

The Anarchist's Guide to Travel

A Manual for Future Hitchhikers, Hobos, and Other Misfit Wanderers

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A manual for future hitchhikers, hobos, and other misfit wanderers.

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1. Starting Out

How I Started Traveling

Summer, 1998.

You could hear the mechanical rattle from miles away. Soccer moms in mini vans turned to look at us in horror as black smoke plumed out of the rear of my car. I had the gas pedal to the floor and we were barely creeping along at 50 mph while white smoke seeped through the seams of the hood.

Suddenly, we more felt than heard a loud *bang* as something large, metallic, and definitely essential to our journey came tumbling out of the engine compartment and onto the road behind us.

Eric looked at me from the passenger seat and through smoke slowly filling the inside of the car said, "I don't think we're going to make it, dude."

My response was to crank up the radio and start laughing maniacally. Joined by Eric, and his girlfriend in the back seat, we hooted and hollered in the face of our current disaster. We wouldn't make it very far, that was obvious. What was surprising was how much fun it was.

A few days earlier I'd left my childhood home in Post Falls, Idaho to move to the great city of Los Angeles, California. Of course, my parents knew nothing of this. Convinced they would never let me leave on such a foolish adventure in a vehicle barely capable of such a journey, I told them I was going to play a show with my band in Seattle.

It was doubtful that my car would make it even that far. Still, my parents bought the lie and I took off with the majority of my belongings the next day.

When I hung up the pay phone in Eugene, Oregon, I wasn't feeling that great about myself.

My car was on its last legs and despite my parent's offer to buy a greyhound ticket back home, I'd decided I wasn't coming back. I was determined to do something besides rot in a hometown I hated. My dad had been clear though; I was on my own from now on. At that moment, the thought was terrifying.

I had no idea where to go or what to do from there. I was in a strange city and the whole world was before me. Fortunately, I wasn't alone. My longtime friend, the drummer of my band, and the motivating factor for this whole journey in the first place, Geoff stood next to me.

"Dude, let's go find some punks," he said. It was sound advice. Punk rock had been the first way I'd been able to connect with people and it fueled the majority of what I wanted to do with my life. I figured it wouldn't be too hard to spot some kids rocking mohawks and studded vests. Maybe they could help us get the lay of the land and figure out what to do next.

One of the things I've always enjoyed about punk rock culture is a general willingness to open up to complete strangers based on something as simple as a similar set of clothing. Some people will criticize 'fashion punks,' but to me it's always served as a useful tool for making friends while looking damn good doing it.

It's a simple equation. If you're wearing an *Antischism* band shirt, you're probably into anarchy. I'm into anarchy, so if you're wearing an *Antischism* shirt we should probably be friends. Punk patches, spiky hair, and studs can go a long way towards establishing a common bond.

So it was no surprise we were met with warm smiles from a group of punks just down the road in an outdoor strip mall in downtown Eugene. After a brief explanation of who we were and our current situation, we were immediately pulled in tow on a group mission to come up with beer money and do some drinking down by the river.

Two hours later we sat in a patch of woods with the sun setting on the river behind us and a set of railroad tracks in front. Between the eight of us it didn't take long to come up with the money we needed and we sat in a circle around the three twelve packs needed to start the night. It was there I first got to know the person who would be my first real travel partner.

Eric was traveling with his girlfriend and another friend named 'Church Key'. Eric looked like Leonardo DiCaprio with a mohawk. His girlfriend was blond too. The two of them made a cute couple, but overall I didn't find her all that interesting. Church Key on the other hand was the oldest of the four of us, and the most experienced. I asked him about his name, and he demonstrated for me by taking his bottle opener (which he called a "church key") and using it to punch three holes into the top of my beer. "It's to let air into the beer as you drink. That way you can drink faster."

We spent the next few hours drinking and watching freight trains pass. Church Key explained about hopping freight trains all around the country, hitchhiking to anywhere you pleased, and the bounty of food to be found in dumpsters wherever you went.

Such basic concepts of underground travel were so new to my virgin mind, it felt like my head had exploded. Before that moment 'hitchhiking' and 'train hopping' were in the realm of fantasy; things you'd only see on television and read about in books. The people I was surrounded by were laughing in the face of all the naysayers of society, and I wanted to be laughing too. With the split second consideration capable of the young, I wanted in.

We got along well enough that the next night we decided to pair up into two groups. Geoff was going with Church Key and another person, while I was going with Eric and his girlfriend.

Our goal was to hitchhike to Ashland, Oregon, the next town south worth visiting. There we'd regroup and spend some time exploring. My life had in no way prepared me for this, so I made an emergency run to the local thrift store, where I bought my first travel pack, an old 1970's frame pack for ten dollars. After getting the sleeping bag out of the trunk of my car, I'd be set.

My car's first breakdown was on the outskirts of Eugene's south side, so after a short bus ride we found it sitting in the parking lot where I'd left it a few days earlier. I gathered together everything I needed and prepared to ditch everything that wouldn't fit in my backpack. As a joke and expecting nothing, I turned the ignition key.

To my shock the engine turned over and started. The pistons were pounding even worse than before, but we looked at each other and I simply said, "Fuck it. Let's see how far we can get."

We pulled onto the highway laughing maniacally in the face of society and sanity.

The hammering of the engine, the black smoke coming out the back, and the white smoke coming out the front climaxed as the engine's temperature gauge shot up. Smoke filled the inside of the car faster than we could get it out the windows, and I knew the last voyage of my first car was at an end. Its final blaze of glory lasted about three miles.

We pulled into the first rest stop south of Eugene, and that's where my lovely turd colored beast gave up the ghost.

We climbed out of the car as white smoke billowed out of the engine compartment, cursing and kicking it in a half joking manner. As I walked around to the front to open the hood, the beast's radiator popped, dumping the greenish contents on the ground at my feet.

I looked around at the scene we were making. At a rest stop in the full swing of summer, we were a group of maniacs laughing and kicking a car in it's death throes while families in their RV's looked on like we were one horseman short of the apocalypse. It was no surprise when the police showed up about a half an hour later, just as we were about to stick out our thumbs and continue our adventure southward.

As cops go they were pretty cool, laughing with us and asking us about our piercings and mohawks, and letting us make funny faces as they took polaroids of us. They wouldn't let me ditch the car, of course. They did call a tow truck for it, at which point I sold what remained of it to the junkyard for the price of a tow, and a ride to the next town. Assuming it hasn't been crushed into a tiny square, it's probably still in Cottage Grove, Oregon with my high school diploma sitting in the back seat.

The next six months of my life was a combination of slowly wandering down (and back up) the west coast, a myriad of misadventures and summer crushes, my first freight train ride, and the beginning of my lifelong addiction to travel. Not just *any* kind of travel, but that special mix of punk-as-fuck, zero budget wandering with the kind of friends that will never tell you what can or can't be done.

Why I Wrote This Book

Shortly after that first journey, I started the website *Squat the Planet* (www.squattheplanet.com; often abbreviated as ‘StP’). It began as a way to document my fascination with this new world at a time long before blogs were invented. Over the next few years StP would go through a slow metamorphosis, eventually becoming a message board and an entire community of people networking together around the ‘travel punk’ lifestyle. The ultimate goal of StP has always been to show people an alternative to the career-work-retirement cycle.

Fifteen years later, StP has grown to thousands of members and changed countless lives, all with no advertising or promotion (other than word of mouth). The website sees dozens of new discussions a day, and over the past few years, I’ve noticed some of the most commonly asked questions about travel keep coming up again and again.

Eventually, it became clear to me that some kind of guide was necessary for those who were completely new to this lifestyle. Not something that would spoon-feed every piece of information without actually *earning* it, but something to actually *guide* people in the right direction so they could not only see the whole picture, but also get pointed in the right direction to learn more about each part of this community.

This book is an attempt to put everything I’ve learned from my travels over the past fifteen years into a guide for those just starting their first adventure. It is my sincere hope this will inspire those that are feeling a bit lost in life to tear down any barriers between themselves and experiencing all the world has to offer.

Travel doesn’t have to be expensive, and you don’t have to buy some kind of vacation package to see the world. With a little determination and a do-it-yourself attitude, you can go just about anywhere you’d like. There’s hundreds, if not thousands of people doing the same, and if you follow the tips in this book, you can do it too.

Who This Book Is For

This book is for anyone that's interested in unconventional travel. This includes hitchhiking, train hopping, vandwelling, sailing, bike touring, walking, and *any* other method of travel that defies the standard rules.

It's also for those tired of being told everything has to have a price tag, and the only way to see other parts of the world is by working most of the year and saving for that two weeks of freedom we call a 'vacation'. In reality, commercial vacations only take you to another place to wrap you up in a safe little box in that part of the world. More often than not, these packages end up separating you from the people, places, and cultures you want to become a part of. When you reject this philosophy and remove the barrier of money from your travels, you not only see more of the world for less, you create deeper, more meaningful connections with the people and places you encounter along the way.

So if you can't see yourself traveling due to the costs involved, or you're looking for an alternative to what society tells you is the *right* way to travel, you've come to the right place.

Why Should You Travel?

I'm not going to pretend traveling will solve all your problems, and neither should you. It's entirely possible that you might find out that wandering the world just isn't your calling. There's absolutely *nothing* wrong with that; but I encourage you to give it a try, at *least* once. Even just dipping your toe into the world of underground travel is likely to change your life in ways you can't imagine.

Why is traveling important? Imagine you've spent your whole life seeing the world from a single point of view. Seeing the same things, the same people, talking about the same things that are popular in the area you live in. The fact is that when you surround yourself with the same things all the time, it leaves very little room for you to experience something new. It's entirely possible you're in that situation right now, and you might not even realize it.

Someone once said 'travel is rebellion in it's purest form,' and I believe this to be completely true. When you get out there and start seeing the world, you're putting yourself into a situation that's the complete opposite of standing still. You're seeing new locations, people, cultures, and situations *every day*. Exposing yourself to these things teaches you how people from different parts of the world interact with each other, and the situations you come across in your travels will help expand your mental horizons and understand points of view outside of your own.

Ultimately, travel helps you evolve as a person, test your personal limits, and teach you things about yourself you might not have known.

There's other benefits as well, such as seeing a place for the first time, witnessing an epic display of nature, or having an experience that completely changes your view on life. Anything is possible once you're ready to take that first step.

The media and society as a whole has done just about everything they can to convince us that deviating from social norms like going to college and working towards a career will permanently exile you into a world of poverty and misery. The truth is that there is a long and crowded history of people striking out on their own, whether it was to live simply and see the world, or simply go do their own thing and start a company that made them millionaires.

The point is there's really no reason why you shouldn't just take a chance and see what the world has to offer. The chance you won't be able to resume your previous comfortable life are slim, and if things don't work out, you can always jump back on the hamster wheel and resume being a cog in the machine.

Whether you adopt a lifestyle of travel for just a few weeks or the rest of your life, it's likely to be a choice you'll look back on fondly for the rest of your days.

Telling Your Friends & Family

If you're starting out in the world of travel later in life and farther outside the sphere of your parent's influence, this section might not be as relevant to you as it will be to younger generations. Still, telling your family about your crazy plans for seeing the world is more likely to be met with dismay than encouragement in most situations. This is partly because of the media's portrayal of anything outside the college/career cycle as something to be feared, and also because your parents/family (most likely) care a great deal about you and have built-in wiring meant specifically for worrying about your well being. This desire to keep you safe may not always come across in the nicest way, but try to remember that they're looking out for your best interests.

From their point of view, their beloved offspring is coming to them with desires of hitchhiking across the world or (god forbid) to be a hobo riding the rails, or do some other form of crazy travel mentioned in this book. Imagine the horrors that come to their minds as their little baby duckling is suddenly out on their own, all alone! On top of that, they want to go do a bunch of (potentially) dangerous shit that will probably get them killed! The fact that you would even *consider* doing these things will probably be enough to convince them that you've lost your fucking mind.

So if you're going to be completely honest with them, try to remember this when talking to them. Attempt to present what you're doing in the best possible light, and make sure they understand that you're taking every possible precaution so that you return safe and sound to their loving arms. If they know you're being extremely careful and they're okay with your decision, that's great, all the better.

Unfortunately, it might be that you find yourself in a situation where they are going to object so vehemently that being honest with them just isn't realistic. The forms of travel in this book are on the fringe for a reason, as not all of them are 100% safe, but if you prepare properly and pay attention to the advice here, you're likely to be just fine; although getting your family to understand this can be pretty difficult.

If you find yourself in that situation, I recommend lying to them about your plans. Trust me, you're doing it for their own good, since it's unlikely you will (or should) change your plans, and if there's no way to get them to see things from your point of view, then there's not much point in upsetting them. Just replace every instance of 'train hopping' with 'driving with friends' and 'hitchhiking' with 'Craigslist ride share' when talking about your travel plans and keep the rest fairly close to the truth. I did this with my own mother, since every time I even tried broaching the subject of hitchhiking or train hopping with her, she'd break down and cry, pleading to Jesus for my safety. It was as if I could actually see the hair falling out of her head, so I decided it would be much kinder to just lie about my *methods* of travel while keeping the rest relatively truthful. That way, I could avoid giving her a heart attack every time I hit the road, and my family would still know where I am.

After about a decade of traveling around the globe with only a small handful of bad things happening to me (I handled them fairly well, in one way or another) my parents finally came around to the idea that if I hadn't gotten myself killed by this point, I probably knew what I was doing well enough to stay out of trouble. Also, retiring from train hopping (minus the occasional ride for fun) reduced my mother's stress levels quite a bit, and we can now safely talk about my 'wild hobo days' jokingly and without a tear shed (although I *have* noticed she started wearing a wig).

The point is even if you can't tell them right away, you might be able to do it some day in the future, and by then, breaking it to them might not be so bad. If your family is *completely* opposed to your dreams of travel, I recommend following your heart and hoping they'll come around down the line. If they're smart, they'll accept that you're an adult and can make your own choices rather than not

have you be a part of their lives. Getting your family to accept the ridiculous travel methods in this book (face it, they *are* a little crazy) can be difficult, but stick with them and have a little faith in your family, and they'll be there for you when it really matters.

What is Travel Punk?

Since I'm going to make a lot of references to punk and 'travel punk' throughout this book, I think it would be helpful to explain the definition of these terms and how they apply to this culture.

First, my definition of 'punk' isn't very strict. If I call you a punk it's generally not a reference to the things you wear, or what music you listen to. The way I see it, if you're living your life in a do-it-yourself fashion, have a disdain for authority, and are generally battling the status quo, you're a punk. Of course if you wear mostly black, have multi-colored hair and listen to loud aggressive music, that's cool too. The point is punk as a culture broke loose from it's musical boundaries a long time ago, so you'll often hear people in the travel punk culture refer to things or people as 'punk'.

As a culture punk tends to embrace activities that promote liberation and freedom for everyone. This comes from the anarchist political beliefs at the root of punk rock music, and the same ethics apply to traveling as a punk. Generally any form of travel where the benefits drastically outweigh the costs will find popularity among punks. Combined with a disdain for the rules a capitalist society has imposed on us, punks are generally more willing than most to break the laws of that society in order to attain the freedom they seek (in *Dungeons and Dragons* terms, this alignment is considered to be 'chaotic good').

In other words, when authority imposes rules you had no say in (and you're not hurting anyone) it's pretty easy to just say 'fuck it' (or fuck you) to those laws and do what you want.

This is why modes of travel that skirt the law such as train hopping have become so popular in the travel punk culture. Not that I'm being critical of that culture; I'm a firm believer in this philosophy. Seditious is the name of the game folks. Nobody in power is going to give you what you want if you play by their rules.

A Few Disclaimers

While I've worked very hard to include as much information about traveling into this guide as possible, it's impossible to write something that is all-inclusive of every person, culture, race, gender or life situation. This book covers what's worked for me, and what worked for me might not work for you based on many different factors that are completely outside of my control.

While I personally identify as an anarchist, and am doing my best to present this from an anarchist point of view, there are some that would argue that shopping at Amazon (one of the things I mention later in this book) isn't 'anarchist'. To tell the truth, I'm really not interested in debating the semantics of what is or isn't anarchist; nor am I interested in debating the morals of some of the techniques I discuss here. I'm only interested in conveying what works for me, in the hopes it will work for you. If you're not comfortable doing something I recommend, don't do it. It's that easy. Find your own path and take what I say with a grain of salt.

I think it's worth mentioning other publications that have discussed homeless travel often portray the lifestyle in a overly romanticized manner. Most famously was the Crimethinc book "Evasion," which became infamous for the quote "Homelessness. Unemployment. Poverty. If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right." A lot of people found this to be pretty insensitive towards the poor/homeless and rightfully so.

The intention of this book is not to portray homelessness as something to strive for. In fact, while some categories of underground travel involve not having an established home base, or even a roof over your head for extended periods of time, others (such as vandwelling, sailing, etc) are simply alternatives to the capitalist concepts of what a 'home' should be.

I personally advocate for the concept of being "home-free" rather than *homeless*. However, choosing to have a home or not doesn't make you any better than anyone else. Homelessness is a serious issue all over the world, and no one stuck in that situation wants to be there. So when a bunch of middle class kids come along to play at being homeless while at the same time telling them 'they're not doing it right' is downright insulting. I write this book in the sincere hope that if you're reading this you'll pay attention to the Travel Culture section in particular and not become one of these people.

If you're a minor and considering traveling because you're not happy with your life as it currently stands, I ask that you please stay in school until you're at least eighteen years old (or however old you must be to be considered an adult where you live) and have graduated from high school.

I'm not saying this to cover my own ass legally; I honestly believe that no matter how much things seem to suck right now, leaving high school early will deprive you of many options later in life, a lot of which are travel related (high school / college diploma requirements for certain travel jobs, etc).

If you absolutely *need* to escape a bad family or living situation, please take a look at this list of resources on the StP website:

<https://squattheplanet.com/threads/so-you-want-to-run-away-from-home.26196/>

This guide is also written from an American-centric point of view, and assumes that you're an American citizen. This is because that's where the bulk of my travel experience lies. That said, you're still likely to find this guide quite useful if you're a citizen of another country and visiting the United States.

Finally, any links to books, gear, or other specific items in this guide have not been paid for or sponsored in any way. I do not use affiliate links and I do not profit from your decision to purchase anything this book recommends. All opinions are my own, and I only link to things I honestly believe will help you in your journey.

Hopefully this covers most things I anticipate people getting upset about, but I'll probably get trolled, flamed, and shit talked no matter what I say, so fuck it, let's get this train rolling.

2. What Should I pack?

Gearing Up

What you take on a journey depends on two things. How you plan on getting to your destination, and how comfortable you want to be on your way there. The important thing to remember is that traveling as a lifestyle isn't much different than planning for a hiking trip in the woods. You're just going to be gone for a much longer period of time. In this chapter I'll be going over a huge list of gear you might want to consider for your travels. Now, this list is going to be *long*; you're not meant to take *everything* you see here. Personal preference will decide what gear is right for you based on how much you're willing to carry.

The best advice I've heard when it comes to deciding what to take with you on a trip is to gather up everything you think you need and then cut it in half. This forces you to really think about what you *need*, and what's just junk you're probably never going to use. Lugging around fifty pounds of gear will put a serious damper on your fun, so try to take as little as you can with you.

In my opinion, most people should take no more than thirty pounds of gear with them, and ideally, if you can get that down to twenty pounds or less, you're going to be better off than 90% of the travelers out there. Of course, if you have a bigger or smaller body frame, you'll have to adapt accordingly. Once you've shoved everything in your pack, take it around town for a few hours and see how it feels. This should help you decide if your gear is appropriate, or if you need to make adjustments.

Keep in mind that certain kinds of travel require specialized gear. For example, train hopping can require some gear not necessary for other types of travel. Instead of listing every kind of gear for every kind of travel, I'll be listing this additional gear in a separate section inside the chapter that discusses that kind of travel.

Weather

[image not archived]

If you're like most travelers, you're probably going to be migrating to where the weather is reasonably warm. In the United States of America, that means you'll likely be in the south during the winter, and north in the summer.

Even if you follow this migratory pattern, you should still be aware of what kinds of weather you'll be encountering. For example, if you're going to be in New Orleans in the fall, be aware that hurricane season is from June 1st to November 30th. You might not encounter a hurricane, but the torrential rains of that season can hit so hard you'll be soaked even in a decent tent. Using another example, train hopping through the Mt Shasta region of the west coast gets ridiculously cold at night even in the middle of August. It always pays to do a little research to find out what weather you'll encounter in the region you're visiting during certain times of the year.

Based on this research, make sure to bring gear that will protect you from that weather.

Nothing puts a damper on your travels worse than being exposed to the elements without the right gear. For the sake of simplicity, this chapter will only list the gear necessary when weather conditions are most ideal; it's up to you to prepare for the worst.

Shopping Tips

When looking for travel gear, I tend to do most of my shopping online. This is because you can almost always find what you're looking for at a fraction of what you would pay in a retail store. Even if you're buying something that isn't used, online outlets are almost always cheaper than brick and mortar stores since they don't have the same overhead costs of maintaining those stores, the employees, etc.

Backpacks are something you usually want to try on in person before shelling out your hard earned cash, so in these situations I generally tell people to actually go to a physical store like REI (Recreational Equipment Incorporated). REI is probably one of the most well known outlets for camping and sporting goods gear in the United States. There are a lot more of course, like Cabela's, Eastern Mountain Sports, Dicks Sporting Goods, and many others. For gear that you want to try out for yourself, visit one of these stores, find something you like, and then go home and search for that product online. I recently found a backpack that fit me well at REI and when I checked the price on my cell phone it was almost eighty dollars cheaper (1/3 less) on Amazon.

If you're reading this guide I'm assuming you're just about as poor as I am. You really can't afford to buy a particular piece of gear more than once, so it's got to be the right gear, the first time, and has to last as long as possible. Doing the requisite research before buying an item online will save you a lot of buyer's remorse. Read reviews of the product on Amazon and blogs that specialize in reviewing the kind of things you're looking for. A simple Google search of "[item name] review" will give you more info than you've ever wanted to know.

Seek out the negative reviews over positive ones. Most of the time positive reviews are short and don't have much thought put into them, while negative reviews will let you know about little known flaws in the product, or horrible customer service when it comes to returns. Pay attention to both positive and negative reviews that are long and detailed, as these will give you the best idea of what you'll be receiving when you open that box.

When researching products, one of my favorite techniques is to search for reviews of products that are 3-5 years old. I find it especially useful to do searches for "best [product] of [year]" or "best [product] reviews [year]". So, if you're searching for the best tent you can afford, searching for "best ultralight tent of 2012" (i.e. five years ago) will return reviews for tents that were top of the line (and expensive) that year; but thanks to the consumerist culture of always having to have the 'newest' thing, the prices on these older tents will have come down significantly. There's no rule saying the newest gear is the only gear worth having.

Also, don't be afraid of buying certain things marked 'refurbished', especially when it comes to technology. For the unfamiliar, a refurbished item is something that was broken at one point, sent back to the manufacturer, they fixed it, and are now re-selling it. Consumers have an unhealthy obsession with buying only things that are new, and there's definitely a stigma with consumers when it comes to buying something used or previously broken. This reputation is largely undeserved. As long as the item is *manufacturer refurbished*, (not 'seller refurbished') the item is going to be in almost new condition.

In order to avoid sullyng a corporation's brand name, any product resold by that manufacturer is going to be scrutinized much harder than anything coming off their assembly line. Most of the time the product you're getting is going to be just as good if not in better condition than what you would buy off the shelf. Better yet, most refurbished items still come with the manufacturer's warranty, which is something you won't get from a used item. Best of all, because of the general consumer stigma surrounding the word 'refurbished', these items are generally going to be deeply discounted from their

shelf-sold counterparts. Basically, you're getting a brand new item (with warranty) for around 30-50% or more off the retail price.

Buying used gear can pay off in spades. Craigslist (www.craigslist.org) is the best place to buy used gear, since you're dealing with actual people (not corporations) that are willing to take a larger margin of loss on something if they feel it's worth it. Typical discounts can be as high as 80-90% of when looking for used camping gear, since 90% of consumers want to buy these things new from a store. The savings are not as high on tech gear, but still better than most stores (online or off) so it's always worth taking a look. Although thrift stores are less likely to have the kinds of travel gear you're looking for, they're usually very cheap, and may have online stores in addition to the physical ones in your city.

Two other alternatives are Amazon (www.amazon.com) and eBay (www.ebay.com). Amazon has a huge third party seller market, and when these sellers put their goods up for sale, Amazon is very strict on their requirements for these sellers. Anything sold by a third party on Amazon has to be in almost the same condition as the new version of the item. Unlike eBay, Amazon will not let third party sellers sell items that are broken, or missing parts that would usually come with a brand new item (there are some exceptions, so always check the item description). The advantage here is that you know you're getting the same item at a used price, with a basic guarantee that it will be almost the same as a new item (possibly with a little wear and tear).

Amazon also has a lot of 'open box' items, where the packaging has been damaged, or opened for display or some other reason. Any damage to the item itself is always mentioned (generally there's none) and it's usually a new item being sold at a 'used' item's price. Also worth mentioning is that anything listed as "fulfillment by Amazon" in the used item listings is going to be shipped by Amazon, so their (very good) return policy applies. If the item shows up and isn't what you expected, you can generally return it with no questions asked and at no cost to you. eBay is basically what Craigslist would look like if it was run by multinational corporations. It should be your absolute *last* resort when it comes to shopping for something online. It's become a wasteland for every kind of cheap knock off, plastic accessory, and broken item you can imagine, but without the quality control you'd come to expect in your average dollar store. Sure, you can find the occasional deal, but only if you learn to use ridiculous search schemes like "Nexus 7 2013 32gb -broken -parts -as-is -not -working" and limit your search to 'buy it now' (non-auction) items listed by lowest price first, and filtering out anything under \$50 (to remove 1000's of plastic accessories). As for auctions? Don't even bother. I've never won an auction in eBay's 20 year existence. Unless you enjoy waiting a week to be disappointed, just stick to items listed in the 'buy it now' category. Besides, auctions are for people with money to burn, and we're not one of those people.

Last but not least, patience is key. The longer you wait to buy something, the older it gets, the lower the price goes. So think long and hard about how badly you need the item you're looking for, and whether you can wait a few months for the price to take a nose dive. With a few rare exceptions, it *will* get cheaper, so the wait could be worth it.

Clothing

In regards to clothing, there's definitely a bit of a stereotype when it comes to the punk traveler. Most commonly we have vests with patches, Carhartt canvas pants with the crotch sewn up, or dirty dresses that are some kind of weird combination of punk and ragtime you'd expect to see from the 1920's. It's a blend of fashion and utility born out of the necessities of the road.

As a largely anarchistic culture we often defy those stereotypes as well, so there's plenty of travelers in our community that look just like anyone else you'd see on the street, so try not to judge.

Whether you're punk as fuck or a little more mainstream, this section is going to go over all the clothing basics you should consider.

First, the easy stuff. Traveling around completely naked will probably not attract the kind of attention you're looking for, so at least two sets of clothing are preferable. One for wearing, the other in case you fuck up what you're wearing and need to change into something else. Or, for when you've worn that first set of clothing so long you smell like a sewer, you might want to have that second set of clothing so you can mingle with society once more.

Personally, I usually carry one set of cargo shorts, a pair of jeans, three shirts, and three pairs of boxer shorts. Throw in about four pairs of socks, and that makes up the clothing portion of my gear. It weighs around four pounds, and will easily last me up to two weeks before I get intolerably rank. Let's take a look at a other things you might want to consider taking with you.

Thermals are a good thing to consider if you're going to be heading into cold weather. They've come a long way over the past decade or so and there's plenty of kinds of thermals available that are both warm, thin, and lightweight.

Socks. Oh god, socks. If you've never had the displeasure of having to wear the same pair of socks over and over again until they're absolutely caked with layers of disgusting-ness, count yourself lucky. I've literally seen some gutter punks that had to wash what remained of their socks off their feet. Pretty gross.

Buying quality socks is an investment that will pay off enormously during your travels. Avoid the standard cheap white socks and get something a little more expensive. I bought a set of Puma brand athletic socks that cost me thirty bucks for six pairs, but three years later I haven't had to buy a new pair, so the initial cost is worth it.

Boxer Briefs! You'll likely end up on long walks across town, down the highway, along the railroad tracks, etc. This can lead to a lot of chafing 'down there', so save yourself some grief and switch to boxer briefs. Note that I say boxer *briefs*, not boxer shorts. Boxer briefs are usually form-fitting (especially in the crotch area, which is essential) and extend down your leg a bit further than normal boxer shorts, which prevents the rubbing together of your inner thighs (for those that have to worry about that) and keeps chafing down to a minimum. Highly recommended for all genders.

The traditional **bandana** worn around the neck has made a comeback with train hoppers over the past two decades, and it's a useful bit of clothing to have for any mode of travel. From cleaning up a mess, to staunching a wound, to making cowboy coffee, bandanas have a dozen uses and should be a part of anyone's packing list.

A similar piece of clothing I've recently fallen in love with is the **shemagh**. A shemagh is a scarf most commonly found in the middle east and areas of the world where protecting your head and face from the sun and sandstorms is very important. It also can come down around your neck like a bandana when you don't need it around your head. It takes a little bit of practice to learn how to wrap it around your head, but I find it fills that perfect slot of being both utilitarian and stylish.

Gloves are great protection against the elements and in any situation you want to protect your hands. It's not one of those things you think about when you don't need them, but when you do, you'll be glad you brought them.

A **hooded sweatshirt** (aka hoodie) is a must, even for the hottest of areas. Since weather can change drastically in a short period of time, it pays to have a light hoodie in your pack so you can stay comfortable.

A **hat** will help keep your head warm when it's cold out and also keep the sun off your head when it's hot. Not having one (especially if you have a bald head like me) can lead to sunburns on your scalp that can be pretty painful.

Proper **footwear** is important! Find a pair of shoes that are comfortable and have decent traction for hiking and climbing. Nothing sucks worse than trying to climb up a hill in flat footwear with no tread. This doesn't necessarily mean you need to invest in a pair of boots; in fact most boots don't breathe very well and can easily lead to foot rot.

You're going to be spending long portions of time on your feet, so this is another thing you don't want to skimp on. Make the initial investment and avoid hours of agony walking down the highway in shoes that hurt to wear.

Backpacks

Choosing a backpack is a personal choice. This is because we all come in various body sizes, physical strength, and the kind of life we like to live (aka, what we don't mind carrying with us).

[image not archived]

The most basic (and cheapest) setup is the classic Alice military pack. They run about 20-30 dollars, are very durable, and will hold most of your basic items, although you may have to rope your sleeping bag to the outside. The main disadvantages to this pack is that they have no back support whatsoever (unless you get one with a frame), and can be incredibly uncomfortable on your shoulders if you're carrying a lot of weight. It's not always the best choice for those long, grueling walks to/from the train yard, or to the next town if you get kicked off a train.

[image not archived]

On the higher end of the spectrum would be a backpack designed for long hiking excursions such as my old Deuter ACT Lite 65+10 (www.amzn.to/2qEBCbU). I bought this on Amazon for

\$120, and when I switched to this from an Alice pack it felt like a godsend. I could essentially carry twice as much, twice as far, and my back was no longer in a slow agony everyday. It had an internal frame (two aluminum crossbars) that can be taken out so the bag will fit in the washer or rolled up for storage.

[image not archived]

I've recently chosen a new style of backpack for my travels, and that's the Osprey Farpoint 70

(www.amzn.to/2r6fyIB). I chose this pack because it opens around the sides like a suitcase, instead of only from the top like my previous Deuter bag mentioned above. This makes it a lot easier to access things buried at the bottom, and this pack includes an incredibly handy day pack that zips on and off the main bag so I can carry it all on my back at once. I generally leave the big bag with my clothes and other misc gear at the place I'm staying, and bring the day pack with me as I go around town. The day pack holds my expensive gear like my laptop and camera so they're never out of my sight.

There are external frames available for both Alice packs and other kinds of backpacks, but I highly recommend getting a pack with an internal frame only. The reason for this is because it's very easy to get the edges of external frames (such as older, 70's style hiking backpacks) caught on various parts of a train, potentially leading to disaster.

For example, my first train ride was from Sacramento to Klamath Falls in 1998. Long story short, I was the last to get off the boxcar, and being scared out of my wits and having no idea how to hop off properly (we'll cover this later), I sat on the edge of the open doorway and tried to jump out, minimizing the distance between myself and the ground. Unfortunately I had chosen a hiking pack with an external frame, and it caught on the edge of the doorway. This threw me off completely and I ended up careening forward and doing three barrel rolls next to the train. I got up, bruised as hell, clothes torn, and bleeding cuts everywhere. I got rid of that pack as soon as I could.

This warning goes for loose belts and straps on your pack as well. Make sure to cut them off or tuck them in. I've had a nylon strap on my pack get caught on a passing boxcar (while walking around a train yard) and been dragged 20-30 feet before the strap broke. Not fun. Be especially wary of loose straps on more expensive backpacks. I've seen a few REI bags that were train hopping death traps.

As I mentioned in the shopping tips earlier, a backpack is one of those pieces of gear you'll definitely want to try on in a physical camping goods store like REI, EMS, etc. Fill them up, walk around, see what feels comfortable to you. Make sure you can carry a lot of weight in it, and make sure the weight of the bag sits on your hips (with the hip belt closed around your waist) and not on your shoulders.

There's a lot to know about finding the right kind of backpack, but if the camping goods store you're at is any good, they'll walk you through everything you need to know. Just remember that even if they're really nice, don't feel pressured into paying retail. Leave that store and search online for the backpack you liked, or better yet, check and see if you can find a used one on Craigslist.

If you're going the Alice pack route, try your local army surplus store before shopping online. For some reason online retailers think Alice packs are worth a small fortune (\$60+). One (of the few) advantages of Alice packs is that they are generally 'one size fits all', so you can safely order one online without having to try it on.

While it's fine to start out with just dumping what few possessions you have into your bag, once you get tired of constantly rummaging through a bunch of loose items to find that one thing you're looking for, you might want to consider a few ways to keep things in your pack more organized.

Organization can be as easy as storing things in a series of plastic zip-lock bags, or reusing the cloth pouches that come with the Crown Royal whiskey you bought last week. The zip-lock bags also have the bonus of keeping your items dry if you get caught in a rain storm.

[image not archived]

For the obsessively organized, take a look at packing cubes. They're basically lightweight fabric boxes that store your clothes and other items into a tight little rectangle.

[image not archived]

Another handy (but less common) way to organize your clothes is the Hoboroll, which is basically a compression sack for your clothes. It's also sectioned up like a pie, so you can put different kinds of clothing together (e.g. all socks in one slot, underwear in another slot, etc) for even more organization. It closes with a drawstring and the outside straps can compact all your clothing into a neat little sack not much bigger than your sleeping bag.

Another tip that works great with the hobo roll (and works without it as well) is actually rolling your clothing instead of folding it. This has been proven to not only make your clothing take up less space, it actually prevents wrinkles as well (in case you're carrying around a 'job interview' shirt in your pack).

Sleeping Gear

Sleeping bags come in all shapes and sizes, but don't skimp on something you're going to be depending on every night. You should get the smallest (compressed size) and lightest weight sleeping bag you can afford. The cheapest solution I've found for the money is the TETON Sports TrailHead +20F Ultralight sleeping bag (www.amzn.to/2qEHtxK). As of this writing it's around sixty dollars. Considering that most good sleeping bags are \$100-300 or more, this is a pretty awesome deal. It's not the fanciest sleeping bag, but it's completely decent for the price and it held up fairly well for me over several years.

If you can't find that particular bag, look around for anything under three pounds, compresses to a reasonable size (around 14.5" x 6.5" x 6.5") and doesn't cost any more than 150 dollars.

You'll still find a lot of choices in this price range. Just keep in mind that while summer bags are lighter and pack smaller, you're going to want something that is rated to at least thirty degrees.

You should always assume that the rating on a sleeping bag is ten degrees less than what it says. So, if a particular sleeping bag is rated at thirty degrees, assume you're only going to be comfortable (i.e. not freezing) in temperatures down to forty degrees.

There's a ridiculous amount of information on the internet about sleeping bags, from the kinds of stuffing to baffles, heat ratings, shapes, foot boxes, and just about anything else you'd want to know. Just like shopping for any other gear, do your research and go to a physical store to see what kinds of sleeping bags are right for you. Once you find something you like check online to see if it's available somewhere cheaper.

