

# Mooseadventures Self Q&A

## **What (the heck!) are we doing?**

A bucket list travel for 8 months, around Europe and Africa. About 40 Countries mid-September thru May.

## **How?**

We zero'd our credit card debt, packed our belongings into storage, and rented out our house. Lareena took a leave of absence from work, and I'm confident I can get work again in the Summer.

## **Are you crazy? You can't do that!**

We're 55, and know we can do this. We traveled for 8 months in 2012-13 around North America in our car. (We know we can get along being together 24/7 long term). We drove our car around 49 states and 10 provinces of Canada pulling our Goldwing on a trailer, along with camping and lots of other gear. Much of what we brought we didn't need (though it was convenient to be able to drive anywhere, and have everything we could need at hand). This time we're bringing only what we can carry on our backs, and using Buses, Trains and Planes and Ferries.

## **How can you afford such a trip?**

We have a meager income from our rental properties, so we make payments to satisfy the credit card bills. We bought Traveler's Health Insurance. We're using 2 Eurail passes (8 and 10 days each) for major Train legs\*. We use bus services for short distances, and metros and city buses, and the occasional Uber or Taxi. We stay with friends some days, mostly use AirBnB and Hostels, searching for the most reasonable. We thought about Couchsurfing or even workaway.com, but we're not planning ahead enough for that. We will (and do) have credit card debt building up over the trip, and will have to work hard to pay that off over the next year or so. Keep in mind we're not paying rent (our house is rented out), nor storage, so there's savings there. People on a 2 week or month or longer vacation still have house payments or rent, as well as house or pet sitting costs. We are paying someone to manage our properties, and they'll be using that money for... a vacation!

We're tracking all expenses, and we may have a daily average (though we're hesitant of finding this out during the trip – it may squash some plans here at the end!). The general cost will be about as much as a new car.

\*Eurail passes for intercity or high-speed trains require reservations--to guarantee a seat – these vary, averaging about \$8-10 or so each leg.

### **What research did you do before the trip began?**

We have made shorter trips to Europe, and since our earlier North America trip, ran an AirBnB & hosted Couchsurfers for years at our home and certainly asked visitors about their home countries. Everyone was 'pumped for information'. We have a 'pin map' on our wall with where everyone was from. We did casual research on-line on many places, joined some on topic Facebook groups, and more serious research once we decided to go. One great resource was and is Youtube.com. There are many video-bloggers traveling Europe and specializing in segmented travel advice or at least a bit of orientation. A few we followed are Permanently Traveling! One girl in her 20's has been traveling, on her own, for three years, and videoblogs 1-2x/week, spending several days to several weeks in any one location. She learned investments and saved her money, and has income she is able to manage, plus some funding from Youtube hits or other funding by viewer sources.

### **How are you planning this whole thing?**

We're not planning the whole of it. That would be impossible. Our initial plans included the open "collect lots of countries", and a bunch of specific goals or "can't miss" places: places like Reykyavik, London, Copenhagen, Prague, Cairo, Cape Town, Rome, Venice, San Marino, Gibraltar, Porto. Plus, more specific features such as Bran Castle, Northern Ireland Family, Game of Thrones Filming locations, The Pyramids and Cape Point, South Africa (our Southernmost point).

Our general strategy is/was North to South as the weather cools. We can only be in the Schengen 90 out of 180 days, so that is factored in (the "Schengen" being the European Union for the most part). So, we started in Iceland, and then went to the U.K. & Ireland, Denmark, and Scandinavia, the Baltics, Poland, Czech Republic, and South from there as Christmas approached. We met friends in Italy, which was terrific, then we had to go North into Germany/Belgium/Holland in chillier weather, before heading to Hungary and Croatia for Christmas and New Year's. In the Spring, we are staying South along the Mediterranean and work our way North again before flying home from London.

Day to day planning isn't more than 2-7 days ahead, averaging 3-4. Some circumstances allow longer planning, but often we don't want to book an accommodation until we know for sure we'll be there. The internet with AirBnB.com, Hostelworld, Hotels.com, etc., and being off-season, allows us to book same day, though choices may be reduced that close, or airline prices higher. There is a cost to convenience.

