

Inspiring tips from passionate travelers!

SPRING 2023 | Issue 01

TravelInspiration

#travelinspirationmagazine

MAGAZINE

VAN-LIFE

AND ADVENTURES
IN NEW ZEALAND
WITH MARISA

TRAVELING
TO THE
HIGHEST
PEAK
IN EVERY
EUROPEAN
COUNTRY
WITH NATASHA

TRAVEL FAR
EAT LOCAL
WITH NICK



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PUBLISHER:

Yordan BALABANOV
70376 Stuttgart
Germany

CONTACT:

+49.176.376.708.10
info@travelinspirationmag.com
travelinspirationmag.com

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Welcome

EDITOR'S LETTER



Yordan **BALABANOV**

PROJECT FOUNDER

Dear friends – welcome to the first edition of Travel Inspiration Magazine, a digital publication which brings together people, emotions and places and where you, the reader, will have the opportunity to explore the world through the eyes of creative bloggers and video content creators and in their own words. Be ready to let yourself be inspired for new adventures and get to know new and passionate travellers whose footsteps you can walk in! Travel Inspiration Magazine is a digital travel magazine which provides you with exciting content in PDF format – easily accessible online and available for free download!

About me: my name is Yordan, a seasoned traveller from Stuttgart, Germany and a proud dad of two awesome daughters. I am a publisher (BA) and a marketing specialist (MA) by profession and I like the challenge of bringing creative ideas to life.

Let yourself be inspired and enjoy life!

See you soon,

Yordan Balabanov

Yordan BALABANOV

[in](https://www.linkedin.com/in/YordanBalabanov) www.linkedin.com/in/YordanBalabanov

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SAAS-FEE

AN OUTDOOR PARADISE
IN THE **SWISS ALPS**



Hi,
my name
is **Savina**
and I decided to spend
my **winter vacation**
at **Saas-Fee**
in Switzerland!



SaaS-Fee is a small village with a unique nature, located in Wallis – a canton in the southern part of Switzerland. Saas-Fee is a popular destination for skiing and actually that was my main thought to do there. By staying in this wonderful place, I was able to see and discover so much more...

When I arrived, I noticed the magnificent mountains surrounding the village. I instantly understood why the area is so popular – it's a peaceful piece of nature. Even going back to the moment of arrival with my family, I was amazed by the locals's concern about the cleanliness of the natural area. The entrance to the village welcomes you with an underground parking lot where you can leave your vehicle. From there on - the harmonious co-existence between people and nature awaits you.

We totally enjoyed walking around the main streets of the totally car-free resort. Beautifully decorated souvenir shops, pleasant

clubs with live music and tasty drinks, as well as warm hospitality, contribute together to the unique atmosphere of the Saas-Fee resort.

When I reached the ski slopes... well, Mother Nature revealed herself in her full beauty! A view more beautiful than a postcard! A place that can only be felt when you are there! Talking about skiing opportunities, I can share that maybe more than half of the ski terrain contains exciting red slopes, perfectly suitable for intermediate skiers like me. There is also plenty of choice by blue slopes and in fact I also enjoyed them a lot, too. As my must-try tip here is the blue slope, starting from the rocky outcrop Felskinn (at 2989 m). You should definitely try it! Beautiful, exciting, memorable! And... did you know that there are tracks specially made for sledding in some countries, like in Switzerland? Well, if you have kids, you can definitely enjoy the great sledding slopes in Saas-Fee! When packing, just don't forget to put the sled in the trunk!

As a passionate traveler, I also enjoy getting to know the local culture. In Saas-Fee, I recommend visiting the Saas Museum, an inspiring place with folk artefacts and unique traditional costumes. Or the church of Saas-Balen – a late Baroque chapel, dedicated to the Assumption of Mary that has been built and rebuilt three times from 1809.

A must-see tip in the surrounding is the spectacular Ice Cave. It's interesting – to get there, you can simply take the Metro Alpin – the highest underground railway in the world. A 70-meter-long tunnel leads into the most probably largest ice pavilion. The ice sculptures are really numerous and diverse and they make the place unique.

You can only be impressed!



Of course, I was curious to try the local cuisine as well. Actually, a homemade fondue was highly recommended to us by an extremely nice and interesting traveling couple from Italy (with whom we chatted, shared interests, became friends and had a great time together for the rest of our stay) ...

Anyway, I tried for the very first time a homemade fondue and since then I became a fan of it. Especially, of the natural one with white truffle butter... And also, of the one in a tomato style! ...And of the one with onions! I admit, the homemade fondue is amazing, period! To note, they all were served with fresh bread – just the same as in the old Swiss cookbooks.

Would I visit Saas Fee again? With the greatest pleasure! Because of its skiing opportunities with amazing panoramic views, the opportunities for great forest walks in the incredibly beautiful nature, the warm hospitality, and the tasty local food and drinks – it's just a small part of the breathtaking activities that the amazing area has to offer.

Next time planning to visit Saas-Fee, I'd love to explore also the nearby mountain village – Zermatt. And from there – to climb the Klein Matterhorn – the magnificent peak (3883 m), accessible by the world's highest 3S cableway. People say it's like a winter wonderland! You should be probably eager to know how exciting is to be on the top and how beautiful is it there, right? Well, me too. Next time I will tell you the impressions from my new adventures! Until then...



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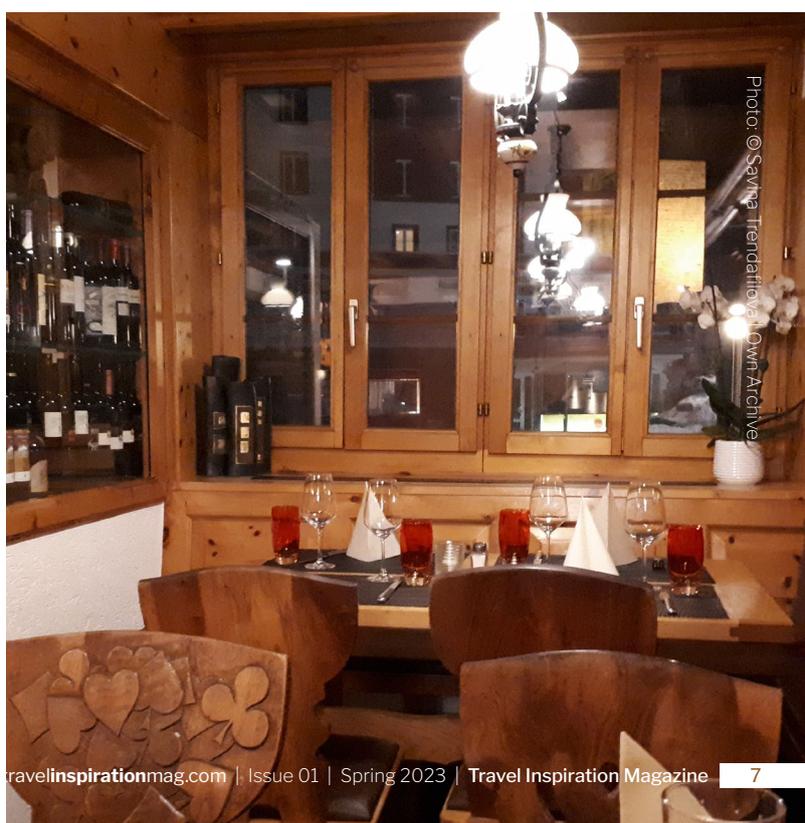