One small tip for couples out there. Try and get sleeping bags with the zipper on the opposite side of whatever your partner is getting. If they have a sleeping bag with a zipper on the right, get one on the left. This way you can zip both bags together into one big sleeping bag. They don't always need to be the same brand (although that helps), as long as the zippers line up. Your body heat will help keep each other warm, and it's a much more pleasant way to spend your nights under the stars.

It's a bit of a luxury item, but you might find it worth getting a sleeping pad of some kind.

There's about a hundred different kinds and brands; some are made of foam, some are filled with air, but they're all designed to create a barrier that keeps your body heat from being sucked away by the ground you are sleeping on. Just keep in mind the cheaper the sleeping pad, the bulkier it's going to be; expect a cheap foam pad to take up more space than your sleeping bag, while the more expensive pads compress to the size of a large water bottle. Of course if you have access to it, sleeping on a bunch of free cardboard from the dumpster can achieve the same effect.

Hammocks ride the line between sleeping gear and shelters depending on the kind you get, but I'm going to include it here. Hammocks are generally best for using in warm climates, but it's possible to winter camp with them as well. The biggest issue for hammocks seems to be losing body heat through the bottom of the hammock while you're sleeping. I also find it hard to sleep in a hammock position since I toss and turn pretty frequently.

Still, there's hammocks available that are both cheap, extremely lightweight, and compress to the size of a can of soda. So while a hammock is definitely not a requirement, there's very little to lose by not having one in your pack. There's definitely something to be said for being able to read a book in a swinging hammock on a pleasant sunny day.

There's also more advanced hammocks available that cross into the 'portable shelter' category, like the Hennessy Hammock (www.hennessyhammock.com). These types of hammocks are most well known for having both a mosquito net built in, and an optional tarp that hangs over the hammock itself to protect the occupant from the rain. You also climb into it from the bottom instead of coming in through

the top. If you're absolutely in love with hammocks, it's a pretty good option that will protect you from the elements and free up weight in your pack by not having to carry around a tent.

Portable Shelters

I am not a fan of bugs. To a mosquito, I imagine my blood must taste like a fine Cabernet, or like a sidewalk slam to a gutter punk. I say this because any time I sleep outside I spend most of the night swatting away these insects instead of actually sleeping. What little sleep I do get is ruined in the morning by the hundreds of welts I have across my face and body while my travel companions wake up with a full night of rest and no bites of their own to complain about.

So, enter the tent. Finally, I can get a good nights sleep without being eaten up by bugs! The main problem with tents are how much they weigh, which makes sense considering you're hauling around a portable house on your back. Unfortunately, the weight of your tent is directly related to the size of your wallet. Once you start looking at tents that weigh three pounds or less, the price skyrockets considerably. Luckily, there are a small handful of tents available that are both reasonably priced and won't break your back.

Two of these tents are the Eureka Solitaire (www.amzn.to/2pZcbmK), and the ALPS Mountaineering Lynx 1-person tent (www.amzn.to/2pZnB9L). The Solitaire is the lightest of the two, weighing in at three pounds, and costs a mere \$70 USD. I've used this tent while hitchhiking the west coast of the United States with my girlfriend, and while it's labeled a oneperson tent, it fit the both of us fine (but very cozy). My main complaint is it isn't a free standing tent, so if you're camping in a spot where you can't get the stakes through the ground, you're basically fucked. It's also difficult to get in and out of, especially with two people in it.

The ALPS Lynx is freestanding so you're not as dependent on stakes as you are with the Solitaire, but it does feel a bit smaller, so I don't think you could fit more than one person in it. It does have side doors that are easier to get in and out of though, with the only con being this tent is slightly heavier, weighing about three and a half pounds. It's also a little more expensive, as it costs around a hundred dollars.

As I've mentioned before, there are lighter tents available, but most consumer brands get *extremely* expensive once you get past the three-pounds-or-less mark. Fortunately, there's been quite a boom in the world of do-it-yourself ultralight tents. This has been directly related to the demand for a lighter weight tent from folks that regularly traverse America's longest hiking paths such as the Appalachian Trail. This demand has led to a lot of innovation in portable shelter technology that started with hikers designing their own tents, and eventually some of them starting companies that make ultralight tents to sell to everyone else.

If you have the time, skill, and a sewing machine, you can find plans for making your own ultralight tent for around a hundred dollars in materials. For the rest of us, there's a few small companies that sell these tents for anywhere around 175 dollars and up. Almost all of these tents sacrifice the weight gained from tent poles and replace it with a hiking stick. This leads to one of their biggest drawbacks, which is that they are almost exclusively non-freestanding tents that are required to be staked into the ground. Although those sacrifices come with a bright side; the tent can weigh as little as *one and a half pounds*, and with an average price of 200-300 dollars you'll be hard pressed to find anything lighter or cheaper.

While we've gone over a lot of options here, the question remains: do you really even *need* a tent? The answer is probably no. Less than 10% of travelers I've met carry one, although that may change if they become cheaper/lighter in the future. For most people, it's just added weight and one more thing to worry about. There's nothing wrong with camping under the stars without one, unless you're a mosquito magnet like myself.

Before we move on, let's touch on two other small things related to portable shelters. First, if you're absolutely *not* concerned about the weather, and you only want to protect yourself from bugs, you could easily get a cheap mosquito net that you can hang from a tree while camping.

They're extremely cheap (\$20-30), lightweight, and compress into a tiny sack.

The other item you might want to bring is a tarp. I know plenty of people that swear by it, so it's something to consider. If you're camping in the woods you can easily hang it up in the trees over you, or just drape it over yourselves in the well of the train you're riding on to keep the rain from soaking you. It's one of those things you'll probably be glad you have when you do, and wishing you did when you don't. Also, if you don't have a tarp or can't afford one, keep an eye out for construction sites or newly built houses. The Tyvek plastic they use in construction makes for great tarp material.

Knives

There are many different kinds of tools you might want to consider while traveling. When it comes to self-defense, you should try to avoid anything authorities might consider illegal. This includes batons, switch blades, butterfly knives, etc. Unfortunately what knives are legal depends on what state you're in, and is too broad a topic for this guide. Since you're going to be wandering from state to state, we'll try to cover knives that are legal just about anywhere.

In general, folding knives with a four inch blade or shorter are both sufficient for self defense and won't get you in trouble with the law. You can find cheap knives at nearly any inter-city convenience store, Walmart, or camping goods store. If you want something higher quality, consider buying a Gerber branded or equivalent knife. Any knife you buy should open easily, and lock when open so it doesn't close onto your hand. Most of these knives are considered 'assisted opening' and were specifically exempted from the Switchblade Act in 2009, so they're legal.

Remember a knife is not just a weapon, but also an essential tool. Don't go traveling without one! Not having one sucks in just about any situation, whether you're trying to defend yourself from some psycho or making a peanut butter sandwich.

The only places you don't want to take a knife are airports, government buildings, and schools. If you have to fly somewhere, ditch your knife and pick up a new one at your destination. This is one reason I don't invest in more expensive knives, since the ones you can find for 5-10 bucks are generally good enough and I don't feel too bad when I have to give it away or throw it in a trash can at the last minute.

Before we move on, I would like to specifically debunk an odd myth floating around travel circles over the past few years. A lot of people have been telling folks new to traveling that you *shouldn't* carry a knife, especially when train hopping. The working theory is that somehow if you are put in a situation in which you need to defend yourself, your attacker could take your knife from you and use it against you. I've seen this bizarre logic come up several times, especially when the debate involves women defending themselves on the road.

Let's make this very clear; this logic is not only foolish, but dangerous. To my knowledge, there has *never* been an incident like this in the travel punk community. It is a false logic that is frankly, astoundingly stupid. A person brandishing a knife is going to make even the toughest aggressor think twice before attacking. No one likes getting stabbed, and simply showing someone you have a knife and are willing to use it is enough to defuse almost any attack.

Overall, whether it's to use as a tool or for self defense, a good knife is an essential piece of gear. Although I will always recommend getting a knife first, another good self defense weapon is pepper spray. You can get these just about anywhere, and it comes in a palm-sized can you can clip to your key chain for easy access.

Tools

Let's go over a quick list of tools you might want to take on your travels:

P-38 or P-51 army issue can opener. This incredible tool is small enough to fit in your wallet and will help open cans of food in seconds. You can find these at your local army surplus store and they cost less than a dollar. It's usefulness combined with it's small size means there's really no reason you shouldn't have one. I prefer the P-51 model since it's the same as the P-38 but a bit larger and easier to use.

Leatherman Multi Tool - Probably one of the most useful tools you can own with multiple uses for just about any situation. Most multi tools include a set of pliers, a knife (or two, or three), one or two screwdrivers, and many other useful items all combined into a single collapsible tool you can hang on your belt. There's a dozen different sizes and varieties ranging from \$25-\$100 so do a little research and find one that fits your needs and budget. You can also get off-brand multi tools for much cheaper, but they won't be nearly as high a quality.

Spoon/Spork/Hobo Tool - Having an eating utensil is important if you want to shovel food into your mouth. What you use is up to you, but try to get something with a key chain clip or carabiner so you can attach it to your pack and not lose it.

Cheap Butane Lighter - Because you're going to need to set something on fire eventually.

Sewing needles, dental floss, and safety pins - Try to put together this sewing kit with an extra lighter. Convenient for patching clothing. Most travelers use dental floss instead of thread since it's a lot stronger, and melting the ends of the floss with a lighter makes a nice bead of wax on the end that will keep the floss from coming out; it's also easier than tying a huge knot in the end of the thread.

Flashlight - This can be whatever form of light you prefer, although most folks these days pack a headlamp. Headlamps are worn around your head and generally run on AAA batteries. Most of them are small enough to fit in the palm of your hand, so you can easily stuff it in your pocket when you don't need it. The Energizer battery brand sells cheap versions at most grocery stores for around \$10; while they are completely decent, it's worth investing a little more (\$30-60) for a higher quality light that will last longer.

Sharpie / Grease Pen - Useful for all kinds of things, but mostly writing on cardboard signs when hitchhiking or flying a sign. Grease pens are just higher-end sharpies that use paint for ink and are popular with graffiti artists.

Duct Tape - You already know what this is, but keep in mind that you don't have to bring the whole roll. Just wrap a decent amount (4-6 feet) around a pencil and throw it in your pack for when you end up really needing it.

Binoculars / Monocular - I know very few people that actually travel with these, but they can be fun/useful in train yards, especially if you can find one that has night vision.

Wallet Chain - I've never lost my wallet or anything in it. Not once. I attribute this to the fact that I keep my wallet tethered to me with a chain and carabiner. Any dog chain you find in the super market will do, just keep it short so it doesn't get stuck between park benches and the like.

Fire Starter - Usually comes in a rectangular brick of some kind. It's made of magnesium and you scrape metal against it to create sparks that can start a campfire.

Fence cutters - Another item you won't find traveler's carrying that often, but can be convenient in certain situations when you need to make a whole in a fence.

Pocket Chain Saw - Just like it sounds. Take the chain off a chain saw and use it by hand. Fortunately camping good stores sell versions of this that fit in a portable tin, and give you handles to

insert on each end to make using it easier. If you spend a lot of time camping this is incredibly useful for cutting larger tree branches down into something that's easy to put in a campfire.

Universal Water Key - This is either just the handle to a spigot, or a four-pronged tool designed to let you turn on and off water spigots. Worth having if you come across handleless spigots often, but you could probably use a multi-tool and have one less tool to carry around.

Compass - A reliable compass can be handy since unlike the gps in your cell phone, it doesn't require batteries to tell you where to go.

Pocket Road Atlas - Essential when hitchhiking and train hopping, so you can keep track of where you're are and where you're headed. I like the smaller-sized atlases since they fit easily into your pocket.

Small First Aid Kit - I've been fortunate enough to never need one of these, but you might not be so lucky. It doesn't have to be a huge kit, even a small one with just the basics can make you a hero for the day when your travel partners get themselves hurt.

Plastic Garbage Bag / Disposable Poncho - These are great for staying dry without spending a ton of money on expensive rain gear. Trash bags can be gotten for free, and disposable ponchos can usually be found for around a dollar. They also are pre-folded into pocket size squares for easy storage.

Stoves & Cookware

While only about a third of the travelers I know carry a cooking stove with them, it can be a handy thing to have if you're planning on spending some time in the great outdoors. A lot of us don't wander that far from where food can be easily obtained, so you might decide you don't need one, which is fine. Cooking your own food though can definitely reduce your food budget costs, so I recommend taking one with you if you have the room in your pack.

[image not archived]

There's an endless variety of camping stoves out there, using all kinds of different fuels and staging apparatuses, but the best invention ever to come into the world of hobo-ism is the DIY beer can cooking stove. You can use this for heating up food on the road, and all you need to make your own is a pocket knife and an aluminum soda can. This technique has developed into it's own art form in recent years, so you'll see a variety of techniques for making one online, but I still think this video from Tom Allen's adventure cycling blog is one of the best instructional videos for beginners:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui8t3pivqtk>

One of this stove's biggest advantages is that you can use cheaply available alcohol found in just about any drug store. Rubbing alcohol is the most common, as you can get almost a liter for one or two dollars. Once you've filled it about a quarter to half way full, just ignite it with a lighter, place your pot on top, and you're ready to cook!

In my experience, this stove seems to work better the more you use it, so the first couple of burns might be a little spotty. Cooking one or two meals a day, I was able to make a liter of rubbing alcohol last almost two weeks. Two weeks of hot meals for two dollars is a pretty good deal.

You'll definitely want to be careful with this though, since it's easy to accidentally kick over your stove or pot while it's cooking. Safety first! Don't use this in your tent, or in a highly flammable portion of your squat. I recommend finding a small piece of Tupperware that your can stove can fit into. You can use this to store the stove (so it doesn't get your other gear smelling of alcohol) and most importantly as a way to snuff the flame out. Taking the Tupperware and placing it over the stove so that it makes a decent seal with the surface below it will cut off the oxygen supply to the flame and make it go out.

If building one of these on your own doesn't work out, you could try getting one online.

There's a lot of people selling them on Etsy for about nine dollars, which is pretty reasonable, and some are much nicer and better made than the version I describe above:

<https://www.etsy.com/search?q=alcohol%20stove>

When it comes to cookware, you can definitely use an empty tin can to cook whatever you're eating that day, but sometimes I like to have nice things, like a good cookware set. If you're hitchhiking or train hopping or generally living in your pack, this might not be a huge priority, but if you're van dwelling, bike touring, or traveling in a way that space isn't quite so precious, having a good cookware set is a huge convenience you might want to consider.

My absolute favorite is the Pinnacle Backpacker by GSI (www.amzn.to/2pZOqLj). It's a cook set that has a pot, pan, lid (with built in strainer!) two cups, two bowls, and a wash basin. The best part is that it all compacts into itself, so it only takes up the same amount of space one pot would (minus the handle).

Food

If you've made it this far in life you probably know how to feed yourself, so I'm not going to go too deep into this subject. Most food you'd take on a camping trip will work as long as it doesn't spoil easily and you don't mind hauling it around. Here's a few food items to think about taking with you when you travel.

Peanut Butter - When you're traveling poor, it's likely you'll be doing some dumpster diving, so peanut butter can be a wonderful thing to have with you. It's cheap, high in protein, and spreads great on all those bagels you'll be eating.

Salt / Spices - You don't need to take the whole spice rack with you, some salt packets will do just as well. If you want to get absolutely luxurious, you can find travel-friendly containers that hold many different kinds of spices in one jar.

Hot Sauce - A good hot sauce will save even the worst of meals, so if you like spicy food, take along a (small) bottle for those times when the gourmet hobo meal you've been working on under that bridge goes to shit.

Instant Coffee / Tea - This stuff is great if you have a caffeine addiction like myself, or just generally enjoy a cup of joe/tea in the morning. You can find instant coffee that's easy to pack and tea will go just about anywhere. Mate tea in particular is great for getting a buzz on the road since it's one of the few teas available that will steep in cold water.

Meals Ready to Eat (MRE's) - Ah, the classic MRE. Developed by the military, they're generally high-protein, high carbohydrate meals designed to keep you alive. Despite the media stereotype of rations tasting like crap, most of these meals are actually pretty decent. They often include miniature bottles of hot sauce, candy as a desert, and a self-boiling pouch to cook the food in.

Unfortunately, they are laughably expensive just about anywhere you find them on sale, so it's not something you should go out of your way to add to your gear list. The reason I mention them is because while they're completely impractical to buy, they are often easy to come by when traveling. On more than one occasion I've been given more MREs than I could carry by homeless shelters, churches, and just random veterans who have picked me up hitchhiking.

Technology

I'll start off by saying most of the things in this section are not necessary by any means; you can certainly survive your travels without them. However, some of these items are worth considering even for the most anti-technology people.

For example, it's worth having a cheap, shitty cell phone even if you have no desire to pay for cell phone service. Even a cell phone without paid service will let you dial 911 (assuming you can get a signal), so keeping one charged and turned off in your pack might save your bacon in the right circumstance.

In addition, the growing importance of the internet in our daily lives combined with cheap access devices such as tablets and smart phones make it almost foolish to not carry one around with you, even if you only turn it on to access the wifi at your local library.

Here's a list of technology you might consider taking with you on your travels.

Cell Phone / Smart Phone - As mentioned before, even if you don't use it, you should consider taking one with you in case of an emergency or simply just to access the internet on the road. They're lightweight, small, and give you easy access to information on the road. If you can afford to pay for a data plan, even better, but if not, there's almost always a place you can find with free wifi access, such as your local library or the McDonald's down the street.

If you're interested in getting cell phone service or a data plan, it's worth noting that there are many, many alternatives to an expensive cell phone plan. Companies like Boost Mobile, Straight Talk, Cricket, etc, are just resellers for the big companies like AT&T and Sprint.

It's the exact same service for about 1/3 the price.

Tablet - Although one of these will take up more space in your pack than a smart phone, they do have larger screens (which is nicer for surfing the internet) and their batteries usually last significantly longer than smart phones. It's also fairly easy to find used tablets for sale for a hundred dollars or less.

A camera - Photography is a huge subject and definitely outside the scope of this book, but I will say that in this day and age most cameras are decent and reasonably priced. I probably wouldn't invest in something too expensive (losing and breaking things are common in this lifestyle) unless you have a special interest that requires it. This is another reason why having a decent smart phone is a good idea, since most smart phones have pretty good cameras built into them.

Years down the road you'll thank yourself for documenting your adventure when looking back on those photos, so don't skip this one!

Batteries / Battery Charger - You might need these if you have items that require them, such as a flashlight. I recommend getting rechargeable batteries since they're better for the environment and are cheaper in the long run, since they'll last up to a few years, saving you the need to buy new ones constantly.

The main disadvantage is having to carry around a battery charger, which takes up more room in your pack, but I generally find the trade off to be worth it. If you buy a 'speed charger' you can usually recharge your batteries in as little as 2-4 hours instead of waiting all night, which is great when the only outlet in sight is in the local park or during a greyhound bus layover.

External Battery Pack - These are re-chargable packs of batteries that usually come in a small brick and have one or more usb ports built in. The idea is that you can recharge these packs when near an outlet, and use it to recharge your electronics later when you're on the road.

They come in all kinds of sizes; you can find them as small as a lipstick case (generally good enough for one cell phone recharge) to giant bricks that will recharge your phone dozens of times. The trade off is how much they weigh and how long they take to recharge (the larger packs often take overnight).

Laptop Computer - Now it's pretty unlikely you'll need this unless you're working online, maintaining a website, or doing some other kind of related work that requires something more powerful than a tablet or smart phone.

If that's the case, you probably already know what you need in terms of the laptop's specifications, so I'll keep this brief and just say that you should try to keep it lightweight, cheap (in case you break it), and make sure you get a padded case for it.

Google Voice / Voice Mail - If you can't afford cell phone service, sign up for a free Google Voice account. You'll get your own phone number (you get to pick the area code) and you'll have a completely legitimate phone number with free voice mail included. You don't need phone service to access it, you can fetch your messages anywhere you can get internet. You can also have text transcriptions of messages emailed to you, but the transcription quality can leave a lot to be desired.

Entertainment

Travel often lends to extended periods of boredom between short bouts of excitement.

Waiting under a bridge for the next train to arrive, waiting for someone to pick you up hitchhiking, waiting for that next connection at the bus station or airport... you get the idea.

To keep yourself from going crazy, it's a good idea to bring along some kind of entertainment, even if it's as simple as a deck of cards. Here's a few suggestions for maintaining your sanity on the road.

Deck of Cards - As I just mentioned, a good old-fashioned deck of cards can help pass the hours away while waiting for the next stage of your journey. Even if you're just playing solitaire, it beats watching the grass grow for hours on end. If you're looking for something a little more advanced, you could try Magic the Gathering or Pokemon...

Notebook or Sketch book - Something to put your thoughts, notes and drawings into. Despite being a total computer geek, I still carry one of these with me, since it's generally easier for me to plan my projects on paper before I start work on my computer.

Books / Ebooks / Zines - A good book is a great way to pass the time. If you're a serious bookworm, you might consider getting an ebook/eink reader like a Kindle, Kobo, etc, that way you can take hundreds of books with you in a tiny device that can last up to a month between charges.

Zines (Pronounced 'zee-ns', not 'z-eye-ns') are DIY photocopied magazines that can usually be found at local infoshops, punk houses, or other activist community centers. There's zines on just about any subject you can imagine and they have a huge community of people that are quite passionate about the format. They're usually free or extremely cheap, so take a few for reading on your next trip.

Music / Podcasts / MP3 player - Music can make that long walk between towns a thousand times more pleasant, and long gone is the era of having to carry around dozens of tapes or CDs in your pack. MP3 players can be obtained for extremely cheap, are super small, will hold all but the largest music collections, and often last 12+ hours on a single charge.

Podcasts are episodic radio episodes that you can subscribe to and automatically get new episodes downloaded to your device when they get published (and you're connected to the internet). There's literally 1000's of podcasts to choose from, from music reviews to political debates. Comedy is my favorite podcast genre, and it's a great way to keep yourself awake on long drives across the country.

Video Games - Now some of you are probably going to scoff at this one, but bear with me here. I'm sure I'm not the only one out there that's an avid gamer, and it's definitely not impossible to get your fix on the road. Even if you pick up an old Gameboy Advance (about

\$20-\$30 these days), that will give you 4-5 hours of entertainment on one charge, and fits perfectly in your pocket.

I spent a summer train hopping up and down the west coast with a few friends and playing Advance Wars (a turn-based strategy game) since it lets you pass the Gameboy around so each person can take a turn. This led to tournaments lasting hours and was a great way to kill time while waiting for our next train.

Smart Phone - I bring this up again just to remind you that a lot of the above can be done on your smart phone (if you have one) and save you the effort of carrying around multiple devices. Most smart phones are designed to carry tons of music, can run emulators for most old video game consoles, and can be used to read ebooks as long as you don't mind pointing your eyeballs at a backlit screen for hours on end. The only disadvantage is that using a smart phone for all these tasks will likely mean you'll have to recharge your device quite often.

Musical Instruments

Musical instruments not only serve as excellent entertainment, but are also incredibly useful for making money on the road (see Busking in the Making Money chapter for more information). Throughout history wanderers have used music to inspire, bring people together, and simply get their next meal. There's such a variety of portable instruments available that it's definitely worth giving them their own section in this book.

Acoustic Guitar - One of the most common musical instruments available in the world today. It's not very hard to learn how to play, it can play along with any other instrument, and it is fairly easy to carry around. There are even 'backpacker' varieties that are designed to be more compact for travelers such as yourself. If you've never played a musical instrument before, this is a great one to out start with.

Ukulele - Although it's strings are tuned much differently than a guitar, this remains a popular instrument due to it's diminutive size and portability. Very popular with the female crowd, although it's certainly not limited to that gender.

Harmonica - Not much says 'hobo on the road' more than the classic harmonica. This instrument is played by blowing out and sucking air through it, and using your hands to block certain holes, creating a particular note. It has a bit of a learning curve, but goes well with just about any other instrument your fellow travelers may be carrying.

Violin - I don't see nearly as many violin players as I'd like these days, but if you're looking for a busking instrument that doesn't have a lot of competition, this is the one to go for. Difficult to learn, but if you can master it, you can make money just about anywhere and rock out around the camp fire with your friends as well.

Accordion / Concertina - It is extremely rare to see this due to it's size and excessive weight, but if you don't mind carrying it around, you can definitely rock people's world with a distinct and unique sound. The concertina is a smaller (and much more portable) version of an accordion, and is often referred to as a 'squeeze box'.

Mouth Harp - The mouth harp is a metal device that you put in your mouth and pluck a bendy part in the middle with your finger. It gives a 'boing' kind of sound that goes well with the harmonica and other old-timey instruments. Try not to whack your teeth though!

Everything else - I could go on forever, but the above are what you're most likely to see on the road. If you're a passionate flute player, you could certainly take one with you. You could also strap a five gallon plastic bucket to your pack if you just want to drum all day. I've seen people carry around battery powered keytars (a guitar with an electric keyboard built in, instead of strings), and mini electric keyboards. There's so many kinds of musical instruments in the world that you're really only limited by logistics and your imagination.

Showers & Hygiene

Before we get into the following list, let me take a moment to impart some advice on staying clean. In a lot of travel punk circles, it's become almost comically 'cool' to be as dirty as possible, and folks often joke about how many 'punk points' they've earned by basically smelling like shit wherever they go.

It's disappointing that I even have to mention this, but smelling like a sewer isn't just dumb, it's actually bad for your health. The number one reason many travelers get staph infections, scabies, and other bugs is because they couldn't be bothered to take a shower every once in a while. Showers, sinks, and other bodies of water are not difficult to find, especially in the United States, and I would encourage you to bathe as often as possible in your travels.

One of the most common techniques for showering on the road is to go to your local truck stop and pay for a shower there. Truck stops have this service available for truck drivers going long distances that don't have any other place to shower. Rates range from seven to twelve dollars on average; depending on how badly you need to get clean, that may or may not be worth it to you. It's worth noting that it's fairly easy to sneak more than one person into a single paid shower. Keep in mind that these showers are usually limited to around fifteen minutes. This obviously halves the time you have for each person to about seven minutes a piece, so be quick!

Other places you can get access to a shower include churches, the salvation army, homeless shelters, and occasionally public showers on the beach. If you can't find a shower and are in desperate need, try going to any bathroom and doing a 'bird bath'. This is just a quick shower that only involves cleaning private parts and under the arms. It's certainly better than nothing, and will save you significant discomfort when you start to chafe during a long day of walking.

As for other aspects of hygiene, here's a quick list of suggested gear for making yourself more pleasant to be around.

Toothbrush & Toothpaste - Hopefully you've been using this most of your life already, so you should be pretty familiar with this. If not, it cleans your teeth so they stay in your mouth.

Dental Floss - I'll admit, I'm not really a flosser; I use it more often for sewing than getting stuff out of my teeth. I list it as a reminder to those that like to use this for their teeth.

Toilet Paper - I rarely carry this in my pack unless I know I'm going to be somewhere I'll need it. Even carrying around a small amount can be useful though, especially when you need to blow your nose. You can definitely use paper napkins from a fast food joint instead, and it'll be somewhat easier to carry.

Condoms / Prophylactics - I'm sure you'll want to avoid unpleasant STIs/STDs from your fellow travelers, and you definitely don't want to get knocked up just a few months into your travels. Practice safe sex and be prepared, since you never know when the love bug might hit.

Gold Bond - This is probably the brand of talcum powder you're most likely to find in your local grocery store. In your worst, sweatiest, most chafe-ridden days, this stuff can be a godsend. Pour it on your those painfully chaffed areas and it's an almost instant cure.

Chap Stick / Lip Balm - When I first arrive in extreme cold or desert environments my lips often get so painfully chapped I can't take it anymore. This stuff is small enough that I find it worth packing to have around for those kinds of emergencies.

Beard Trimmer - Okay, so most of you can probably skip this, but I personally carry around a rechargeable electric trimmer for maintaining my beard. Also works great for shaving my head (I've been going bald for quite some time now) and giving my friends mohawks that I'm quite jealous of.

Wet Wipes / Baby Wipes - If you're in a situation where bathing in a river or showering at a friend's place isn't possible, it pays to carry around a pack of wet wipes (often referred to as 'baby wipes') as you can use these to wipe down sensitive areas of your body and keep them somewhat clean until you can get a decent shower. They're usually only a dollar or two a pack, so there's no reason not to use them if you're in a pinch.

Feminine Wipes / Pads / Tampons - All the things you need to avoid any messes on the road, and ensure you have as comfortable a trip as possible. There are many interesting alternatives to traditional products that are worth looking into, such as the Diva Cup (www.divacup.com).

Documents

One of the obstacles travelers often face is losing their documentation such as a Driver's License, Birth Certificate, etc. So in this section we're going to cover how to get new ones if you happen to lose them in your travels. While I don't advocate for government documentation in any way, I do believe in being pragmatic, and I've found that carrying an ID while traveling usually results in smoother interactions with the authorities.

I can tell you with a certainty that you will have interactions with the authorities living this lifestyle. Not many people understand nomadic cultures, and what the police don't understand, they will immediately find suspicious.

It's certainly safe to hitchhike without an ID even if the cops stop you. On the flip side of the coin, you'll land yourself in serious trouble if driving a vehicle without a driver's license. Also, it's virtually impossible to get some forms of assistance such as food stamps, food boxes, and other homeless services without an ID. It sucks, but that's the world we live in.

Of course, it might be your desire to do away with all documentation entirely; you wouldn't be the first, and I wouldn't blame you for doing so. If that's your situation, feel free to move on to the next section and refer back here if you ever do need to get your documents in order.

Birth Certificate - The easiest place I've found to get a new copy of my birth certificate is VitalCheck (www.vitalcheck.com). Prices vary, but I was able to get mine sent to me for

\$17. I was able to complete the entire process online and it arrived less than a week later.

Proof of Residency - There are many different ways to prove residency, including utility bills and paycheck stubs. If you don't have any of these it's extremely easy to fake residency using a generic lease agreement form. You can find these at most office supply stores (or possibly online). Just print it out, write in whatever address you like, have a friend sign as the leaser, and you as the lessee, and boom, instant proof of residency.

Social Security Card - You'll have to apply for this in person at your local Social Security Office and you'll need to know your parent's social security numbers as well as your own when you fill out the application.

Identification Card / Driver's License - Identification cards generally require the documents listed above, and possibly some kind of identifying photo like a high school yearbook photo. Driver's licenses work similarly but sometimes require you to take/retake the test depending on your circumstances, and the rules can be different from state to state, so check your state's requirements online.

Passport - If you're a United States citizen traveling inside your home country, you're almost never going to need a passport. It is (of course) essential if you are traveling outside the United States, even if you're only going to Canada or Mexico. They're not very difficult to get, but the process is a bit time consuming and costly, as it can take up to six weeks for your passport to arrive, and usually costs around \$150.

Once you get your documents (or if you already have them), you should make a photocopy and store them in a safe place. You can use these in some situations to help recover your documents or to prove citizenship if you're in a foreign country.

Shipping Stuff

So once you're out and about in the world, you might find it necessary to get something shipped to you, whether it's an important document, an x-mas present from your parents, or something you ordered online.

The *easiest* way to receive that package is to have it sent to a friend or someone you trust that lives near you. If that isn't possible, the next best option is to get your package sent to your local post office via General Delivery. This service is available at almost every United States Post Office, and the way it works is that any package addressed like so:

Your Name General Delivery

Post Office Address City, State, Zip Code

Will be held for you at that post office for up to thirty days; at that time it will be returned to the sender. This is a good way to get gear sent ahead of yourself if you're on a bike tour, or camping gear sent to the next city ahead of you when thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. Keep in mind you'll need a valid ID to retrieve your package, and this service is only offered by the United States Postal Service (USPS).

If the store you are buying from won't ship to a general delivery address or a PO Box, UPS Stores offer the same PO Box service as the Post Office, but use the store's delivery address combined with a suite number instead of a PO Box number. Sensitive items like identification documents and credit cards can be mailed to these addresses without the restrictions related to PO Boxes. Also, most UPS stores will accept packages on your behalf for a fee of five dollars per package. This works the same as sending general delivery to USPS, but you have to call the store in advance so they know your package is coming. They'll even accept packages from other carriers like FedEx (something USPS will definitely not do).

A very new service (and only offered in a few major cities at the moment) is Amazon Lockers. These are storage lockers that you can have items delivered to that you've ordered from Amazon's website. Once the package has been delivered, you'll get a notification email with a six digit code that you can punch into the locker to retrieve your package.

The only limitations (besides availability) is that you're limited to items sold by Amazon and authorized FBA (Fulfillment by Amazon) retailers. This means that most used goods won't qualify for shipping to an Amazon Locker. It's a minor point, but something to consider if you're ordering something from Amazon.

This will mostly be of interest to van dwellers, but there are a variety of mail forwarding services available if you're willing to pay for them. These companies generally let you have a mailbox in a state that has very low taxes (if you're running a business) or as a way to establish residency for car insurance purposes. For example, states like South Dakota usually have very few car accidents compared to other US states, so this can mean saving yourself several hundred dollars in car insurance if you choose to establish residency there.

Some of these mail services will also open your mail, scan them into a computer, and email them to you for an additional cost, saving you the hassle of finding a place to have the mail forwarded to.

3. Feeding Yourself

Excess & Waste

One of the main concerns I get from new travelers is how to stay fed on the road. If you live in the United States of America, you're an extremely lucky person! This country is one of the richest and most powerful countries in the world. It's capitalist nature also makes it a country that produces a lot of food waste. A staggering 40% of the food produced in this country is thrown away before it even reaches the grocery store. Until we're able to solve this waste problem, all we can really do for now as individuals is try to take advantage of it.

The United States also has a pretty decent social support system that you can take advantage of, like food banks, soup kitchens, and food stamps. These social programs are for those truly in need, so I'm not encouraging you to race straight to the bottom if you're capable of supporting yourself with work. If you can work to make money (even just for a few weeks/months - see Working Seasonally) you get to choose what to eat, where to eat, and what time of day you want to shove something in your mouth, rather than being at the mercy of those that are willing to help you out.

Dumpster Diving

[image not archived]

Illustration credit: Alexis Ellers and Micco Slays.

One of the best ways to take advantage of the excessive amount of waste in this country and do your part to save the planet is to go dumpster diving as much as possible!

Now, I'm sure some of you are reading this, mouths agape, imagining the *horror* of sifting through a wet sludge of half eaten fast food, and putting that slop into your mouth. This really couldn't be farther from the truth. In reality, 90% of dumpster diving involves sifting through trash bags containing boxes of prepackaged food that hasn't even reached the expiration date.

Almost all the food we eat has what we call a 'sell by' date. Although most people would consider the food in question to no longer be edible after this date, this is not accurate.

Remember, this is a 'sell by' date, not an *expiration* date. The date is designed to keep track of items so they are put on the shelf of the grocery store with enough time left over to give a customer time to buy that item, and have that item last a few weeks in storage at home. So if you see a loaf of bread that has sell by date for today, it's likely that bread will still be edible for some time.

A lot of the food you'll find in grocery store dumpsters is just food that didn't reach the shelf by the sell date listed on the package. While it's certainly not the only food worth scavenging from dumpsters, it's definitely the most ideal, since we know this food isn't likely to be spoiled and will last at least a few days after we've recovered it.

Another fear people have about dumpster diving is going into the actual dumpsters themselves. Some dumpsters can definitely be festering piles of awfulness, but you can easily avoid these by using common sense, finding good places to dive, and knowing what to look for when doing it. For example, diving into the dumpster of a meat market in the middle of summer is probably going to be a horrifying experience. On the other hand, hitting up the dumpster of a cereal factory will probably be okay no matter what time of year it is. The key is to mostly aim for pre-packaged non-perishable goods that have a low likelihood of getting contaminated by other things in the dumpster (like raw chicken).

There's a lot of places worth dumpstering besides your local grocery store. Taking a step up the supply chain will lead you to food distribution centers, which can yield huge quantities of the same product. For example, looking up the distribution center for Lay's Potato chips (in the phone book or on Google) will often result in discovering a dumpster overflowing with hundreds of bags of chips and nothing else.

It's not impossible to dumpster perishable goods like fruits and vegetables, just make sure they're in decent shape and clean them thoroughly when you take them home. Even if produce is slightly spoiled, they can often be put into a juicer to make delicious juice that is totally fine for consumption.

