities, and maybe I'd even pick up some new skills.

The trip began to take form. I would leave in January. I'd go into the world, visit 12 countries and do what people did before money even existed: engage in reciprocal relationships. ☉

THAT DECEMBER, I signed over my cherished rent-controlled apartment to one of my best pals. My most important items — photos, books, tax receipts, a suitcase of plaid shirts, a stovetop espresso maker and my Leonard Cohen vinyl records — were neatly tucked into a storage space the size of an airplane lavatory. The rest I gave away. One by one, I hugged my Montreal friends with a mixture of guilt and glee.

I went west for Christmas. In British Columbia, I kissed my family and packed a final backpack. Then, on the first day of January, I eagerly stepped forward into the world and into a journey born from curiosity.

Not looking to give or receive charity. Simply seeking to participate. ☉



ABOUT THE WRITER

DANIEL BAYLIS WAS born in British Columbia, educated in Edmonton and refined in Montréal. He holds a degree in Human Relations from Concordia University, has planted more than 250,000 trees and has run a grand total of one marathon. His professional credentials include articles for *Fast Company*, *Huffington Post* and *The Guardian*, as well as content collaborations with Tourisme Montréal, *enRoute Magazine* and N/A Marketing. In his spare time, he enjoys yoga and drinking Malbec.

Find him at www.danielbaylis.ca.

“Daniel had the chutzpah to quit an excellent job, leave his friends and home to travel the world on his own. Tell me you aren’t dying to know his secret.” —**Doug O’Neill, Canadian Living Magazine**

“Inspiring and laugh-out-loud funny, [The Traveller] is a must-read for anyone thinking about taking a gap year.”
—**Jessica Lockhart, Verge Magazine**

“Daniel’s got the kind of honesty and storytelling genius that makes me weak in the knees.” —**Candice Walsh, Matador Network**

TWELVE MONTHS. TWELVE COUNTRIES. TWELVE TALES.

As Daniel Baylis approached his 30th birthday, he asked himself a tough question: *Who’s at the steering wheel of my life?* The verdict came back unclear, so he decided to take immediate action. He gave up his job and his rent-controlled apartment to tackle one of his biggest dreams—to travel the world.

With an objective to not only see places but also to experience them, Baylis spent an entire year sampling a variety of volunteer positions. From an elementary schoolroom in Peru, to Edinburg’s Fringe Fest, to an organic goat farm hidden in the hills of Galilee (and many places and projects in between), he dove headfirst into immersive travel experiences.

With a touch of introspection and a heap of humour, *The Traveller* presents literary snapshots of twelve very distinct global destinations. What emerges is a portrait of an individual trying to be helpful, along with all the people who helped him along the way. Lively and compelling, *The Traveller* is required reading for anyone who dreams of international adventures—or for anyone who simply dreams.



SPARKS

For more on the journey visit
www.thetraveller.ca