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Hi, my name is Miranda

I am a 28 year old traveler from Southern California. I love exploring new places, learning about new cultures, and being out in nature.

Hi Miranda, please share about your YouTube channel and how it all started..

It all started back in 2019. I was going on an extended backpacking trip and wanted a way to document my travels. I enjoy watching travel vlogs, so I decided to document my trip on Youtube. I fell in love with travel vlogging though, so I didn't stop after that trip. I continue to make travel vlogs any time I travel.

Miranda, what are the most exciting places you've visited?

Every place I visit is exciting to me, but there are some places that stand out. Oftentimes this is because the destination was full of epic adventures, and therefore felt very exciting. One of these destinations for me is Myanmar. I'll never forget riding scooters through ancient cities, visiting floating villages, or the magic of the Shwedagon Pagoda at blue hour.

Please tell us about your favorite trip!

My favorite trip has to be the backpacking trip I took back in 2019 that started my Youtube channel. I spent a few months traveling and got to see so many different places. I started in Europe and ended in Southeast Asia. I visited over ten countries during this time, so I got to experience so much! I crossed off bucket list experiences on this trip such as Oktoberfest in Munich Germany, and the Lantern Festival (Yi Peng and Loy Krathong) in Thailand. It was a fun and eye opening trip.



© Miranda Mullens, Santorini

TOP 10 THINGS TO DO IN ATHENS



Athens is an amazing city full of so much history. There is so much to do and so many sites to see. We included a mix of historic sites, modern locations, and great food into our itinerary. We had such a great time exploring Athens, which is why I recommend many of these locations for first time visitors.

01. The Acropolis. This is probably the most famous site in Athens, and one you don't want to miss! We downloaded the Rick Steves podcast and gave ourselves a DIY tour of The

Acropolis. We enjoyed learning about the history behind everything we were looking at. I recommend this because it is a free alternative to paying for a tour.

02. The Ancient Agora: This was the center of Ancient Athens. It had a market, a meeting hall, and so much more. This was another favorite location of ours, and another one not to be missed. Once again we downloaded the Rick Steves podcast which really enhanced the experience. Without it, we wouldn't have appreciated the Agora nearly as much.



03. Hadrien's Library:
Athen's biggest library.

04. Kosta Souvlaki:
Our favorite souvlaki!

05. Panathenaic Stadium:
The first Olympic Stadium!

06. The Temple of Zues: This is one of the
ancient wonders of the world!

07. Anafiotika neighborhood:
A neighborhood in Athens.

08. Pittaki Street: A fun and quirky street in
Athens.

09. Ice Cream: We stopped for ice cream,
and you may want to as well if you are there in
the summer because Greece can get very hot.

10. A is for Athens Rooftop Bar: This bar has
incredible views over Athens! You get to see
the main square and The Acropolis. I honest-
ly think this may be the best view in Athens.
They have interesting drinks too. Jan got a
drink with edible sunscreen!

ATHENS STREET FOOD TOUR

Greece

has one of the best cuisines in the world in my opinion. There are so many different dishes to try, and everything we ate was delicious. Souvlaki is a must try when you are there. We tried a lot of different souvlaki, but the best was from a small shop called Kosta Souvlaki in Athens. Other dishes I loved included moussaka, saganaki, pasticcio, and Greek salad. Greece has great desserts as well. My favorite was a dish called loukoumades. Some compare this dish to an American donut-hole, but the loukoumades are covered with honey and other decadent toppings.

I made a video about street food in Athens if you would like to see more...



GREEK FOOD
Athens Street
Food Tour
Link: [YouTube video](#)

Miranda, what could we see in the near future on your YouTube channel?

My next destination will be Fiji! I am so excited to visit Fiji, it looks like paradise!

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this article. I truly believe travel helps break down barriers, and connects people from different walks of life.

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**COMING
SOON!**



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ON YOUR FAVOURITE
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* Supported platforms: Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Deezer

My name is **MARISA**...

I'm a passionate woman,
currently living and driving my Van
around New Zealand

QUICK LINKS | MARISA RAMÍREZ:

Let yourself be inspired for new adventures!
Follow Marisa on the social media!

[YouTube](#) | [@marisaaRL](#) | [@marisaaRL](#)

I believe that you can make your dreams come true as long as you have the strength to fight for them... Do you want to achieve your dreams? Do you want to live a life full of adventure? If your answer is yes, then keep reading. In this article, I'm going to share with you my story and how I made my dreams come true by moving to New Zealand...

HERE WE GO...

I was born in a small town in Oaxaca, Mexico. When I was little, I never dreamed of traveling the world, I actually didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up. The only thing I was sure about, was that I wanted to dance and have my own family someday.

I'm from a conservative and traditional family. When I was younger they always told me that if I wanted to achieve something great in life, I had to study hard and get good grades. And so I did, but even though I was doing what they wanted me to do, I still felt like something was missing in my life. I danced ballet for many years but being a dancer professionally wasn't an option because „in Mexico, it's really hard to make a living out of art“, that's what they said. So I got rid of that dream at that moment.

When it came time to decide what I wanted to study in college, I felt so much pressure because I had no idea what I wanted. Honestly, who at the age of 18 really knows what they

want to be for the rest of their lives? I admire these people who have very clear what they want, but I was not one of them. Eventually, my parents decided that Law school would be good for my future and I hoped that it would make me happy one day.