Use your sense of smell to check things like meat and dairy. You'll want to avoid meat most of the time unless it's been sealed, pre-cooked, or the outdoor weather is cold enough to keep it from spoiling. If you suspect something smells a little off, don't take chances! I've never once gotten sick on food from the dumpster, but I thoroughly check anything I find before taking it home.

Unfortunately, most people don't understand why anyone would go dumpster diving. Be prepared for strange looks from employees and passersby, and some businesses will go out of their way to get rid of dumpster divers entirely. The most common tactics include covering their trash with bleach water, putting locks on the dumpsters, or replacing it with a trash compactor; these contraptions are the bane of a dumpster diver's existence and are very difficult to defeat.

These things seem to happen more often when a dumpster gets abused. For example, some dumpster divers are careless and leave trash laying all around the dumpster because they are too lazy to put the trash they removed back into the container. This is obviously annoying for the business and it's employees, and usually results in the anti-dumpster diver tactics listed above. Be a model dumpster diver and always leave the area cleaner than when you left it! Doing this in combination with being sneaky and not attracting attention will usually ensure a good dumpster spot is around for everyone to enjoy for quite some time.

If someone confronts you about your dumpster diving, don't feel obligated to put back anything you've already taken. Just politely make your exit and move on. I've almost never had the cops stop me, but on the few occasions they have, I usually explain that I'm just looking for materials for an art project. If it's painfully obvious you're scavenging food just be truthful about what you're doing and they will usually tell you to move along. I've never heard of anyone being ticketed or arrested for dumpster diving, so the risk of that is pretty low.

You can find more than food in dumpsters; there's a whole world of things being thrown away every day, and you can find almost anything you'd ever need if you search long and hard enough. I've found a Pabst Blue Ribbon beer lamp in a donut dumpster, CPR dolls in a medical supply dumpster, and cases of dented beer in the dumpsters of liquor distribution outlets. I've furnished my home/squat with sudo-persian rugs, expensive couches, and even working refrigerators, all from apartment complex dumpsters.

College towns can be a gold mine if you know where to go when the school semester ends.

College kids often have little appreciation for money and the things given to them (by their parents) so when the end of the semester hits, these people often throw away anything too difficult to haul back home. This season is often referred to as 'Dirty Kid Christmas' by many travelers since they find so many wonderful things that seem downright absurd to throw away. Everything from brand new TVs, furniture, food, and anything in between can be found in these dumpsters. I have one friend who found a perfectly working Playstation Portable video game system; there was literally nothing wrong with it.

So while I wouldn't depend on it completely, adding dumpster diving to your list of skills can be a great way to feed yourself, furnish your home, and make some money on the side as well!

Food Stamps

In the United States, the program widely known as ‘food stamps’ was designed to help those in need put food on their table to survive. It started out as a paper based system where the government would issue you a booklet of monopoly-looking money divided into different denominations. In those days it was often hard to find grocery stores that would take them, but they were easy to sell to other people for non-food items since these food stamp ‘dollars’ didn’t have any identifying info attached, so if you had a \$5 food stamp bill, you were just assumed to be the rightful owner of it, just like standard American currency.

Of course businesses always looked at you weird when you tried spending your monopoly money on food in their store, so it was often awkward and a lot of places didn’t accept them at all. This all changed when the government moved the entire program over to an electronic credit card-like system. This not only made it easier to use in stores, but also normalized the experience and made poor people not feel so strange when using them. It also had the added benefit of making it easier to use food stamps outside the state you got them in. For example, a food stamp card gotten in California could be used in any other US state without any issues.

Some folks might have some pride issues with taking assistance from the government, but personally I’m glad to have any opportunity to get something back from them, since it seems more often than not they’re taking everything they can from us, and not giving a whole hell of a lot back. Even if you’re completely against the government and everything it stands for, I believe we should take advantage of every opportunity for aid in fighting our oppressors. I just remind myself that taking food stamps from the government is a kind of ‘asshole tax’ I’m enacting on the government for all the fucked shit they do on our behalf around the world.

Fortunately food stamps are fairly easy to get in most states, all you need to do is show two forms of identification and tell them you’re homeless, have no money or any other way to support yourself. Usually you’ll get expedited assistance and a card with just under \$200 in food stamps. Your account will renew each month, generally for six months at a time before you need to report in any changes (or lack of) in your income or living status. If you fail to do so they’ll simply stop renewing the balance on your card.

If you do have a bank account with a little money on it, or pay a cell phone bill, pay rent, or worked in the last 90 days (even if you’re not now) these are all questions that are going to be on the forms you need to fill out, and frankly 90% of the time you should just lie and say you haven’t got or done any of these things. The reason for this is because once you deviate from the ‘I have nothing and need assistance’ routine, you’re going to be stuck coming back to the office again and again, with documents proving your work history, financial standing, and any bills you’ve paid recently.

The irony of having to go through this extra work is that once you start introducing all these things to your application the chances of you getting the full amount of food stamps each month plummets dramatically. I know some folks that have applied while working part-time minimum wage jobs (certainly not enough to pay bills and eat) having to go through a mess of paperwork only to receive \$35 dollars a month in food stamps. When dealing with most things government related, it’s often easier to just lie and move on with your life rather than deal with the bullshit.

If you do own a car, I probably wouldn’t lie about that, but mention that you’re still homeless and live in the vehicle. Also, don’t be greedy and go out applying for food stamps in multiple states; while many states don’t communicate this information well, some do, and many people have been caught and

forced to pay fines in addition to repaying what they were given, not to mention being banned from the food stamp program entirely.

If you're concerned about the food stamp office finding out about any funds in your bank account, it might be worth considering moving to a pre-paid credit card as your only bank account. I have no idea what methods the food stamp office has for checking financial information, but no one I know has ever had an issue even when they had several hundred dollars still left on a pre-paid credit card. You can find out more information about getting one of these cards in the Banks & Credit Cards section of this book.

When it comes to what state to get your food stamps from, there's good states, *great* states, and downright awful states to apply in. For example, Texas (being a republican state) is probably one of the worst states for applying for food stamps. You can only get them for three months at a time, have to go to a special class, and if you don't go looking for work for at least eight hours a day (and document it with signatures) they'll cut you off. Even worse, if this happens you can't reapply for *three years!* That's pretty absurd.

On the other hand, there's a joke that if you're in Oregon and have a pulse, you can get food stamps. Like all west coast states, it's definitely one of the easier states to get approved. I won't go into a complete list of states here, but do a little research and you'll find which states are best and what the limitations are.

If you apply for food stamps in one state and start using them in another, it's possible that state will cut you off prematurely. I'm guessing these states do this because they want money from these programs to be spent supporting the local economy, not those of other states they don't get taxes from. Not all states do this, and some will cut you off faster than others, so don't be surprised if your stamps fail to renew once you leave the state you received them in.

Generally though, you'll get two or three months of food stamps outside the state before this happens. If you get cut off, just reapply for food stamps in the state you're currently in. All food stamp applications ask if you've received food stamps from their state or another state in the past ninety days; everyone I know says no, and I've never heard of any repercussions for doing so.

Selling your food stamps is definitely a crime, and technically a moral gray area. Personally I feel like selling a few dollars of your food stamps for essential non-food items like toiletries is pretty harmless. Selling your stamps for booze/drugs though is kinda shitty, since you're clearly taking advantage of an assistance program for poor people and using it for your own vices, so don't be that person.

Food Banks & Soup Kitchens

Food banks are another wonderful social service run by very generous people willing to volunteer their time and energy in making sure people in lower income brackets are able to feed themselves. These places are often supplied entirely by food donations from local businesses and the government. Of course, these places are entirely at the mercy of the donations they receive so some have a better selection than others.

Some are government funded, others run by local church organizations, and some are a combination of both. There's many different kinds of food banks and some have different requirements than others. You might need to fill in an application and show a photo ID to get in line. Some only require a signature so they can prove to the government how many people they're helping. Some require a local address, in which case you can usually make something up or use a general delivery address. A few food banks have a certain number of times you can come through without being a local resident (which usually involves them sending you a letter and you returning with it to prove your residency) which is fine if you're just passing through anyways.

Some food banks will ask if you have a way to cook food; if you say yes, you'll almost always get more food than if you say no, but that food might be something extremely perishable, such as a frozen chicken. So keep in mind that food banks are generally geared towards those with houses and a way to cook food, and not so much for those traveling on the road. This is still a good resource if you're traveling with a vehicle, or if you don't mind being picky about what you want to take and carry in your pack.

Either way, if the need and opportunity arises, definitely hit up your local food bank since they often have a surplus of food that will go bad before they get a chance to give it away, and it's a great place to get free produce.

The classic 'soup kitchen' is another way to get a decent meal when traveling, since there are many organizations putting in a lot of work to keep the poor and homeless fed. Most often these are religious organizations that might require you to listen to a sermon before they'll feed you, so be aware of that, but in exchange you'll get a hot meal in your gut.

Food banks and kitchens like the above can usually be found with a simple Google search, or in pamphlets that are distributed at places like drop-in centers, churches, etc.

Food Not Bombs

One of the most popular DIY social services available to travelers, punks, and anyone looking for a meal to eat is the Food Not Bombs organization. Started in 1980, Food Not Bombs (FnB) is an all-volunteer loose-knit group of independent collectives that share free vegan meals as a protest against war and the existence of hunger in the midst of abundance. Most food is surplus food that would otherwise go to waste from grocery stores, bakeries and markets, as well as donations from local farmers. FnB collectives usually feed people once a week (sometimes more) at the local city park. You can usually find the schedule for your area on the FnB website (www.foodnotbombs.net) or local city paper. FnB collectives are always seeking volunteers to help prepare meals so it's a great way to plug into the local punk/activist community and make friends in a town you've never been to before.

When All Else Fails

In the event you find yourself in a desperate enough situation, keep in mind these tactics when times get especially hard, or simply when the opportunity arises.

Trash Picking - Just like it sounds, this is picking through garbage cans looking for half-eaten food. If you don't mind eating a slice of pizza with a bite taken out of it, there's plenty of food to be had in these receptacles.

Table Scores - This is when you take food that's been left behind on a table at a restaurant, food court, or any other open eatery. Drawbacks include trying to locate abandoned food, and getting kicked out by restaurant staff or security.

White Boxes - If you're standing on a street corner spanging, you might as well ask for people's leftovers as they pass by. Customers often take home food they couldn't finish at the restaurant and they're most often placed in white Styrofoam boxes. Most people don't care about their leftovers that much, so if asked you're likely to get some free food.

Gleaning - This is kind of a form of dumpster diving, but without having to dive into a trash receptacle. Gleaning is when you go to a farm or local farmer's market and collect all the leftover produce that sellers weren't able to sell and are throwing away.

Asking Businesses for Food - A common tactic for homeless people with no other options is to simply ask restaurants if they will give you free food. I've seen this done at many fast food places, and seems to work fairly well at certain places, like pizza restaurants.

Just politely ask if they're throwing anything out that you can have, or ask if there's some kind of work you can do like washing their dishes. Some sympathetic business will just give you free food, or if they ask you to do some kind of work, they'll generally hook you up with more food than you can carry afterwards.

Shopping for Food

While most of what we've covered here so far has involved *free* food, if you have money, food stamps, etc, you'll definitely want to stretch your food dollar as far as possible. Here's some ideas for making sure you don't go broke.

Always check the discount table at the grocery store. You can find all kinds of heavily discounted items there, including day-old bakery items.

Speaking of bread, check around your area for bakeries, bagel shops, donut shops, etc.

These places have an extremely high likelihood of having dumpsters overflowing with baked goods. If possible, always hit these up before spending money on bread at the grocery store.

Just because a store has the word 'dollar' in it's name doesn't make it a true dollar store. Usually these are just slightly cheaper grocery stores. If you can find a true dollar store (like the Californian '99 cent only' chain of stores) these can be a gold mine of cheap food.

Additional Resources

As you can see, there's a ton of options for feeding yourself on the road, so hopefully you shouldn't have a hard time keeping your belly full. If you'd like to learn more, there's a lot of different resources on the web and in print form for being frugal and living cheaply. A few of my favorites include:

Trash Wiki - This website is the collaborative world wide guide to creating value from trash. There are various tutorials on things like how to unlock dumpsters, diver's etiquette, and location specific information about recovering goods from the trash.

<http://trashwiki.org>

The Art & Science of Dumpster Diving by John Hoffman - Considered to be the authoritative guide on the subject, this book has 152 pages explaining how to use dumpster diving for food, clothing, appliances, furniture, books and other treasures. Also learn how to handle run-ins with the authorities and convert your trash to cash, all while being entertained by the outrageous anecdotes of this life-long dumpster diver. <http://amzn.to/2q9HjuY>

Falling Fruit - Everything from the lemon tree down the street to the aloe vera plant in your neighbor's yard, this is the largest interactive map of user-submitted locations where you can pick all kinds of edible produce for free.

<http://fallingfruit.org>

Dumpster Map - Much like Falling Fruit, this is an interactive map of user-contributed dumpster locations around the world that have goods worth taking.

<http://dumpstermap.org>

Food Not Bombs (FnB) - This is a worldwide organization dedicated to recovering food that would have otherwise been discarded and use it to feed those who are hungry as a way of protesting war and poverty. The website has more information about the group's principles and history, and you can also search for FnB locations around the United States.

<http://foodnotbombs.net>

Dumpster Diving Subreddit - This section of the Reddit social media site is a good place to ask questions and get general advice from people that are very passionate about sifting through the trash.

<https://www.reddit.com/r/DumpsterDiving>

4. Sleep for Free

Avoiding Rent

If there was only one piece of advice I could impart to the newbie traveler, it would be to avoid rent at all costs. To be clear, when I say *rent* I mean the concept that you should have to *pay money* for the privilege of having a roof over your head every night.

We're all taught humans need food, water, and shelter, yet capitalism insists on charging people for these basic needs. Since we need these things to survive, they can keep charging us for them in perpetuity. We should reject the theory that profit is more important than people's needs, and fight against the concept of taxing someone for simply existing.

So it shouldn't be surprising that the largest cost in traditional travel is often going to be paying for a place to sleep. When your average hotel costs more than a hundred dollars a night (more than a full day's wage for many people) you can see why avoiding this expense is essential to making your funds last as long as possible. In this chapter, we'll take a look at a variety of ways to sleep for free.

Couch Surfing

It's likely that staying at someone's house is probably the first place you'll end up when starting your travels. While there's nothing wrong with that, keep in mind it's not your host's job to support and feed you, so help out around the house and do whatever you can to make their lives easier. Living rent free shouldn't come at the expense of someone else's hard work, so be a good house guest.

A very popular resource that's popped up over the past few years is the Couch Surfing website (www.couchsurfing.org). This website is a resource for people to find places to stay during their travels. People willing to open up their homes to couch surfers get connected with people from other places in the world and this usually results in a cultural exchange and unique experience for both parties. The website is free to use, but getting a 'verified' status costs around twenty dollars and proves to other users that you are who you say you are. Verification also includes a few extra perks like your listings being highlighted in search results. If you think you're going to use this resource often, it might be worth paying for the verification.

There are a few similar websites that do the same thing, including:

<http://www.trustroots.org> <http://www.bewelcome.org> <http://www.stay4free.com> <http://www.hospitalityclub.org> <http://www.globalfreeloaders.com>

Most of the websites in this list are *average* at best and don't really compare to Couch Surfing, which is clearly the big kid on the block. One exception is the website Warm Showers (www.warmshowers.org), which was built specifically for people bike touring, and has been quite reliable for people I know that travel via bicycle.

The Squat the Planet website itself is a great way to find other like minded travel punks; we have a section dedicated to couch surfing (that we jokingly call Crust Surfing) and it's completely free. If you're reading this book, it's likely you'll get along with many of the folks you'll find there.

Stealth Camping

One of the best ways to hold onto your hard-earned cash is to simply sleep outside. Most of the time no one can charge you a fee for sleeping outside, so if the weather is good, and you've got the proper gear, there's no reason you can't go sleep under the stars.

This obviously gets more difficult in urban areas since these are the places you're most likely to get harassed by the police or other thugs looking to prey on homeless people. So it pays to keep an eye out for spots you can sleep without being seen. This is often referred to as *stealth camping*.

Although you should definitely try to be as ninja as possible, stealth camping doesn't always mean being completely invisible. A good example is sleeping under a highway overpass or other road bridge. You're out of the sight of most people, but these tend to be one of the more easily found and more popular sleeping spots, so it's likely you'll run into other homeless people here as well.

Less obvious spots to sleep are behind dumpsters, inside buildings under construction, forested areas, parking garages, under stairwells, some public parks, and any other place normal people aren't going to look, especially at night.

A very good example of this is sleeping on building rooftops. On the west coast of the United States, urban sprawl tends to go in a sideways direction, rather than straight up (like it does on the east coast), and it's much more common to find roof access ladders behind buildings like fast food restaurants, strip malls, and other commercial spaces. While most are locked, some are not and others can be bypassed with a little creative climbing. Just remember to choose a ladder no one will see you ascending, and make sure to stay out of sight once you're on the rooftop itself.

Squatting

Squatting is the act of occupying an abandoned building for the purpose of using it as a shelter or community space. These spaces are usually abandoned by corporations (as tax write-offs), the owners are deceased, or are owned by the city because the previous owner failed to pay their property tax.

The core concept of squatting is everyone should have some kind of shelter, so it should be within the people's right to re-purpose a space not in use for the common good. This is what is most commonly referred to as 'squatter's rights'. This doesn't mean you can claim squatter's rights on anything; it should be a space not in use (and ideally with no immediate use planned) and squatting it should benefit society in some way, even if it's just to give a few people a roof over their head.

The squatting movement has a long and interesting history, especially in Europe where there are actual laws on the books to protect squatters. For example, in some countries, the only requirements are that you did not break into an abandoned property (i.e. the door was already open) and you place inside it a bed, table, and chair; if you notify the police (after changing the locks) you are protected under law as tenants until the owner takes you to court. Unfortunately, the powers that be have been working to eradicate these laws in recent years with the Netherlands criminalizing squatting entirely, and England changing their laws to only allow squatting in non-residential spaces.

The closest equivalent we have in the United States to squatter's rights is 'adverse possession'. Adverse possession basically says that if you live on a property long enough, you own that property. How long you have to live there depends on the state and your situation, but it generally falls somewhere between five and twenty one years. Adverse possession doesn't give you any specific rights the way Europe's laws do, but instead just makes it possible to officially obtain ownership of a property in certain situations.

What you're going to most often hear referred to as 'squatting' in the United States travel punk community is the act of occupying an abandoned building as a way to avoid the police and get a decent night's sleep. Without the laws that protect squatters in other countries, these spaces usually end up being extremely temporary, and I've had to run out the back door of an abandoned house I was sleeping in when the owners (or sometimes, the police) show up.

There are definitely long-term squats that exist in the United States, especially in poorer cities with a lot of urban blight. Detroit is probably one of the most famous, but there have been longterm squats established in many cities like Philadelphia, New York (mostly in the 80's), New Orleans (especially after hurricane Katrina in 2005), and Oakland. You might even come across (or stay at) some of these places in your travels.

You can definitely open up your own squat, but it might help to visit a few first or do it with an experienced friend so you can learn how not to get busted. If you don't have that luxury, I'll go over a few tips here to get you started.

Since we're looking at this subject from the perspective of only needing a temporary place to stay, the rules are going to be a bit looser than those of a long-term squat. While you should do everything you can to make sure you get in and out with no witnesses, if someone sees you exiting the building and you're leaving town that day I wouldn't worry about it too much, especially if it's a place most people wouldn't squat at long term.

Besides the usual obvious signs of abandonment (no one home, no lights, no furniture inside, etc) check for things like a ton of untouched mail in the mailbox. Checking the electrical meter in the back of the building will let you know if any electricity is being used (you'll see the spinning gages moving)

and if not, that's a strong indicator that the building is no longer in use. If the meter is moving even a little bit, it's likely there's still power going to lights or possibly even an alarm of some kind.

Next you'll want to see if there's an easy way to get inside the building. This could be as easy as an open (or unlocked) window, bending back part of a damaged garage door wide enough to enter, or climbing an access ladder to the roof and entering through a skylight. Be creative, but also be ninja.

If you can get in and out of the building easily without being seen by neighbors, police, or the random passer-by, you should be in good shape. Avoid bringing *any* kind of attention to yourself. This includes shining your flashlight at or near uncovered windows, making lots of noise (don't invite your drunk-ass friends over) painting graffiti or tagging up the place, or telling everyone where your squat is. A lot of people going in and out will be the first thing that attracts attention and ultimately leads to you getting busted.

Only use that space to sleep, eat, and relax outside the public eye. If possible, enter the building late at night and leave early in the morning before people wake up. Try your best to avoid leaving any traces of you being there, including packing out your trash, and taking all your gear with you when you leave. You never know if you might need that space again next time you're in town, or another traveler might need that space in the future, so try not to blow things up and ruin it for everyone else.

If you get caught, be polite and try to demonstrate (with your words and body language) that you're not a crazy psycho, just a normal person that happens to be homeless and looking for a place to sleep. If you're lucky, they'll just ask you to leave (or threaten to call the cops) in which case just apologize and make your exit as quickly as possible.

If you are caught by the police, they are *not* going to be as understanding, and it's entirely likely you will go to jail for trespassing. This is why it's important to choose your squat carefully and be as ninja as possible while sleeping there.

Wilderness Squatting

Wilderness squatting is another great example of rent-free living that rides the line between stealth camping and establishing a long-term squat. You can think of it as just living in the woods and trying not to get kicked out of the spot you've set up. If you do it right, you can have a beautiful place with little to no risk and it's unlikely anyone will come along to bother you.

This is generally better for living rent-free in between travel adventures, but it's also useful if you're just spending a few weeks in a town and don't have anywhere else to sleep.

For example, I spent several months living in the woods on the east side of Austin, Texas. Texas has some brutal summers, but the rest of the year is pretty great for living outdoors and has particularly warm winters. It only took me about a day of riding around on my bike to find the perfect spot, it even had a paved bike path that took me back and forth to the city. From there I spent the next few months biking into town for work, and biking back at night to fall asleep to the sounds of nature outside my tent. A meager cell phone bill was my only expense, so it was a great way to save up money for my next travel adventure.

Of course, most people would have considered me to be a homeless bum, and I'm sure my Tinder dates would have been less than happy about coming back to my place, but I was having a hell of a good time doing it, saving a considerable amount of money, and with only a bike to get me around, I was getting in better shape at the same time.

It's remarkably easy to do since it's the same as going on an extended camping trip. Much like squatting an abandoned building though, it starts with finding the right location and then making sure you aren't discovered by anyone that would give a shit. Try and choose a location that's far from people and civilization but is also in reasonable commuting distance. Personally, I try to keep my commute to a maximum of five miles one way (using a bike), but I've lived as far out as ten miles without it being a huge deal.

Make sure your camp is somewhere off the beaten path and make sure there's plenty of brush to hide your tent from anyone that might be taking a stroll through the woods. This will keep people from discovering it and messing with anything you left behind that day while riding around town.

If your camp is remote enough it might be okay to build a campfire to cook with, but if there's a chance anyone would see the smoke I would avoid it. If you need a stove you can use that won't attract attention, try the beer can alcohol stove mentioned in the Stoves & Cookware section of this book.

If you're going to be in town for a while and using this setup, getting a local gym membership can be very useful since you can use it to get cleaned up and take showers without having to depend on friend's houses. These memberships are usually priced pretty reasonably (they're almost always having a 'sale') but their contracts are usually a mine field of tricks designed to sap money out of your pocket (such as membership termination fees), since they know most people won't commit to more than a few months of membership. For these places I recommend using pre-paid credit cards so you can just walk away and ignore these fees entirely (see the

Banks & Credit Cards section for more details).

Hostels & Hotels

It's entirely possible you might find yourself in a situation where you *have* to pay for place to sleep for the night. For example, you might be stuck in the middle of a huge and unfamiliar city with no other options, or you're caught somewhere in a torrential storm, or you're simply worn-the-fuck-out from your travels and need to recover for *one* night. As long as it doesn't become a habit, there's definitely nothing wrong with doing that.

If you find yourself in one of these situations, try to hit up a hostel before going to a hotel.

Hostels were designed for budget travelers such as yourself and often cost only a fraction of what you would pay at a hotel (usually around twenty dollars). The trade off is that sleeping arrangements are usually in dormitory rooms, meaning you'll be sleeping in a large room filled with bunk beds occupied by other guests. Many hostels have individual rooms for rent, but those are significantly more expensive.

Another benefit of hostels is many will let you stay for free in exchange for doing things like cleaning up the hostel or working in the kitchen. It often helps if you've already paid for your first night when you approach them about staying further nights in exchange for work; this way they don't assume you're just a homeless person coming off the streets that could cause potential problems. You're more likely to have success with this kind of work exchange at independent hostels rather than corporate chains like Hostel International.

Finally, the chances of this working are pretty low, but sometimes it's possible to negotiate with the attendant at a hotel for a lower price than folks would normally pay. This works better late at night since it's likely that without your patronage the room would go empty. From the hotel's point of view, it's better to have a little money come in than no money at all. Either way, it's still going to be more expensive than a hostel and it's unlikely they'll take more than 20% off the usual price.

Between Travels

When it comes to finding places you can sleep for free, it's mostly a matter of being creative and seizing on opportunities as you come across them. With experience you'll find living a life rent-free isn't all that difficult if you're willing to make a few sacrifices.

Saving up money for your next travel adventure can often be difficult if you don't have a good paying job, so avoiding rent can go a long way towards making those travel dreams happen. It's not always necessary to avoid rent *entirely*; if it's acceptable to you and your situation, finding a way to only pay a small amount of rent each month is certainly an option.

Punk houses and collective houses in general are good places to find folks who are down with cramming as many people into a house as possible, thereby reducing rent to a pittance per individual. If you don't mind living like Harry Potter under a staircase or in a friend's closet, you can often rent these spaces from friends for as little as a hundred dollars a month.

Other Options

Homeless shelters are another option if you need a place to rest but you should really avoid them whenever possible, since most have very strict policies, including an early curfew (usually around 6pm), you can't leave until the morning, and you're surrounded by a lot of drug addicts and other shitty/crazy people who will steal your gear at the first available opportunity.

If you're in a pinch and stuck in a major city, it's often possible to sleep on the public transportation system. You can purchase a 24-hour (or longer) metro card for a few dollars and curl up in one of the back corner seats; just make sure to secure your pack to your body so you don't wake up to find it missing. You might have to change trains every hour or so, but most of them are heated in the winter so it's a decent way to get out of the cold.

Additional Resources

As mentioned before, I've only covered the very surface of squatting for travel purposes in the USA; I would encourage you to look into squatting as a movement, especially if you're interested in social justice and homelessness issues. Also, if you're traveling abroad, squatting is often a large part of any anarchist community you come across, so it pays to be knowledgeable about the subject if you find yourself in a country with more liberal squatting laws than the United States.

Cracking the Movement: Squatting Beyond the Media by The Foundation for Advancement of Illegal Knowledge - This book has a lot of interesting and instructive tales on the Dutch squatting movement of the 1980's, giving you a first person view of what it was like to live in a squat in that area and shares many experiences of what it was like fighting the police, state, and landlords for the right to housing.

<http://amzn.to/2q2S3jE>

Squat!net - This website posts news and updates on squatting movements around the world in several different languages, and also acts as an archive of squatting related films, books, zines, and pamphlets.

<http://squat.net>

Homes Not Jails Website - This organization was formed in 1992 to advocate for the use of vacant and abandoned buildings for people who are homeless. Includes some information on obtaining tenant's rights for squatters and adverse possession.

<http://sftu.org/hnj>

Couch Surfing - The most popular hospitality exchange on the internet. If you're willing to invest the time into making a good profile and keeping up with communicating with hosts, it's a great way to find a place to sleep and get a bit of a cultural exchange while you're at it. <http://couchsurfing.org>

Sleeping In Airports - This website actually reviews different airports based on how easy and/or comfortable they are to sleep in. If you find yourself traveling a lot by airplane, this can be a good resource for avoiding costly hotels, and even includes safety tips and tactics for making your stay as pleasant as possible.

<http://sleepinginairports.net>

HelpX - An online listing of farms, ranches, lodges, B&Bs, backpacker's hostels and even sailing boats who invite volunteer helpers to stay with them short-term in exchange for food and accommodation.

<http://helpx.net>

Squat the Planet - If you couldn't tell by the name, StP has a ton of discussion threads in our forums on squatting and other sleeping options, in addition to hosting zines and other materials related to squatting, which can all be downloaded from the library.

<http://squattheplanet.com>

5. Making Money

Saving Money

If you're just starting out into the world of travel, you might want the added security of having some extra money in your pocket before you go. Here's a few idea for cutting your expenses and saving up as much money as possible before you kiss your current job goodbye.

Stop eating out - This can save a lot of money in the long run, since the average restaurant visit costs ten dollars or more per meal. Instead, go to the grocery store and prepare all your meals at home.

Assign a food prep day - If preparing all your meals at home sounds like a daunting task, I've found it easier to assign one day a week to cooking food then just reheat that food at work, dinner time, etc for the rest of the week.

Quit smoking - If you're a smoker, try to quit. Cigarettes are expensive. Assuming a pack a day habit, you're probably spending at least \$150 a month on cigarettes. Think of all the other uses for that money.

Give up expensive coffee - That expensive frappo-whatsit coffee you get every morning before work adds up as quickly as a smoking habit does. Energy drinks fall into this same category. Try making your own coffee at home, or switching to a caffeinated tea, since they cost a fraction of the price.

Avoid expensive nightlife - Considering your average mixed drink costs between five and ten dollars *per drink*, this is an obvious habit you can cut out of your life. Instead, buy a cheap six pack and hang out at home with some friends.

Avoid the movie theater - Movie tickets are expensive these days, averaging ten dollars or more, so be patient and wait for that flick to come out on Hulu/Netflix or even BitTorrent will save you a decent amount of money.

Become a cord cutter - If you have cable tv, considering getting rid of it and getting your tv entertainment from streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, etc. The average cable bill is

\$100 a month, so compared to paying \$10-20 a month with streaming media services, that's quite a savings.

Go full pirate - Say fuck it entirely and steal all your entertainment online from BitTorrent websites. It's 100% free and the risk of getting in trouble is fairly low unless your internet provider is Comcast, Time Warner/Spectrum or another company that monitors for such activity.

Reduce your shopping - A hundred dollar dress could be a flight to your next destination, or an expensive dress shirt could be an essential piece of travel gear in your pack. Cut out expensive non-essentials and try shopping for things you need at thrift stores.

Reconsider your living situation - Find a cheaper apartment, or rent out a spare room (or closet, or that space under the stairs) can be a way to save or make more money. If it's possible without annoying the crap out of them, see if you can move back in with your family for a short period.

One of the common excuses I hear when people say they can't go traveling is they're locked into a lease. A lot of people think their credit will be ruined if they skip out on their lease, but the reality is the only thing you'll lose is your deposit, which (depending on your situation) you might not be getting back anyway (see the section Some Notes on Debt for more information).

Downgrade your cell phone plan - Take a look at your current cell phone plan and see if you can reduce it to save money, or switch it out for a different carrier entirely. There are many smaller cell phone carriers out there that are resellers for the larger companies like AT&T, Sprint, etc. For example, Straight Talk resells the exact same service as AT&T (they use the same cell phone towers) for around fifty dollars a month, versus AT&T's average price of \$75-120 a month.

Set aside paychecks - See if your employer will set aside a certain amount of money from each paycheck into your savings account. If you can live off the remainder, you will save money automatically each pay period without even having to think about it.

Track every penny - It's work, but if you track all your spending for one month, you can look back and see where you can reduce bills and expenses, saving that much more money. There are many smart phone apps available to help you do this.

Set aside 'no spend' days - Once or twice a week make it a point to not spend any money.

Start a \$5 jar - Set up an empty jar in your room and put a five dollar bill in it any time you have a spare one in your wallet.

Cut your own hair - It's a small thing, but cutting your own hair (or having a friend do it for you) can save a little money, and every penny counts towards affording your travel goals.

Don't buy new books - If you have a bookworm habit, try visiting the local library instead of buying books on Amazon or in bookstores. Some libraries even offer ebooks you can check out and read on your ebook reader. Used book stores are an option that often nets you the same great books you'll find at regular book stores for a fraction of the price.

Sell your car, buy a bike - You can skip this idea if you plan on living in your vehicle while traveling, but for the rest of you this might be a good way to cut out a *lot* of expenses from your life. Car payments, insurance, gas and repairs are just a few of the expenses involved with owning a vehicle. Cycling usually warrants only an occasional minor repair, is better for the environment, and will make you healthier in the long run.

Sell your old clothes - If you have a closet overflowing with clothes, start working on adopting the minimalist lifestyle you'll be living on the road. Vintage clothing shops will pay for clothing in good shape, so take inventory of what's in your closet and see if there's anything there you can live without.

Sell everything else - If you're going full on vagabond without a need for any of your old stuff, go ahead and sell everything! This includes anything you wouldn't be taking in your backpack, like your old xbox, DVDs, furniture, and well... everything. Of course, if you don't want to give up everything, just sell things you know you won't need and put the rest in storage (say, in your parent's basement).

Equate your expenses to something travel related - When buying *anything*, stop and ask yourself if there's something else that money could go towards. For example, an impulse visit to McDonald's could instead be a night in a hostel in Bali, or a sixty dollar video game could be a new multi-tool to use in your hitchhiking adventure.

Find extra work - Working part time jobs or one-off gigs on Craigslist can be a way to work up extra cash. I've done everything from hauling furniture to putting up flyers around town to earn extra scratch. Some towns have consumer survey companies who will pay to get your opinion on certain products. Keep an eye out and you'll find all kinds of opportunities for side work to pad your bank account.

Post reminders of your goals - A great way to keep yourself motivated at saving money is to simply set up visual reminders of your travel goals. Changing your desktop wallpaper on your computer to a remote beach, or taping a map of a foreign country on your wall goes miles towards reminding you why you're working so hard.

Hopefully, that gives you plenty of ideas on how to cut your expenses and work up extra money for your travels. Remember, saving money doesn't mean you need to be a hermit who never leaves the house and doesn't spend *anything*. Maintaining a healthy mental balance by having fun outside of work is just as important as saving towards your goals.

Working Seasonally

I've spent most of my life working and traveling in shifts. Generally, I'll stop somewhere to work for six months, then take six months off to go see the world. Sometimes the shift is only three months, or occasionally up to nine months, it depends entirely on how much money I'm looking to save and what my travel goals are. The point is, I made my jobs work for me, not the other way around.

An advantage to traveling in this way is you're forced to slow down and experience the places you're living and working in. While the rest of the world is cramming twenty cities into two weeks of vacation, you're getting to know people over prolonged periods of time and making friends you'll still be talking to years later.

Service industry jobs are generally the easiest to get, leave, and come back to due to their high turnover rate, but any category of work will do. I've been a dishwasher, cook, bartender, door man, grocery clerk, bike delivery guy, and too many other jobs to list. Of course, most managers aren't interested in hiring people who are going to leave in a few months, so don't mention your travel plans to potential employers. Make up a story about how you just moved to town and you'll be around for years to come.

It's important to remain as frugal as possible during your work stint, since many jobs you can walk away from on a regular basis aren't jobs that pay a lot of money. That said, don't forget to go out and have fun as well, especially if you're in a place with exciting things to do. This is part of the travel experience, and you shouldn't hesitate to go out and *experience* it. As mentioned before, balance your work with play and working in shifts allows you to experience places while making your way across the world.

Seasonal Jobs

For those of you interested in working seasonally, there are a lot of jobs designed specifically for people like yourself. One of the best websites for seasonal work is Cool Works (www.coolworks.com), which lists hundreds of seasonal jobs throughout the United States.

Many of these are service industry jobs where you'll be working with the public, like being a sales clerk in a souvenir shop, a ticket taker at a ski resort, or a server at a restaurant in a national park. Non-service industry jobs include working for the conservation corps, restoring hiking trails, and teaching kids about nature through outdoor education programs.

Another very similar website is Back Door Jobs (www.backdoorjobs.com). While I don't have any personal experience with this organization, they seem to be more focused on outdoor conservation jobs rather than service industry work, so this might be a good place to start if that's the kind of experience you're looking for. They also have an emphasis on international volunteer and internship positions if you're looking to get out of the United States for a while.