If we were on a more 'permanent' travel – as I mentioned earlier -- lingering in places as long as a month or as the law allows, we might have more time to plan bigger jumps.

### **How's it turning out?**

We're super flexible people, so if we don't "do every little thing" on the list, we're okay. Each country or even city has more than anyone could do in months, much less in a few days, so we try to weigh and balance opportunity with ability. We have our goals going into a country. Sometimes we really don't, and once there, check the scene. The best example is the Baltics. We ferried from Helsinki Finland to Talinn, Estonia. Our minimal research placed us near the Old Town, and we spent 3 days just exploring to our delight. Latvia was similar. The people spoke English, everything was inexpensive. The intercity Bus services were great and we had little trouble finding our way around.

We were in Budapest, and had long-planned going to Timasoara, Romania, intent on Bucharest and into Bulgaria, which are both outside the Schengen. However, we couldn't find a viable bus or train to get to Timasoara and on to Bucharest, so we did an about-face and headed to Zagreb, Croatia. Croatia wasn't on the original list at all, and we were delighted to spend 15 days there!

We did have to plan our Northern Italy portion as we were meeting two friends and traveling with them, but it was still done without reservations far in advance (except for hotels). We were in Pisa and "split the party" earlier and at the last minute as we decided to stay an extra night and explore Pisa, and head to the Cinque Terra a day later than the others.

We figure we're seeing a bit of every country, and if we are really enamored with a place, we can return and concentrate there a whole normal vacation.

Oh, and I have to report the WEATHER was amazing for us: in 7 months we've only had a few rain days. We arrived on the train to a seriously rainy evening in Bergen, Norway, and the next two days were sunny as could be, and warm like

Summer though it was October. We had some chilly days and did see a bit of snow, but we planned for that.

### **Isn't 8 months a ridiculously long time?**

It is and it isn't. We're having no trouble filling it in. In fact, with 7 weeks left before our Exit airline flight May 15, we're feeling a crush of time to try to get to all the places we want. We've had to cut a few countries like Malta and Tunisia, as they'll need minimum 3 days apiece, and ferry or airfare time or rates money will be better spent elsewhere.

The shortest stay in a country is 3 hours (Lichtenstein), and the longest is 20 days (South Africa) all together, or 22 in 3 pieces (Italy). Sweden and Croatia are third and Fourth at 16 and 15 days each.

We're not just doing 3-5 days in each country (40 countries for 240 days would be 6 days each). Many countries have too many features to not spend extra time in (Italy), or it's a long trip or expensive to get there (African countries) so you want to add value by staying longer. And, frankly, traveling like this is hard work! Yes, it's seeing amazing things on vacation, but doing all the planning for the next 2 jumps is many hours work and can be stressful. Don't laugh! We need days off to relax, or upload video, or take care of business online.

### **What gear are you using?**

We both have pretty large backpacks (55 and 65 liter), and I have a camera gear small pack I sometimes wear in front. A few sets of clothes, a fleece and bomber jacket (Baubax Travel jackets) which cover us for most of the weather. Our Motorcycle rain jackets (we've rarely used them). Toilet kit, bamboo fabric towel, and a super small but effective sleeping bag each. Camera gear include a Nikon P900 camera, GoPro Hero 2, and GoPro Fusion 360, and our iPhone 6's; plus chargers and extra batteries, etc. Primarily, we have a Sager notebook computer, several external hard drives (primary and backup) and an iPad. Lareena also has a Lenovo Explorer VR headset and controllers (for research purposes...).

We're under the usual 23kg for airline checked baggage and 8-10kg for carry on. When we're not flying, we carry a bag or two with foodstuffs and temporary or consumable gear we don't want to pack in the backpacks.

### **What "didn't" you need that you brought along?**

I forgot I had some things, and some items are for specific uses. The Polarizer filter for my camera – never even opened the package. I have a solar charger for

USB devices I never dug out. Many extra parts for the GoPro. Could have brought fewer, but you never know. Mini-tripods. My advice is bring 2 'extra' batteries and 2 of anything breakable, and that's all. Other items to bring are: Ziplock bags, small binder clips, and hair ties, and any medical things you can't do without (Anti-biotic ointment, Ibuprofen, shavers of choice.). We usually carry some tea and coffee in case our hotel doesn't provide it.