I don't regret it, I truly believe that education is the most powerful tool we have to change the world, after all, I had the privilege to attend the university. When I finished, I started working in a government institution. I was good at my job, but I was never passionate about it. I was just going through the motions day after day, waiting for the weekend so I could go to the dancing classes. That's when I realized that I needed to make a change in my life. I knew that I had to find something that made me feel alive, something that filled my heart with happiness and passion. After a lot of thinking, and some guidance from my mom, in 2016 at the age of 25, I decided to move to the United States to give myself a chance, and start fresh. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life.



Photo © Marisa Ramirez | Own archive

GOODBYE MEXICO, HELLO USA!

It was my first time moving out of my home, to a completely different country, with a different language and culture. I had to leave my family, my dog, my friends, and everything I knew behind, but I was willing to take the risk because I knew it was what my heart needed. From this day on I had to divide my heart into 2, one is with me and the other part is still at home, in Oaxaca.

I took a plane and landed in New York City, and one of my favorite memories is when I went to Times square for the first time. I remember standing there singing the song „Empire State of Mind,“ I was in the „concrete jungle where dreams are made of“, feeling so proud and happy to be there. It was an unforgettable experience and I knew it was the beginning of an amazing journey.

I lived in Denver Colorado with a wonderful American family. They brought me in, as another member of them, and they helped me out with everything, I was not completely alone. During that time I immersed myself into the dancing again, and I rediscovered my passion for dancing. I started taking classes with the best teachers in The States. I met amazing people in the dancing industry, I was living my dream! Moving to The States gave me the opportunity to open my mind to new possibilities and to grow as a person. I redefine myself, I became more independent, more confident, and more open-minded. It was an experience that changed my life forever.



THE REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK...

I lived in the country for two years and then it was time to go back home. But, what nobody ever seems to mention is reverse culture shock. I didn't even know it was a thing until I came home from my two years abroad. And let me tell you, it was a real shock. I thought that I would come back as exactly the same person. How could I possibly change when I was just seeing new places and cultures? But of course, that's not how it works. With each new place I visited, I changed a little bit. And while I appreciated all of these things about myself, I also realized that I was no longer the same person who had left home. Part of me had been left behind in all of the places I'd been. A part of me was now made up of all the new experiences I'd had. So when people ask if I've changed since travelling, my answer is always YES. And in some ways, I think that's a good thing.

It was really hard for me to come back because I felt like I didn't belong there anymore. I had changed, and my view of the world had

changed. It was a difficult time for me, I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life again. I knew from the bottom of my heart that I wanted to travel more. After a lot of thinking, and this time with guidance from my best friend I decided to apply for a working holiday visa to New Zealand.

The thing was that for Mexico there were only 100 visas a year to go to New Zealand, I needed to fight to get one, I didn't have another plan so I needed one visa. And guess what? Yes, I get one of them. I was 1 of 100! I bought a one-way ticket, and I was on my way to start a new adventure. Once again by myself, and without any family waiting for me. I had no idea what to expect. But I was ready for anything. This time it was even harder because New Zealand is literally on the other side of the world. It was a 19-hour flight. I always say that in New Zealand we live in the future. We are 18 hours ahead of my home country, which means that when I talk to my family it is always tomorrow for them.

New Zealand – THE NEW BEGINNING...

I arrived in Auckland, and it was love at first sight. But the culture shock I experienced was far more difficult than the first one I had in America. It was such a big change, and I felt like a fish out of the water, but I was determined to make it work. I had never felt so alone in my life, but at the same time, I was filled with hope and excitement for what was to come. The first months were really tough, I barely had any money and I didn't know anyone in the city, plus a pandemic started. But I kept going because I knew that if I wanted to achieve my dreams, I had to keep fighting.

The biggest cultural shock I had was the streetways, in America we drive on the right side, and in New Zealand on the left side. Have you ever questioned yourself, what way do you look at first when you cross the street? Imagine that you were taught to look to your left first when crossing the street, and now you have to look to the right first. I was so confused in the

beginning, and luckily I never got hit by a car. It sounds very simple but you really need to change your mindset. I had to relearn what I was taught for 30 years.

A few months after I moved to New Zealand, everything changed. I made friends, a group of people that have become like family to me. I also started working, and I began to feel at home in this new country. I worked in an amazing New Zealand company, and also had the opportunity to work in TV series and live events. But the most important thing, I started my own online business from 0. While I was working physically at those jobs, when I came back home I was also working on my business. I barely slept 6 hours, but there was nothing that encouraged me more than to know that one day I can quit all those jobs and do what I like the most. I was 100% focused on making it happen. Eventually, the day came, when I could work on my business full-time and have the freedom to travel.



I KNEW
I wanted to
EXPLORE
this country
in a
DIFFERENT
WAY...

...not only
taking a plane
and going to
tōurist places...

THE FREEDOM TO TRAVEL

...So I decided to buy a Van and start a new project, a Youtube Channel – **Mar Ramírez | @marisaarl**, where I share my experience with others, and encourage them to follow their dreams the same as I do. I live in my Van, and I move around New Zealand, exploring places that are not on the tourist map. And I love it! I can't imagine doing anything else, and I am so grateful for everything that has happened on the road.

Nature here is so different from anything I had ever seen before, it's like another world. In my videos on YouTube, I share all the places I have visited, from museums to unbelievable landscapes. I can tell that one of my favorite places on earth is Rotorua, NZ. It's a small city located in the North Island, and it's famous for its geothermal activity. You can see and smell the sulfur everywhere, and it's just so much fun, you feel like you are in Jurassic Park. You can watch the video here – **Hell's gate | My fav place in the world.**

My time in New Zealand has been great so far. I've met some wonderful people from all over the world, and I've learned about the Mao-

ri culture, which is the native culture of New Zealand. My eyes see the beauty in every single person, we are all different but we are all equal. I love the smell of fresh rain in the air, listening to the birds singing, and I enjoy the cold weather here, even though I complain a lot!

It hasn't been easy, there are so many times that I found myself in the middle of nowhere, alone and scared. There have been ups and downs, but I can say that I am happy with my life. This lifestyle has given me so much freedom and happiness. I feel so lucky to be able to experience New Zealand in this way. This country has given me more than I ever dreamed of and has shaped me into the person I am today, I would not change it for anything in the world. And most importantly, it has shown me that I can find beauty in the most simple things, in nature, in the present moment, and in my soul. That I have to enjoy my company first and feel comfortable in solitude to be happy with the rest of the world.

Travelling has taught me so much about myself, and it has helped me grow in ways that I never thought possible.