My first experience with Cool Works netted me two offers; one for a maintenance job at the Grand Canyon, and another working in the main warehouse at Yellowstone National Park. I chose the warehouse job since the pay was slightly more with better housing arrangements.

When I arrived, I was set up in an apartment split with one of my coworkers, which was fine except there was only one bedroom (with two beds), so I often chose to sleep on the couch in order to spare my roommate the agony of going through my legendary snoring every night. The apartment cost \$180 a month, and I've certainly lived in much worse conditions, so I didn't mind this arrangement.

The job itself was easy; we worked all day unpacking group shipments and repackaged them into boxes shipped out to individual stores in the park. Most of these shipments were the souvenirs and trinkets gift stores sold to tourists. The work was easy, the pay was okay (\$8.25/hr) and most of the people I worked with were really nice. I even ended up playing guitar in a rock band with my boss that summer.

The town itself, West Yellowstone, Montana, was small (about five blocks square) but had three bars so there was always a place to go unwind and have a few drinks. I ended up making a lot of friends, since West Yellowstone had a decent amount of travel punks working at various places in town that year.

Of course weekend trips throughout the park were really what I came there for, and I got plenty of those in before the season was over, including checking out Old Faithful, hiking around various waterfalls, and seeing countless buffalo, moose, and bears throughout the summer.

I feel pretty lucky that my first experience with working at a national park worked out so well, since I've met others that had less than ideal experiences. Like all jobs, it's going to depend on the people you work for, the work environment itself, and how much money you can walk away with at the end of the season.

If you're a vandweller, you might be interested in 'work camping' jobs. Work camping usually involves living at a particular campground for a few months, and your main duties involve collecting fees from the other campers, picking up any litter in the campground, and cleaning the toilets once a day. Some of these jobs only give you a place to park and free hookups (water, electricity, etc) in exchange for your work; if you're willing to seek out work camping jobs in more remote locations without hookups, you'll be more likely to be compensated with a weekly stipend in addition to having a free place to stay. Jobs on more 'primitive' sites (i.e. without water/electricity) are ideal for those that already have their own off grid setup and want to make money in exchange for (fairly) easy work.

Amazon is one of the biggest retailers on the planet, and they recently started their CamperForce program, which is essentially a special employee setup for people living in Recreational Vehicles. Much like work camping, you get your RV spot and utilities paid for up to two days before you start the job and two days after your employment ends. Average pay is between ten to eleven dollars an hour, with *plenty* of opportunities for overtime. Shifts are ten hours a day, with a half hour break for lunch. I've read it's hard work (mostly loading and organizing packages for shipment) but you can walk away with 10k or more in a single season, which usually runs from the beginning of September to Christmas day.

If you can handle being stuck on a boat in the middle of nowhere for long periods of time, you might consider working on a cruise ship. Companies are looking to hire employees who are willing to work and live on a boat up to six months at a time. The benefit of this job is you don't have anywhere to spend all the money you're earning, and room and board is covered, so you're likely to come out with anywhere from 10-15k or more in your pocket after a six month work stint at sea. Work shifts are generally four hours on, two hours off, then four on again. If you can suck up to tourists with no escape for months on end (you're on a boat in the ocean after all), this might be the job for you.

Another line of work that folks don't often think about is that of working at Renaissance fairs, circuses, selling Christmas trees, posters at colleges, product promotion and any other job that requires moving around every few weeks. While these jobs are definitely on the fringe, they're out there if you're willing to do a little research to find them.

Finally, teaching English in other countries is another job in demand, since English is one of the most widely used languages in the world, especially for doing business. This is usually referred to as 'Teaching English as a Second Language' (TESL for short). Surprisingly, you don't actually need to know the native language of the area where you'll be teaching; unlike language lessons you might have had as a child, the aim is to immerse your students in an English-speaking environment. This means you only speak English in the classroom, even if you are familiar with some of the local language. TESL jobs are available all around the world, and while most will pay enough to cover your expenses, some areas have such high demand that they will pay significantly more (as of this writing, Kuwait, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, and China are at the top of the list).

Migrant Farm Work

Some of the most common seasonal jobs available to travelers is migrant farm work. These jobs can be found in most areas of the country and generally only last a few months at a time, making it perfect for those who like to save up a bit of money before moving on to their next adventure.

Migrant farm work generally involves manual labor in the form of harvesting some kind of produce for distribution and manufacturing. For example, one of the most popular harvests for the travel punk community has always been harvesting sugar beets in Minnesota. This season lasts about a month, but you can walk away with several grand in your pocket once the job is finished.

The downside is the work is pretty hard, and in the sugar beets example above, you can work as long as twelve hour days, so you don't have much time to do anything but work and sleep until the season is over. If you can put up with this kind of work, you'll have a payday to finance your travels for quite some time.

I spent one fall season between travels working at an apple farm in New Hampshire, and overall it was a really good experience. We lived in a nice bunk house where all the beds were on the top floor (divided by curtains). We had a live-in cook who made us two meals a day, six days a week (lunch and Sundays we were on our own). There was also a great convenience store nearby with an amazing beer selection, so we drank high class beer every night after a hard day's work.

Now I definitely think this farm was the exception to the rule, and it's unlikely all apple farms will be as nice to work for as this one, but if you don't mind long days standing on ladders while picking apples out of trees (you can listen to your music player while doing it) it's a decent way to spend a season making money.

The pay obviously varies depending on the farm/company, but in the example above I made a guaranteed minimum of eight dollars an hour. If you could fill more than a certain amount of apple crates a day you made more money, but I wasn't that great a picker and I didn't feel like killing myself for the extra pay.

There are plenty of other harvests available like blueberries, cranberries, and about any other kind of produce you can imagine, and not all of them involve picking. You might get a job working the packing factory, sorting apples, or moving boxes of apples onto pallets. There's all kinds of jobs, so keep an open mind when applying.

Turnover rates for harvest jobs can be quite high though, and there's a reason they're always looking for new workers. Some (if not most) harvesting jobs involve backbreaking work that will literally push you to your physical limits. Blueberries for example involve bending over for hours on end while using a dustpan-looking rake to pull blueberries off the plant and into a bucket. We had many people come to the apple farm I worked at that quit the blueberry harvest early due to the extreme physical labor.

Another popular option amongst travelers is working cannery and other fishing related jobs in Alaska. Canneries are often looking for people to work their factories sorting and packing fish. From what I've heard, these jobs are extremely monotonous, but the pay is decent, and the companies often pay for your airfare to Alaska and back if you complete the season. If you quit early though, you won't be able to come back, and you have to pay for your ticket out there and find your own way back home. For an excellent first hand report of what it's like to work at one of these places, check out this thread in the StP forums:

<https://squattheplanet.com/threads/28817>

The legendary 'trimming job' is one of the most sought after jobs amongst travelers. This involves working on marijuana farms and spending long hours using a pair of scissors to clip buds off the stems.

You can make a lot of money doing this, and although the work is often boring, at least you get to hang out in a room chatting with your fellow trimmers and you can smoke all the pot you want (if that's your thing).

Since these jobs are in such high demand, they can only be applied for in person and new hires are usually required to be vouched for by another employee. So your best chance of getting a trimming job lies with getting a recommendation from someone who's been doing it a while.

Trimming jobs in the past were most common in the Humboldt county area of California, and if you didn't know someone in the industry, you had to go to Arcata and hang around town hoping to get picked up for a job. Now that marijuana is becoming legalized in more places across the country, it's often easier to find trimming jobs in other states where there's much less job competition.

A lot of folks go through an organization called the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, or WWOOF for short (often referred to as 'woofing'). This organization is designed to partner up organic farms with volunteer workers who are interested in learning about organic farming. If you find a farm to stay on through woofing, you're expected to put in a certain number of hours working for the farm in exchange for a free place to stay. There are thousands of participating farms all around the world, so I would recommend starting with the www.woof.net website to find listings for the area you're interested in.

While woofing is a very popular thing to do in the travel punk community, it's important to be aware of a few things before you begin. Since there are very few requirements when creating a listing for a farm, this has flooded many of the woofing websites with listings for farms that are simply looking to take advantage of free volunteer labor. To be honest, I've heard far more horror stories about shitty farms that abused their workers than I have stories of positive experiences. Other than a negative review from a former worker that gets posted on the farm's listing, there's virtually no repercussions for these places that are specifically looking to exploit free labor. So it's up to you to make sure and vet the farm owners as best you can before committing to work for them.

Those are most of the migrant farm jobs you'll hear about from other travelers, but it's certainly not the only ones available. There are many opportunities in just about any country you can think of if you're willing to do the research to find them, not to mention put in the hard work required when you get there.

Panhandling

Simply asking strangers for money can be enough to sustain you through tough times when you're down and out. Most of us have been asked for spare change by homeless people at some point in our lives, so it should be pretty obvious how to go about this. Stand on the corner in a spot with lots of foot traffic and ask if people can spare any change as they pass by. Street kids and traveler punks alike usually refer to this as 'spanging,' which is an amalgamation of the words 'spare' and 'change'.

In travel punk culture, holding a cardboard sign saying 'will work for food' is generally referred to as 'flying a sign'. This isn't any different than spanging, you're just holding a sign to get more attention in places that have a lot more traffic going by. This is most commonly done on the concrete medians between car lanes, on the curb next to stop lights, or the exit lane of your local Walmart's parking lot. Any place where traffic has to stop for a moment could potentially be a good place to fly a sign.

People will often give you things other than money, such as food, or toiletries, and other things they assume you might need. If you need money for something specific, make sure to write that on your sign so you'll be more likely to get it. For example, if you need gas money to get your vehicle to the next town, make a sign saying 'out of gas, anything helps'. Always be polite and courteous when receiving anything, even if it's not exactly what you were looking for.

It often helps to be a little creative when making your sign. A sign saying, "Why lie? I need a beer," will sometimes net more positive results than the boring 'will work for food' sign we've all come to expect. "Family killed by ninjas, need kung-fu lessons" is another more comical take on the cardboard sign asking for money. Be original if you can, but try and use a sign that's appropriate to the climate of the community you'll be using it in. For example, 'will work for food, god bless' will likely go over better in a town with a high religious population than the 'I need a beer' sign mentioned above.

However you choose to ask people for money, keep in mind at some point you're going to have to interact with the police. Most of the time this will involve them pulling up to your chosen spot and asking you to leave. If this happens there's no point in arguing, simply move on and try to find another spot. If they say you're not allowed to panhandle in that area, well, you're hosed. Even if you try another spot in that area they're likely to kick you out again and possibly ticket you.

Fortunately, actually getting *arrested* is pretty rare in all but the most affluent neighborhoods.

Having to pay a fine for asking people for money might seem a bit ironic, and it definitely doesn't make much sense, but it's really not meant to. Local governments know homeless people will ignore these tickets and not pay the fines (since they obviously have no money to do so) and eventually these people will have to leave town or face incarceration. In places where panhandlers get ticketed, this is mostly used as a strong arm tactic to motivate them to go somewhere else.

It's worth noting that a few cities have ordinances against holding cardboard signs, but not panhandling itself. In other places they've gone as far as to pass 'no sit-lie' ordinances. In these areas it's illegal to sit or lie down for any period of time whatsoever or face possible arrest.

These ordinances are clearly designed to persecute the homeless, so try to be aware of them if possible. Asking any homeless person you see on the street is usually the quickest way to find out if you're in one of these places.

Most of all, it's important to remember panhandling is to be done as a last-ditch effort for things you need, not the first go-to when there's something you want. There's often stories in the media about people who are too lazy to work and instead panhandle hundreds of dollars a day off of the good will of others. Don't be one of the people who reinforce this stereotype, as it hurts the image of the homeless and people that genuinely need the money people are nice enough to give. Also, the people giving you

money are more likely to be from the middle working class than they are to be rich people with lots of money. Don't be the person who lives off the hard work other people do to survive.

Busking

Often viewed as one of the more romantic aspects of nomadic culture, busking can also be a way to have fun and make money on the road. If you're new to the term, busking is the act of playing music in public places in exchange for money. Unlike panhandling, your musical talents are considered to be a service you're rendering to the public; if people are enjoying that service, they simply drop money into your guitar case as they pass by.

Busking isn't limited to playing music; there are many other kinds of performances you can do and earn money from those walking by. One of the most common non-musical busking acts is the 'human statue'. Most of the time this involves painting yourself head to toe in silver or gold paint (including your clothes) and standing still on a sidewalk or street corner where there's a lot of foot traffic. When someone places a dollar in the bucket you've placed in front of yourself, you start moving and do some kind of dance, or mime out something that will make that person laugh. Most of the time this is done in a robotic manner to keep up the statue illusion.

I've seen all kinds of variations on this act, from golden football trophies (a guy painted in gold holding a football like he's going to throw it) to silver boom box robots (the boom box was his chest and played music while he danced after getting a tip) to a woman posing as a magic fairy that gave out flowers or a kiss on the cheek when someone put money in her bucket. The key to this kind of act is to stay *perfectly still* until someone gives you money, and *never speak*, even after they do give you money. Otherwise both the 'act' of being a statue and the results patrons receive when they give money is broken. This can be pretty hard to do sometimes, especially if you're in an area with a lot of drunken frat boys, since people like that are almost always going to try and fuck with you until they can get you to break your facade.

Circus acts are something else you can try if you have the organizational skills and can get enough people involved. Small sideshow/freak shows with as little as 2-3 people can do quite well, and usually have displays of an unusual nature, like hammering a nail into your nostril, or walking across a bed of nails, to eating light bulbs. These are all 'tricks' that can be done safely with enough practice, but appear fantastic to an audience, especially if you have the personality to rile up a crowd and get them excited about what you're doing.

The benefits of circus acts and human statues versus the more common music act is that if they're done in the right place, at the right time, and done well, you're going to make stupid amounts of money. Over several years bartending in New Orleans I've watched human statue acts walk away with several hundred dollars about every night.

Of course if you're starting out in the world of busking, you might want to first try playing music for money with your instrument of choice rather than diving into the deep end of live street performance. To start, learn popular songs people will recognize on the street, but also try to avoid radio music we've all heard a thousand times before. Especially when performing for your friends, songs like Hotel California and Wagon Wheel are more likely to get you strangled than earn you any kind of applause.

Always have a cup, hat, or instrument case open in front of you. Try to keep a dollar in your wallet that you can put in that cup or case, along with a smattering of loose change. This establishes to people passing by that yes, you are playing music for money, and not just having a random jam session on the street. Also, try to thank people when they do give you money, but do it between vocal parts of your song so you don't interrupt your performance to do so. If you can't say anything, just give a polite nod in thanks.

Like panhandling, some places have city ordinances against busking or playing live music, or they require a permit to do so. Make sure to ask around to see if any of these rules are present to avoid getting a ticket and having to pay a fine. Other than that, go nuts. The great thing about busking with an instrument is that you can set up anywhere and if it doesn't work out, you can easily move somewhere else that pays better.

How much you'll earn can depend on a wide range of circumstances, everything from your level of talent, your chosen location, the day of the week, the time of day, to the random will of the traveler gods. It's difficult to say what you can earn in a day, but if you love to play music (and can keep your expenses low) then there's really no better way to make a living on the road.

Self Employment

If you like not having a boss and living by your own rules, self employment might be the best way to finance your travels as you move around. You can sell your drawings or paintings, make jewelry to sell, collect cans to recycle, or sell bottles of water on a hot day in front of a sporting event. There's a lot of different hustles if you're creative.

There's online jobs that pay quite well and can be done from the road if you have the discipline and dependability required. Many of these are technology jobs like website design and computer programming, but some can be less technical, like being a writer, editor, or administrative assistant. These days the idea of being mobile and working these kinds of jobs is often referred to as being a *digital nomad*.

The idea of being a digital nomad has taken off in the past few years, and you can now find a plethora of websites, travel blogs, and online communities centered around this subject. Nomad List (www.nomadlist.com), Location Indie (www.locationindie.com), the Zero to Travel podcast (www.zerototravel.com) and the Digital Nomad community on Reddit (www.reddit.com/r/digitalnomad) are some places to get started.

The most ideal situation for a digital nomad is to take jobs in countries with a strong currency (like the United States dollar, the Euro, the UK Pound, etc) and live in a cheaper country like India, Mexico, or Argentina. This keeps your expenses low and your income high, so even if you only work a few jobs a month you can support yourself and have some money to spend on exploring the area you're currently living in.

You can build up your own clientele or find work on job listing websites like UpWork (www.upwork.com) and Freelancer (www.freelancer.com). It can be difficult to get your first few jobs when starting out, but after you get a few positive ratings on your profile, it's possible to get a steady income going from these websites if you're diligent enough. The best part is, if you want to take a break, you can ignore new job offers until you're ready to work again.

Strange Jobs

There's certainly nothing wrong with looking towards the fringe areas of job employment, and there's certainly enough of these jobs available to make them worth considering. Some are a bit more risqué than others, but the stranger the job, the more it generally pays. If you're willing to take a walk on the wild side, consider a few of these options.

Modeling - It's certainly possible to get jobs being a nude model for photographers and art schools while wandering the country. It can take a while to get started, but generally once you've built a reputation with your fellow models and employers, you can get referrals to other people and institutions willing to hire you.

Web Camming - I've known a lot of travelers who are sex workers through the internet. Performing live on webcam can pay a lot of money very quickly if you've got the space and computer to do so. There's a lot to know about the industry before you get started, so I suggest checking out O Camgirl (www.ocamgirl.com), a very interesting blog about the pros and cons of becoming a web cammer, including cam site reviews and how to not get scammed.

Stripper / Exotic Dancer - If you're comfortable being naked for pay, it's a good way to make a lot of money fast. Many strip joints have 'amateur night' where they let nonemployees dance for tips, or if you don't mind sitting in one place for a few weeks you can become a dancer for that business during that time and take off whenever you're ready to get back on the road.

Escort - Although less common amongst travelers, I've met a few people who have worked as escorts through various services. Being an escort generally means you're getting hired to be someone's date for the evening, and although most people assume escorts are prostitutes, you're not under any kind of contract to have sex with your clients.

Lab Rat - Working as a human guinea pig is a popular gig amongst the punk traveler crowd, since you can make ridiculous amounts of money in a relatively short time.

Pharmaceutical companies will pay you large sums to let them test various kinds of drugs in your body, and while this might sound dangerous, they're legally required to be straight forward with you about what they're doing and the possible effects so you can make an informed decision about your participation. Philadelphia has the most drug study options by far, but you can also find occasional studies in most major cities by checking the local city paper.

Donating Blood - Being a blood donor for pay is relatively easy, and the typical pay is around fifty dollars for the first and second visits, then tapers off to around twenty dollars per donation with a maximum of two a week (exact rules depend on the clinic). Some donation centers offer bonuses for donating a certain amount of times in one month.

Sperm Donor - If you've got the equipment, it's definitely possible to donate sperm regularly and make a few hundred dollars a month for doing so. Look for local sperm banks in your area and see if they have an application process. Most sperm banks want donations from intelligent individuals, so your chances of being accepted are higher if you mention a college degree when applying.

Egg Donor - Unfortunately the female equivalent of being a sperm donor is much more invasive, but the pay is also significantly higher. The average pay for a single donation is around \$3,000.

Drug Dealer - This would definitely be easier to do during your breaks between travels, but there's always a market for people who want to get out of their heads for a while and have some fun. I worked as a bike messenger delivering marijuana to folks around New York City for a few months and it was not only fun (you get invited to the best parties) but you make a lot of loot as well. Just stick to the light

stuff like weed and avoid hard drugs like cocaine and heroin since these will get you in more trouble than the money is worth.

Banks & Credit Cards

It may have occurred to you while saving up money for your next adventure that you might not have a safe place to put that cash until you're ready to spend it. Maybe you've never had a bank account, or your new job does direct deposit, and now you need one. In this section we're going to take a look at some alternatives to the standard bank account.

First off, if it's at all possible, try to use a local credit union instead of a major bank. Credit unions are not-for-profit institutions, so they usually reinvest their profits in a more sustainable manner. Large banks are for-profit and fucked up in all kinds of ways; they will take your money and reinvest it in things like mountain top removal and are basically some of the worst corporations capitalism has to offer.

If you can't divest yourself of these entities entirely, try to minimize your interactions with them as much as possible. One way of doing so is by using only prepaid credit cards. These cards are available at most CVS, Walgreens, Walmarts, and other convenience stores across the United States. The card usually costs five dollars and you have to load a minimum of twenty dollars onto the card at the register.

After doing this, you can use the card as-is or register it online to a name and social security number. While the name and SSN is verified during the registration process, you can put literally any address you want (besides PO Boxes) and it will work. You can also change this address at any time (useful for businesses that won't let you specify a separate mailing address).

Registering the card lets you make online purchases, get direct deposit, and get a 'real' card with your name printed on it (the card in the store says 'pre-paid customer' or something similar).

Unfortunately the mass majority of these prepaid credit cards are designed to take advantage of the poor and bleed you for as much money as possible. The worst ones include fees for checking your balance, per-transaction fees, and include high monthly 'account maintenance' fees. Always makes sure to check the fine print so you know what you're getting into before purchasing one of these cards. The good news is that unlike bank accounts (which require you to come into the bank and close your account) you can spend the money on the card and throw it away if you don't like using it.

In my experience the cheapest prepaid credit card is the Walmart prepaid card. It costs three dollars for the card, three dollars a month for 'account maintenance', and it's free to load money onto the card from any Walmart location. There are no per-transaction fees and standard ATM withdraw fees apply (as they would with *any* card).

The main reason I *don't* use the Walmart card anymore is because I use PayPal to take donations for the Squat the Planet website. When PayPal released their own pre-paid credit card, the ability to get PayPal funds *instantly* transferred over to that card (instead of having to wait 34 business days) was enough for me to justify the added expense of five dollars a month (versus Walmart's three dollars). So if you use PayPal regularly you might want to consider this card over the Walmart card.

One minor disadvantage to these cards is they will not work for every service you'd like to purchase. This hasn't been a huge issue for me, since the only two things I was unable to purchase was a membership to Gamefly (a video game rental service) and a mobile hotspot device from FreedomPop. The Gamefly denial was because that service sends you physical games, so they won't let you use a credit card you can walk away from (and possibly take their games with you) and I have no idea why FreedomPop won't let me use my prepaid card, but those are the only two times I've been denied, so my success rate is currently around 99.6% of all the transactions I've ever made.

Also, these cards can be a poor way to save up large amounts of money. My Walmart card was limited to a total of \$2,500 dollars, but I almost never have anywhere near this much money to my

name unless I'm saving up for a trip abroad or a new vehicle. I suppose there's nothing stopping me from having multiple cards/accounts though, so if you find yourself in this situation give that a try.

The best trick I've found for these cards is buying membership services you don't want to pay the termination fees on. The best example of this is using a prepaid credit card to purchase a gym membership. Gyms are a good place to get a regular shower, especially if you're living off the grid in the woods or living out of your vehicle. Unfortunately, they also try to screw you with as many 'early termination' fees as they can in an attempt to get you to stay with them and keep paying your monthly membership. You can avoid these fees entirely by using a prepaid credit card, then ditching the card when you don't need the gym membership anymore.

I can't guarantee any of the above services are better than having a regular bank account either financially or morally, but they're there if you find yourself in a situation where you can't get a normal bank account or don't want to deal with the extra bullshit that comes with having one.

Some Notes on Debt

As I mentioned previously in this book, one of the most common excuses I hear from people that would like to travel but don't think they can, is that they are stuck in a rental agreement for an apartment or house. The assumption in these situations is that if you break the lease it will somehow negatively impact your credit rating. Having a poor credit rating can seriously hinder your ability to finance a car, house, or land, and the general consensus from most of society is that without a good credit score your life will be eternally ruined.

Much like the myth that not finishing high school will lead to a life of destitution, the reality is that breaking the lease agreement on your living space isn't going to ruin your life. There are of course other consequences, like losing your security deposit, but under certain circumstances this might not be a big deal. Whenever engaging in a rental agreement, I generally make it a policy to mentally give up on any chance of getting my security deposit back, since things like carpet stains and accidental damage will always take a portion if not all of that sum anyways.

The best tactic is to not rent from corporations, but rather, an actual person that owns the property. The odds of a real person sending any back rent they feel they are owed to collections is fairly unlikely in most situations, whereas a rental agency will do whatever they can to make a buck. Not to mention renting from these companies comes with a lot of red tape, including having to provide proof that you make over a certain amount a month (generally three times the amount of rent they are charging) and submitting to a credit check before they'll even let you in the door.

As we covered previously in the avoiding rent section, anarchists generally define the act of charging someone for shelter as 'theft', making most landlords pretty much scum of the earth (that's my opinion, but many others share it). That said, renting property has become such a common way to create passive income in our society, that I have a hard time hating *everyone* that owns a space and chooses to rent it out, since most of them have been convinced by our capitalist society that this is a fair practice. So with that in mind, I choose not to abuse real people the way

I would abuse a corporation that exists only for profit. What that means is if I decide to break my lease agreement with that space, I'll generally just accept the loss of my security deposit and walk away guilt free, knowing that will cover the cost of whatever 'inconveniences' the landlord may incur by my moving out. This of course assumes the landlord is a decent person just trying to get by; if the person owning your property is a total slumlord shit bag, feel free to bust up a few toilets and walls on your way out.

The point here is I've broken almost all my leases early, and I've never once suffered because of it. Unless it's a rental agency business, the landlord will recover, your credit score will generally stay the same, and you'll be free to move on with your life and not be tied down to the artificial construct called 'rent' that's preventing you from pursuing the life of travel you desire.

Other kinds of debt can get in the way as well, such as medical bills, student loans, credit card debt, car payments, and other financial 'ball and chains'; people fear if they don't pay off those debts their lives will be ruined beyond repair, forcing them into a life of destitution. Most of these concepts exist to keep the majority of the population afraid and stuck in a position of wage slavery, where they'll continue to go to work and keep making payments on the things our consumerist society has convinced them to buy. The problem is the list of things we're told we 'need' will never end, so most people continue running on the endless hamster wheel we call capitalism.

Ever since the elimination of debtor's prison, the concept of 'debt' has largely remained in our own heads. Our own government signs away trillions of dollars (of your money) without blinking an eye, and

even the United States' monetary system hasn't been backed by enough gold to cover all the money we've printed over the past forty years. So in my opinion, it's all a figment of our imaginations, the consequences of which only occasionally drift over into reality.

It's important to note that 'opting out' of this system (as much as one can) *can* have a real impact on your life, so if you choose to default on your student loans, there will definitely be a few things you won't be able to do in life, like own land, finance a car, etcetera. Not to mention the government can and will garnish your wages. Although this is much less likely to happen if your income is below the poverty line; surviving at this level is definitely doable given the lifestyle outlined in this book, so you can probably fly under the garnishment radar if you avoid having a 'real job.'

Of course, if you're willing to go without the conveniences of financing something you want (perhaps saving up for it first, and buying it outright) and accepting the idea that you might never be able to own land, the trade off of blowing up your credit cards and casting off the shackles of any other debt you might have could be acceptable to you. Just because most Americans are used to the idea of debt being a part of adulthood doesn't mean there aren't millions of people around the world living perfectly happy lives outside the realm of capitalism.

Either way, my point here is you shouldn't let artificial constructs (like debt) get in the way of living the life you want. If your debt is marginal, it's probably worth the time to take care of it since you'll be better off in the long run (and possibly have more options when you're older). If it's substantial, you may find that a lifetime of bad credit in exchange for total freedom (with a few sacrifices) might be a better deal than a lifetime of working as a wage slave to pay off your debts. Remember there will always be a way to 'hack' the system and achieve your goals if you're willing to make a few compromises along the way.

Additional Resources

There's are many different resources out there for finding work that fits into a nomadic lifestyle, so let's recap the websites and publications we've covered previously in addition to adding a few more that you should be aware of.

Cool Works - This is my favorite website for looking up national parks jobs. Mostly involves service industry jobs, but there's a good amount of trail conservation and other outdoor jobs that don't require you to interact with quite so many idiot tourists.

<http://coolworks.com>

Back Door Jobs - Very similar to Cool Works, but with more emphasis on conservation jobs and international jobs and internship positions.

<http://backdoorjobs.com>

Workamper - The 'Original Resource of Jobs for RVers since 1987' seems to be the most organized of the workamper websites. There's a free membership, but you'll probably want to shell out the \$47/yr if you're really serious about finding workamping jobs through this website.

<http://workamper.org>

Workamping Jobs - Similar to the workamper website above, but posting and replying to listings is free.

<http://workampingjobs.com>

Amazon CamperForce - This website will tell you everything you need to know about working in Amazon's distribution facilities and how to apply for the job.

<http://www.amazondelivers.jobs/about/camperforce/>

About Amazon's CamperForce - This is a long and very detailed blog post about one person's experiences working for Amazon's CamperForce over the past five years, and a break down of everything you can expect from participating.

<http://www.interstellarorchard.com/2012/06/26/about-amazons-camperforce/>

WWOOF - The website for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms is a loose network of national organizations that facilitate placement of volunteers on organic farms. WWOOF is designed to provide volunteers with first hand experience in organic farming in exchange for volunteered hours on various farms around the world.

<http://wwooof.net>

Just Another Lab Rat - Probably the number one resource on the internet for turning yourself into a human guinea pig for fun and profit. Lists almost every major pharmaceutical company in the USA so you're sure to find a well paying drug study in your area.

<http://jalr.org>

Making Money Modeling While Traveling by QueerCoyote - A member of the StP website wrote this great article about their personal experiences traveling and working as a model, along with some tips for those interested in doing the same.

<https://squattheplanet.com/threads/making-money-modeling-while-traveling.28970/>

Guide to Busking by Tom Senkus - Ever wanted to know what it takes to be a street musician? This book will show you the hows, the whys, and the why not's of being a professional street musician. Littered throughout this wonderful how-to guide are amusing anecdotes of failure and triumph that will either inspire or at least give you a good laugh.

<https://leanpub.com/theguidetobusking>

Busk Break YouTube Channel - An interesting YouTube channel of someone that went out and tried to film as many buskers on the street as they could find. Lots of great artists here and many interesting song covers that you might want to add to your own play list.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAXI27V-WjXBt3pOCEHJGKg>

Ready for Busking - This blog was created with the intention of documenting their experiences as they traveled around Europe using busking as their main method of getting by. Lots of interesting information such as the amount of money made and how bad the cops were in each region.

<http://readyforbusking.blogspot.com>

How To Work On A Cruise Ship by Wandering Earl - This eBook details everything you need to know about getting a job working on a cruise ship. What to expect, the kinds of jobs available, which companies to apply to, and how much money you can expect to come away with at the end of your season. Highly recommended. <http://www.wanderingearl.com/how-to-get-a-job-on-board-cruise-ships/>

Up Work - Formerly known as oDesk, this website is one of the largest market places for clients to find freelancers (and vice versa) for just about any technical job you can imagine, from writing to design, to programming. It's a bit hard to get your first job, but once you get some positive ratings on your profile you can definitely build a digital nomad career out of this site alone.

<http://upwork.com>

Zero to Travel - If you enjoy listening to podcasts, this covers just about every aspect of being a digital nomad you can think of, from volunteering opportunities to starting your own business that you can travel with.

<http://zerototravel.com>

Dave's ESL Cafe - Just one of many resources on the internet for learning the ins and outs of teaching English as a second language. Includes jobs boards, discussion forums for teachers to share techniques, and other information.

<http://www.eslcafe.com/>

Making a Living on Squat the Planet - This section of our message board has a ton of information about various jobs (seasonal and otherwise) and other ideas for making money on the road. Members often post threads documenting their personal experiences so you can have a better idea of what it's like to work that particular job.

<https://squattheplanet.com/making-living/>

6. Travel Culture

The Traveler Code of Ethics

Since there's been a lot of Drainbows, Scum Fucks, Oogles, and Hipsters invading the travel punk culture over the last few years (we will describe these groups in detail later in this chapter), I thought it might be helpful to go over a few suggestions on how to be a good traveler. Ideally, I'd like to create a traveler culture in the future that is made up of the kinds of people that give back to the world instead of only taking from it. I think being a good human being is timeless, so not unlike previous codes of ethics passed around from hobo to hobo back in the late 1800's, think of this as a 'new' hobo / punk traveler code to live by.

Be humble & avoid entitlement

Popularity comes through humility and doing good deeds; not by proving you're better than others. Nobody owes you a ride, meal, place to sleep, or some change. Those are things people do out of kindness, so make sure they know it is appreciated, that way they will be more likely to help other misfit travelers in the future.

No gods, no masters

Ultimate freedom lies being able to decide your own life, and accept the consequences of doing so. If you need to let someone rule you (i.e. working a job / having a boss) do it with the goal of becoming your own person once again, hopefully better off than you were before.

Only steal from corporations, not people.

Remember, corporations are not people; while not all of them are evil, most corporations *have to be* in order to compete in our capitalist society. Make sure you know the difference between a locally owned grocery and a multi-national conglomerate. Give your money to former, and take what you can from the latter.

Always try to find work before panhandling.

Sure, it's a hell of a lot easier to ask people for money than it is to work for it, but that money is coming from the kindness of an individual who sympathizes with your position. This is probably because it's not that far removed from their own, or they've been in a similar place before. Don't abuse the hard work others had to do to earn the money that is given to you.

Also, remember 'work' doesn't have to be a 'job'. Doing things like making jewelry or selling dumpstered items on eBay are just two examples of how you can do what you love without selling out.

Only panhandle for things you need, not things you want.

Food, shelter, and clothing are all examples of *needs*. Booze, drugs, toys and other things that are not completely necessary to your existence are *wants*. If there's something you *want* as opposed to *need*, find a job and work for it. Making others do that work for you is incredibly dishonest.

Respect handouts and don't wear them out.

Another traveler will be coming along who needs them as bad (if not worse) than you. If you *must* panhandle, do so respectfully and non-aggressively. Don't be greedy; when you've got what you need, move on. If you're spanging as a group, everyone should pitch in what they made and collectively use the money to spend on the needs of the group.

Otherwise, the group should divide the pooled amount equally between everyone.

Do your best to maintain a reasonable level of hygiene.

Nothing puts off small town locals more, or makes you a target for police harassment, than being dirtier than you need to be. If your friends can smell you, it's time to find a bath, shower, local river, or sink to take a bird bath in.

Always respect nature and don't leave garbage in your wake.

Don't leave trash behind in the park, don't take a dump in hobo jungles, and don't go smashing bottles under bridges just because there's no one there to stop you. Take only pictures, leave only footprints.

Everything in moderation.

Don't be afraid to let loose and party like it's the end of the world every once in a while. Everyone should be able to relax and get out of their heads for a bit, just make sure you can put yourself back together the next day. That said, if getting wasted becomes a need that you can't control, find a way to get help and continue your travels on the sober path.

Pitch in and help when needed.

Help out whoever, whenever, however you can. Treat people in need the way you'd want to be treated in need. We all fall, need help to get back up, and depend on the people around us to survive. Whether you're someone's house guest, just met a group of new travelers on the street, or have been traveling with someone on the road for any period of time, always contribute and try to pull your own weight.

When train hopping, ride your train respectfully, don't take chances, and don't cause problems for the crew or train yard.

Rolling into a yard naked riding on the nose of a unit does not make you a train rebel, it makes you a moron. The extra two likes you get on Facebook for that picture is not worth the trouble you've given

to every other rider passing through that area for god knows how long. Be ninja. Stay low and out of sight.

Call out all assaults on women, people of color, and LGBT.

Everyone is welcome in the travel punk world, and all of them deserve respect. Even if you are not a member of these groups yourself, you can be an ally to them and work together to make the world a more tolerant place.

Be open to new experiences and try to say ‘yes’ to everything!

Don't be afraid to try new things. If someone asks you to join them in an activity, imagine what it would be like to say ‘yes’ *before* you decline the offer. Even if you don't feel like doing that thing, say yes anyways! It's entirely possible you will reach the end of the day being glad you did.

Do the Goddamn Dishes

Being a good house guest is an *essential* part of traveling. Not only does it keep open the possibility of being invited back, but it also helps you make friends you can count on in the future. It also makes other travel punks look *awesome*, and keeps those hosting us interested in having more guests in the future. In this section we'll go over a few tips on how to be the best house guest possible.

As the name of this section implies, doing the dishes is the number one thing you should be doing as a guest in someone's house. Nobody likes doing dishes (especially the person that just cooked for you) so washing your host's dishes will *always* make you look like a fucking rock star. This especially goes for males, as gender dynamics have traditionally pushed women into the kitchen. In fact, you should just consider this to be your new travel job; do the dishes wherever you go and very few people will have anything bad to say about you.

