

10 Common Questions

TRAVELING AS A COLLEGE STUDENT

HUNTER KIRBY



Images by Hunter Kirby

In 2021, I was able to travel in 8 countries (yes, I'm counting Vatican City) and 14 states. And when I came back from each trip, I was flooded with questions about my various excursions. So to help everybody, this is a response to the most common things I've heard as a college traveler. Let's begin!

1. "ONE DAY I'LL GO THERE. RIGHT?"

For as long as I can remember, I have been using the phrase "one day" to describe many of the landmarks and locations I've always wanted to visit. Then, over the course of the year, I took the mindset of why wait for one day to happen? Why can't one day be today? I've noticed that life is too short to stay within your comfort zone. The looming date of graduation, inevitable future job and family responsibilities, and various uncertainties make now the best time to take a leap of faith and explore new cultures while we are still young and tuned to learning. As students, we are prone to be encapsulated within our own bubbles. That makes sense—our communities are a safe, comfortable, and low-risk environment. But just think, would you be looking back if "one day" doesn't come?

2. "WAS IT WHAT YOU EXPECTED?"

Rarely. I'll explain why. When setting out for these trips, I had presuppositions for what these places have in store. For something like the tour of California, a place I've visited before, the experience met or exceeded those expectations in my head because I knew what to expect. For the Glacier trip, I expected Montana to be rural plains and mountains,

but in reality, it was stunning and more akin to the Canadian Rockies and weather like the Pacific Northwest. Europe, on the other hand, is highly romanticized. So you would likely have a sense of awe going into that region, and have high expectations (with good reason, it's incredible). Because of this, finding hidden gems and areas away from the tourist traps would make your visit even more enjoyable!

3. "WAS IT A BIG CULTURE SHOCK? OR 'DO THEY DO THIS/THAT THERE?'"

Thankfully no. One of my favorite things about travel is the research and planning that go into figuring out what regions and cultures I will experience. Sure there are differences that online resources or locals cannot prepare you for, like playing bumper cars and frogger (A.K.A. driving in Rome or Houston), but for the most part, the internet is a fantastic place to prepare yourself for the customs in the area you're visiting.

4. "HOW'D YOU GET AROUND?"

Prefacing this with it's my personal preference and that I can see the appeal of both, I choose to only stay in one place for a day or two at a time. Moving from place to place forces you to explore and travel with a purpose within a city, and allows you to see more than if you stayed in one spot for the whole adventure. It also gives you an idea of which locations in an area are your favorites, so you can make a more focused itinerary the next time you travel there.

I would strongly recommend getting a rental car if you're only visiting each location for a day or two. Public transit can be unpredictable and one missed or delayed train could derail (pun intended) your visit. Roadtrips also let you explore more during transit, allowing you to pull over to see a jaw-dropping sunset, eat topos out of a Chihuahuense market, or spontaneously see a friend in Las Vegas. Even crossing borders can provide some entertainment (even if it's

not good entertainment).

Two things I've realized in my travels. If you're under 25 you will pay a young driver surcharge of roughly \$30/day, so budget accordingly. Additionally, US Driver Licenses do not have a proof of driving history, only your issuing date. So your issue date must be earlier than the driving history requirement for the rental agency.

However, if you are staying local, too young to rent where you are traveling to, or renting is too expensive, most cities overseas and an increasing number of US ones have substantial infrastructure to get you where you need to go a lot more affordably than a car.

5. "WASN'T IT EXPENSIVE?"

It doesn't have to be! There are many ways to shave costs on foreign and domestic trips. Discount travel sites made my European trip a reality, saving 50% over buying direct through the airlines. Staying in hostels or camping are very affordable alternatives to expen-



sive hotel stays. And bringing along passengers helps divide up gas, lodging, and food costs significantly—especially if you choose a fuel efficient vehicle and buy food in bulk instead of at restaurants. A pro tip for photographers is to use this as an opportunity to boost your portfolio of work and sell prints from your travels to offset the costs. Or for those who work remote, you can use your mornings or evenings to crank out some hours if you don't mind working on holiday.

6. "ANY HORROR STORIES?"

Many. Here are just a couple. If you are going to set out on a 20 hour road trip, try to avoid getting food poisoning if you can, this will save you a lot of worry. Also, although travel sites are

great for finding a good deal, if you want the smoothest itinerary you will likely want as few intermediaries as possible. Nearly got stranded in Frankfurt due to a communication error between United and Lufthansa. And lastly, there are things completely out of your control. I had to drive back from Mexico at 4 AM because of the Marshall Fire devastating the western slope.

7. "WHAT WAS THE BEST PART?"

Find somewhere off the beaten road! Although days spent at the destination sightseeing can be truly magical, some of the best moments of my trips have been the time in the car, jamming out to our favorite tunes, and looking for roadside attractions to pull into.

Although every stop in California was breathtaking, the roadtrip up Highway 1 is what I've remembered most fondly. Get away from the crowds, find an empty black sand beach (or equivalent), and make your own landmark.

8. "WHO DO YOU GO WITH?"

Finding your best friend, texting your friend group, and asking your family members are a great place to start! The people around you can make or break your trip, and I was blessed enough to go with trusted friends throughout my journeys. Just keep in mind what your objective is when you choose your crew. If you know you want to climb the famous peaks of Yosemite, you might not want to take your

friend who likes to stay on resorts. That's okay! There will be time for their comfortability levels in the future.

9. "WAS IT WORTH IT?"

Every time.

10. "WHERE ARE YOU GOING NEXT?"

Wherever I can! I'm looking to fill the northeastern and northwestern corners of the U.S. since I have neglected them per the map above. Additionally, Alberta has been on my bucket list for years and I am looking to cross that off in the next year or two. But at the end of the day, I try to keep myself open to what opportunities present themselves! Want to go or need some advice? Feel free to contact me! ♦