Nowadays I'm living my dream, always so grateful for everything that has happened in my life, I continue to chase my dreams. And I know that when I was a little girl who didn't know how to put in words what she wanted to be, when she grew up, it was because there is no title for what I do today and for the person I have become. I stopped blaming my origin, my parents and my situation and I had to make myself responsible and take action to achieve the life I want. I haven't given up on dancing, traveling, writing, being myself and having my own family. And I don't let anything or anyone stop me. I can't wait to see what the future holds, I'm so in love with my future. Who knows where life will take me next?

If you feel like you're not where you're supposed to be, make a change. If you are thinking about taking a big step in your life, go for it. Life is too short to play small. Believe in yourself and never give up! Everything is possible if you set your mind to it. Just take the first step, and the rest will follow.

Thank you for reading!

If you want to know more about my story, or if you have any questions, find me on social media as @marisaaRL

Marisa

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Hello!

My name is Nick...

I am originally from Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania in the USA



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Believe it or not, I am a doctor by training. But it was not a straight road to becoming a physician. I completed my undergraduate education in 2009 and shortly thereafter, I started traveling. I went to Europe, lived in Denver, Colorado for two years, and drove my car across the United States. After kind of bouncing around for a few years, doing odd jobs here and there (like making wood-fired pizza in a food truck in Denver), I decided to move back to Philadelphia and pursue medical school. That pursuit took the better part of a decade. After graduating medical school, I went on to a radiology residency in New Hampshire, USA.



Photo: © Nick Benvenuto | Own archive



Photo: © Nick Benvenuto | Own archive

However, my true passion has always been travel – even through all the years of becoming a doctor, I was dreaming of traveling the world. I've been traveling for quite awhile now (my first trip abroad was at 24 years old, I am now 36), and when COVID started, I re-evaluated where I was going in life and decided to try to make full-time travel a reality!

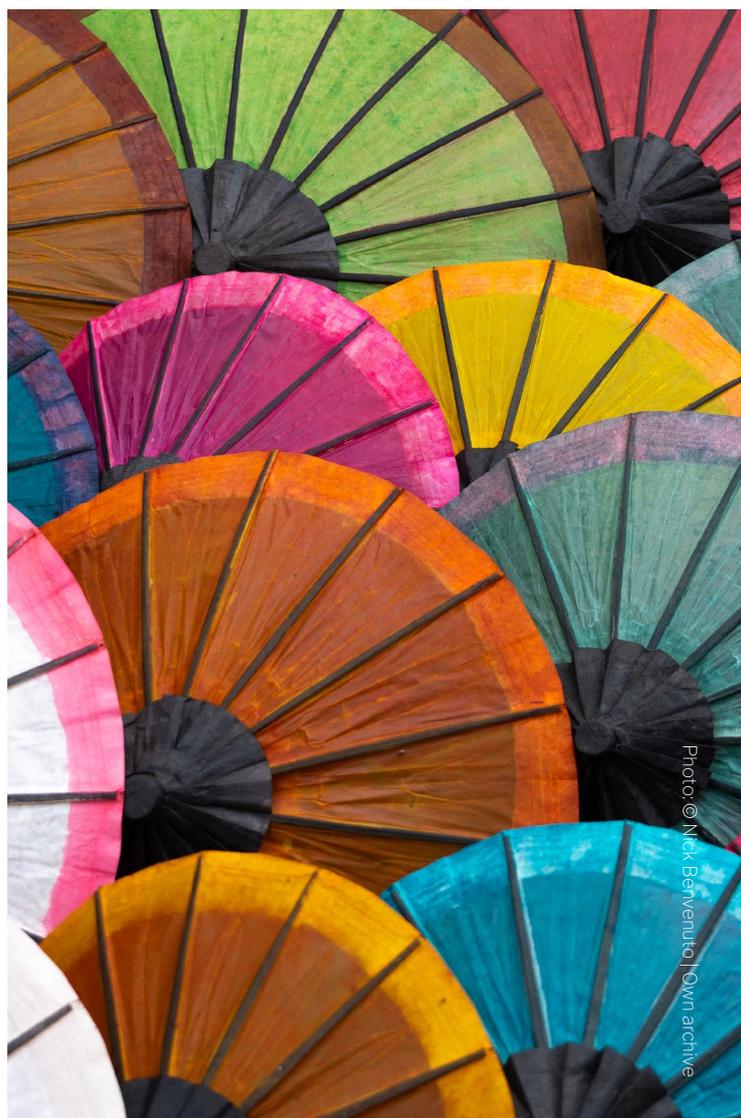


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My YouTube channel is

Travel Far, Eat Local

@travelfareatlocal

You can also follow my Instagram

[@travelfar_eatlocal](#)

I have always had a passion for local food and cooking, which to date, has actually been my main motivation for traveling. Generally speaking, I travel for food (ie a gastro tourist). If there is a certain type of food found only in a specific country or city, I gravitate towards that and will go far out of my way for a specific cuisine (for example, making my way all the way up to the island of Hokkaido in Japan for a special type of ramen called miso ramen).

My channel all started during COVID – like many people, I had significantly more time off from work (in my case, being in the hospital), and with all that free time, I taught myself how to film, edit, take pictures, and edit photos. I have always captured my travel through photos – first with an early digital camera when I was younger and more recently a cell phone. But I've been passionate about learning how to use a DSLR/mirrorless camera for true travel photography and videography. COVID seemed as good a time as ever to learn a new hobby!

A BOWL OF MISO RAMEN WITH CORN AND BUTTER
from Sapporo, Japan



Photo: © Nick Benvenuto | Own archive

RAW, CURED PIG HEART MARINATED IN SESAME OIL AND GARLIC
from Tokyo, Japan



Photo: © Nick Benvenuto | Own archive

A PLATTER OF CURED REINDEER, SALMON ROE, LOCAL CHEESE WITH CLOUDBERRIES,
REINDEER SAUSAGE, BAKED ANCHOVIES, AND REINDEER CARPACCIO
from Helsinki, Finland



Photo: © Nick Benvenuto | Own archive



Some of my recent memorable trips would have to be Japan and Laos. Japan, simply because it is food practiced at its highest craft. Eating in Japan is more than just the taste of the food – it's the presentation, the etiquette, the place setting, the ambiance... to the Japanese, all of this contributes to the dining experience just as much as the taste of your food. You meet people who spend their entire lives doing just one thing, like perfecting soba noodles or sushi. It's truly amazing. If I could pick one country to eat in for the rest of my life, it would have to be Japan.