The next most important thing you can do is to be around as little as possible. Nothing will burn out your host on your visit faster than laying around their house all day, every day, especially if you're eating them out of house and home. Make a conscious effort to get out and explore the town you're visiting each day; that's the reason you're traveling in the first place, isn't it? Use the place you're staying to sleep and eat but otherwise try to be doing something productive outside the house.

Cooking meals for your host is another way you can help out around their house. Even if you don't have food of your own, offering to cook for them removes one extra thing they need to do that day and is a way to reduce their stress and endear you to them even further. If you don't have food to contribute to the house you're staying at, try collecting food from food banks, or dumpster diving. As long as it's not a mess of slimy food in garbage bags, these contributions will usually be much appreciated.

Cleaning up after yourself and keeping your gear stored out of the way is another great way to minimize the amount of stress you're putting on your host. Avoid being the kind of traveler who's bag explodes all over the room the minute they put it down. In addition, when you're using their shower, laundry facilities, or cooking food, always clean up after yourself, and do it as soon as you're done using those facilities. Be like the ninja and leave the space like you were never even there.

The main thing to remember is to maintain as minimal an impact on your host's life as possible. This will keep their personal stress low and likely extend how long you're able to stay; the next traveler to come along will appreciate it as much as your host, so always leave it better than you found it!

Finding People to Travel With

While some people start their life on the road going solo, many people prefer to have an experienced traveler to show them the ropes. If you already live in a city with a decent punk/anarchist/activist community it's likely you can find someone there who is either interested in traveling, or knows someone who is. Let folks know you're looking; talk to people at punk shows, find locations in town travelers hang out at, and participate in activist groups with transient members like Food not Bombs.

For those not lucky enough to be in a populated area, your best bet for finding a travel partner is to either hitchhike by yourself to a location with a higher concentration of travelers, or find someone online you can meet up with in real life. Squat the Planet is one resource new travelers can use to find a travel partner but you have to be careful in how you go about it. You'll meet both good and bad people on the road, and it's up to you to figure out which is which.

On the road you have to trust your instincts, but communicating on the internet rather than in person makes this more difficult. While researching your potential 'road dog' may seem creepy or paranoid, it is not an exaggeration to say in certain situations, a trustworthy road dog can mean the difference between life and death; so spending some time figuring out who you're dealing with before you meet is a good idea. Here are some tips for making sure you're traveling with the right people.

When you're talking to someone, the first thing you'll want to do is make sure you will get along. If their answers to the questions below are similar to yours, it's likely you'll work well together and have a great time. A few things to ask might include:

What do you want to get out of traveling? How much travel experience do you have?

Where do you want to go and how do you want to get there? How do you fund your travels?

What do you do for food and shelter? Do you drink or use drugs?

Do you carry a weapon when you travel?

Do you have any health issues or needs that may affect you on the road?

It's pretty easy to lie when you have the barrier of the internet between you. Try to schedule a time where you can talk on the phone or use video chat. You can get a better feel for a person when there's no time for them to rehearse or edit what they are going to say.

Most of the time you can get a good sense of a person by simply trusting your intuition; things that could be potential sources of conflict will become more apparent as a conversation goes on. Occasionally it can be difficult to get a read on someone, so keep an eye out for the following red flags:

Does this person refuse to answer certain questions or try to change the subject? Does this person seem argumentative or quick to anger?

Has this person had problems with previous road dogs? Do they complain about everything?

Trust your instincts. If the conversation was less than ideal, find an excuse to cut off your communication with that person and continue your search. Of course, if it went swimmingly, you'll both probably feel pretty stoked about the conversation and you can move on to a real life meet up.

If you know of someone who has traveled with (or even just spent some time with) your potential road dog, contact them. Ask what the person is like and whether they would travel with them again. Looking through someone's posts on Squat the Planet or googling their name can alert you to any weirdness early on. If they've got a Facebook account, ask them to send you a friend request. This way you can look through their profile and Facebook wall to get a better feel for their personality.

Ask for a photo of your potential road dog before agreeing to meet up. It may seem like overkill but a good road dog will understand the need for caution when dealing with strangers you might be traveling with.

If you still feel good about the person after all the previous steps, meet up with your potential road dog. Meeting face to face is really the best way to figure out if you want to travel with someone. Don't wait until the day you're supposed to head out together; you don't want to find out at the last minute that you're stuck traveling with someone you don't get along with. Tell a friend or family member who you're meeting and post a status on StP if you're comfortable with that. Meeting during the day in a crowded public place like a coffee shop is ideal.

If something seems off, it might be. If you're having second thoughts anywhere along the way, you should part ways. You may feel bad about it, but your personal safety and well-being should be your first priority. Try to reasonably explain your concerns but don't worry about it if they aren't understanding. There are plenty of other road dogs out there.

If after all this you've decided to go for it, that's great. Hopefully you get along but being on the road together is the ultimate test of any relationship. If you decide after a while you'd rather go solo, you should. You can always go solo for a while and meet up again. Leave on good terms if you can, but don't let your road dog pressure you into staying if they aren't understanding.

Tips for traveling as a female

As a woman on the road, you will constantly have people tell you it's too dangerous for you to be out there. This 'concern trolling' will get old but it's not entirely without merit. Follow the steps mentioned above and take the time to get to know someone before allowing yourself to become too vulnerable around them. Trust your gut and don't let anyone push you into doing anything out of your comfort zone. Be especially careful with alcohol or other drugs that may impair your judgment. Don't assume other female travelers are safer just because of their gender. Make sure your road dog (regardless of their gender) knows and respects the limits you place on the relationship. Be direct and don't assume people will take hints. Don't worry about seeming rude by refusing to associate with someone if it doesn't feel right.

Traveling as a Queer, Non-Cis, Etc.

There are a few things to keep in mind when traveling as something a bit outside of what society calls 'normal'. Yes, the world is changing slowly to be more tolerant towards all types of people, but that doesn't mean everyone you meet will be. Before meeting up with someone, be sure you feel comfortable being yourself around them. If that person turns out to be someone you feel uncomfortable around, find someone you *can* be yourself with. Remember, you'll be around this person around-the-clock for an extended period of time, so if at any point during your travels they become too focused on your sexual orientation and/or your gender identity then don't be afraid to part ways. Your own safety should always be your first concern.

Hopefully these tips will help you find the right person to travel with. Protecting yourself pays off, but so does making friends. If you take the right precautions, you can avoid the harmful people and hopefully meet some truly unique, delightful human beings on the road.

Oogles, Gutter Punks, Drainbows & Hipsters

While traveling can be a wonderful, mind-blowing, and often ridiculously romantic experience, the real world can also be a harsh place, and there's going to be some bad people out there you'll want to avoid. These people make up the darker side of underground travel, so I'm going to discuss them here briefly so you know who to avoid on the road.

Oogles

Honestly, oogles are going to be the least of your worries, but they can and will get you into trouble due to their ignorance, lack of experience, or by pretending to be something they are not. Oogles are the posers of the travel punk world, and should be avoided if possible.

The majority of the time the term is used jokingly to poke fun at someone, but it is also used in a derogatory way to refer to someone who often acts like a fake or clearly has no idea what they are doing in a given situation. Using train hopping as an example, if someone got on a moving train and proceeded to wave at every car passing by (instead of hiding, since train hopping is illegal) that person might be described as an oogle.

Rather than embrace humility, most oogles run the other direction and instead feel they have something to prove in order to make up for their lack of experience. This usually means lying about their previous travels, or blowing them out of proportion to make them sound more impressive. Without the proper experience, these people usually get caught while trying to impress others; whether it's riding trains, shoplifting, or doing anything else that skirts the law, this usually results in higher security measures making the next attempt by an experienced hobo much more difficult.

Oogles can most easily be identified by outlandish stories that seem a little too convenient, and are usually pitched in a way that makes them sound more important than they really are. This may include stories about how they were homeless at a very young age, bragging about the distance they've traveled via freight trains, or any other story that sounds a little too good to be true.

You can avoid being an oogle by simply being humble. No one (besides other oogles or the dreaded 'hobo hipster'—see below) cares about how many trains you've ridden this year, how many miles you've hitchhiked, or how many 40s you've drunk. In fact, people with big egos are almost always a pain to be around, so try to stay down to earth and realize you're not more important than anyone else in the grand scheme of things.

Instead, try admitting your inexperience on a subject from the beginning. This usually nets you the *appreciation* of your peers rather than their ridicule. If you embrace a willingness to learn you'll usually be rewarded with the knowledge you were looking for while making some great friends along the way. Most people enjoy sharing their knowledge with others, so when you take the time to learn from them you're showing appreciation for the information they are imparting; this in turn makes that person feel good. If someone makes you feel bad about asking questions, they probably weren't going to be a very good friend anyways, so move on.

Gutter Punks (aka Scum Fucks)

Unfortunately gutter punks look very similar to most travel punks, since they both look like a cross between a hippie and a punk; they also travel with dogs, and wear dark patched up clothing. The main differences between the two is gutter punks usually have awful facial tattoos and are mostly nihilistic, not caring about anything besides where their next beer is coming from.

This sense of apathy is what really sets them apart from other travelers, since most gutter punks proudly declare themselves ‘scum fucks’ and often embrace the idea of being complete dirt bags and being generally awful people. The scum fuck term comes from the infamous punk rocker GG Allin, who is considered to be the ‘original scum fuck’. GG Allin’s persona was mostly built on promoting rape in his songs and flinging his own feces at his audience.

If I can be a huge dork for a moment and put this in Star Wars terms, most travel punks (i.e. you) fall on the light side of the force, while scum fucks take pride in following the dark side. They don’t care about you, don’t care about making a mess, fucking up your house, giving you bugs, or aggressively panhandling to the point the cops are called and that spot gets completely blown up. So you can see why travel punks hate these people; they cause all kinds of problems for the rest of us.

Gutter Punks love to be hated, and will often fight you for the most ridiculous reasons. Since they’re often high or drunk, they can be very unpredictable. Just because they’re nice to you sober doesn’t mean they’ll act the same when intoxicated. I’ve witnessed several occasions where these folks nearly murdered each other for almost no reason at all.

So it pretty much goes without saying that you should avoid this group of people at all costs, and belittle anyone who thinks acting this way is cool. There’s a lot more to life than living on the streets, riding trains and getting fucked up all the time.

Let the gutter punks follow their dead-end road. Having a personal moral code that revolves around helping others, thinking outside yourself, and being a decent human being will carry you much farther than they will ever go. Have goals for yourself and be willing to grow as a person. Feel free to get out of your head, but don’t make intoxication an addiction. Doing these things will keep you open to new and exciting experiences you would otherwise be closed off to.

Drainbows

These people earn the nickname from being a constant drain on everyone around them, since they are basically too lazy to support themselves on the road. The ‘-rainbow’ portion is a reference to the Rainbow Gatherings, which is one of the biggest annual events in hippie culture. While mostly used when referring to stereotypical hippies who give nothing back, it can also be used as a derogatory term for traveling punks or anyone else who constantly asks others for their cigarettes, booze, drugs, food, etcetera.

You can avoid being a drainbow by being prepared and making sure you have all the supplies you need in your travels. This includes ‘party’ supplies like cigarettes, booze, drugs, or anything else. If you can’t afford these things, you should probably go without. In a social situation it’s not a horrible offense to ask for a little of someone else’s, but *don’t make it a habit*. If you constantly find yourself asking others “Hey, can I have one of your (fill in the blank)?” you’re being a drainbow and need to stop. Go work, sponge, or barter for what you need instead of leeching off those around you.

The running joke about drainbows is usually along the lines of “Hey, can I have one of your *EVERYTHING?*”

Hipsters

Different kinds of hipsters permeate all aspects of society, but in the travel punk culture, the travelers who think they are better than you fall into this category. These people act like oogles, but usually have the real life knowledge and experience to back up their stories. The hipster will do or say whatever they can to make sure everyone around them knows what a bad ass they are. This includes tall tales of travels that are usually true, but told in a condescending way that makes it clear you're 'less than' for not having the same experience. While hipsters can be found in just about any form of travel, they seem to be especially attracted to train hopping culture due to it's difficulty (and therefore, exclusivity).

These 'hobo hipsters' go out of their way to prove they know more about trains than anyone else (this is often referred to as 'giving the high hat' by some hobos) and consider almost every other form of travel inferior. Like the oogle, they really won't shut up about how many trains they've ridden, or miles traveled, or incessantly debate minor points of train knowledge no one cares about. If someone condescendingly says, "What, you've never ridden the rear DPU of the BNSF KDX201 intermodel southbound through the Chino yard at mile marker 104?" They're probably a hobo hipster and you should walk away.

Hipsters are especially bad on the internet, where they're quick to play armchair hobo and pass judgment on anything and anyone related to train hopping culture; you'll usually see their posts pissing and moaning about how everyone is ruining train hopping for them, when in fact most parts of train hopping culture haven't changed all that much in the past twenty years.

You can avoid being a hipster by not being a loud mouth braggart who talks down to everyone with less experience than yourself. Like not being an oogle, a little humility will take you farther in life than rubbing what you know in everyone's face. Also keep in mind train hopping isn't the end-all be-all of travel. Other methods of travel are just as valid, and there's no shame in not ever touching a freight train in your explorations.

Sex & Relationships

Part of the beauty of traveling is all the unique and interesting people you'll meet out there, and it's entirely likely you'll end up having at least a few crushes along the way. I've certainly had my share, so here's some advice on the subject I'd like to give to those starting out in their travels.

First off, try not to get pregnant, and don't go around knocking up everyone you see. I've seen countless travelers set out to wander the world, only to come back pregnant in the first few months. I know some of the 'life is a gift' folks are going to be irritated by my saying this, but the reality is that having a kid is going to grind your travel plans (and *any* other plans) to a complete halt. This means you should use any kind of birth control available to you, and not make any exceptions when it's time to 'get busy'.

You have your whole life ahead of you to make the decision of having a child intentionally, responsibly, and when you can afford it, so don't go pumping out kids just after getting your travel adventures started. If you do, you can kiss the younger years of your life goodbye to working a real job and taking care of that kid. I'm not saying you can't *travel* with a kid, but that's another subject entirely and outside the scope of this book. The point here is to avoid having kids for as long as possible. Most likely you'll be glad you did.

Second, learn about consent. There's still a lot of sexual assault going on in every subculture, and a lot of it could be avoided by simply asking permission and acknowledging that *anything other than a 'yes' is a 'no'*.

Media has sold us on the idea of how romantic it is to kiss someone without saying anything first, so you'll probably feel like a huge dork the first few times you ask someone if you can kiss them; but asking permission eliminates a lot of confusion, and can make both parties more comfortable since you'll both know the other is okay with what's going on. In fact, some people find it unique and refreshing and will be glad you asked, so ask first!

It's also important to keep asking for consent as things progress, and keep checking in with your partner to make sure what you're doing is okay. Asking "Is it okay if I do ," or "Can I do ," and getting positive verbal consent each time is a way to keep tabs on your partner's comfort level and can be incredibly sexy too.

If your partner says no or asks to stop at any time, you should stop what you're doing and check in with them to see where things are going between the two of you. It's important to do so without putting pressure on them to do something they don't want to, since coercion is obviously the opposite of consent, and trust me, you don't want to be that asshole. Be ready and willing to accept 'no' as an answer and walk away with no hard feelings if all parties involved aren't completely comfortable with the situation.

External forces can muddy up the waters of consent as well, so you should be aware of situations in which you might be taking advantage of someone, whether you/they realize it or not; intoxication is often the biggest culprit here. In these situations this can lead to doing things you regret, or resulting in outright sexual assault of someone incapable of making rational decisions. Instead, if there's any question as to whether your partner is too intoxicated to properly judge what they are doing, take the high road and politely take a rain check. It's entirely possible that person will still be interested when they are sober, and if they are not, then you've avoided putting yourselves in a situation you might regret.

Learning Good Consent by Cindy Crabb (www.bit.ly/goodconsent) is one of many great zines you can find on this subject that is packed full of all kinds of resources. There's a lot of personal experiences

to learn from and there is a huge list of questions to ask yourself and potential partners that acts almost like a worksheet designed to get you started thinking about all aspects of consent. It's definitely a must-read if you would like to learn more.

Finally, I would like to touch on the subject of polyamory (i.e. open relationships) for a moment, if only because it's a pretty common form of partnership in travel punk and especially anarchist culture. Polyamory is the practice of intimate relationships where individuals may have more than one partner, with the knowledge and consent of the other partners.

I personally believe that the monogamy of traditional marriage is outdated and unrealistic, as we all have different needs (both emotionally and physically) and these needs change throughout our lives. It seems incredibly unlikely that you could have all of those needs met by just one individual, and that having these needs met from multiple partners is a healthier and far more realistic option. The biggest drawback to polyamory is our natural instinct for jealousy, but if you can work through that I recommend it, especially if your romantic interest is a traveler like yourself, as you never know when you might be pulled in different directions.

The Ethical Slut by Janet Hardy and Dossie Easton (www.amazon.com/dp/B000000000) is one of the most popular books on the subject and covers about everything you need to know about engaging in a healthy polyamorous relationship, from self-reflection, honest communication, respecting boundaries, conflict resolution, to practicing safe sex.

Furry Nomads

Some of you might be considering taking a pet along with you on the road. While I have not done this myself, I *have* traveled with many people who had dogs, cats, mice, and even ferrets. There's a lot to consider given the kind of pet you have, but for the purposes of this discussion I will stick to the most common furry road companion, the dog. Most of what I discuss here can be applied to any other animal, but if you have questions about something not covered here, I encourage you to create a thread in the Furry Nomads section of the StP message boards:

<https://squattheplanet.com/furry-nomads>

First, it's important to realize having a dog with you on your travels has some advantages but also a lot of drawbacks that will get in the way of your travels. Most of these disadvantages are going to involve lack of access. For example, most public transit systems won't allow your dog on, which will hamper your ability to get around any town. If your dog doesn't behave well enough to pass as a service animal (more on that later), expect to be spending many, many hours walking you, your pack, and your dog across every town you come across. Also, entering restaurants, grocery stores, bars, and other businesses will be impossible unless you can tie up your dog outside and hope they don't go nuts barking in a panic until you return. Last, but not least, things like international travel is out of the question most of the time, unless you can find someone to take care of your dog while you are gone.

Now, all that said, the benefits of having a dog (and many other kinds of pets) are things like companionship, staying warm on cold nights, warning you of strangers, warding off sketchy people in bad neighborhoods, and the kind of loyalty that can only be earned from being a good owner, so you know they will follow you through anything. The security factor should not be understated, especially if you're traveling alone, or are at risk due to gender/race/sexual orientation.

In most situations it will be much, much easier to train and prepare your dog for the traveler lifestyle if you get them as a puppy. Taking an already grown house dog that hasn't seen much outside the front lawn is going to be difficult, as the old adage, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks' is certainly true here. Raising a dog from a pup is easier for you, and kinder on the dog itself, since the constant activity of road life will be normal to them if they've grown up with it. On the other hand, with an old dog you'll be fighting against a lot of the previous programming they already have, and they'll often be upset and confused with your new living situation. It's not impossible to take an old dog on the road (given your dog's personality) but these are all things you should consider before doing so.

As mentioned before, having a dog companion will limit your ability to access certain places, especially if you're traveling via hitchhiking/train hopping (i.e. do not have a car to keep them in). A lot of these annoyances can be negated by obtaining service dog papers. Service dogs are trained animals who are used by disabled/altered-abled people to assist them with living a normal life. This could be a seeing eye dog for blind people, or a dog that's trained to start barking in the event their owner starts having a seizure. There are even animals that are used for 'emotional support' (although these are not protected under the American's with Disabilities Act the same way service animals are). The law requires businesses and public transit allow for service

animals to be on the premises as needed by these individuals.

Some service animals are designated with a special kind of vest, or with a patch sewn on any kind of clothing they might be wearing. While I do not believe this is completely required, when your dog has an embroidered vest that clearly states, "I'm a service dog; please don't pet me, I'm working!" most people won't even question why you have a dog in the grocery store. There are no requirements for purchasing service animal patches, clothing, and identification cards online and it's quite easy to do so;

a simple search on Amazon or eBay will give you countless options. In general, anyone asking (say, a bus driver, or grocery store employee) is only allowed to ask if the service animal is required because of a disability and what work/task the animal is trained to perform. They are not allowed to request documentation for the dog, require the animal to demonstrate its task, or inquire about the nature of your disability.

Of course, if you're going to pretend your pet is a service animal, it needs to have the training to match. Keep in mind ADA laws exist for people who genuinely need them to protect from harassment and/or protect their personal health in public places. DO NOT be the person who claims their dog is a service animal while it's trying to bite the head off another service animal on the bus, or pooping in the middle of an aisle in the grocery store. If you're going to go this route, please make sure your dog is *extremely* well trained. As long as you've been a good handler and trained them properly, I don't see the harm in pretending your dog is a service animal, but please don't abuse the privilege.

I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention one other benefit of having an animal with you on the road is that people are much, much more likely to give you money when panhandling.

Personally I am on the fence about this, since I've seen some gutter punks with pets who are not well trained and aren't much more than money making 'props'. I'm sure they care about that animal, and most will assure you that their animal gets fed before they do, but overall I've seen way too many dogs with shitty owners who haven't taken the time to train them well enough to keep them out of trouble. It's not fair to the animal since they don't know any better, and it's extremely lazy of the owner not to protect them with the proper discipline. On the flip side of the coin, I know travelers who practically *worship* their furry road companion, and have trained them extremely well. If you've decided to partner up with any kind of animal on the road, be prepared to invest a lot of time, effort, and love into that creature. This way you can set an example for other travelers and help society view our culture a little more positively.

One last thing worth mentioning is the road is not without risk. If you are hitchhiking, train hopping, or just squatting somewhere, it's very likely you will have quite a few interactions with the police. Police do not know how your dog will react to them, so they will sometimes put them in 'doggy jail' while they deal with you, especially if you've been arrested. These shelters sometimes put down animals within a certain amount of time, so you have to ask yourself if your chosen mode of travel, combined with a pet, is worth the risk to their life.

Traveling as a Minority

One of the goals I set for myself when writing this book was to reach out to folks from backgrounds outside of my own (I'm a straight cis white male). Since travel is often about broadening your horizons and inspiring others, I thought it would be helpful to conduct a series of interviews with people of color (POC) and folks in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities. Through their words I would like to help alleviate some of the fears people from these backgrounds face and encourage them to join the traveler culture. Whether you identify as POC/LGBT or not, I think it's important to learn what we can from these unique perspectives.

Andy is a 26-year-old Mexican from the Chicago area who identifies as homosexual with a non-binary gender.

Cornelius Vango is a Caucasian 28-year-old polyamorous pansexual that identifies as nonbinary/gender-fluid and hails from the mid west.

Matt is 30-years-old, Caucasian and identifies as a homosexual male.

Benji is a 25-year-old Caucasian who identifies as queer/bisexual with a male gender identity and lives in Australia.

A person that chose to remain **Anonymous(1)** is just over 30 years old, Caucasian and Bisexual. In terms of gender, they identify as a Male to Female Transsexual.

A. Iwasa is a 36-year-old mixed-asian heterosexual male.

Another person who chose to remain **Anonymous(2)** is a 44-year-old heterosexual male of mixed Native American descent.

Malcolm, aka **Brotha Magpie** is a 26 year old African American heterosexual male.

When did you first start traveling?

Cornelius: I started out couch-surfing around 2006-ish, van-dwelling in 2007... traveled locally, bumming around Minnesota for awhile before going full nomad in 2011.

Andy: I first started traveling in 2010.

Matt: Ever since I was a kid I would kinda wander or roam to places I wanted to see. Maybe it was running through the woods, or riding my little BMX bike, or paddling on a little boat, but I was always a little adventurer. I'd explore my hometown and anywhere my parents took me. As I grew up, schooling was the only thing that was really preventative to further exploration. When I was 23 and finished university, I started doing a lot more cross country type travel.

Benji: I first started traveling on my own accord in 2006, these were primarily trips to my hometown Sydney (I moved to Brisbane in 2004) to catch up with friends. My first major overseas travel was to Thailand in 2009.

Anonymous(1): Almost two years ago (2015).

A. Iwasa: Just before I turned 20, which happened on my first road trip by myself.

Anonymous(2): I've been traveling off and on, mostly off all of my adult life however I would take seasonals with housing. I've been hardcore traveling, if you want to define it as that (tent, car, hammock sleeping) since Jan 2016.

Brotha Magpie: I started traveling at the age of 19.

What modes of travel have you participated in?

Cornelius: Mostly due to my below knee amputation, I've traveled mainly by van. I now have a bus that I adore, but I also hitch-hike and walk from place to place and ride public transportation.

Andy: I have hitchhiked, greyhound, train hopped, rubber tramped, and attempted bike touring.

Matt: Walking, biking, hitchhiking, train hopping, van life...

Benji: Modes of transport have been driving, flying, trains (passenger trains, not freight - it's near impossible to ride freight trains out here), buses, ride sharing.

Anonymous(1): Rubber tramping in a simple cargo trailer setup is my main lifestyle. I've also hitchhiked.

A. Iwasa: Most ways considered conventional in some way in the US; bus, passenger train, plane, car pooling. But I've also hitchhiked a fair amount, ridden some freight and have walked pretty far while stranded at various points.

Anonymous(2): Rubber tramping, hiking, and I've hitched a few times. The second two methods were when the truck was broken down, which happens way more than I would like.

Brotha Magpie: Hitch hiking, boat, air plane, train. City, hippie greyhound bus.

What is your favorite mode of travel?

Cornelius: Currently, my school bus. I haven't sailed yet, but I know once I do, I'll be hooked. I also do enjoy a good walk.

Andy: My favorite method of getting around is rubber tramping.

Matt: I like them all pretty equally, but its kinda apples and oranges. That's like asking a parent to pick their favorite kid.

Benji: Definitely couch surfing or car camping.

Anonymous(1): So far rubber tramping, but maybe one of these days I'll try a boat ride or a train hop.

A. Iwasa: Hitchhiking. **Anonymous(2):** Rubber Tramping. **Brotha Magpie:** Hitchhiking.

What do you like most about your favorite mode of travel?

Cornelius: My bus is large, but not a full-length so it handles amazingly well. I can haul things, the interior is very minimalist so it is versatile and can be arranged to suit any mission. I liked my van a lot too because it was stealthy to live in and handled well-enough to get it down some crazy back-roads to do some serious wilderness boondocking.

Andy: Rubber tramping allows me a level of privacy and security I couldn't get by just living out of a pack.

Matt: Walking is great because you can always do it. I love it because if you're in decent shape you can just go, and its free. Bikes are awesome because in towns/cities you can make some serious distance and everything feels accessible. Hitchhiking is fun if you like meeting random crazy people. Train hopping has got that risk-it-all vibe powered by those big dangerous trains so if you like adrenaline and breaking the law and cat-and-mouse games you can't beat it. Van life makes you feel like you have a material home to come home to each night and that can be very comfy.

Benji: With couch surfing, getting to meet all kinds of people and see all kinds of lifestyles. I love car camping for the freedom and convenience. I found different risks with both modes, and have had some negative experiences, however I've found with a bit of common sense and research the issues are minimal.

Anonymous(1): I have a lot of privacy when boondocking—the large amount of public land allows me to disappear whenever I want to and go all over the place. The number of parking lots give me the

ability to stay in just about any city at least overnight. Plus, I have the ability to give other travelers a ride.

A. Iwasa: The people I meet.

Anonymous(2): The freedom to go anywhere you want whenever you choose, as long as you have the funds to get there. I've seen things since beginning the life that I know I never would have at home.

Brotha Magpie: I love sleeping under the stars. Then waking up to the birds and sun rise, then having the freedom to go anywhere in the country. Also, I like meeting people, going on side adventures, and experiencing different perspectives and personalities.

Do you prefer to travel alone or with friends?

Cornelius: I like being with friends for the most part, but sometimes I like to be alone in the wilderness.

Andy: I prefer to travel on my own at this point.

Matt: Like making music, you can do it by yourself, but it's so much more amazing with friends.

Benji: Alone. More freedom, less drama.

Anonymous(1): I prefer to be with someone.

A. Iwasa: I prefer to Travel with the right people. I'd rather be alone than with the wrong folks.

Anonymous(2): I prefer to travel alone. My greatest disappointments in life are when I've relied on people. Sometimes it was all their fault, sometimes it was all my fault – most times we share the blame. That's the good and bad thing about blame though, no matter whose fault it is the end result is the same.

Brotha Magpie: Traveling with other people can be helpful but it can also hold you back. I've learned tricks of the trade quicker than if I had traveled alone the whole time. There's a strong traveler fellowship that can be hard to find in some of these house dweller's communities. On the other hand, traveling alone is very peaceful and often turns out to be a good time for self reflection. A lot of times its easier to hitch a ride, get a place to stay, and to move at your own pace. The balance of both are equally important.

Have you had any major difficulties traveling as a member of the POC or LGBT community? If so, can you tell us about a personal experience you've had?

Cornelius: I was drugged and raped in Billings, Montana. I came to and pulled out my switchblade and chased the guy off. I've had people get pretty upset about how confusing I am to them, some get aggressive.

Andy: While not having any difficulties pertaining to my race, I have fair skinned privilege, I have had only a handful of encounters that could be considered difficult. In South Carolina I had a man attempt to assault me on the street for being flamboyant. Also in SC I had an older man enter my tent and he began to touch me in my sleep. In Ocala, Florida back in 2013 I had a similar experience where a man at the rainbow gathering tried to forcibly have sex with me while I was intoxicated. All three instances I was able to protect myself by being either quick, clever, or, as a last resort, violent.

Matt: No major difficulties because I'm gay. Nope.

Benji: I've had a couple of horrible things happen when couch surfing overseas for the first time. I was a member of a few LGBT travel forums and thought I'd found a safe place to crash, but I was wrong. For legal and, honestly, psychological reasons I don't want to go into things too deeply - but someone who I had built a rapport with and thought was safe turned out to be a very unhinged drug

addict. One thing lead to another and he started demanding sex; I politely declined his advances and he became enraged. He pulled a knife on me and tried to rape me, but I managed to disarm him and defend myself. There was a similar incident about a year later where I was drugged and assaulted by someone I mistakenly trusted.

Anonymous(1): People cannot usually tell I am trans for sure without being pretty slick or asking. This helps a lot. I've had people threaten some pretty interesting things, but generally I'm ok.

A. Iwasa: Honestly, when someone or people are giving me a lot of grief On The Road, I'm almost never entirely sure if it's because I'm Brown or crustie. I've been picked up by a few exEarth First!ers, and none of my white Traveler Friends have, but in fact they have been picked up by any number of racists, which I haven't, so I assume a lot of racists pass me up which is fine!

Anonymous(2): I'm going to combine the next two questions and try to be brief. I could write a book the size of War and Peace about the negative experiences that I've had bc of skin color when traveling and housed up. The most common are just from average every day white people with their smart comments and dirty looks. There's always a chance that the looks could be because of being a traveler when I'm in my truck. I say that because the truck is loaded down with all the gear I have in this world and the roof rack is full so in some ways I guess I fit a stereotype. There's next to zero chance that the looks are because they think I'm a traveler when I'm away from the car because I take great pains and go through more than a little expense to look like I'm part of the everyday day population of the town I'm in. I'm not being elitist about that in any way, or I'm not trying to, I've just realized, especially since traveling, that I have enough going against me that I don't need any extra scrutiny. I have this unique skin tone that seems to let white people see whatever race they want in me. I've been thought Middle Eastern, Hispanic, and mostly Native American. It's worse in the fall and early winter because I typically work outside all summer and my tan just never stops getting darker through the year. Then, if I happen to be dating a light skinned Caucasian woman, well, that's pure Hell when going out in public. I honestly believe that many of the people who drop their little comments, turn their noses up, otherwise do all that they can to show their disapproval would be fine with me and not knowing what race I am, if I wasn't sleeping with one of their "own". I've been walking down sidewalks, hand in hand with the woman I was dating at the time and had people throw beer bottles at us and yell "you dirty spic". That's not all they've yelled or commented toward me whether I was with someone or not. I've been called much, MUCH worse. So that's just racist people without any power, it bothers me but they aren't in any position to really hurt me unless they get really violent and I've found that most people lack the courage of their convictions.

They're more than happy to shoot a dirty look or mutter a few barely audible insults, then strut around like they've done the work of God or something. It's the cops, and I include land management agency law enforcement officers in this category, that are the worst.

Brotha Magpie: This was before Barrack Obama was elected president. I was working on his campaign in Fort Collins Colorado. I would go door to door speaking with people about his campaign and handing out flyers. As it started getting dark I noticed that people started giving me strange looks, but I payed this no mind. Then this vehicle was following me. After four blocks of this harassment, I go to the car to ask why just to have the people roll the window up in my face. About twenty minutes later, the police come with guns in my face saying, "Drop whatever is in your hands and don't come any closer". They take and put me in handcuffs and set me down on the sidewalk. At this time it starts snowing so I ask to use their phone to call my boss to tell her what's happening. They reply quickly, "After we're done here." The cops go through all my pockets, and my book bag that had my paperwork and an unopened bottle of wine. They ask me questions like "What are you doing on this side of town?" "Where were you going next?" "How would your boss feel about the wine in your bag?" When there was only two cops then came two more asking the same questions but this time they became aggressive saying "We're just gonna take you to jail." While the whole time I'm very calmly reminding them I'm doing my job. After a hour and a half they leave me in the snow without letting me call my boss.

What about *minor* difficulties? The little annoyances you face on a daily basis? **Cornelius:** Mostly, I just get verbal abuse, invalidation of my gender and sexual identity, gawkers and creepers. I've had people take pictures of me without my permission, people saying lewd things based on their assumptions about my sexuality, stalkers, and people trying to "help" me to figure myself out when I didn't ask. When I tried to explain to one guy about how I don't identify solely as a female, he told me "I disagree" and then tried to hit on me to clear up my confusion. Gross.

Andy: As far as minor difficulties go one of the biggest annoyances is the passive homophobia that is encountered in the traveling community. I recognize that this form of treatment is not necessarily malicious, however it can become taxing on one's patience when you have to constantly be everyone's ambassador to LGBT culture. The most recurring annoyance is having to put up with the constant use of the word 'faggot' as well as having to explain to a majority of the men I meet that just because someone is homosexual it does not mean they are instantly attracted to every member of the same sex.

Another constant annoyance is when men who aren't as comfortable with sexuality, (i.e. closet cases), get drunk and begin to try and coerce me into sex. This tends to happen on a less frequent basis since I started traveling in my van, which is due in large part to being able to separate myself from people at the end of the night and not deal with these individuals.

Matt: Only the sense of isolation you get from not being around other gay men. I don't know many gay men who travel the way I do. Being surrounded by straight people all the time can make you feel real lonely. Straight people are so serious.

Also I like guys who are bigger than me, so it is a little dangerous going home with men I don't know but want to get to know. I never had a bad experience, but its always in the back of my mind that I could be physically overpowered if something got weird.

Benji: Minor difficulties are generally the same as faced in everyday society - casual homophobia, ostracizing and discrimination. This is more apparent in hostels than anywhere else and is something I've faced in Australia, USA, UK, the Netherlands and South Africa... everywhere I've stayed in dorm hostels. There is such a 'fuckboi' culture in these places - if you're not a straight guy looking to get laid you're already out of place. I've even had people (in 10+ bed dorms) complain that they're in a room with a 'faggot' after seeing me holding hands with another guy.

Anonymous(1): I've had a lot of facial electrolysis, but I still need to shave once in a while to keep from growing too many small hairs. If I am in a crowded parking lot, I will worry about being seen doing things like that and whatnot. I also really hate that I cannot strip off my pants to take a swim. Even friends will treat me differently if they know or confirm that I am trans. I hate that, so I just act more shy than I am.

A. Iwasa: The only place I've ever been totally refused service was a gas station at the 5 and route 66 junction in Ashland, OR. Again, I'm not sure if old dude was thinking I should kick rocks because I'm Brown or crustie, or what really. Things like that happen all the time, and frankly it's part of why I'm still a crustie at 36, it's part of my shell.