### **Are you "Backpacking" around Europe?**

Not in the normal sense. We're carrying backpacks between buses, trains and accommodations. We are in no sense packing all our gear romantically and athletically around the Swiss Alps and through the Sahara. We just like packing better than dragging wheeled hard-cases around on cobblestone streets.

Once at a place, we unzip the day packs from the main ones, and carry what we need for the day. We have several different configurations for planes, trains/buses, and daily use. We call it "recombobulating".

### **How are communications working?**

Wifi is the key. Most of our communications are e-mail and Facebook and service web-sites accessed via wifi in accommodations, airports etc. Service on buses, planes, train and train stations vary a lot, from amazing to nonexistent, so cellular data is a good thing. But...

We could have kept our American cell phones but would have been expensive, as we would have had to add an international plan. Looking back on it, we should have kept one U.S. phone.

But you can get an E.U. sim card for your phone, and it should work throughout the E.U., but won't elsewhere except location services and sometimes receiving a message for online account verifications. Caution – if you get a sim card from one country, we chose Sweden for example – the dealer will NOT know this – the card can only be renewed/money added to it, with a Swedish bank account or Swedish credit card! You can pay for several months at a time if you know you'll need it. Also, any messages from your new sim carrier will be in the language of that country. I have a Czech Republic Sim card. It hasn't done me much good since we left the E.U. in January. Once back in the E.U., I got an Italian sim card.

### **Verification Code Trials and Tribulations**

We suspended service on both our cell phones when we came on the trip. And almost immediately ran into trouble. So many of our bank accounts, online

accounts and websites rely on using verification codes sent to your phone now. And we didn't think this would be an issue; however, once we began accessing online accounts from overseas, the "security" kicked in and wanted to send us a code to verify it was us.

We got locked out of numerous accounts and had to try to use email or a VPN or call them up to get access to accounts again. For this reason, it would be good to keep your original cell phone and number, just for the purpose of getting codes. Lareena had a "Google number" which worked for some websites, but others, including some banks, won't let you use a "Google number" as a primary number.

On cell phones – you might just leave a phone with a friend, so you can have account verifications from banks and services sent to them. You have too many on-line accounts to track, and to change all the contact phone numbers is too much. American web-sites, for example, don't have the format to use European cell phone numbers. So, the upshot for me, is I cannot access my Well Fargo Mortgage accounts on-line (\*), nor verify my Google/Youtube account. So I can't upload any vacation video to youtube.com during this trip. ☹️

I had to spend 2 hours on a pay phone in Split, Croatia with Wells Fargo to find out my new payment amount (with the new year) for my 4 mortgages!

\*We found out (too late) that Wells Fargo has a dongle you can get from them that acts as a VPN, so it will always recognize your computer and not kick you off. But who thinks to ask about such a thing?

### **What is a VPN?**

A VPN tells web-sites your computer is in American instead of wherever you are. This helps with accessing sites and different content on news services or even Facebook (in certain countries)! But some sites, like Netflix or HBO Go, won't work using a VPN, as they are licensed by the country you are in. We can see headlines from Alaskan newspapers on Facebook, but can't open the articles. We use Bitdefender, but there are other VPN programs. The problem is: the VPN doesn't always connect, depending on what country you are in or the internet provider you are using.

### **Are you posting our progress on a Blog or Facebook?**

We intended to Blog throughout this trip, but we'd need a day extra in each place to do so. We do have a Blog, and have posted, but it hasn't been regular. If we Video-Blogged, it'd be a few more days to edit and post. As it is, we entertain our

Facebook friends with our progress and thousands of photos in albums. A couple of dozen follow closely, “traveling vicariously”. Sometimes we tag people for specific interests, especially after a museum tour. I’m unable to post to YouTube until we return, so I may post some selections then.