Photo: © Nick Benvenuto | Own archive

Laos because of its history with the United States. During the Vietnam War, the United States was simultaneously waging a Secret War in Laos, whereby they dropped nearly half a million tons of bombs on an otherwise sleepy nation of mountains and rice farmers. This has led to Laos being the most heavily bombed country in the history of the world. When I traveled to Phonsavan, about 100km northeast of the capital Vientiane, you see the bombs everywhere. They're used as decoration for building facades, fire pits, piled up behind buildings. It's nuts. Seeing this first hand is a humbling and eye-opening experience.



Photo: © Nick Benvenuto | Own archive



I like to focus on the history of a place and how the food of that place has been shaped by its history. Wars, famines, migrations, trade routes, hard times and good times – all of these shape a country's cuisine.

For example, I mentioned miso ramen in Hokkaido, Japan earlier. Classically, this is served with corn and butter, ingredients that you would not consider to be in a bowl of ramen. But WWII, and in this particular case, a US military occupation, brought corn to Japan, and now you can find it in miso ramen.

It's amazing how intertwined food is with history once you really look for it. I am also a huge history nerd, so I try to learn as much about the history of a place as possible before

I travel there. Along those lines, you'll often see me visiting historical sites when I travel!

Well, for the near future, I am focusing on creating more raw, real content that gives my viewers a deeper appreciation for what it's like to be traveling in a given country – riding a crowded bus on winding roads in the Himalayas, walking through a busy morning market in Luang Prabang, Laos, or content that focuses on local people in addition to food and history.

Right now, I am traveling through Pakistan, so stay tuned for new content from here coming in the next few weeks!

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To be inspired is great, to inspire is incredible!

If you instagram – inspire us all...
#travelinspirationmagazine



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MIAMI TO KEY WEST

ONE OF THE BEST WEEKEND ROAD TRIPS IN FLORIDA

Key West is probably one of the most memorable places to visit in Florida. Why, you may ask? Read on, and you'll find out!

As you may already know, I'm from Europe but I love exploring the United States. And it's not by chance – I've always associated the US with its untold wonders of nature, exciting amusement parks and cruise adventures from the many ports located in its major coastal towns and cities.

Our adventure today begins in one of these cities – Miami, Florida. All my friends tell us – whenever you're in Florida, go and visit Key West and enjoy the route that takes you there. This time, on our latest trip we finally managed it! We hired a car for the weekend and headed south.



Photo © Jordan Balabanov | Own archive

For those who don't know, the road to Key West is US Highway 1 – the one which actually begins from our end point (where I expect to see the Mile 0 Key West sign) and extends 545 miles (877 km) north up to Folkston, Georgia. The U.S. Overseas Highway 1 makes for an impressive sight...

It connects the entire length of the Keys over 42 bridges, from where the view of the shimmering blue water is simply breathtaking. The road to Key West is only 165 miles (approx. 265 km), but even so we decided to really take in the wonderful weather and the splendid sea views, stopping over at Marathon Key for an evening mid-way through our journey.



Marathon Key



It wasn't by chance that we stopped at Marathon Key. We knew there was a great beach here, as well as restaurants offering tasty, fresh seafood. I really recommend you spend at least one afternoon at Sombrero Beach, as we did. It pays to really enjoy the tranquility of the area, the white sand, palm trees and cool, crisp sea water.





And once you're ready for something really tasty for dinner, I would really recommend Island Fish Company, where you can enjoy the magical sunset as you dine...

Photo: © Jordan Balabanov | Own archive



Photo: © Jordan Balabanov | Own archive



Photo: © Jordan Balabanov | Own archive



The next day after a healthy breakfast at the hotel we went on to Key West. Once we got there, we decided to leave the car at the Mallory parking lot next to the quay – a good place to start a long and exhilarating walk through the town.

Fun fact: as soon as you arrive, you'll see that there are quite a few unusual residents enjoying a walk just like you – hens and cockerels! Yes, that's right – get ready to be noticed by these feathery friends!

To sum up our day at Key West, I'm going to show you the top things you really need to do and see while you're there...

As you start walking on Whitehead Street, you'll not only get your first impressions of this quaint town, you'll eventually get to Southernmost Point Buoy, which is the southernmost point in the continental United States and only about 90 miles away from Cuba.

On the road towards it, you'll pass US 1 Mile Marker 0, the Hemingway Home and Museum and Key West Lighthouse (the first Key West lighthouse, built in 1825). Take the time to have a look around them.

Nearby you will find Key West Butterfly and Nature Conservatory, where you can see a variety of butterflies as they flutter around, and even flamingos!

If you want get the most out of your walk from the start, you could visit the Harry S. Truman



Little White House, Florida's only presidential museum, the US Coast Guard Cutter Ingham Maritime Museum or the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum, which can easily be found on the western coast of Key West and just a little walk away from Whitehead Street.

The list goes on of worthwhile places to visit, but it's best to go and explore them yourself just like us – try out some of the local delicacies such as pink shrimp, royal reds or rock lobster and then take a stroll along Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park Beach. Soak in the afternoon sun as you lie back on a deck chair with a local drink in your hand, such as hurricane rum, a dark 'n stormy or a papa double (as long as you're not driving!) or take a dip in the tropical waters of Key West.

As you walk back to the car, you might take a detour to Duval Street, which is parallel to Whitehead Street and a vibrant downtown commercial zone street brimming with bars, restaurants and souvenir shops, where you could get yourself a sweet souvenir as a memento...

We had a great weekend full of exciting trips, tasty seafood and magnificent beaches replete with sea views of shimmering blue water and fine white sand. I really recommend you visit these places and I'm sure you'll love the walk to Key West, one of the most beautiful beach resorts in the whole of America!

Until next time!...