Brotha Magpie: Being a person of color I've learned lessons from an early age preparing me for adult hood. My mother would teach me to have respect for my elders and say yes ma'am and sir. Also if I played outside with friends, she'd tell me not to go any further than her voice could reach me and to be inside before the street lights turn on. As a teenager older white women would hold their pocket book and there purses closer while I passed them in the street in fear of being robbed. If I liked a girl and felt a connection I would ask them on a date. More then once in my life I've been rejected because the color of my skin. Then while hitchhiking I've had average conversations with white men just for them to say, "You're not bad for a black guy," then share with me their negative opinions of the Black Lives Matter movement. I have people yelling nigger at me while they drive by. Then I've had people act surprised once I tell them I was born in Kansas and not Jamaica or Africa. Even after a night of passionate love making, women often have to tell how I'm the very first black man they've had sex with.

Can you tell us about a positive experience you've had while traveling that was due to your skin color or LGBT status?

Cornelius: I've learned a lot about myself and who I am because of the brave queers I've met on the road. It was because of a few of cross-dressing men that I got back in touch with my feminine side while still being comfortable with my masculinity (I hadn't worn women's clothing in years before that).

Andy: As for positive experiences, I have had many. When you are an LGBT person there are just as many people out there trying to help you as there are hurt you. There are a large amount of youth drop-ins that are design specifically for LGBT youth that provide all sorts of services. In Charleston, South Carolina a group known as Safe Space helped me out a lot when I first got on to the road. There is a certain level of camaraderie when you meet other queer individuals on the road and people will lend a hand if you ask.

Matt: So many good experiences. I really don't like gay men being cast as victims or portrayed as people who face all sorts of adversity or difficulties because they're gay. That's not true! I've met many many wonderful gay men, mostly who weren't travelers but lived in cities in towns I passed through. So many champions and good times. More than a handful turned into lovers. I got to see a lot of places more easily because gay men are so into bonding with each other so quickly.

Benji: Meeting up with a mate in Los Angeles the first time I traveled to America, it was my second day over there and he took me to a queer/feminist punk mini-festival near Inglewood... I'd never experienced such a welcoming, friendly and non-judgmental group of people. I had a similar experience in San Francisco a couple of years later with both the punk and kink scenes up in northern California.

Anonymous(1): Since I am in a long term relationship with a woman, I have a positive experience due to being bi nearly every day! On the other hand, being pre-operative and a transwoman means I can still pee standing up when I'm in a private enough place. I avoid it, but sometimes that's a whole lot faster!

A. Iwasa: Well, a lady who picked me up once told me point blank she liked brown guys with long wavy black hair, and we made out. Otherwise, like I mentioned before, I think a lot of racists probably pass me up which is a default blessing. They never seem to hesitate from picking up my white friends who endlessly complain about them!

Brotha Magpie: It's not all bad. When I'm hitchhiking I'll get rides from other people of color and it all comes as a breath of fresh air. Instantly we connect just speak about our experiences and vent about our hardships. This becomes a very healing experience that helps bring about an understanding of ourselves and the country we live in. I'll meet people — white men and women

— that feel more comfortable with people of color and are shining positive love to the youth everyday creating an awareness that works towards making a strong community. I know there's a good chance of this happening, and I never forget the stories of my elders; tales of the days when black men and white women were getting hung for their love. But these days, many children of color form mixed families, so things are changing and it's beautiful!

Do you have any advice for someone preparing to travel for the first time as a POC or part of the LGBT community?

This can be anything from gear to self defense or anything else related to getting ready for travel.

Cornelius: Travel with mace on you, and keep a scary weapon on hand at all times. If I hadn't had my switchblade in Billings, things would have been more difficult. If you're not comfortable in a situation, don't hesitate to just *leave*. It may be your last chance to protect yourself.

Andy: My advice to LGBT members who are thinking of traveling for the first time is to be brave. We live in a society where we are constantly being bombarded by people who will question our very

right to exist. There is a very real fear for our safety when we head out on our own but as long as you keep your wits about you you will be just fine. Always be who you are but also don't feel bad if you have to tone yourself down, so to speak, while encountering strangers on the road. Feel out each situation individually and always remember that your sexuality and gender identity is nobody's business but your own.

Matt: I think if you're part of the LGBT community you are probably hyper aware of the discrimination and risks you face. I would say try to loosen up and don't let it define you. Sure you could be LGBT, but there's a big world out there to explore so don't let straight people have all the fun. Paint the town rainbows if you want, but don't be a knucklehead and be respectful.

Benji: *Do your research!* Seriously, the internet is such an incredible resource. It's helped me out and saved me so many times. Whether it's places (cities, squats, roads, bars) to avoid, just to find places to sleep for free or ways to save money.

If you're car camping check out local council regulations, a lot of places over here won't let you sleep in your car on public streets and can fine you AU\$500+.

Some dating apps give you warnings about local laws/customs when it comes to homosexuality, I had a missed connecting flight and was stuck in Nairobi, Kenya for the better part of a day - I checked my phone and got a notification from Scruff advising homosexuality isn't legal and I could face prison time if caught with another guy.

Common sense is your best asset. Try and have a little bit of cash stashed for an emergency, and be careful who you trust.

Anonymous(1): I own a gun. I recommend any other trans person out there do the same if they can afford to buy one, get licensed to carry it concealed and learn to use it. This can restrict your travel opportunities, so one has to weight the pros and cons, but I feel better knowing I have it. Also, it's easy for transwomen in particular to feel a little too bulletproof compared to cis women. My advice to other transwomen is to remember that you are more of a target than before, and you don't want to learn that the hard way. Staying smart and being careful to avoid dangerous situations is important. You have to be somewhat bold to travel in an unconventional way at all, but you need to find balance as any kind of woman.

A. Iwasa: Go with your instincts 100% of the time, and if you can, start small like Cleveland to Chicago with a friend to get a sense of what you need to have with you, and general support network, etc.

Anonymous(2): This is something that people already know but as a POC you can't get away with the things that normal travelers can get away with. As an example, I'm writing this from 5 miles off a main paved road in a desert. I could have camped right by the main road and saved the gas but the truck would be exposed so I had to four wheel back into a canyon where the truck can't be seen because I don't want the hassle. I'm not hiding from anyone because I've done something wrong, I'm hiding so that the truck can't be seen and identified as my house due to all the stuff on the roof rack. I'm hiding so that I don't get a knock on the window at ten at night.

I'm hiding so that I don't have to explain to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs), as they drag my life out of my truck and throw it onto cow shit in the middle of the desert, that I don't have papers, even though I was born in this country.

For those already on the road, do you have any suggestions for destinations or events that are relevant to POC or the LGBT community?

(For example, Idapalooza could be a good event to attend if seeking other radical gender-queer folk).

Cornelius: I haven't been to too many LGBT oriented parties and festivals, but I always loved going to Twin Cities Pride Festival in Minnesota. Tons of free shit, and good times. It made a huge impact on me when I was first figuring myself out.

Andy: As far as I have experienced homo/trans-phobia can happen anywhere, however the west coast is definitely more open to seeing different kinds of people.

Matt: I always just go to the gayest places I can find anywhere I go. This could be a library or a museum, or a gay bar, or a gay or gay friendly resort. It could be a rest area bathroom. I don't like big scenes of any type so I can't speak to festivals and scenes. But yeah those are the easy ones because they're heavily advertised, where you know, that rest area in West Texas isn't.

A. Iwasa: I used to protest hop a lot in 2001/'02. I still travel sometimes for convergences like about two months spent on Standing Rock last year was one of the most important things I've ever done. I just keep my eyes and ears open. The Earth First! News Wire is a good place to read calls for supports to travel. Otherwise, anything that sounds worthwhile to a person they should consider traveling for if they can. Visit a Collective! Apply for a residency or whatever your thing is. If it isn't where you are and you can't start it, why not hit the road?!

Brotha Magpie: I can leave you with some good hubs to meet other travelers and some important words... just remember it's about the journey, not the destination. New Orleans, Louisiana, San Francisco, California, Portland, Oregon, and Kansas City, Missouri are all good places.

Are there places in the USA (or the world) POC or members of the LGBT should be especially cautious around?

Cornelius: Small towns and anywhere that is predominantly Christian can be pretty scary when you're visibly queer. Even in states that are generally cool.

Andy: The South, in my opinion, should be generally avoided. That being said there are still cities that are more LGBT friendly such as New Orleans or Key West (I have heard, I avoid Florida like the plague) that can be exciting to visit.

Matt: Of course, there are haters everywhere. But I lived in NYC a couple years back when Mark Carson got shot in the head and killed, like two blocks from Stonewall, for being gay. You should assess the amount or level of hating and use your best judgment as to what's going on around you.

Benji: I've felt very uneasy in a few places and would recommend being very cautious if you're traveling through them:

Many parts of Queensland, Australia (pretty well anywhere away from Brisbane City, the Gold Coast or the Sunshine Coast). I reside in Brisbane, about 16km north of the city, and even there I've dealt with homophobic violence - like most places, the inner city is generally more tolerant. There are good and bad areas.

Everywhere I went in Mississippi and in rural Tennessee.

Byron Bay, NSW, Australia. Byron has a reputation of being fairly tolerant but gentrification has brought in an influx of rich yuppies who go against the town's culture, there are also a few older locals who are stuck in their bigoted head spaces. A few mates and I narrowly avoided a brawl on the beach after someone took issue with an antihomophobia patch on my vest.

Johannesburg, South Africa.

Numerous parts of England...this was surprising, I'm not sure if I just overheard too many of the wrong people or wandered around the wrong areas.

Kenya.

Anonymous(1): I can only speak to what I know. I'd say that transwomen should be especially careful around guys who might find them attractive and have been drinking when they don't have a

friend around. A lot of guys have a very unfortunate reaction to discovering they were turned on by a transwoman, and this is worse when they are drunk.

A. Iwasa: Everywhere, to a certain degree. I feel like you never know. For instance, I love Chicago, and spent a good amount of time there as an adult from about 2002-'10. I never had a run in with the '77s, but they've beat down plenty of crusties and what not for no good reason, one of them even got away with murdering a street artist. You just never know, again, I think people just need to keep their eyes and ears open, and follow their instincts.

Brotha Magpie: Places I'd avoid: Gallup, New Mexico; Amarillo, Texas; Colby, Kansas; Salt Lake City; Utah, Arizona; The Grand Canyon; Orange County; California; and Spokane, Washington.

Are there any safety concerns you think minority groups should be especially aware of when traveling?

Cornelius: Always be aware of straight white males in large groups in places where their privilege prevails. Mob mentality can be very dangerous for the traveling queer or person of color.

A. Iwasa: You're especially vulnerable while traveling, so I think it's all the normal concerns but times ten. The flip of that I think is when you're with good people you can see the most amazing things, really the best in people and of the world in general.

Do you have advice for POC or LGBT folk that is related to a specific form of travel?

For example, this could be tips specific to hitchhiking, bike touring, sailing, etc.

Cornelius: Don't tell strangers too much personal information, like where you are heading, where you're camping/parking, whether you're alone. Pay attention to your discomfort and intuition, it can save your life. If somebody is scoping you out, move to another location if you can. Don't get into a car with somebody that creeps you out, and always make sure you have an exit strategy and a way to make it seem like somebody is waiting on you, even if you have a phone with no service that you can pretend to be talking on, or of course, a working phone that you can message somebody with, telling them your current location and intended destination.

Anonymous(1): Rubber tramping is especially nice because you can more easily hide things you need to hide (especially if you are trans). Also, get a mail forwarder and set up your meds with a mail-order pharmacy if you can! This will make being trans on the road a hell of a lot easier. A mail forwarder can send your meds to you via general delivery to whatever post office you are near. It'll cost, but if you can manage it, it's worth it to have that option.

A. Iwasa: Not really, be careful but go for it if you feel like it's the right thing to do! Again, it's all the same pros and cons of life, just enhanced.

Brotha Magpie: Keep water with you at all times if you spend time hitching in the heat please don't make the mistake of forgetting this! Since temperatures get very low in certain areas, pack a good sleeping bag and maybe even some light weight winter gear. Another reason to travel in a group is because travelers come up missing; sexual assault and harassment may be more common than we know. There safety in numbers!

Is there anything you'd like to share with potential future travelers? Current travelers?

To the world in general?

Cornelius: Don't let the cruelties and hardships of the world scare you from living your life and doing what you want to. You may have a physical handicap like me, or worse, you may be a target minority but that doesn't mean that you can't get out there and be free. In some cases, you may have to plan ahead for your safety and physical needs. There might not be a tutorial on how to do what you want to do, but that's the real adventure! Blaze your trail, and do the impossible.

Andy: Never be afraid to be yourself. You may think that you have to jump back into the closet for your own safety but that shouldn't be the case. Courage is a huge part of traveling the way we do and if you have the courage to be true to yourself than you already have what it takes to make it out on the road.

Matt: Stop looking at your phones so much! Gays and probably a lot of the LGBTQA spectrum are like disappearing into the cloud. Remember gay physical places and people need your attention, especially now more than ever. Life is becoming too virtual, but people and places are the antidote to that virtual isolation. As Edna St. Vincent Millay said, "Yet many a man is making friends with death, even as I speak, for lack of love alone." Go out and love some people and places and never forget them! Also, good luck when you fall in love and you're traveling. Seriously I wish you the best. So many loves out on the road I'll never forget. Be open to it.

Benji: Respect others, respect the land and love your world. See as much of the planet as you can and don't let how other's view you influence your life. We're not here for too long - live the life you want.

Anonymous(1): You'll mess things up. That's okay. It's the only way you will figure out your own journey. Just say as safe as you can while still enjoying the ride, find good people to help you and help them back. It'll be awesome.

A. Iwasa: It's not for everyone. I don't think people should travel hard just for kicks. Similarly though, I feel like it's worth the sacrifices and risks, and why the hell should only the rich get to travel, or poor people have to join the military or whatever to see the world?!

Brotha Magpie: Stay clean and keep clean clothes! Your chances of getting a ride can be slim if your driver can smell you from a distance. To make money learn an instrument or do some arts and crafts. To save money ask passers by and restaurants for there leftovers.

So there you have it. I honestly hope these words from fellow travelers will give you the inspiration you need to get on the road no matter what your background may be. There's all kinds of unexpected rewards waiting for you if you have the courage to step through the door. Join us even just for a little while, and I promise you won't regret it!

7. Where to?

Researching Destinations

Knowledge is power as they say, so doing a little bit of research into the places you're interested in will not only make sure you're prepared, but will pay off several times over once you arrive. If you're living in a situation where you're unable to travel for a while, it can also be a good coping mechanism, since you can spend your time daydreaming about the places you're researching. When the day comes that you're finally free and able to start (or resume) your travels, you'll know exactly where you want to go and how to go about getting there.

First we'll start with some of the techniques I use for doing research, including some web software that will help automate the process.

Evernote (www.evernote.com) is an excellent note taking software available for about every platform, including all mobile platforms or just using your web browser. Their company motto is 'remember everything', and the idea is you can use their program to take notes, pictures, voice memos, or clip entire web pages into 'notebooks' you can organize however you like.

The most useful option for our purposes is the web clipper plugin you install for your web browser. This plugin lets you save selected portions or entire website pages and back up information to one of the notebooks in your Evernote account. Once the information is 'clipped', you'll have your own copy available offline on your mobile device, desktop, or accessible via web browser. This is useful since sometimes you'll come across useful information on the internet that might disappear eventually, so it pays to make a copy of these pages somewhere so you'll be able to reference it later.

Evernote also includes the ability to share notebooks, which is useful for giving others access to your research. For example, if you'd like to take a look at the 500+ destinations I've clipped into my Evernote account over the past few years, you can view it here:

<https://www.evernote.com/pub/mattpist/destinations>

Evernote has a free version that allows you to save up to sixty megabytes of data a month, which doesn't sound like much, but if you're using it to save text notes and the occasional web page, you'll probably have a hard time hitting that limit. Paid plans start at \$35/year, which enable a one gigabyte limit and other features like offline viewing on mobile devices and the ability to email things to yourself with a special Evernote email address.

There are some free Evernote alternatives, including **OneNote** (www.onenote.com) for windows (included with Windows 10) and **Google Keep** (www.google.com/keep). They're not quite as feature-rich, but will definitely work if you find Evernote to be too complicated.

Pocket (www.getpocket.com) is an app that serves a similar function to Evernote, but is better suited to saving articles you come across online that you want to read later. Pocket has both a web browser plugin and a mobile app; when you come across an article you don't have time to read right this minute, you save it to your Pocket account. Saved articles are downloaded and available for reading offline in the mobile app, which is good for having things to read when you don't have a data connection. This is a huge help in doing research whether you're on the road or killing time on your bus ride to work. Articles you find useful can be forwarded to your Evernote account for permanent archival.

Another excellent, yet little known research tool is the **Wayback Machine** (www.archive.org/web). The Internet Archive regularly caches just about every website on the internet to make a copy of what that page looked like at a certain time. For example, if you bookmarked a website that had exact directions to an abandoned town you wanted to explore, but the website is no longer online, you could use the Wayback Machine to see what that page looked like before it was offline, and potentially retrieve

those lost directions. It's also fun to see what a website looked like five, ten, or even fifteen years ago (try it on the StP website)!

If This Then That (www.IFTTT.com) is a fantastic free service that allows you to automate certain actions across the web. For example, by linking your Facebook and Twitter accounts to IFTTT, you can set up an 'applet' that automatically reposts your tweets on Twitter to your Facebook wall. While this is a very basic example, with a little bit of creativity and setting up several social media accounts, you can send the same message to all your social media accounts with one post instead of having to login to each service and post them individually.

IFTTT has dozens of applications you can associate to your account, and thousands of premade applets for automating all kinds of tasks. Many websites use RSS feeds, which are website URLs that constantly update with the newest information from a website. Using IFTTT we can create an applet that will watch one of these RSS feeds for you, and whenever that website releases a new blog post, article, etc, IFTTT will automatically add that article to your Pocket account so you can read it offline later.

There are literally dozens of services you can connect to your account and thousands of premade applets for automating all kinds of tasks, so you'll have to play around with it to see what the possibilities are and how they apply to your work flow. The examples above are a few ways you can automate some of your research, or make sure you never miss an article from one of the following websites we'll cover next.

Useful Travel Websites

Fortunately, in our modern everyone-is-connected world of the internet, researching places worth visiting has gotten infinitely easier than it was before. There are literally hundreds of quality websites that specialize in writing about all kind of destinations, from the mundane to the truly bizarre. Here are a few of my favorites:

Nomad Wiki - This is a more traditional wiki-style website aimed at providing information about destinations around the globe. It's slanted more towards people living a full-time nomadic lifestyle, and states on it's front page that it's 'not for tourists'. This website also includes a wealth of information on just about every aspect of nomadic living; expect to see articles on everything from food, money, equipment, staying healthy, etc.

<http://nomadwiki.org>

Atlas Obscura - This website acts as a wiki-style kind of community collaboration that prides itself on documenting and sharing some of the strangest and most awe-inspiring destinations you can think of. Check it out and if you know of a place not in their database, consider contributing!

<http://atlasobscura.com>

Messy Nessy Chic - This is a fantastic blog covering interesting destinations, histories, and other curiosities throughout time. While not primarily centered around travel and destinations (there's a lot of posts on fashion), the places discussed on this blog are fascinating enough to warrant signing up for their email newsletter.

<http://messynessychic.com>

Road Trippers - Although this site deals mostly with national parks and other destinations useful to RV tourists, there's occasional off-beat destinations covered worth checking out. Unfortunately their mobile site kinda sucks and some of their content can be difficult to save with Evernote.

<http://roadtrippers.com>

100 Best Travel Blogs - Most of the websites in this top 100 list are going to be more along the more 'mainstream' side of travel, but if you're willing to spend the time digging through them (thankfully they're organized by category) there are definitely a lot of things you can learn, depending on what aspects of travel you're interested in.

<http://nomadsnation.com/best-travel-blogs/>

Wiki Travel - Another in a long list of wiki-style websites dedicated to destination-specific travel. This one is better for looking up information on cities in advance of your visit. The info they provide is great for people new to an area and lists many resources useful for travelers.

<http://wikitravel.org>

Wiki Voyage - This travel wiki is run by the folks that created Wikipedia, and is a travel resource filled with information contributed by it's users under the creative commons license. What makes this different than other wiki travel sites is it's featured articles section on a variety of interesting topics.

<http://wikivoyage.org>

Urban Exploration

For those of you interested in satisfying your inner Indiana Jones, I highly suggest looking into the hobby of Urban Exploration. Often referred to as 'Urbex' (or UE) for short, this is the art of exploring abandoned places. There's a huge community of urbexers both in the USA and internationally, and it's possible to find groups you can explore with in about every major city in the world with a quick Google search.

Adding Urban Exploration to your list of hobbies will expand your destination list a thousand fold, since there are tons of abandoned places with fascinating histories, all worth visiting. I've been to abandoned insane asylums, tuberculosis hospitals, oil refineries, and subway tunnels all over the USA and most of them were well worth the visit.

The UE community is large enough there's literally hundreds of websites dedicated to the subject, from personal blogs to huge directories of locations worth exploring. There's also a decent amount of published books on the subject, so here's a list of resources I recommend checking out.

Infiltration - This website was originally created by Ninjalicious, who unfortunately passed away back in 2005. Maintained by his friends, this website did a lot to popularize the Urban Exploration movement. While the website became mostly dormant after the owner's passing, there's still a wealth of content here and great stories worth reading. The forums are also still somewhat active. <http://infiltration.org>

Infiltration Zine - This is a collection of zines sold on the Infiltration website listed above. Although no longer publishing new issues, the back catalog has an amazing array of UE stories exploring everything from abandoned oil tanker ships, what it's like to get caught when exploring, to documenting off-limits areas of the Paris Catacombs. The whole back catalog of 25 issues can be picked up for fifty five dollars. <http://infiltration.org/zine.html>

Access All Areas by Ninjalicious - This is a complete beginner's guide to those interested in exploring abandoned places for the first time. A great resource if you're completely new to the subject. <http://amzn.to/2pTVTdK>

Urban Exploration Resource - This website is a database of abandoned places submitted by users from around the world. Unfortunately only a handful of places can be viewed by new users; you're required to participate on the forums for quite some time and be approved by the staff to view all the listed destinations.

<http://uer.ca>

Forbidden Places - This is one of many Urbex websites that show off their explorations to those interested in seeing what they look like first hand. Definitely 'porn' for those interested in UE and it's not too difficult to discern where most of the best locations are with a little research.

<http://forbidden-places.net>

Opacity - Another excellent website that uses the photography of abandoned places to provide a portal into what these places were in their past while documenting their current state of decay. With over 221 locations explored, it's a wealth of urbex eye candy.

<http://opacity.us>

28 Days Later - One of the largest message boards on the web dedicated to urban exploration. Discussions are categorized into types of site reports like hospitals, military sites, underground, etc. There's also a variety of other areas for sharing videos, photography, discussing gear, and books about urban exploration.

<http://28dayslater.co.uk>

Tom Explores Los Angeles - While there are plenty of Urban Exploration YouTube channels out there, this one is the most fun to watch. Great narration from it's main character, and so well produced it could easily be a show on cable television. Although the destinations are limited to one city, each episode is a fascinating exploration into various parts of Los Angeles that make me actually want to visit that awful city again.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqXj1154mZYnYMb69lUeRSg>

A Brief Guide to the USA

Traveling in the United States is incredibly easy to do, but it definitely helps to have at least a vague idea of what you're getting into before you walk out the door. Here we'll take a look at some cities and areas of the country you should be aware of during your travels.

First, you can easily divide the country into four areas; the West Coast, East Coast, Mid West, South East, and the 'Dirty' South. Since the Americas were colonized from east to west, this has led to a large difference in the layout of cities on the east and west coasts. The east coast tends to be more crowded, with cities built closer together and generally in an upward (multi-story) direction. The opposite is true of the west coast, as the cities there are farther apart and tend to stretch outward rather than upward. The same can be said of both the mid-west and the south, with a few exceptions like Chicago.

Winter weather is always a concern to those on the road, especially if your mode of travel puts you in more direct contact with the elements (such as hitchhiking), so it pays to know what the general weather patterns are for most of the country.

The east coast seems to be much colder than the west coast, with the exception of the southeast, which is a bit warmer, but also tends to be more humid (especially during the summer). East coast winters can be pretty extreme even when it isn't snowing, since the winds can bite through your layers of clothing and chill you to the bone. If you're traveling through this area during that season it's worth wearing winter gear that deflects the wind.

Weather on the west coast is milder, but heavy snow during the winter is still an issue in the Pacific Northwest states like Washington, Idaho, Montana and Oregon. If you like hot and dry winters, the south west is the place to be, while the bay area around San Francisco shares the same biting winds you'll find on the east coast.

The mid west is generally miserable in the winter but usually has less snow than the Pacific Northwest, with a few exceptions like North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota. These states experience such extremes that no person would be safe traveling there during the winter and you should really avoid these areas during that time. The south on the other hand is usually pretty pleasant, making it a bit of a mecca for travelers during winter periods.

Of course you can reverse most of these conditions for the summer. For example, while New Orleans is a good place to spend the winter, the summers are almost unbearable due to the heat and extremely high humidity. While most northern states are cold as hell during the winter, these places are perfect for visiting during the summer and make for amazing summer travels.

Travel on the east coast is definitely more complicated than elsewhere in the country due to the higher concentration of cities, but this is more an issue for train hopping than road travel since hitchhiking isn't too difficult on major thoroughfares and if all else fails, there's a network of cheap bus companies that make getting around anywhere on the east coast both easy and cheap.

The west coast, having much more distance between cities, limits your options in paid transportation to either Greyhound or Amtrak, but train hopping tends to be much easier since there's a much smaller chance of hopping on a train going the wrong direction.

There's a definite shift in attitude as you go from the east to the west, with the west coast having a slower, more relaxed attitude versus the faster hustle and bustle of the east coast, which makes a lot of people more aggressive. States in the south pride themselves on their 'southern hospitality' and from my experience this is still true today. Unfortunately, some religious and racial prejudices still exist throughout the southern states. Finally, the attitude in the mid-west has the slower pace of the west, but is much more conservative than other areas of the country.

Now that we've taken a broad look at the country as a whole, here's list of major cities in the continental United States and a few of my thoughts on them.

West Coast

Seattle, Washington - Known famously for its 1999 WTO protest, Seattle has maybe struggled to live up to that ideal, but remains a liberal epicenter for the Pacific North West. Currently it is the crane capitol of America in regards to reshaping the city skyline and if you haven't been here in a while, you may not recognize it. Where there were once neighborhoods that had plentiful dumpsters, rockin' house shows and travelers around every corner, skyrocketing rent has pushed people further and further out, some even into Tacoma. Minimum wage is the highest in the country, and service industry jobs are plentiful, but housing is near impossible to find. Public transportation is still pretty reliable and easy to use for free. Train hopping in this area is fairly simple if you have your sights set on the High Line. While Seattle is perhaps one of the most aesthetically pleasing cities in the northwest, it would be a shame to miss out on all the beautiful areas surrounding it. Venturing out into the northern cascades or the rain forests of the Olympic peninsula is especially worth the trip.

Olympia, Washington - This small college town lies about two hours south of Seattle, and it's pretty easy to catch a local city bus back and forth between these two cities. The Evergreen State College is a fairly hippie/left-wing school farther outside of town in the forests, which are pretty good for sleeping in as long as you don't bring any attention to yourself. Olympia has one of the best food banks I've ever been to, offering many vegetarian and vegan options. Fourth street is the main strip, which has many bars and restaurants worth checking out. Right off 4th and Jefferson St SE is the Artesian Commons Park, which is a glorified pipe that comes out of the ground pumping fresh water out from the aquifer that runs under the city. It's actually very good water, and people come from all around to bottle it up and take home with them.

Portland, Oregon - Once an epicenter of anarchist activism, this city is still more hard core than most when it comes to protesting (and promoting radical politics), but it's definitely gone through a lot of changes over the past decade or so. Almost a victim of its own success, finding cheap housing has become a huge issue in addition to a lack of available jobs, making Portland a good place to visit but a hard place to live. Summers are gorgeous here, and while there's not as much activity as there used to be years ago (punk shows, etc) there's still a decent amount of stuff happening here to make it worth visiting.

Eugene, Oregon - Another college town known for its hippie culture. Formerly home to a lot of anarchist activity centered around the defense of old growth forests in this area; unfortunately it's been pretty quiet in terms of activism in recent years. As a result, there's not a lot going on here for punk travelers. Hitchhiking on the I-5 is legal, and the train yard is ridiculously easy to catch out of. I've been told that the Dining Room is one of the best soup kitchens around if you need a free meal. The city apparently just passed an ordinance in April banning all dogs from the downtown area. Like most areas of Oregon, the food banks are quite good.

San Francisco, California - SF is a beautiful city, but is also extremely expensive to live in. Gentrification has taken over most of this area, so while there's a lot of things to do and places to see here for the average tourist, there's not much of interest here for poor travelers. Haight street is where lots of hippies and travelers hang out to spange, and Golden Gate Park is where lots of homeless people hang out to sleep or do drugs. If you have just a little money, SF is worth exploring for the city itself and various oceanside locations like the Sutro Baths.

Oakland & Berkeley, California - While Berkeley was the epicenter of political movements throughout the 60's and 70's, these days it has a pretty basic 'commercialized college town' vibe. Not much to see here other than perhaps People's Park, where you can see nut jobs yelling about whatever

conspiracy is currently in their heads at the moment. Oakland, on the other hand, has had a great punk and squatter community in the past, although that's starting to go away due to the recent influx of yuppies from silicon valley, which has been gentrifying the city greatly.

Las Vegas, Nevada - This city generally isn't a place that is thought of very highly by other travelers. Hitchhiking is illegal in Nevada, (though not strictly enforced) and cops in Las Vegas will probably give you a hard time if you are bumming around the streets for too long. If you enjoy gambling and have enough money for a hotel room and some left over cash for slots or a table game, Vegas beats Reno any day. Come with some friends, pool your money for a hotel room, and have a good time throwing your hard earned money away. Gambling age is 21 in Las Vegas and you will be carded quite a bit. Otherwise there's not much here for the average hobo so you should just move on.

Los Angeles, California - The home of Hollywood is a never ending concrete jungle that sprawls on for seemingly forever, with very little in the way of nature. Being so large, it's extremely difficult to get across without a car or taking public transit. Additionally, there just isn't much there worth visiting; the beaches are okay, but overflowing with tourists just about any time of year. Unlike most cities on the west coast, the people of Los Angeles have a generally shitty attitude towards each other, making it an unpleasant place to visit. The travel punk should avoid Los Angeles whenever possible.

If you find yourself hitchhiking or driving up/down the west coast, doing so on the 101 highway versus interstate five is about a thousand times more fun. Whereas interstate five is clogged with traffic and boring scenery, the 101 (and Pacific Coast Highway) has amazing ocean views with lighter traffic, and drivers are much more open to the idea of picking up hitchhikers.

East Coast

New York City, New York - Home to one of the most revolutionary periods of squatting in the United States, this city has a long history in activism and punk rock. Unfortunately the squatting heyday of NYC is long gone, with very few squats still existing today. Still, I would visit ABC No Rio (www.abcnorio.org) and the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space (www.morusnyc.org) if you're in town to learn more about the history of squatting in NYC. The city itself is huge, and it's expensive. It's literally a city that never sleeps and there's always something going on somewhere. If you've never been it's a must-see, as it's one of the most bustling metropolis' you'll ever experience.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - I once heard someone call 'Philly' the city where punks go to retire, and that seemed to be true in the years between 2001 and 2010, although I haven't visited since then. Philly has always been an epicenter of punk on the east coast due to it's proximity to every other city in that area. It was also well known for it's abundance of abandoned buildings, which had (at that time) resulted in one of the largest squatter communities in the United States. Due to the short distances between cities in this area, I recommend grabbing a cheap chinatown bus to NYC/Baltimore or hopping a train rather than dealing with the chaos of traffic while hitchhiking.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania - I haven't been to this city in quite some time, but I've been told there's a killer crust punk scene in Polish Hill, and tons of punks living in apartments there that would more than likely house up fellow crusties. Apparently Spak Bros. (on Penn ave) has the best vegan cheese steak around. "The Strip" down by the river has a nice farmers market, and there are often leftovers to be found afterwards. If you're walking or even riding a bike, be prepared for extreme climbs, as this is the definition of a mountain city. There are some cheap city buses that will take you a good distance across town.

Baltimore, Maryland - When someone asks me about this city, I've always made it clear that it's one of the dirtiest, shittiest cities I've ever lived, but filled with amazing, wonderful people. I think most people I know living there would agree. Unlike most cities that have a 'good' part of town and a 'bad' part on the other side of the tracks, Baltimore is a patchwork of neighborhoods, making it difficult to navigate by foot since you can go from a relatively safe neighborhood to dodging bullets in the span of one to two blocks. Combined with extreme racial tensions and a high murder rate, it's not a place you'd want to be caught out at night. Baltimore has a great music scene though, and it's easy to hitchhike or train hop in or out. Also, don't forget to stop by Red Emma's (www.redemmas.org); it's easily one of the best anarchist book stores you'll ever visit.

Washington, DC - Interstates here have no shoulders and are arranged in such a way that it's not actually possible - to my knowledge - to walk out of the city. The homeless population is absolutely insane - comparable only to the bay area. It's all suits by day, but as the sun sets, the overwhelming population of home bums and crackheads make themselves known. Almost every building has a security guard charged with telling homeless people to kick rocks. Everything is ultra expensive, with the exception of the Smithsonian museums. Overall this town should be avoided. If Richmond is considered the Portland of the east coast, then DC is the east's Los Angeles.

Richmond, Virginia - Richmond could be thought of as the Portland of the east coast. The art and music scenes are vibrant and murals litter the crumbling infrastructure. The campus police patrol alongside the city police, and the police presence is extremely heavy. On weekends, it is not uncommon for a cruiser to be stationed - lights swirling - on every corner along major roads. The people are generally very nice. The city's main form of entertainment is bars, and on the weekends almost all of

them have metal or punk shows. Train hopping in this city has become increasingly difficult over the past few years, and it's recommended you board a train elsewhere if possible.

South East

Savannah, Georgia - This is one of the top three cities in the world for celebrating St.

Patrick's day. It is also legal to walk around with an open container of alcohol as long as it's in a twelve ounce plastic cup. Savannah has also passed a lot of anti-panhandling laws in recent years due to the amount of gutter punks that are attracted to this area during the winter season. Cop presence is high in this city so if you're traveling in a vehicle it's a good idea to park far outside the downtown area. It's easy to hitchhike and train hop out of this area if you're careful and remain low-key.

Jacksonville, Florida - This is a large city that's mostly comprised of suburbs and industrial complexes. They have three moderately tall buildings in the eight block downtown area that they are quite proud of. For the average traveler, this city isn't going to be much more than a blip on your radar that you'll occasionally find yourself going through, but not spending much time in. Overall, there's just not a lot worth seeing. For train hoppers, it does have the largest CSX IM yard in the country, but should otherwise be avoided unless you have a good reason to be there.

Key West, Florida - Surprisingly, this city isn't filled with rich high-rise hotels, but instead maintains it's small-town vibe with many residential areas spread out over the two by seven mile island. There's one main tourist drag, and not all the beaches are accessible to the public, but there's still a surprising amount of places to explore here. Unfortunately there's virtually no where to sleep if you're on foot, and if you're in a vehicle you're better off parking on Stock Island to the east. Obviously there is a large community of people living on boats here, and there's even a small group of younger boat punks that spend the winters here and love helping others get into sailing.

Dirty South

Atlanta, Georgia - The center of the southeast, the city of Atlanta is a hub for traffic, mediocre sports teams, and trains. Atlanta has been known as the connector in the south for hundreds of years, and therefore has many big yards throughout the city. While it is a nice city to visit, not so nice to squat in for an extended period of time. There is not a huge population of travelers and vagabonds here, and most people seem to not be fond of it for more than a short stay. Overall, Atlanta is a place to visit for sure, but there will be lots of rides heading out of there when you are ready to leave.

New Orleans, Louisiana - This is widely known as a mecca for punk travelers, mostly due to it's combination of great weather (during the winter), open container laws, and number of squattable buildings. Unfortunately this has led to a rise of gutter punks making a mess and aggressively panhandling people to the point that it's become a serious issue in the city and police will often profile people walking around with backpacks in the French Quarter area. Otherwise, this is a great place to spend the winter. If you're looking for work, I would recommend showing up a few weeks before New Year's Eve, and you'll easily find a job that will last you until the season ends in late April.