We do regularly post to our Mooseadventures “Personality” page, which isn’t as personal as our own Facebook pages, yet keeps interested people apprized of our progress. It features two stuffed Mooses we photograph in front of features like the leaning Tower of Pisa or the Pyramid at Giza. It’s like the Roaming Gnome from the Movie “Amelie”.

Official blog: [www.mooseadventures.net](http://www.mooseadventures.net)

Facebook blog: @ourmooseadventures

### **Any recommendations for others looking to do similar trips?**

Yes, many!

First, this couldn’t be done in the Summer season. For example, traveling the night train through Sweden in July requires reservations 2-3 MONTHS in advance! If you’re traveling permanently and are flexible enough to stay at train stations waiting for cancellations, good luck to you.

We have a friend managing our rental properties and collecting our mail for us. There’s no way to go more than a month from your mail. You don’t know what will show up and when. And some things need to be done in person or with a power of attorney. Our accountant knows we’ll be filing late. We were able to apply for our Alaska PFD on-line. We were worried, as many American web-sites are unavailable to us, even using a VPN.

For Airfares, look at Momondo.com for the flights, but go to the specific Airline to actually book the flight. Momondo sends you to a travel agency to book, like ‘Gotogate’, but their service is uneven.

### **What’s the best part of the trip?**

Everyone asks this, and we can’t answer it. SO many worthy places, and many cool people. Apple and Oranges! We can only answer more specific questions.

We were most pleasantly surprised with the Baltics. We loved the food (and the “fairy-chimneys”) in Cappadocia, Turkey. The traffic in Egypt was absolutely frightening. The generosity of our hosts in Northern Ireland, Sweden, Germany and South Africa was amazing! Renting a scooter and drive the Amalfi Coast!

Don't fly Ryan Airlines! Flixbus is usually a good bet for an intercity bus. The salt mine in Poland was much better than the one in Salzburg, Austria, but both were super cool. And CASTLES! We're collecting a lot of Castles along the way! Huge and little, pristine and ruined.

### **Are you experts on each country now?**

Experienced, but not experts. If queried, we'll have stories, but separating out details may be foggy after 33-40 countries. The European Union makes traveling MUCH easier and standardized, and neighboring countries/countries who may wish to join, are making things more standardized. English translations on public signage being a major one. Also, most countries in the EU use the same money now (Euros), but not all.

### **Are you experts on the foods of each culture?**

In no way. But we're likely to adopt some new ideas into our own food. Probably a wider use of vegetables, hummus, yogurt and muesli cereal.

### **Any change in your eating habits?**

Smaller or shared portions. Eating more with beer or wine instead of soda.

### **What would Americans notice that is generally different in Europe/Africa?**

Many things are different in the E.U. and Africa vs the USA Normal – for better or not. Here's a list:

Zippers (coats, sweaters, etc) are left handed for men as well as women.

Clothes Dryers are rare – they air-dry 95% -probably saving power and expense.

Shower plumbing is different, often unmounted head, and often no curtain or tub.

Amazing use of less space – either bedrooms or bathrooms.

Most buildings and houses are built of cinder-blocks/stone & marble, not wood. And even marble sidewalks!

English is the universal common tongue – very little problem being understood.

Food is less sugary and less salted. Pretzels come with sesame, not salt. Yet Croissants often have Nutella, chocolate or sweet fruit filling.

Many American style foods unavailable. Couldn't find Sour Cream (or maybe it just didn't translate).



Movie theaters have assigned seats – not that you can't choose, but it's not 'go in and get' a seat. Most are still played in the original language, but not always.

Electric vehicles much more prevalent. Scooters, Bikes, and cars.

It's harder to buy ordinary meds at Pharmacies. Have to consult with Pharmacists for simplest drugs. No giant bottles of Tylenol or aspirin.

Pets are welcome in the mall and in shops (leashed, or muzzled if necessary), but not allowed in the park!

Beer and wine are cheaper than soda, more often than not. And available in most any mini-mart store. But there few large liquor stores with large selections.

In cities, it's rare to find large department stores where you get everything in the same place. Mostly small specialty shops. If we were driving ourselves and could range out of the city, we may have encountered larger shops more frequently.