 [yordan_balabanov](https://www.instagram.com/yordan_balabanov)

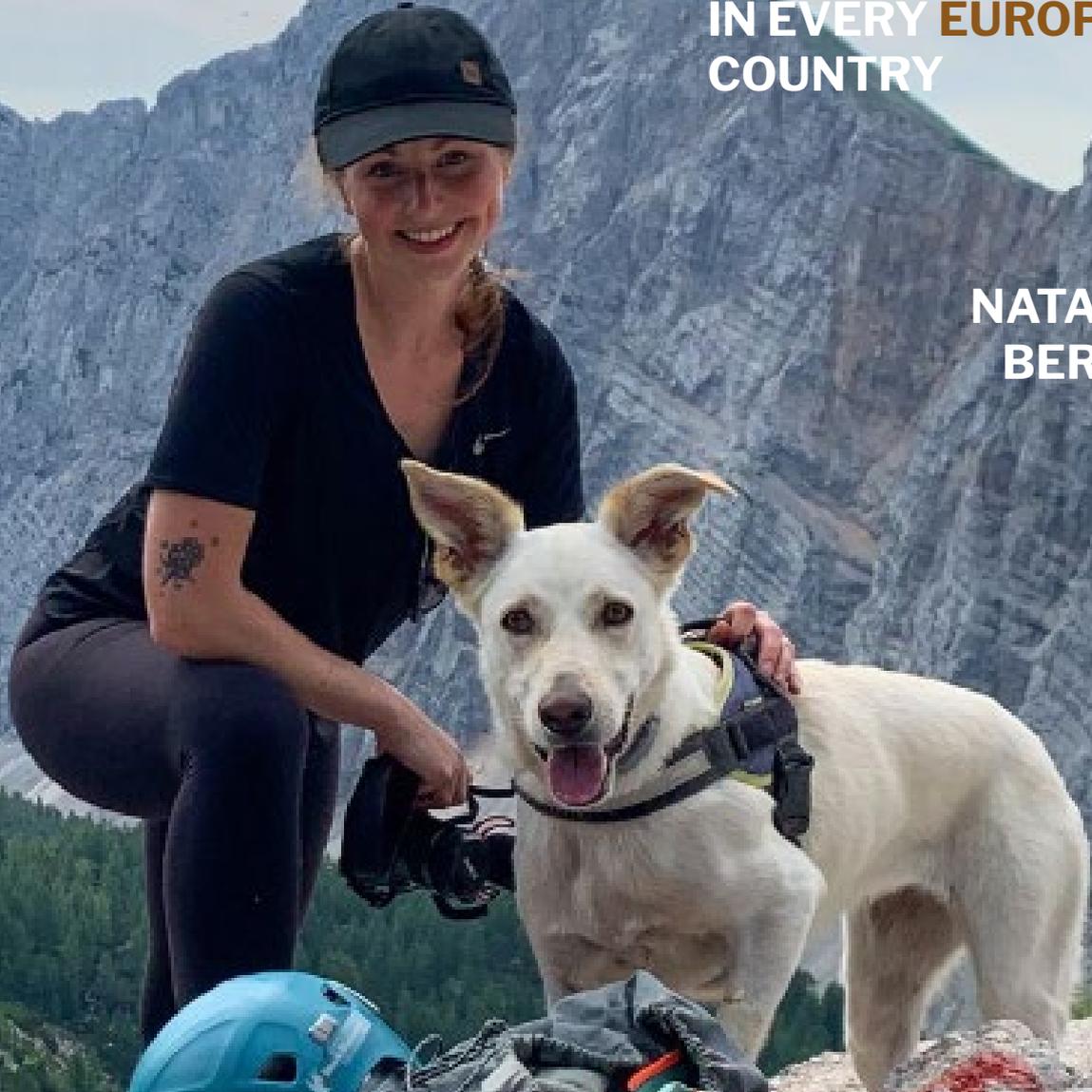
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TO THE CORE, I'M A NATURE LOVER AND ADVENTURE SEEKER

Traveling and exploring are what give me life, and it's always been like that. I'm a huge goofball, risk taker and stubbornly driven and that's how I've managed to continue living and traveling abroad for the last 9 years! I've lived in Colombia, Vietnam, Portugal and Spain – I even tried out van life in Europe for a year! It's all been an adventure!

On paper, I'm from a small city in Canada called Kitchener. In reality, I was raised all over Canada – hence my bizarre accent. My entire childhood and adolescence was about moving and being independent. You see, my parents divorced when I was very young, so I flew back and forth across Canada, usually alone. I quickly learned how to navigate and take care of myself while I was a little 10 year-old sitting at the gate for my next flight. I would scribble and do my homework while I ate the sandwich my mom had packed for me.

Flying back and forth between what felt like two different lives was weird and I was often seen as an outcast. It was hard being

made fun of for constantly moving or having to learn another language as a child. Now, it's a different story. These are things that I embrace and now seek out, funny how that works isn't it?

I started moving through this world with hopes of finding a place that truly feels like home. Only to find that we can have many places that feel like home and as we meet new people and explore new places, we leave bits of our heart around the world.

When I dream, I think of what brings me the most joy and that usually involves exploring and creating. I feed off of new ideas and challenges, like trying out via ferratas! If it's new to you, this is essentially a mixture of hiking and rock climbing where you're attached to a metal cable or rods on the side of a mountain.

This was 100% new for me and terrifying until last year when I tried it for the first time in Slovenia, where I scaled its highest mountain (*YouTube video: **HIKING TRIGLAV, Slovenia and Facing My Fears***).



Photo: © Natasha Bergen | Own archive

Now I dream of things like learning to ice climb; there's always a 'what's next' for me. Which interestingly means I have to focus very hard to stay in the present moment. This is where creating comes in – whether it's a video or a connection, it's normally what keeps me in the moment.

If I'm super honest, creating is also what pays the bills right now! Professionally speaking, I'm insanely inspired by a couple of my favourite travel YouTubers, Kara and Nate (@KaraandNate). They are the definition of globetrotters and currently have several successful businesses! I strive to do as they do and motivate people to get out and explore!

Is it cliché to say my mom is one of the most inspiring people I know? It doesn't matter either way, because it's true! She's the strongest, most generous person I know- and also a dreamer. She had this cute little saying when I was growing up, and it goes like this – 'follow your heart's arrow, wherever it points'. And that's exactly what I've been doing and plan to continue doing.

Natasha, could you please share about your YouTube channel and how it all started?

It all started with a metal beam falling on my head. I was teaching an English class and went to open the window – and bang! The bar dropped on my head from 10m above, I went to the hospital and was out of work for several weeks.

During my recovery I spent a lot of time in nature and painting, which led me to relax and let my creativity flow again. At the time I was living in Portugal and had just received a nice tax refund which I spent on a DSLR camera. I started to take it out on hikes and found a deep love for filming.

Once I could look at a computer screen again without a severe headache, I taught myself how to edit videos. I didn't expect to like it as much as I did, but I found every aspect of the process exhilarating! There was always something new to learn or try.