Mid-West

Austin, Texas - While most travel punks avoid Texas like the plague due to its staunch conservatism, Austin is the one city that is the complete opposite of the state it lives in. It's a very liberal city with a college town vibe, and definitely fits my 'Goldilocks' scenario for a city that is neither too big, nor too small. It's bike friendly, easy to find work, and has countless nature spots a short bike ride away, making it easy to camp out and avoid rent. All these factors make it a good place to work and save up money for the next leg of your journey, but the summers there should be avoided due to the extreme humidity.

Chicago, Illinois - This is the largest city in the Midwest and there are a lot of ways a traveler can end up there depending on what route they take. Overall, it is not known for being all that friendly to travelers, and this will probably be one of those cities you just pass through, rather than spend time in.

There is a thriving DIY music scene but without knowing someone involved in the community it can be hard to find shows that are worth going to. Busking is also difficult since the police are strict on those trying to make money without a permit. It is not altogether impossible to busk but be cautious about what neighborhoods you attempt to do this in; as a rule of thumb, if you're in a nicer area the probability of being ticketed will be higher.

Due to the city's own financial politics there aren't many resources available to travelers. The winters are long and cold, while the summers are hot and humid. Hitching out of the city is also extremely difficult because most people are unwilling to help out anyone that might look to be a potential threat in a city with such a high violent crime rate. It is very easy to get stuck in Chicago due to this and if you do find yourself in a bind it will be easier to take public transit out to the distant suburbs in order to hitch or hop elsewhere.

Detroit, Michigan - Detroit is an infamous city that can be very intimidating to some. Despite all the bumps in its past (and present), it's always had a collection of different types of people.

From the juice bars and schwarma shops in Dearborn to the Polish haunts of Hammtramck, it is a very unique place. Though it can be dangerous (there are roughly twice as many guns as people), those with street sense need not be afraid. Detroit has a long history of art and music and hosts many proud artists and musicians. There is a strong DIY ethic in punk community houses like the Trumbullplex (www.trumbullplex.org) or underground bars like The Painted Lady. Because of the large number of abandoned properties squatting is alive and well here, from the east side to the west. You can take the Gratiot bus from downtown and see some of the best graffiti in the country, all for a few bucks. Stop in to any of the many coney islands for 99 cent hot dogs, buy a loose smoke and 40oz from the corner store, and see a failed industrial city that is still alive and kicking.

Minneapolis, Minnesota - Probably most well known for crust music and mutant bike clubs, it's also cold as shit there during the winter, so most travelers will avoid it most of the year.

Summers are nice though, and it's possible to train hop to Seattle from here along the high line. The Seward Cafe offers free food, there's a decent spange/busk in uptown, and the light rail offers cheap transportation (you can ride it for free if you're willing to risk getting a ticket).

Denver, Colorado - The river walk passes through a lot of parks and several attractions downtown, but has a heavy police presence. Smoking weed, drinking and camping there is a bad idea and they also ticket for spanging/busking but the people are generous when they give. I'm told the city has a lot of social services, kitchens, etc, and it's easy to get day labor right now as construction is booming. There are more marijuana dispensaries than Starbucks in this city and any state ID will get you the finest chronic outside of northern California.

Outside the Contiguous U.S.

Hawaii - This group of islands makes up America's 50th state, and apparently has a large enough homeless population that the state will pay for a plane ticket for anyone that claims to be homeless and wants to leave. Most tell me it's incredibly easy to be home-free there due to the pleasant weather, but food and gasoline (if you're renting a moped, etc) is extremely expensive.

Otherwise, there is a ridiculous amount of beauty in these islands, from the Haleakala Crater through the Kaupo Gap, to the Venus Pool on Maui, the black sand on Punalu'u Beach, and one of the clearest views of the sky you'll ever see at Mauna Kea. I've also been told it's one of the easiest states to hitchhike in.

Alaska - Most travelers that go here do so for work, as there's an abundance of cannery jobs and other positions related to the fishing industry there. I've been told it's a beautiful state in terms of nature and scenery, but it's one of the few states I've never been to due to my complete aversion to cold weather. If you're interested in visiting, I'd advise having a job lined up and bundling up.

So that's pretty much the United States in a nutshell, which should be more than enough to get you started. Of course, if you have further questions about a specific place in the United States, check out the **Destinations** section (squattheplanet.com/destinations) of the StP message board.

Annual Events

There are obviously all kinds of events, gatherings, festivals, and other kinds of parties going on around the world all the time, and the ones you choose to go to will be a matter of personal taste. In this section I'm going to list events you'll hear other travel punks talk about most often.

It was actually pretty difficult to do the research necessary for this list; many events have come and gone and are no longer being put on. There also aren't that many 'punk' gatherings (in terms of ideology) compared to years past. Still, there are some events that soldier on, and this list is intended to show you a piece of what's going on each year that might be worth traveling to.

Anarchist Book Fairs - About any anarchist book fair is a great place to meet other anarcho-punks, activists, and travelers. They're also a den of activity for music, discussion panels, and of course, finding interesting books you can read when traveling between destinations.

Autonomous Mutant Festival (*June; Oregon/Washington*) - "An annual free gathering for art, culture, DIY technologies and a harmonious relationship with the earth." One of those festivals I've been trying to get to for years, but somehow keep missing. Takes place at a new location each year deep in the woods of the Cascadia region (Western Oregon/Washington). Expect DJs, bands, drugs, and a huge party with interesting people and a very DIY atmosphere that makes it the opposite of every other 'festival in the woods' you've ever heard of.

<https://mutantfestival.org><http://mutantfest.info>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/302438183186935/>

Bike Kill (*End of October; Brooklyn, New York*) - This is an annual gathering of builders and riders of home-made bicycles that culminates into various competitions, most infamous of which is a tall bike jousting competition. Unfortunately, there is no official website with dates or information, so you'll just have to find out through the grapevine.

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=bike%20kill>

Black Fly Ball (*August; Machias, Maine*) - The Beehive Collective is famous for making large, intricate posters depicting struggles against capitalism all over the world. They are based out of Machias, Maine, and put on the Black Fly Ball each year during the height of the Machias Wild Blueberry Festival. The event takes place in the Machias Valley Grange Hall and features around a dozen live bands. There doesn't appear to be an official website for the ball, so the best reference is the blueberry festival website.

<http://www.machiasblueberry.com>

Black Sheep gatherings (*November; Location changes*) - This annual event is an offshoot of the traditional rainbow gatherings. From what I've heard, it was started by a bunch of people that weren't happy with how rainbow gatherings were organized. The first three Black Sheep gatherings quickly got a reputation for being a place where gutter punks and drainbows go to get wasted and break things. I have been told by many people in 2016 they are working hard to turn this around and the 2016 gathering was much more in line with traditional rainbow gathering culture. Still, there's no website with more information (since hippies can't seem to figure out facebook, much less make a website) so you'll just have to ask around for dates and a location.

Burning man (*Last week of August, Near Reno, Nevada*) - Unless you've been living under a rock for the past decade or so, you've likely heard about Burning Man. The event is described as an experiment in community and art and has become one of the biggest counter-culture events in the world, but in recent years has lost a lot of credibility due to rising ticket prices (currently about \$400/person) and lavish private camps for celebrities and the rich that go against the sharing model the event was built on.

<https://burningman.org>

The Fest (*October; Gainesville, Florida*) - 'The Fest' spans over multiple days and venues in Gainesville, Florida each year while all the meat head sports fans are out of town, usually on Halloween weekend. This festival brings together a variety of bands from different genres but mostly maintains a punk rock vibe, and many people come from all around the world to see the lineup each year.

<http://thefestfl.com>

Flip Side (*May; San Gabriel, Texas*) - This claims to be one of the biggest 'regional' Burning Man gatherings in the world, so if you're looking for an alternative to the 'big burn' in Nevada, this could be right up your alley; it also costs a fraction of the price at just over a hundred dollars.

<https://www.burningflipside.com>

Halloween (*October 31st; New Orleans, Louisiana*) - Travelers often flock to 'NOLA' for Halloween, as it's the type of place that revels in such a dark holiday and people really go all-out in designing their costumes and just having a lot of fun with the occasion. It's pretty much the beginning of the tourist season due to the warm weather, so you'll likely meet a lot of other travelers there as well.

Mardi Gras (*February; New Orleans, Louisiana*) - This is the biggest event of the winter tourist season in New Orleans and it brings people from all over the world. Festivities can start as early as two weeks before the actual event, and there is a non-stop barrage of parades and parties until Ash Wednesday, so you'll want to get there early.

Maryland Death Fest (*May; Baltimore, Maryland*) - Probably one of the most famous music festivals in the crust and punk scenes, due to the usually epic lineup of brutal death metal, grindcore, doom, thrash, hardcore, black metal, and experimental bands from all around the world.

<http://www.deathfests.com>

Punk Rock Bowling (*May; Las Vegas, Nevada*) - Now in its 19th year, this has been one of the longest running Punk Festivals in the country. PRB takes over downtown Las Vegas for 4 days; the outdoor festival lineups start in the afternoon and features nine bands each day on Saturday, Sunday and Monday with four late night club shows. In all, there are over

100 bands performing throughout the weekend. There are also 1,000 bowlers at 3 separate bowling centers, and a ton of side events and parties throughout the event.

<https://punkrockbowling.com>

Rainbow Gatherings (*July 1-7; Location changes*) - This is probably the most famous annual gathering of hippies in the world, and has been going on since 1972. Rainbow events actually come in two forms; the 'national' gathering takes place in a new location once a year, while the 'regional' gatherings occur in a different region each month. Expect lots of school bus kitchens, drugs, dance parties and 'om-ing' around campfires in the woods. The website is atrocious and difficult to read, so you might as well just go to StP and get the info you need about each event there.

<http://welcomehome.org>

Rubber Tramp Rendezvous (*January; Quartzsite, Arizona*) - Bob Wells started this gathering to give people living out of their vehicles a chance to meet and learn from each other through campfire hangouts and various workshops. It's a free event, and it coincides with the Quartzsite Gem show if you're interested in checking that out.

<http://www.cheaprvliving.com/gatherings>

Saint Patrick's Day (*March 17th; Savannah, Georgia*) - While most would assume Boston to be the best place to go for this holiday, Savannah, Georgia actually ranks the highest amongst punk travelers due to its liberal open container laws and warm weather. The population explodes during this event, going from 150,000 to nearly 750,000 people in a matter of days.

Squat the Planet's Dirty Scouts Jamboree (*Late October; Slab City, California*) - This is the official annual gathering of travelers organized by the StP community. For one weekend in October we have a series of workshops, art, movies, bands, an open bar, urban exploration, and the kind of general chaos that can only come from a mad-max-like postapocalyptic squatter town in the desert.

<https://squattheplanet.com/fest>

Wasteland Weekend (*End of September; California City, California*) - This event started as a small gathering of passionate fans of all things post-apocalyptic, and has slowly been evolving into the closest thing you can experience to living in a dystopian post-society world. Taking place in the desert around California City, expect to see a ton of cosplay (dressing up is mandatory) combined with amazing mutant vehicles that look like they're straight out of the *Mad Max* movies. Music, booze, and various competitions occur throughout the weekend. Unfortunately the price doubled to \$185 this year (2017) but even then it's worth the cost of admission for anyone obsessed with the end of the world.

<http://www.wastelandweekend.com>

8. Hitchhiking

What is Hitchhiking?

Hitchhiking is the act of standing alongside a road and using a hand signal to let passing drivers know you're looking for a ride. The hand signal for hitchhiking in most areas of the world is to stick out your arm with a closed fist while pointing your thumb out from the top. If a driver is interested in giving you a ride, they can pull over to the side of the road and let you enter their vehicle. Drivers pick up hitchhikers for many different reasons; some are feeling generous and enjoy helping out their fellow human, while others are looking for someone to keep them entertained on a long drive.

Although in some rare instances in which the driver might want something in return (insert 'cash, grass, or ass' cliché here), hitchhiking is generally regarded as a free activity in which the only form of compensation is your company in exchange for a ride to your destination (or near it).

Hitchhiking is a good way to brush up on your social skills if you're not used to talking to strangers and a downright cultural exchange if you're traveling outside of your home country. It's also a way to experience the world from the point of view of those who live in that area.

Hitchhiking is also widely recognized as a legitimate form of travel in almost every part of the world, so it's very likely you'll end up doing it at some point in your travels. Whether you're looking for an easy way to get to the next village or traveling across whole portions of the globe, it's a valuable skill you'll want to become familiar with.

Is Hitchhiking Illegal?

In most of the United States, hitchhiking is legal. It is against the law for pedestrians to walk on the highway itself where motorized vehicles operate. What complicates things is that each state has its own laws about hitchhiking, so it's worth looking up the specifics for each state you might be traveling through.

[image not archived]

Despite the laws allowing or disallowing hitchhiking in that area, most are not enforced, or if they are, carry only a minor fine (in most cases). In general, it's worth giving hitchhiking a try even if you're in a state in which it's illegal.

You should be prepared to be questioned by the police no matter what laws are in effect in your area and most will want to run your ID through their database to see if you have any warrants out for your arrest. If you are told to leave you should do so and find another place to hitchhike from, preferably outside the county you were chased away from.

Overall though, you shouldn't expect to encounter many legal issues when hitchhiking in most states of the USA, and getting arrested or fined for doing so is pretty rare.

Dangers of Hitchhiking

Obviously the idea of hitchhiking in general seems dangerous, since you have no idea who might pick you up and what their intentions might be. While most drivers are only interested in having someone to chat with on their journey, some others may have less pure intentions. It's not uncommon for men to pull over and give rides to women in the hopes that they'll reciprocate with sexual favors of some kind. Unfortunately, this image of women riding alone is often perpetuated by the porn industry, so that doesn't help the situation. Of course it's not uncommon for men to receive the same treatment, although this is more often from other male drivers than anyone else.

While the stereotype of the hitchhiker as a dangerous person is the most common amongst those not familiar with the culture, the reality is that the people picking up hitchhikers are often much more dangerous than the people looking for rides. In my personal experience, I can't think of a single hitchhiker I've met that sketched me out nearly as much as some of the rides I've gotten.

So if that's the case, why hitchhike at all? While you're bound to run into a few weird rides, the rides you'll get from good, honest, helpful people far outnumber the weirdos until they're a tiny minority. Truly, every good ride is a testament to the kindness of individuals and restores my faith in humanity.

While most hitchhiking experiences will be positive (or at least tolerable) it pays to be prepared for the worst. The best way of being prepared for a dangerous situation is to simply have an effective means of defending yourself. This should ideally be some kind of easily accessible knife. Pepper sprays are a poor choice for enclosed spaces like a car, since you're bound to blind yourself as badly as your attacker.

You don't have to be an expert at wielding a knife either. Simply brandishing it is enough to make any attacker think twice about escalating a situation. In a hitchhiking scenario, the driver is also being distracted by having to keep the vehicle on the road, so if you find yourself in a situation where you need to pull out a knife, the odds of them backing down and letting you out of the car is heavily in your favor.

Any kind of assisted opening knife with a four inch or smaller blade should be legal in most states, and a good one will have a clip that will keep it from falling all the way into your pocket so you can easily grab it when needed.

Before You Start

Only hitchhike during daylight hours. It might be tempting to keep trying once the sun sets, but your visibility to drivers drops drastically while your risk of being injured by a passing car rises dramatically. When darkness hits, your best bet is to call it a day and find a place to camp for the night.

Also, obey road safety rules. Remain behind the white line on the side of the road, and only walk on the highway where it's legal to do so. Otherwise, keep your hitching to on-ramps and don't hitchhike past the signs that say pedestrian and non-motorized vehicles aren't allowed. This is for your personal safety in addition to minimizing the chances that you'll receive a ticket from local law enforcement.

Good & Bad Hitchhiking Spots

When choosing a spot to hitchhike, it's important to place yourself somewhere you are visible to drivers while also providing enough room for a vehicle to pull over once they decide to pick you up.

Good spots for hitchhiking:

On the shoulder of a quiet or slow moving road.

Truck stops, rest stops, bus stops, and the exit lanes of gas stations. Roundabouts and intersections.

Frontage roads, turn-outs, t-junctions.

Long on-ramps with plenty of space to stop.

Bad spots to hitchhike include:

Immediately after a corner. Roads with multiple lanes. Inside or just before cities.

Busy highways and roads with little or no shoulder.

Hitchhiking in Groups

In most scenarios, the easiest way to hitchhike is in pairs, with one guy and one girl. This is the most amount of people that can hitch together and still present the least amount of threat to drivers interested in picking you up. While it might make sense that two women traveling together will get more rides, the idea behind the guy/girl pair is that most drivers will assume you're not a threat if you have a woman in your group, and having a man traveling with a woman will deter creeps looking to pick up a woman hitchhiking alone.

It's absolutely possible to have more than two people hitchhike together, but the amount of people that have both enough seats available and the willingness to pick up that many people drops significantly when doing so. I would consider three to be the maximum, and if you have more than that, you should separate into pairs.

When hitchhiking with more than one pair of people, you should let the first pair stand on the side of the road sticking their thumbs out while the second (or more) pairs find some place out of the way to hang out until the first pair get picked up. From there the next pair can take their place until everyone has gotten a ride. Make sure to choose a spot to meet up at your destination before the first pair gets their ride.

Hitchhiking alone definitely puts you at the most risk, since you don't have anyone to back you up if things go south. That said, plenty of people do it all the time, just make sure to take the proper precautions.

Your Appearance

While appearance can be influential when you're trying to get someone to stop and give you a ride, I wouldn't go so far out of your way that you have to carry around an extra set of clothes in your pack. Just try to make yourself somewhat presentable and try not to look so extreme that you frighten off potential rides. Avoid wearing things like sunglasses, scarves, and hats that block your face since this makes it hard for drivers to tell if you're a friendly person worth picking up.

Signs & Other Props

Making a cardboard sign is a popular way of letting drivers know your destination, or at least the general direction you'd like to go. This is why it's always a good idea to carry a black sharpie marker in your pack. You can find cardboard almost anywhere; check the dumpsters of any businesses around you.

Making your sign colorful or decorative is nice as long as it's still readable at sixty miles an hour, and I've seen a few creative signs like giant hitchhiker thumbs made of cardboard that definitely made those carrying them look more approachable. Again, keep it clear and readable, but feel free to have fun with it.

Other props can be both fun and useful. For example, one of my favorite hitchhiking adventures was with two other friends across the mid west, one of which had a pair of walking stilts they traveled with just for fun. These stilts gave them an extra three feet of height, which was just enough to put her at eye level with the truck drivers pulling out of every truck stop we ended up at. This both was eye-catching and amusing to the drivers, so we got a lot of great rides this way.

If you can find a fun way to engage drivers like this, do it! Remember to stay safe and not be so distracting to drivers that you cause an accident.

Staying Motivated

Standing next to the road while an endless procession of cars pass can be a bit of a demoralizing process, especially when you start contemplating things like the empty seats in each car, why people are too scared to stop for you, all the wasted gasoline, etc.

Of course when you're bummed out, you'll probably look like it to drivers passing by, which doesn't help your chances of getting a ride. So staying motivated and keeping your mood positive while hitchhiking is important!

Entertainment is key, especially if you're hitchhiking alone, so make sure to bring something to keep you sane. These days I recommend at least bringing a cheap music player. At least then you can have something to listen to while holding your thumb out and watching the traffic pass by. Audio books and podcasts are another form of audio entertainment you can add to your music player when you're tired of listening to music.

When you're traveling with others, this is the best time to swap stories about your lives and really bond with your travel partner. If you *really* get along, singing duets and dancing together are both fun and make you look like entertaining passengers to those interested in picking up hitchhikers.

Getting Your First Ride

Once a ride does stop for you, gather your gear and run up to the vehicle. Try to keep everything inside your pack while waiting for a ride; this way you can just pick it up and run without having to leave the driver waiting as you gather everything back together. If you have a smart phone, you might want to take a picture of the license plate as you approach the vehicle; this works best if your phone has a 'quick photo' button so you're not standing there suspiciously trying to key in your phone's pass code so you can get access to your camera app.

Once you approach the side of the vehicle, ask the driver where they're going. If the destination matches your objective and the driver/vehicle doesn't appear too sketchy (see below) then feel free to accept the ride. Otherwise, don't be afraid to reject it. There will always be another person willing to pick you up eventually.

If your first look at the driver or their vehicle sketches you out in any way, politely decline and step away. If you're traveling alone and there's more than one person in the car, you might want to decline the ride to avoid being surrounded by strangers. Of course if it's a family or if the passengers look friendly enough, use your own judgment. Use any excuse you need to decline a ride, whether you want to say you're going to a different destination, waiting for a ride going farther, or flat out tell them you're not comfortable taking the ride. Either way, they will be gone in a few seconds and you'll be free to start thumbing your next ride.

Once you *do* find a ride, it always pays to hold your bag in your lap when riding in the vehicle. Drivers often offer to put your pack in the back seat or in the trunk, but affirm as nicely as you can that it's okay and having your pack in your lap won't be a problem for you. In my earlier hitchhiking days I put my pack almost anywhere they wanted and never had problems, but it always pays to be careful. While it's rare, there have been incidents where drivers took off with a hitchhiker's gear during a bathroom break or other stop.

Making Conversation

Once you're on your way, it's your responsibility to be a good passenger. Hitchhiking is a bit of an unspoken exchange; the driver is looking for company/entertainment to make their drive a little less dull, while you're getting a ride to your next destination. Try to be entertaining and chat with the driver as long as it's comfortable.

I try to feel out the driver with questions about who they are, where they're coming from, and other questions about their background. Most people love to talk about themselves, so this is an easy stepping stone towards establishing a good rapport with your driver. Be a good listener and share parts of your own background where it's appropriate.

Of course, if your questions are met with a lot of yes/no answers without much explanation, it might be that they're not much of a talker, and that's okay too. I've had plenty of nice quiet rides with people who wanted someone around to keep them awake. Try not to fall asleep though; this is for both safety reasons and also because you'll be failing at your part of the hitchhiker to driver exchange.

Getting Dropped Off

If your ride is only taking you part of the way to your destination, try to get them to drop you off at a good location for hitchhiking, even if that means cutting your ride short. It's better to take a shorter ride to a busy location than it is to take a long ride to an on ramp with little to no traffic. In fact, a running joke amongst hitchhikers is the driver that swears they know the best spot to drop you off. More often than not, these are terrible places to hitchhike from and usually result in getting stuck for much longer than you would have elsewhere. In these situations your own judgment is better than your driver's since you should know what to look for in a good hitchhiking spot.

Once you're near your destination, remind your driver and make plans for where you'd like to be dropped off. If possible, try and get dropped off somewhere you can easily walk into town or get a ride on the local public transit system. Nothing sucks worse than a ten mile hike into town, especially in the summer heat.

Getting Stuck

Unfortunately getting stuck somewhere while hitchhiking is unavoidable; it's going to happen to you at *some* point in your travels. Knowing what to do when it happens is essential in continuing to your next destination.

Depending on your location, it might be possible to walk to a location with public transit; from there you can go somewhere easier to hitchhike from. That's why it's a good idea to keep a few dollars on hand for such situations.

If the area you're in is impossible to hitchhike from, it might be worth looking into buying a bus ticket to a location with better hitchhiking options. In some situations, spending a small amount of money on a bus ticket to the next town might be better than spending several days alongside the road waiting for a ride.

Train hopping is another option if you happen to be in an area where that's possible. See the Train Hopping section of this book for more information.

Otherwise, your only other option is to walk to the next reasonable place to hitchhike from. I've been dropped off in a few particularly bad spots where the only option was to walk over to the next town. Fortunately this is pretty rare, but you should always be prepared for the worst.

Additional Resources

Due to a long history and general acceptance in most parts of the world, there's a ton of books, websites, and other resources for learning more about hitchhiking. Some of these include:

Hitchwiki - In my opinion this is the most comprehensive resource of information regarding hitchhiking on the internet. You can literally spend hours on this site and learn an amazing amount of information. There's legality specifics for states and countries, tons of safety information, suggested hitchhiking locations by state, and personal experiences of those who've hitchhiked through that area. Highly recommended.

<http://hitchwiki.org>

Hitchlog - If you've ever wondered what it's like to hitchhike in a particular place, HitchLog has user experiences from over 80 countries around the world. There's also a page for finding other people to hitchhike with.

<http://www.hitchlog.com>

Rules of Thumb: How to Hitchhike and Live on the Road by Christopher Drifter - This is an introduction to everything you need to know about the basics of hitchhiking. Where to do it, how to do it, and all the little techniques and rules of the road you wouldn't think of until you read them here. In the spirit of free travel, Christopher has a free version of the book you can download, although I'd encourage you to spend the measly \$2.99 on the Kindle version which is formatted better. Of course, there's a print version as well.

http://www.christopherdrifter.com/books/Rules_of_Thumb/

StP Hitchhiking Forum - Squat the Planet has it's own forum section dedicated to discussions about hitchhiking. There's an active user base here so it's a good place to ask questions and get them answered in a reasonable amount of time.

<https://squattheplanet.com/hitchhiking/>

9. Train Hopping

Introduction to Train Hopping

No doubt you've come to find this book after being wooed by pretty pictures of trains and hobo punks from folks like the Polaroid Kid, heard about that wonderful adventure your friend had, or seen a documentary about train hopping somewhere that made it seem liberating and romantic.

Well, I'm here to tell you that like most things portrayed by the media, this view of the hobo lifestyle is almost complete bullshit.

If you pursue this method of travel you'll be dirtier, colder, hotter, hungrier, wetter, more tired, and more miserable at times than you ever could have imagined in your previous life. It's a hard fucking world, which is why there's not many that do it for long periods of time. There are a dozen other ways to wander the world for nearly free without *nearly* so much hardship, which is one of the big reasons I don't ride trains that often anymore.

On the flip side of the coin, the experience is completely unlike any other. The rocking of the train, the epic views of nature, seeing the country on virtually no money, and participating in a lifestyle with deep and interesting historical roots.

The following guide to train hopping is intended to teach you about the harsh realities and techniques involved in catching a free ride via the world's locomotive transit system. I personally prefer 'education over abstinence' when it comes to these kinds of things, so it's my intention to teach you the basics of traveling via the rail system while staying safe and also *not getting caught*, since this causes problems for other train riders in the long run.

Keep in mind this is not a *complete* guide to train hopping, and will not teach you *everything* you need to know. This is meant to serve as an introduction to the lifestyle and techniques involved, and it's up to you to complete the research necessary to make this form of travel possible and keep yourself safe from harm. I will do my best to point you in the right direction for more information on certain topics, but anything you might read here is limited to my own experience, so take what I say with a grain of salt.

For those of you new to the train hopping world, don't ever feel like train hopping is something you *have* to do to be a part of the travel punk community. Despite the large emphasis placed on it by travel punks as a whole, there's no shame in never having ridden a freight train. There are a plethora of other ways to travel as (if not more) effectively and adventurously, and anyone that tells you different is someone you should avoid.

So with that out of the way, let's move on to the most important part of learning how to hop trains.

Find Someone Experienced

I recommend most people find someone who has a decent amount of experience train hopping and learn by riding with them not just for their first time, but for their first *several* times, since it's impossible to learn and experience everything you need to know about freight trains in one ride. If you don't know anyone in your immediate area, I recommend finding someone on Squat the Planet or hitchhiking to a bigger town with a larger punk/traveler community where you can meet other train hoppers.

Dangers of Train Hopping

There's one other thing I should mention before we go into the actual techniques of train hopping, and that's how fucking dangerous this game is. I'm not screwing around when I say doing this could get you seriously injured, or even killed. It happens to young kids more than I'd like to admit, which is one of the main reasons I'm creating this guide.

You can get your arms/legs/head chopped off, you can get crushed by the cargo sliding around in the train car, or buried under several tons of coal as it's being dumped off at it's destination.

All these things and more have happened, and I've known a few of these people when they were still alive. Don't believe it can't or won't happen to you. There are many more horrific stories out there, just check out the Obituaries section of Squat the Planet.

Also, let's not forget that hopping a train is illegal in the United States of America, and probably illegal in other countries as well. You stand a good chance of going to jail, especially if you don't know what you're doing. You're responsible for your own actions, and no, I won't accept your collect call from the slammer.

Of course, rather than tell you not to do it, and have you lose a limb or your life when you decide to do it anyway, we're going to show you how to do it responsibly, so you can not only have a good time, but most importantly, not fuck it up for the rest of us.

Respect

Unfortunately this is where most 'greenhorns' (aka new train riders) make their first mistake.

Rather than take the time to do some research, some people show up in the Train Hopping section of the StP forums expecting to be spoon fed information.

Most of you reading this have probably grown up in the age of the internet, where the collective knowledge of mankind is available at your fingertips, but showing up in any community (online or off) and demanding information without some kind of participation is considered to be rather rude.

Imagine that you're sitting in the woods (at your hobo 'jungle') and people keep popping into your camp without so much as a "hello", but instead immediately go on to demand information about the local train yard from you, then, without so much as a "goodbye" (or "thank you"), disappear, never to be seen again. Now imagine this happening constantly, throughout the day, every day. Yeah, it gets kinda old, and it sucks for the poor bo's in the jungle. It wears 'em out real bad, and makes us not want to share info anymore.

The point is that if you're going to be jumping into this lifestyle, you should expect to become part of the community. Introduce yourself. Share some stories. Make friends. This goes not just for StP, but all train hopping communities (and communities/cultures in general). You'll get better info, earn the respect of your peers, make more friends, and overall have a lot more fun.

One last thing before you dive into this culture and start meeting us. Please come with a healthy dose of humility. I really don't care whether you've ridden zero miles or a million. Both the inexperienced and experienced alike should be able to come to the table with a mutual amount of respect. We were all newbies once, so to the old hobos, don't be a dick, and newbies, don't pretend you know jack shit about trains. If you're completely honest about your level of (in)experience with trains, more people will respect you for your humility rather than judge you for your lack of experience. If they do judge you, then they're not the kind of people you want to be riding with anyways.

Assuming you've taken the above to heart, it's time to start plugging yourself into the community. If you haven't done it yet, create an account on StP and start participating in the forums. Also, start searching for other train related communities, like 'railfan' websites (also known as 'foamers') and anything else you can think of related to train hopping. There are a plethora of communities out there, everything from message boards to email lists, and a lot of them have useful information that hasn't made it to the StP forums yet.

Special Gear

So, you're aware of the dangers and the hardships, but you're crazy enough to still give this a go. Well good for you! It's time to get ready. There are a few basics you should keep in mind when packing for this kind of journey.

First, and most importantly, is water. On average, you're going to need about one gallon of water per person, per twenty-four hours of travel. There's places in the world where you'll have precious little access to water, and if you're traveling in the summer months, trains can get awfully hot. It's easy to get dehydrated when you're riding a hot lumbering steel snake through the desert.

I'm not going to tell you exactly what kinds of food to pack, since this kind of journey is pretty similar to most hiking trips, so plan accordingly. Pack what you're comfortable with, and if you're not sure, do a little research on food to bring while hiking, or see what other outdoorsy type guides suggest you carry with you.

When it comes to clothing, you're going to want something that is both durable and you don't mind getting incredibly filthy. You're going to get really, really, dirty, and there's no way around that.

The stereotype of train hoppers wearing Carhartts came about because they used to be pretty awesome work pants made from canvas, and lasted quite a long time. This was convenient since train hopping is incredibly hard on your clothes, and having a set (or two) of canvas pants that lasted forever meant less money spent replacing clothes (or doing laundry). I can't really recommend them anymore since I've noticed a pretty severe reduction in quality (mainly the ass of my pants blowing out) since they moved their factories overseas.

There are other brands though, and Dickies are my personal favorite, since they're cheap (about half the price of Carhartts), more durable, and made in the USA. Filson's sells canvas pants that are fireproof, but they're pretty expensive at around a hundred dollars or more for one pair. I've never owned a pair but they're supposed to have a lifetime guarantee, so if you want pants that'll last you (supposedly) forever, that might be the way to go. If you've tried them, let me know, since I've never been able to afford them.

Although we've already covered this in the gear section of this book, I can't emphasize enough how important good shoes are. My first few trains were hopped wearing a pair of Converse shoes, with virtually zero padding, and I ended up twisting my ankles quite a bit. Also, there's a lot of sharp, jagged, loose rock around railroad tracks. After running a half mile up a train trying to find a car to ride in, wearing bad shoes will put a serious damper on your trip.

Just like when going on a hiking trip, get shoes/boots that are durable, comfortable, have enough padding, and provide adequate ankle support. If you're hurting for cash, go with a pair of skate shoes, since they can usually be found for fairly cheap and are padded enough to keep those jagged rocks from hurting your feet.

While most people in the train hopping community stick to the 'crust lord' look (dreadlocks, carhartts, punk patches, alice pack, etc) it might be in your best interests to have a pair of normal' clothes in your pack. This can be advantageous when walking through a city particularly unfriendly to travelers. I'm not saying you have to dress like a yuppie, but making yourself look like an American college kid backpacking in Europe can have it's advantages. Especially nowadays, since the whole 'crust lord' look is pretty well known and recognized by the authorities.

Mandatory miscellaneous gear for train hopping includes some kind of flashlight (you're going to end up in dark places), and a map (because, at some point you're going to be wondering where the hell

you are). Your smart phone won't count for shit when you're out of battery power, so always have a physical pocket atlas as a backup.

A useful (but not mandatory) tool for finding out which trains are going where and most importantly *when*, is a radio scanner. These usually run anywhere between \$50-\$100 dollars, and let you listen in on the radio frequencies in use by police, ambulance, fire and train crews. While not completely necessary, they can be useful in certain situations, since you can hear most of the railroad worker's chatter and announcements about train departures among other interesting information. The downside is having enough batteries to listen in all the time, and the somewhat long learning curve there is to understanding all the lingo/codes being spouted out by the yard tower and workers. Still, if you can afford it, it's a useful tool.

Research & Planning

Ok, so now that you've gathered the proper gear, you're ready to hit the rails. The first thing you'll want to do is figure out where the trains are going, and how you're going to get to your destination. There are several tools that will help you do this.

The Crew Change Guide

Ok, I'm going to get this out of the way first, since it's one of the things that causes a lot of controversy in the train hopping scene, and most of us are tired of dealing with it.

The Crew Change Guide (CCG) is a compilation of information about where trains stop to change crews before heading to their destinations. This guide is published yearly and compiled by a person known as 'Train Doc', and it's purpose is to help you find a good spot to wait for a train that's heading where you want to go.

For example, if you were trying to catch out of Portland, Oregon, the CCG would have directions along the lines of "Take the number 27 bus to the corner of 55th and Hamilton, walk a half mile down the road to mile marker 13 and climb through the hole in the fence to your left.

Hide in the bushes 50 yards to your right, hotshots coming in from the west from 8am to 9pm." As you can see, it has some pretty useful information, especially if you're trying to catch a train in an area you're not familiar with.

Unfortunately, it's impossible to keep 100% accurate track of something as big and monstrous as the US railroad system, as it's constantly changing. Rail companies build new tracks, change cargo routes, and merge with other railroad companies all the time. The CCG is completely dependent on submissions made by other railroad fans, so there's no guarantee what you read in previous editions of the CCG will be accurate by the time you get to the train yard.

This is important to remember, because some folks have become a bit too dependent on their CCG's, to the point where it's become a bit of a 'bible' to some in the train hopping world. This kind of dependence on something that can be so woefully inaccurate is something I discourage, as the CCG is a poor substitute for the ability to go to a train yard and figure things out for yourself.

There's one more thing that should be mentioned about the CCG. Not everyone who gets their hands on a CCG is as responsible as you or I, and it's led to many of the spots listed being 'blown up' or ruined by less respectful train hoppers.

A good example is the 'Stone Lion Jungle' in Roseville, California. What once was a beautiful spot in a field next to the train tracks with a tidy burn barrel, a couch, and the tolerance of the local railroad bull is now a ruined mess of burned furniture, broken glass, and no sign of the stone carving creatures the spot got it's name from. Not only that, but the police patrol the area constantly, issuing trespassing tickets to anyone found there.

Now I know despite all these warnings you're still going to want a copy of the CCG, so I'll go ahead and tell you how to get it. Train Doc (the author of the CCG, remember?) has expressly forbid the distribution of the CCG via any other means than photocopying it from someone else. This means that you have to find someone who has a copy, and they have to let you make a photocopy of it. There's no other way.