### **Buy anything cool?**

As we were back-packing, we really had no room for treasure. We sent a few things home with our friends we met in Italy, but we've only purchased some key-fobs, and a wire car, and some bead necklaces. We just couldn't afford to send anything home, so we didn't make any serious non-consumable purchases. Our purchases were selecting our accommodations and sightseeing locations, and transportation options.

### **What do you miss about home?**

Familiar food – Ritz crackers, bread, pub mix, the favorite brands of everything. Coca-Cola has been universally available in every country, so there was that.

Clothes dryers – very few were found along the way. Mostly they set up a rack to air-dry, or have outdoor lines. Without a dryer the towels are stiff from hard water.

Fast internet. A lot of the Airbnbs and hostels we have stayed in had spotty internet coverage, though a lot were pretty good or great!

Seeing our friends. Gaming. Our own movie collection.

Just having a handle on what things will cost, and the sheer availability of nearly anything in the states. While we found some large grocery stores or an occasional mall, mostly we were met with mini-markets to find food or snacks or other

supplies. Maybe we're consuming way too much in America, but it does make things simpler.

### **What won't you miss about where you've gone, or travel in general?**

We won't miss people outside their business, especially restaurants, beckoning us to come in. Beggars – not that they're legion, but very much more often encountered. The Language barrier wasn't a huge problem, but it can be wearing. Smokers and the litter in the cities and some of the country-sides. Mosque calls to prayer announcements over loudspeakers in the middle-eastern countries.

### **How would you do this trip differently?**

Difficult to say. It would depend on a difference in funding. Many organized tours are rather a lot for a day, and our budget just wasn't up for it, or at least we couldn't maintain taking tours regularly. Even the Sightseeing bus (Hop-on/off) was too much to do regularly, even though it's a great way to orient to a city and find your way around.

Largely, we would know better about some aspects and be more efficient or wary of scams or sketchy web-site services. Perhaps we'd spend a bit more time in certain places, and less in others. The ad hoc way we're going this also allows for 'taking a rest day', whenever necessary, rather than having every day planned out with no way to vary.

This trip we 'collected' a lot of places, as we are still able to get around, and if we were never able, for whatever reason, to go for a long period--we've done a LOT. Given a chance to do it again, heck yeah, we would, and will! We might focus more on a few areas and spend more time.

We do regret not visiting a few countries, namely Jordan, Malta, Tunisia, and some of the Balkan states, and didn't see Southern Egypt (Luxor), and the Elephant reserves in South Africa, but we can make a special, shorter trip and catch them later now that we know the situation. There are many more castles to explore and collect in U.K & Germany. More goals!

### **Where to next?**

Once we re-insert ourselves into 'normal' life and zero our debts and boost savings, we'll turn our imaginations to the next trip. (Actually, we won't wait, but we won't 'go' until we're ready.)

For a shorter trip: Perhaps South America – Machu-Picchu is high on our list of places we'll still need to be able to climb stairs to do.

The Caribbean and Puerto-Rico in shoulder season so we don't burn to a crisp.

The other Big-Trip goal is Australia-New Zealand, East Asia and Pacific Islands (China, Thailand, Guam, etc). We know airfare to them, and New Zealand/Australia can be on the spendy side overall, but Thailand is inexpensive, so we could average things out. Australasia has the opposite seasons, like South Africa, to consider. We don't want to freeze nor burn!

Meanwhile, we'll continue to explore the Great State of Alaska on our "oldwing"!

**Any general advice for people?**

Yes. **GO TRAVELING!!!**

**SEE & INTERACT WITH THE WORLD!!**

**Enjoy! -Donovan & Lareena**

**Links:** Official blog: [www.mooseadventures.net](http://www.mooseadventures.net)

Facebook blog: @ourmooseadventures

**Khevron.com – links to the above in one place, and lots more!**

**Airbnb.com**

**Directferries.com**

**Hotels.com**

**Couchsurfing.com**

**Uber.com**

**Workaway.com**

**Hostelworld.com**

**Bagbnb.com**

**Helpx.com**

**Momondo.com**

**Rail Planner app by Eurail.**

**Whatsapp, facebook, facetime, watsapp, youtube.com, Tripod.lycos.com**