I kept dreaming of traveling, filming, and sharing these stories with other like minded people but could never bring myself to post on YouTube. That is until I met two of my other favourite YouTubers, Eamon and Bec (@[eamonandbec](#)) – two fellow Canadians, van lifers and travelers who bring the world joy. They are the kind of people who leave each place better than they found it. Even though I was super awkward and goofy, they still believed in me... (Bec kindly offered some of her ice cream and instead of being a normal person, I went full on fish mode with that ice cream). Anyways, even after my awkwardness, they were both still super encouraging about me starting my own channel! Soon thereafter I posted my first video!

Now, I create travel content around the world that focuses on outdoor adventures and Europe travel! I aim to motivate others to live their own adventures and get out into nature.



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As I know from your videos, your plan is to reach the highest peak in every European country. Sounds amazing! Tell us more about it!

50 peaks are currently on the list and I can hardly believe it! In all seriousness, it's been one of the best journeys I've ever embarked on. It challenges me physically, mentally and emotionally – and I love it!

If you're a geography buff you probably know there aren't 50 countries in Europe, so I'll admit I added a few. Also, there are some peaks like Mont Blanc that check off two countries – Italy and France.

So as I created my neat little spreadsheet to keep my peak project organized, I realized

that there are some peaks and countries that I may never be able to visit due to war or politics. It didn't feel right to do less so I decided to add extra 'highest peaks' which are in; Portugal and Spain's mainland, Denmark and the UK.

What I didn't anticipate was how much I would fall in love with the project. Whether it's travelling to the smallest peak, which is not even a hill, to conquering 5000m+ high peaks, I love it all.

You know why? It's the people I meet on the journey, the nature I see around Europe, the insane physical challenges I push through, the new foods, languages and cultures I can experience. The very essence of the project is everything I love in life.



VIEW
FROM MOUNT PICO,
PORTUGAL (2351M)

When I came up with this project in December 2020, I gave myself a time limit of 2 years. I based this off of two things; one, because Emma Svensson, a Swedish mountaineer that I look up to did the same project in one year and two, because I figured I'd get bored.

Well I can tell you that I was certainly wrong! I will not be completing the 50 peaks in two years, so I've given myself an extra year. It doesn't come down to pure will and being fit enough - that's not a problem for me. It's all the other obstacles I never anticipated.

So far I've been able to conquer 10 peaks (*YouTube playlist: [EU Peak Project](#)*)! With one failed attempt in Liechtenstein. Here they are in order:

Chemin de revoires, Monaco (163m)
Mount Olympus, Cyprus (1952m)
Ta'Dmejrek, Malta (253m)
Carrantouhil, Ireland (1038m)
Dinara, Croatia (1831m)
Triglav, Slovenia (2864m)
Zugspitze, Germany (2962m)
Coma Pedrosa, Andorra (2942m)
Mount Pico, Portugal (2351m)
Sněžka, Czechia (1603m)

Many of these I was able to do on a budget while my little family, my partner, pup, and I lived and traveled around in our van.

That's the beauty of the project! Sure, it would bring me to the peaks but in many ca-

ses I'd also have the opportunity to explore new places nearby or other neighbouring countries like Austria, Switzerland, and Italy (whose peaks I still haven't done). I can't wait for what's next!

Natasha, what are your favorite cities you've visited in the last two years?

Two years eh? That's a lot of cities! I'll share my three favourites that automatically come to mind.

My absolute, all-time favourite city I've ever experienced is Medellin, Colombia. It has a very special place in my heart. I've visited it several times and even lived there for a short stint while I got my teaching certification. The last time I went was with my partner, Juan Pablo, to meet his family.

What I really love about Medellin is how raw and real it is, there is so much art, and it's situated in a valley surrounded by rolling hills with the perfect temperature year round. Even with all that, that's not what makes it - it's the people! There's always the possibility of an adventure in this city. I did a whole Colombia series on YouTube (*link to playlist: [Colombia Travel](#)*) if you'd like to get a feel for it.

The other two cities are Stockholm, Sweden (*[YouTube video](#)*) and Dublin, Ireland (*[YouTube video](#)*) for ironically similar reasons. Both cities are home to friendly people and I had such unique experiences, I think that's why they stand out. If you want to see first hand, I have YouTube videos featuring both!

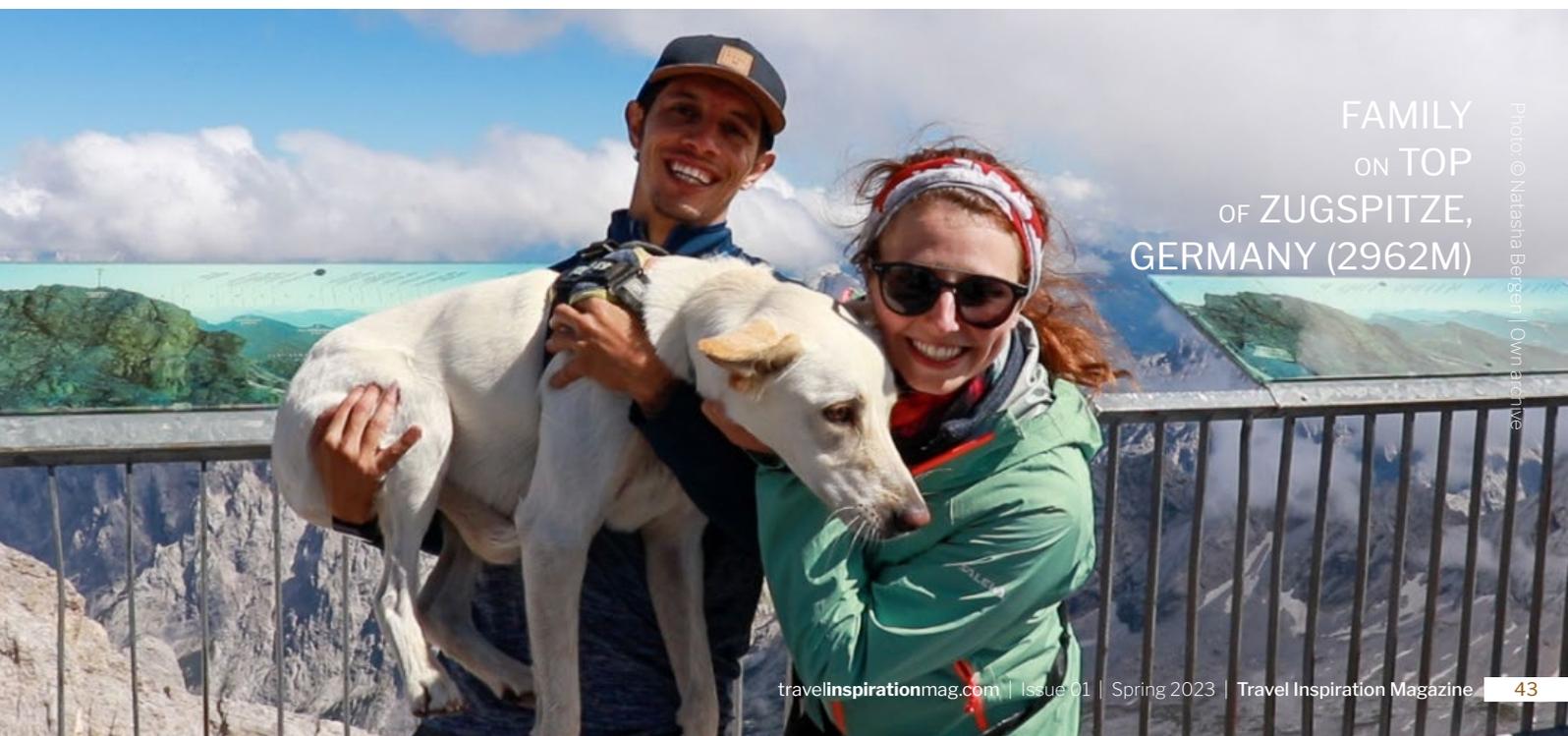


ON TOP
OF TRIGLAV,
SLOVENIA (2864M)

Photo: © Natasha Bergen | Own archive



Photo: © Natasha Bergen | Own archive



FAMILY
ON TOP
OF ZUGSPITZE,
GERMANY (2962M)

Photo: © Natasha Bergen | Own archive

THE MOST MEMORABLE ADVENTURE...

The first thing that came to mind was an insane adventure I had many years ago in Vietnam. At the time I was living in Hanoi, Vietnam teaching English. After a few busy months of teaching, my boss told me to get out of the city and take a holiday. So I flew to Da Nang in Central Vietnam. I opted to stay in a hostel so I could meet fellow travellers and rented a motorbike to get out into nature.

The day before I was meant to leave I got up early and headed towards some waterfalls. Back then Google Maps was a thing but network connectivity was scarce in certain parts, and rightly so because I was in the jungle! I had pre-loaded the map in my phone so I would know where I was going.

My motorbike zoomed through the gravel country roads. The warm tropical wind was blowing through the hair that was peeking out of my bucket helmet. I would stop at rice fields or any place that looked picturesque and just soak in its raw, green beauty.

I took a left turn (I think) to what I thought was the way to the waterfalls. Following the path, I drove alongside a river, and smiled at the farmers and road workers I passed. After about 30 mins with a fuel tank getting low, I had the creeping sensation that I was going the wrong way. I took out my map and panicked when I saw that the map wasn't loading. I had no idea where I was, where the waterfalls were or where I had gone wrong.

I retraced my route to a junction. This was where I must've gone wrong but I still had no idea which of the three paths I needed to take to get back to the main road. No signal and my fuel tank was nearing empty. I parked my bike, took the keys and went running to look for someone. I probably looked like a mad woman running in flip flops with a burnt nose. Eventually I found someone working in their rice field and mimed where I needed to go (they didn't speak English and my Vietnamese was laughable). It worked! She figured out what I needed and sent me down the right road which actually led me to the waterfalls! From there I could make my way back to Da Nang.



You'd think that would be it, but no, it got crazier! Once back in Da Nang I had a delicious dinner of fresh salad rolls. With my belly full I arrived back at the hostel only to find a fellow traveler in apparent distress. She seemed frantic so I asked what was up. She took me aside and explained she had a secret mission that she desperately needed to carry out before she left tomorrow. I offered to drive her to the address she showed me.

She navigated us through the busy night streets as I dodged traffic. We pulled into a tiny cement alleyway with chickens running about and children playing. Initially we couldn't find the house number she had written on the paper. She seemed to be panicking even more. So with some miming skills, we were directed by some locals to a thin man. He could speak English so she explained who she was looking for and what house they were in. He took her by the hand and ushered her farther into the cement labyrinth. Looking over her shoulder she motioned for me to follow.

Finally the man brought us the house we'd been searching for. He smiled and left us. We were greeted by an older woman and a man who seemed to be her son. They welcomed us into their humble home and offered us RedBulls to drink. I sat there silently as the scene unfolded in front of me.

The woman from the hostel pulled out a backpack with some photos of a young boy and his mother with someone's contact information. She had been sent on this mission by her friend from back home to find the father of her son. Apparently this woman's friend had come on vacation and fallen in love with this man but had to go back home for work. The father of the woman's son had no idea he had a child somewhere across the world.

The two family members said that the man she was looking for was at work but that they would give him the photos and her friend's contact information. The older woman assured us that he would call her via Skype. The family was very caring and thanked us for coming. And I never heard from anyone ever again, the woman in the hostel vanished.

Sometimes, the best stories are the ones caught off film.





Natasha, what can we all expect to see on your YouTube channel in the near future?

Great question! It's almost mountain climbing season and I have some BIG mountains planned! So these will be coming over the next six months with videos exploring these countries and city guides ([link to YouTube playlist: EUROPE CITY vlogs, guides, tours](#)) for those who want to experience European cities!

I can't tell all, but I can say that Norway and the UK will be big series coming to the tube this year. For the rest, I suggest you keep your eyes out on my YouTube channel with the notification bell on so you don't miss a thing. If you want exclusive insights and updates, you can join my Patreon community – they already know the plan!

Until mountain climbing season starts you can expect more content in Spain as I'm currently in Barcelona and I have some exciting filming trips planned...

Go out and live your adventure, whatever it may be! *What's the point of having a life, if we don't live it? I hope I will see you out on the road one day!*

If you want to connect and join the journey you can find me here on YouTube [@NatashaBergen](#), Instagram [@bergennat](#), TikTok [@natashasbergen](#)
I LOVE chatting and hearing your stories!

Happy adventuring!

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MAGAZINE

BE READY FOR MORE ADVENTURES...

The SUMMER issue will be released in June 2023!

ARE YOU...

A person with a backpack is seen from behind, looking out over a vast mountain range under a blue sky with scattered clouds. The person is wearing a light-colored tank top and a large black backpack with various straps and gear. The mountains in the background are rugged and partially covered in green vegetation.

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