This has been done to protect the information in the guide for those that really need it. Keep in mind a lot of people depend on trains as a means to get around, and if you go around smashing bottles at every hop out spot the authorities are going to notice, and folks that use the spot in the future are going to get arrested because you were acting like an asshole.

Despite these precautions, the CCG has fallen into the hands of railroad cops and other authorities, and some people have even gone so far as to publish it on the internet. Unfortunately for you, most copies of the CCG you'll find online are from the 2006 edition; it's an educational read, but ridiculously out of date in terms of accurate railroad information.

Those are a few of the reasons why this guide is going to focus on other methods of figuring out how to get to your destination, rather than depend on possibly out dated material.

Main Routes

There are literally millions of miles of railroad tracks in the United States alone, but we're going to concentrate on the main long-distance railroad routes in North America, as these are the basic ones you need to be familiar with when starting out:

[image not archived]

Let's start with the **West Coast** route; this line runs between Vancouver, BC and Los Angeles. These tracks mostly follow the I-5 freeway through Portland, Eugene, Klamath Falls, Dunsmuir, Roseville, Stockton, Fresno, Bakersfield, and finally, Los Angeles.

The **High Line** runs between Seattle and Minneapolis through the middle of Eastern Washington, going through Spokane, the panhandle of Idaho, and through Northern Montana before rolling into the plains of North Dakota and finishing in Minnesota.

The **Overland Route** runs between Roseville and Chicago via Sparks, Nevada, Ogden, Utah, Cheyenne, Wyoming, North Platte, Nebraska, and Iowa. It runs fairly close to the I-80 freeway.

Through the southern part of the United States is the **Sunset Route**; there are actually two lines here, one run by Union Pacific (Los Angeles, Tucson, El Paso, San Antonio, New Orleans) and the other by BNSF (Barstow, Flagstaff, Clovis, Texas, New Orleans). The Union Pacific route runs very close to the Mexico border so security is high; the BNSF route is generally preferred.

The **East Coast** is mostly dominated by the CSX Corporation, and the longest route down the coast runs between Newark, New Jersey and Jacksonville, Florida. This route closely follows the I-95 freeway.

From Chicago there are two routes going to the East Coast. They both take the same train line east through Illinois, before splitting in Willard, Ohio. The northern route runs through Buffalo, Syracuse, and Selkirk, NY (somewhat close to the I-90). The southernmost route goes to Pittsburgh, Cumberland, Washington DC, and Baltimore (I-70, I-68, I-270, and I-95 freeways).

Canadian National Railway runs a line between New Orleans and Chicago. This line follows the I-55 and I-57 freeways through Jackson, MS; Memphis, TN; Fulton, KY; and Champaign, IL.

Last but not least, we have what most call the '**Canadian Highline**'. This is possibly one of the longest train routes in North America. This line runs from Vancouver, British Columbia to Toronto in Ontario (and beyond, via other train lines).

These routes will get you to the majority of places you'd want to go in the United States and Canada. Due to the already existing landscape of the USA and it's development from the east coast to the west, the pattern of railroad lines becomes more spider-webbed in the east and more sparse in the west. This generally makes getting around the west coast a bit easier, since you're limited to a few lines; there's less chance you'll catch a train going the wrong direction.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't do further research though, especially if you want to go to areas of the country outside of these main routes (and outside the country as well). Next, we'll go over some other resources you can use for finding out where trains go.

Google Maps

The internet age changed a lot in regards to how easy it is to find train hopping information. It wasn't long ago that most hobos were dependent entirely on their wits alone and maybe a railroad atlas (if they were lucky enough to have one). Nowadays technology like Google Maps makes it incredibly easy to find out where things are in the world, and that includes train yards and railroad lines. This is probably the best resource available for helping yourself become familiar with places you've never been before. I highly recommend looking up the train yard you'll be hopping out of on Google Maps so you become familiar with it before you get there.

Railroad Atlas

These can be bought or found online. They look just like any road atlas you've ever seen, but they detail every possible train line in existence and what companies run on that trackage. This information is obviously incredibly useful to have when train hopping, so if you can afford to pick up a physical railroad atlas to carry around with you, I highly recommend doing so.

Otherwise, you can print out railroad maps from various railroad corporation websites or rail fan websites and build a railroad atlas of your own.

Getting Into the Train Yard

So you know where you are and where you want to go. Now it's time to go to the train yard and find your train. If you don't have a copy of the CCG, (and even if you do) you should have done your research via Google Maps, a railroad atlas or other means, and know where the train yard is located in your area.

When you start getting close to the train yard, it's important to remain as inconspicuous as possible. It's not necessary to go into full ninja-mode yet, as you're not technically doing anything illegal until you trespass onto the railroad property, but it's important not to bring attention to yourself before you get there. You don't want the cops eying you when you're trying to crawl through a hole in a fence or doing something else they would consider suspicious.

If you did your research as mentioned before, you should know what directions the trains enter and exit the train yard, where any yard offices might be located (where workers and the bull most often reside) and the best way to approach the yard without being seen.

Good places to hide while waiting for your train are heavily wooded areas, underneath bridges and overpasses, and generally any place where you can have a decent view of the train yard, access to the train you want, and not be seen by the bull. This is where the cat and mouse game begins.

Which Cars to Ride

Now that you've settled into your hiding spot, you can start scoping out the train yard and trying to find a ride going the direction you want to go. You can't just hop on *any* train car, so you're going to want to look out for certain train cars that contain rideable spaces:

[image not archived]

I got off to take this picture of the boxcar we were riding north through Dunsmuir, California in 2006.

Boxcar - The traditional boxcar is easily recognizable from movies and television. This is the classic hobo ride that has existed since the great depression. The boxcar is one of the most common rides you'll find, and is fairly easy to hide in. The floor of a boxcar is quite high off the ground though, so it's recommended to hop in them only when they are stopped.

Jumping into a boxcar that is moving is extremely dangerous.

[image not archived]

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(Top) "Nickel Plate Road Gondola No. 4522" by tvol / Wikimedia Commons - <http://bit.ly/2xW7AT2>; (Bottom) A photo of the inside of a gondola car I took in 2007.

Gondola - This car has four walls and an open top. It's generally used for hauling scrap metal and unusual loads like long strands of re-bar/I-beams, coils of wire, etc. It has ladders on each corner, and foot holds on the inside for climbing in and out.

[image not archived]

Grainer - These cars carry grain and other similar cargo (hence the name). The only spot you can ride on a grainer is on the front or back 'porch', which is a flat spot under the angled portion of the car. Many grainers have no porch at all, just an empty space where a steel floor would be. These are obviously un-rideable. The rideable grainers have not just a floor, but a small hole on each side that is generally big enough for at least one person to crawl into. These holes are ideal hiding spots, but aren't ideal if there's two or more of you.

[image not archived]

I took the above photo from the inside of a cadillac grainer while riding from Baldwin, Florida to New Orleans, Louisiana in 2006.

'Cadillac' Grainer - These are pretty much the same as the car mentioned above, except they have walls on each side where the previously mentioned grainers would be exposed. This makes them ideal for hiding in, since it's really difficult for railroad workers to see you behind the wall. You can also fit multiple (3-4?) people since you'll all be sitting on the porch in relative comfort. Calling this kind of car a 'Cadillac Grainer' is a bit of a hobo joke referring to how easy they are to ride in.

[image not archived]

"The Canadian Wheat Board hopper car" by Robert Taylor Wikimedia Commons - <http://bit.ly/2z0jF9Q>

Canadian Grainer - These are easy to spot since they have fat, rounded sides instead of the straight flat sides of a normal grainer car. In terms of stealth and comfort, these are one of the best rides you can get. Not only do they have an exposed porch to hang out on while you're riding out in the middle of nowhere, they also have holes leading to an inside compartment of the car itself, similar to other grainers. The best part about these compartments is the single hole in the middle of the porch opens up to two relatively large rooms on the left and right of the entrance hole, although some Canadian grainers have two entrance holes that open directly into each room. These rooms are easily big enough

for one or two people and their packs. It is extremely difficult for anyone to see you when riding these cars unless you're outside hanging out on the porch.

[image not archived]

[image not archived]

[image not archived]

(Top) A string of 48/53 cars stopped in Portland, Oregon. (Middle) Two friends of mine sleep in the well of a 48 car. (Bottom) The same two friends mill about the well during a siding in Ohio.

48/53 wells - These cars generally carry the kind of shipping containers that are put on semi trucks and loaded onto ships to send cargo overseas. The car itself is 48 or 53 feet long, and has four walls like a gondola, but is much, much shorter. The cargo is placed in the middle of the car; traditionally the cargo was 40 feet long, leaving about four feet of room on each side (in a 48) inside the car so the doors could be opened for content inspection.

Unfortunately this practice has changed over the past few years so that most railroad companies are placing 48 or 53 foot long cargo boxes in these cars to maximize the amount of cargo being sent. Unfortunately this leaves no room to hide in the wells (since the wells are completely filled), making these cars completely un-ridable (if they're totally filled with cargo).

Despite that, this is still one of the most common rides available on hotshot/intermodal trains (see section Junk vs Hotshot Trains). The most important part of spotting one of these cars is to make sure it has a solid floor. More and more of these cars are showing up with holes cut in the floor. My only guess as to why this is happen is to cut down on the weight of the car and therefore the fuel spent shipping cargo.

[image not archived]

Piggybacks - These are simply semi-truck trailers complete with wheels and all, placed on flatbed train cars. In the past hobos would ride between the wheels of the trailer to not be seen. This still provides poor coverage in my opinion, so I've never really been a huge fan of riding these cars.

That said, an interesting change that's occurred in the past five years or so (largely due to high gas prices) is the use of air skirts on semi-truck trailers. These thin, hard pieces of plastic are placed on the left and right under sides of the trailer to make it more aerodynamic. They also just happen to extend down almost all the way to the floor of the train car, creating a huge expansion in the amount of space available to hide yourself in.

[image not archived]

[image not archived]

I couldn't find an exterior shot of a pig in a blanket, so above are two photos I took from the inside of one while riding down the east coast in 2005. Note that while there is open space in the middle there was still plenty of space to ride safely without being seen.

Pig in a blanket - I don't know many folks that actually call this a 'pig in a blanket', that's just my own term since I think it sounds funny. This setup is essentially the same as a 48/53 car, but the cargo trailer has the wheels and all still attached like in the piggyback example. These cars usually have the well floor intact, but it's pretty common to see a big open space between the wheels of the semi-truck trailer itself.

Junk vs Hotshot Trains

[image not archived]

Trains that are made up of mostly boxcars, gondolas, grainers, oil cars, lumber, and other train cars are referred to as 'junk'. Junk trains are good for going short to medium distances, but make lots of stops to 'work' (take cars on and off in train yards) and often get broken up entirely in some areas. They're also fairly low priority, meaning they will stop at sidings a lot to wait for other (higher priority) trains to pass.

[image not archived]

"Freight train in Tucson Arizona 2" by Simeon87 / Wikimedia Commons - <http://bit.ly/2knCUXA>

Hotshots on the other hand are high priority freight that needs to go from point A to B as quickly as possible. This is usually more expensive or time sensitive cargo. These trains are made up of almost always the same type of car throughout the train, although minor variations are common, such as a train made up of 90% 48/53 cars with a few piggybacks in between (or vice versa). This makes hotshots fairly easy to spot. These trains can be most commonly found along the main train routes we covered earlier and are the best choice for going long distances in a short amount of time.

Riding Suicide

[image not archived]

Photo by Mike Brodie - <http://mikebrodie.net>

You might have seen this picture by the Polaroid Kidd in the news and other media. This is known as 'riding suicide' or riding in a 48/53 train car with no floor in it. I think the media picked up on this image more than any other since it depicts some pretty daring and dangerous shit, and in a way romanticizes the lifestyle more than it should be.

Since there's been a dangerous rise of people doing this over the past decade or so, I want to make it very clear that riding suicide is called that for a very good reason. To do so is the height of stupidity, and many, many people have died this way. No matter how desperate you are to leave where you are, wait for the next train. It isn't worth it.

Loaded Train Cars

You should absolutely not ride on any car that is loaded with cargo. It might seem safe to ride in a gondola full of steel i-beams (they're too heavy to move, right?) but loads have been known to shift, and sadly, a few train riders have watched their friends get crushed to death when riding in these kinds of loaded cars. Don't do it, there's plenty of other empty cars for you to ride in.

The Waiting Game

Something you should know about train hopping that no one really mentions or talks about is just how *long* you're going to have to wait for the right train. You're literally going to spend about 90% of your time waiting for the right train to show up, and 10% of your time actually riding trains. It's not unusual to have to wait as long as a few days for the right train to come along. If you're in a bad spot, it's possible the 'right train' will *never* show. In my personal experience, I've had to wait an average of one and a half days for a train going the direction I wanted to show up.

As you can see, this is not a game for the impatient.

Which Train to Get On

The train you want is going to depend on where you're located in the world and where the trains are entering and exiting the yard. Some train yards are more obvious than others. For example, in Roseville, California, trains going north are going to have a lot of empty lumber cars on them, since they'll be bringing back wood from the Pacific Northwest for the endless urban sprawl of California. The nasty trick of this yard is that these trains going north actually exit the yard going south (to Sacramento, then curve back up north). Whatever yard you're in might have similar nuances, so you'll have to do the research necessary to find out.

[image not archived]

[image not archived]

(Top) "FRED Southern Pacific 4449" by *benagain_photos* / *WikiMedia Commons* - <http://bit.ly/2wy3ChZ>; (Bottom) "FRED on a stack train" by *slambo* / *WikiMedia Commons* - <http://bit.ly/2fTuk1f>

Sometimes trains are so long it's hard to see if it has an engine (most commonly called a 'unit') attached to the front, so it's necessary to keep an eye out for the red lights rail companies put on the end of the train. These are commonly referred to as 'FRED's' (supposedly called 'fucking rear end devices' by hobos) and are only put on trains that are fairly close (within a few hours) to leaving the yard. You can think of a FRED as a train's tail light (just like a car) and they're a good way to know if a train is leaving soon, and what direction it will be leaving the yard, based on what end of the train it is being placed on.

For example, if the train yard has tracks exiting both north and south, and the train you want to ride has a FRED attached to the south end of the train, that train is most likely going to be heading north, since the unit that will be pulling the train will be on the opposite side.

[image not archived]

Most train yards have two 'main line' tracks. These are the tracks that trains line up on before leaving the yard, and are usually located on the outside of the yard (i.e. not in the middle). In Eugene, Oregon for example, the two main lines are closest to the road, and all the other tracks where the trains work can be found behind those. In some yards, waiting for something to stop on the main line tracks is your best bet for catching out.

Boarding the Train

Once you've found the train you want, and the train car you want to get on, it's time to get on that damn thing and start your first ride. You might be wondering if you should wait until the train is about to leave before getting on, or if you should get on right away and wait for it to take off. This depends entirely on the situation, but I would usually suggest just getting on the train and waiting for it to leave. The exception to this is if the train is being 'worked' (moved around and cars taken on/off a lot) then you might want to wait, especially if it's likely you'll be seen by workers while the train is moving around. Use your best judgment and don't get caught.

Remember, when you get caught, it makes it harder for the rest of us, so be ninja!

Your hiding spot is likely going to be right outside the yard, so you might have to run across an open area to get to the train you want. There will be railroad workers driving around in addition to the railroad police (aka 'The Bull') so make sure the coast is clear and that you will not be seen running up to the train. Do not casually stroll into the yard like you own the place. Once you step into the yard, you've technically committed a 'crime' (trespassing) so this is where you have to be on your toes and ready to haul ass if you don't want to go to jail.

Also, don't assume rail workers are going to be cool with your presence. If they see you there's a very big chance they're going to call the bull or town police on you (if the yard doesn't have a dedicated bull). Although some workers are cool and will help you out, you should assume they will report you. Some railroad companies are even rumored to have paid incentives for employees that report trespassers.

It's much easier to sneak around trains at night than it is during the day, so if you can, catch your train while it's dark. If you're running between two strings of cars you can easily keep the train between you and any railroad worker trucks going by. Keep an eye out for brakemen and other railroad workers behind and ahead of you as you make your way down the train looking for a rideable car. Once you find a good ride, get in as quietly and with as little fuss as possible. Once inside the car, wait patiently and don't make any loud noises until your train leaves. It's a good idea to wait until you're at least a few (10+) miles out of the yard before poking your head up.

Catching on the Fly

If you're new to train hopping, you should absolutely do everything you can to avoid hopping on a moving train. This where 90% of people get killed or come away with a severed limb. I'll say it again, no train ride is worth your life. If for whatever reason you're found yourself in a situation in which you absolutely *must* hop a train on the fly, This is the best way to do it:

1. Make sure the train isn't going faster than you're comfortable with. Some say if you can't count the amount of bolts on the wheel of the train car while it's going by, it's going too fast. I think this is a good indicator, but if you want a numeric number, I'd say don't hop anything going faster than five miles an hour. This barely feels like anything in a car, but your small fragile body is nothing compared to the thousands of pounds of steel in motion before you. If you hop a train going too fast, you will hurt yourself or possibly be killed.

2. You should be running alongside the train at the same speed the train is going and next to the ladder of the train car you're trying to get on. Be aware of any obstacles that may be ahead of you, such as light poles, railroad equipment, etc.

3. Grab onto the ladder with one hand. Do not grab it with both hands. If a train is going too fast and you latch onto the rung of the ladder with two hands, it's entirely likely the train will pull you off your feet, or at the very least pull you off your footing before you let go, making you fall. Keep in mind you are very close to the train wheels that can cut off a limb or cut you in half.

4. When you grab the rung with one hand, you can maintain balance on your feet while holding onto the rung to see if it takes off without you. If the train is going too fast for you to catch, you can simply let go with the holding hand and run at an angle in a direction away from the train.

5. If you can hold onto the ladder rung with one hand and maintain pace with the train, *only then* should you grab the ladder rung with your other hand. At this point if the train suddenly picks up speed, you can still release both hands and run away from the train.

6. Now with both hands hanging on to the ladder rung, you can lift yourself up while putting your first foot onto the lowest rung in the ladder. Assuming you don't slip or something else goes wrong, immediately pull your other leg up and onto the bottom rung of the ladder. This should all be done in one swift motion, with whatever leg is closest to the train first (i.e. if the train is on your right, jump onto the rung with your right foot first, bringing up your left immediately afterwards). At this point you're pretty much committed, so make sure to climb up the ladder and into the car as fast as you can, since it's possible that an obstruction like a light pole, railroad equipment, or even a tunnel could be coming and hit you or your backpack (remember how you're supposed to be looking out for that stuff in step two?).

To review (assuming the train you're running alongside is on your right) the procedure is right hand first, left hand second, right foot third, and left foot last. If you'd like to see a fantastic example of how NOT to hop a train, check out this horrible Bear Grylls video:

<https://youtu.be/BucvYzYbh9Q>

Bear Grylls is a fucking idiot. Don't be like Bear Grylls.

A note on hopping a moving train with multiple people: This is another good reason to not catch on the fly, as the more people you're with, the longer it takes to get all of them on a (moving) train. The longer it takes, the longer you're in the danger zone (i.e. close to the tracks/train wheels) and this is something you absolutely want to minimize.

If you are catching on the fly with more than one person, make sure the *least experienced* person goes first, followed by the most experienced helping them up. This is because if something happens (e.g.

they slip on a ladder rung and fall) there's at least a possibility the person behind them can catch them, or pick them up, or move them to safety before they get crushed or cut in half.

Ride Baby, Ride!

So you're finally on the train. Great! Congratulations. Here's how not to get caught and have all your fun ruined.

First, as mentioned before, keep your head down. Fight all that intense curiosity to see what's flying by until you're well outside the train yard, and in some places, outside the city completely! You've gone to a lot of work and risk to get where you are right now, so don't ruin it by getting seen right off the bat.

Once you're a few miles out of the train yard, it's probably safe to take a little peek and see what's out there. If it's safe to do so, you can start enjoying the ride and watch the scenery go by. It's important to be vigilant though, and keep an eye out for what's coming up ahead.

Any time you see a road crossing over the tracks you should duck down and make sure you're not seen by someone in a car waiting for your train to pass. The last thing you need is some idiot with a cell phone and nothing better to do calling the police about someone illegally riding on a train (it happens more often than you'd think).

If there's more than one of you, one person should be on each side of the train and ready to call out to the other 'car!' or 'train yard!' or whatever it is that's coming up so you both can duck and not be seen.

[image not archived]

You should also be wary of other freight trains passing by. It's possible for the conductor or engineer to see you, especially from their elevated height in the unit. If you see a train coming towards you on another track, make sure to call out 'train' to your friends (if not traveling alone) and you should all duck where you won't be seen. On cars with open tops (like gondolas) you should all press yourselves against the side of the car closest to the passing train. If the passing train is going slow enough, you might want to drag your gear over to that side with you so they won't see it as they pass by.

What to do When Seen

Accidents happen. No matter how ninja you are, it's likely you're going to get seen by someone at some point. That does not mean you shouldn't try to be stealth. However, if you do get seen, it's important to act like you're having fun and not being suspicious, so you don't get mistaken for a terrorist planting a bomb or something. Make sure to give a big smile, wave, make eye contact, and use your body language to convey friendliness as much as you can in the few seconds you have between being seen and when the person is out of view.

When you've been seen, you've been seen. There's nothing you can do about it, so don't panic and scurry away, it comes off as suspicious, and conveys to people that you know you're doing something illegal, which makes you even more suspect. Use the few seconds you're being friendly to judge whether or not this person is going to report you. If they smile, seem friendly, and wave, there's a good chance they don't care about what you're doing right now and will go on with their lives with maybe a quick story to tell their friends at lunch. If they come off as negative in any way, you should consider getting off the train at the nearest opportunity.

It's possible you might get seen by a railroad worker while your train sits in a yard, or when a train passes by. If this happens, use your best judgment to decide whether it's time to leave or not. It sucks giving up a ride, but it's better than spending a few weeks in jail. Most of the time workers will ask you to leave. If this happens, be as polite as you can. Keep in mind that when you get caught, you're not only making it harder for train hoppers to ride in the long term (more trespassing incidents lead to increased security), but you're also holding things up and being an immediate pain in the ass to everyone working in the train yard.

In my experience it helps to let these workers know you're sorry and you're going to get out of their way as quickly as possible. Saying something like, "I'm sorry man, I didn't mean to cause you any trouble," while making a polite exit usually works wonders towards conveying you're not going to be a problem for them.

Tracking Your Location

Now in today's age of cheaply available technology, it's likely you already have a cell phone with some kind of cheap GPS tracker on it. If so, awesome, good for you! You're set. For the rest of you, here's a few ways to keep track of where you are in the world and hopefully figure out where you're headed.

The most basic way of tracking your location is to look at your pocket road atlas (you brought one, right?). You should be able to spot landmarks such as water towers or business names that include the city's name you're traveling through at that moment. This will work almost anywhere, although you might have a few questionable hours between major cities. Even if you have a smart phone, you should always be carrying a pocket atlas as a backup.

Another option would be a cheap handheld hiking GPS unit like the the Lowrance iFinder GO. You can get one for about \$30 and it's powered by two AA batteries. It has basic train lines in it and major highways. It needs a clear view of the sky and takes a while to get a GPS lock, but it's cheap.

Even if you don't have a data plan, as long as you have a smart phone with a GPS, there's lots of apps out there that will let you download maps for offline use. Do a little looking online and you're bound to find one you like.

What are Sidings?

Railroad sidings are places where the train tracks split from one into two separate parallel tracks for a short distance, then merge back into one. This is where trains can pull over to the 'side' and stop to wait for higher priority trains to pass.

[image not archived]

Sidings can be almost anywhere, but most commonly they are found outside of cities and in the middle of nowhere. Some sidings will have railroad traffic lights signaling whether another train is coming from the opposite direction. Trains don't always side for oncoming trains, on occasion your train might stop to let another higher priority train go by that is behind yours. For this reason, make sure to always keep any eye on each direction of the tracks and hide from any oncoming trains that might be approaching.

Unfortunately sidings can be a little unreliable in terms of how long you'll be sitting there waiting for another train to pass. The majority of the time it won't be more than a few minutes, but it's possible to be sided for hours at a time, so if that happens, don't panic.

A good indicator that your train is about to leave is when you hear the air brakes go off, a kind of sudden hissing sound coming from each of the train cars. If you hear this sound and you're not on the train (answering the call of nature perhaps) you need to get back on ASAP before it takes off without you.

Taking a Dump

I know someone is going to be curious about this, so here's how relieving yourself works while train hopping. Taking a leak is easy if you can wait until the train stops. If you can't, just do your best to aim off the train and be careful! This is obviously a little more difficult for the female-bodied people out there, so you might want to think about getting a female urinary device that allows you to pee standing up.

As for the good 'ol number two, most of the time you're going to find yourself pooping in plastic bag, so make sure to bring a few. You could wait for a siding to do this as well, but sidings are generally so short you're going to end up pinching it off in an unpleasant hurry.

When pooping in a plastic bag your travel buddies might poke fun at you as they face the other direction, but trust me, their turn to do so will come up eventually, so have your poop jokes ready.

Transferring Cars & Luggage

So for whatever reason, if it makes sense for one of you to scout around and the others to wait in your train car you should already have a plan agreed upon with your travel partners before the train stops. Generally the best policy is to have your friends throw your gear off the train if it takes off without you. This way you might be stranded (and alone), but at least you're not stranded without your gear.

Of course, if the train starts leaving and you can't catch up to your buddies, you might want to get on the closest train car and have your them hang onto your gear. It's up to you to decide what plan best fits your situation.

Dispelling a few Myths

Probably one of the most popular myths in train hopping culture is train tunnels. You'll often hear that you have to wear a bandanna around your face in tunnels or possibly choke to death. This is simply not true. There is not a single train tunnel in the entire United States long enough to trap enough carbon monoxide to kill you. Not one.

That said, there is supposedly one train tunnel east of Vancouver, BC on the Canadian High Line that is somewhat dangerous. Apparently it corkscrews through a mountain and is several miles long. Allegedly they need to air it out with big fans every time a train passes through.

These are all rumors and I have not ridden this line myself; I have one friend who slept through it and didn't die, so when you hear them, take these rumors with a grain of salt.

Another popular question I get is about x-ray machines, heat detectors, and other kinds of high-end equipment used for detecting train riders. Overall, it is safe to assume that 95% of these rumors are just that. In eight years of train hopping across the USA I've never been caught by one of these things nor seen one, or know anyone that has been; when people tell me these stories, they are almost always third or fourth hand.

Of course, if you're crossing international borders on a train security measures are more extensive and these things could exist, I don't know.

How to Get Off the Train

So you've managed to make it to your destination unseen, saw some great scenery, and generally had a fun ride. Congrats! Your train is now pulling into your destination, most likely in a train yard.

It's possible, if you had a GPS (so you know how close you are), and sided outside of town that it might be a good idea of get off there and hike into town, depending on your location, situation, and how difficult it is to get out of the train yard where you're arriving.

Most likely though, you're going to be pulling into a train yard before you have a chance to get off the train. It would be a shame to go all this way to get caught now, so turn on ninja mode, and make sure you aren't seen leaving the yard.

It's likely that most of the time you'll be hopping off the train on the fly since you're trying to get off before the train makes it's way deep into the middle of the train yard. Remember it's better to wait for the train to come to a full stop and make your way out of a complicated train yard than it is to hop off a train going too fast and seriously injure yourself.

Your first task is to make sure the train isn't going too fast. Watch the rocks below and judge if that's faster than you can move your legs. Assuming the train is going slow enough, make sure to throw your pack off the train first; wearing it on your back while hopping off a train increases your chances of getting caught on something as you jump off.

If your pack does three or four barrel rolls next the train, your train is going too fast. I've had this happen to me, but unfortunately I didn't want to lose my gear, so I was basically committed to getting off right then. A few seconds later I dusted myself off with a busted finger and some seriously bruised pride.

Once your pack is out, you're going to want to jump off the train with your legs already running and ready to catch the ground. Assuming the train is going slow enough and you do this properly, you should be able to safely get off without hurting yourself.

It's important to run at an angle pointing *away* from the train when you land, since this will put the maximum amount of distance between yourself and the train as quickly as possible.

Congratulations! You've completed your first train ride. Make your way out of the train yard as quickly as possible to ensure you're not busted by the yard bull or local police.

Additional Resources

While we've covered quite a bit of information on train hopping already, we've really only skimmed the surface, so here is a few additional resources you can study up on to learn more.

Hopping Freight Trains in America by Duffy Littlejohn - This is probably the most complete guide to riding freight trains available today. A whopping 353 pages covers much more than I could possibly include in this book. Unfortunately it is only available in paperback and there are not a lot of copies floating around.

<http://amzn.to/2pavmbD>

Open Railway Map - This is an incredibly detailed online map of the world's railway infrastructure, built on OpenStreetMap data. This is possibly one of the best resources available for figuring out where trains go. There's even a mobile version available for checking out one your phone.

<http://www.openrailwaymap.org> <http://www.openrailwaymap.org/mobile.php>(mobile version)

So You Want to Have a Train Hopping Dog by Johnny P - This is a great article about training your dog to ride freight trains. It includes the kinds of dogs and behavior you'd want in a train hopping dog and includes some techniques for training your dog for a life on the rails so they don't get hurt.

<https://squattheplanet.com/threads/so-you-want-to-have-a-trainhopping-dog.21064/>

StP Train Hopping Forum - The train hopping forum on Squat the Planet remains one of the only message boards on the subject that is open to everyone. We've blocked Google indexing and guest viewing to keep discussions out of the public eye, so you'll have to sign up for a free account to view this area.

<http://squattheplanet.com/train-hopping>

10. Rubber Tramping

What is Rubber Tramping?

A rubber tramp is a person who travels and lives out of their vehicle. The phrase is an offshoot of the term 'leather tramp' which hobos used to describe people that mostly walk or hitchhike when traveling. Most rubber tramps are very nomadic, often moving around with the seasons as they please. About any kind of motorized vehicle can be used for rubber tramping, from the traditional RV to even a motorcycle. Compared to every other form of travel mentioned in this book, it's probably the easiest to start out with, especially if you're looking to spend a few weeks going across the country. For the purposes of this book though, I'll be approaching this subject with the assumption that you want to travel this way for an extended period of time.

As mentioned in the Avoiding Rent portion of this book, housing costs are generally the biggest source of living expenses, often taking up 50% or more of your total monthly income. Living in a van or other vehicle can slash your expenses dramatically! Free parking is almost always possible even in big cities, and even if you were to pay for a parking spot, it would easily be only a fraction of what you'd pay to rent an apartment. Living in your vehicle also removes expenses like utility bills, buying furniture, etc. Eliminating these costs of living from your life helps save money for other things like traveling abroad, buying land, or any other goal you might have in mind.

Now if you combine saving money and frugal living with traveling around the country and perhaps Working Seasonally, you can start to see how becoming a rubber tramp can be an ideal way to live. Unlike other forms of travel like hitchhiking and train hopping, you'll have a roof over your head that you can take with you anywhere you go.

What Kind of Vehicle?

If you've decided on rubber tramping as your main mode of transportation, you have several kinds of vehicles to choose from. Here's a list of the ones you'll most often come across, and some of the pros and cons of each.

[image not archived]

Recreational Vehicles (RV) - The most common and traditional vehicles for those interested in living on the road. They vary in size from truck bed campers to full on half-million dollar houses on wheels. With the exception of the latter, RVs are generally reasonably priced and easy to find, especially if it is an older model. At the time of this writing, expect the price range for most used RVs to run between two and ten thousand dollars, although some truck bed campers can be purchased for far less.

The main advantages of living in an RV is space and comfort. If you have a lot of stuff, or having a kitchen or bathroom is important to you, this is probably your best option. Also, with all that extra space, it's easy to take multiple people on long trips, which is nice if you like traveling in groups.

Disadvantages to RVs include poor gas mileage, and most models in our price range are gasoline engines, which generally require more maintenance than diesel engines. Older models will usually have interiors that are falling apart and appliances that might need repair. RVs are also usually quite large; this can make them difficult to park and makes it near impossible to hide the fact that you're living in it.

[image not archived]

School Buses - This is my personal favorite category of vehicle, as I've owned one full size school bus in my life so far, and it was a very positive experience. Buying a school bus is much like buying a boat in a bad economy; it's a buyer's market, since no one in their right mind wants a vehicle that big unless they have a specific purpose for it. This has driven the price on school buses and other similar vehicles (such as public transit buses and shuttles) down to ridiculously low sums of money when compared to the quality of the parts you're getting both inside and outside of the vehicle. This is a result of the high standards put forth by the Department of Transportation, which require these vehicles to be extremely well maintained as long as they are in service.

For example, when I purchased my 1995 Carpenter school bus on eBay, I paid a paltry 1,800 dollars for it. It had an automatic Allison transmission (recently rebuilt) with a Cummins diesel engine that had less than 120,000 miles on it. This was a steal since most diesel engines can go as far as half a million miles before requiring replacement. In the two years I owned the vehicle I never had to do a single repair (other than fluid changes). While I was extremely lucky in buying my bus, I believe you can expect similar results without having to pay any more than five thousand dollars. Essentially, you're getting an RV in much better mechanical shape, and at a fraction of the price.

School buses are ideal if you want to customize your living space, since you can literally tear out the seats and build it however you want. I've seen people do crazy things with that much space, including gardens, building a garage for motorcycles, and even a pen for animals (although I can't recommend doing that). Everyone loves a well built school bus, and they are great for throwing parties.

A few disadvantages of school buses include that like RVs, they are incredibly obvious, and sometimes can be a cop magnet. Unfortunately I've had more than one shitty neighbor complain to the police about my bus being parked in their neighborhood, even though I wasn't doing anything wrong. Also, full size school buses are huge vehicles, so you have to plan accordingly when driving, and parking can be a big hassle. Unless you have a specific reason for getting a full size school bus, you might want to go with the smaller 'short bus' variety.

[image not archived]

“Freightliner Business Class M2 box rigid” by Mr.Choppers / Wikimedia Commons - <http://bit.ly/2fS2d2m>

Box Trucks - These deserve their own category only because they can be obtained for a reasonable price and offer the maximum amount of stealth when camping in a city. I mean seriously, when is the last time you looked twice at a plain old white box truck? Almost everyone is programmed to ignore these things by default, so it's very unlikely anyone will notice you living in one, even if you build a door into the side of the cargo area. If you're looking to build your own home from scratch, you really can't ask for a better template to work from. Some disadvantages include not having windows (you could put your own in) and some box trucks don't offer the ability to go from the front cab of the vehicle to the rear without getting out of the vehicle entirely. Otherwise, they offer similar gas mileage as an RV with an awesome amount of living space to work with.

[image not archived]

Van Dwelling - The majority of rubber trampers you'll come across travel in vans due to the good balance between space and gas mileage. Vans are incredibly common and for the most part are easy to maintain. Most vans are also great for stealth camping, meaning that (with proper precautions) it's harder for people to tell that you're living in a van than it is with other vehicles. There are a thousand different kinds of vans, ranging from huge Sprinter cargo vans with lots of head room to tiny stealth vehicles like the Ford Astro Van.

Living in a van means having less space to store things, and most vans only have enough room for one or two people; this is fine for couples, but things get crowded pretty quickly when traveling with a large group of people in one vehicle.

[image not archived]

Car Living - Sleeping in most cars is usually a last resort for those really on the down and out. Since there is so little space it makes it both incredibly uncomfortable to sleep, and also very obvious that you're doing so. If you decide to sleep in your car, expect to be woken up by police and told to move along quite frequently. Overall, the main advantage of car living is cars can be very cheap to obtain, but you're probably better off saving up a little more money to buy a decent van.

There are of course exceptions; I've had one friend remove the passenger seat in his Ford Geo and build a bed there making it more livable. Alternatively, there's lots of cars out there that have more room to sleep in, like a Ford Explorer, or a Subaru Outback station wagon. Still though, you should only consider this option for short trips across the country where you'll have places to stay.

[image not archived]

Motorcycles - There are still thousands of people who travel across the country via motorcycle, and plenty of movies have been made depicting the biker experience, the most famous of which is probably *Easy Rider (1969)* (www.imdb.com/title/tt0064276). A motorcycle is an option for loners or those interested in living a minimal existence; there's not room for much more than a sleeping bag, tent, and small bag of clothes on all but the biggest cross country motorcycles. The advantage of this form of travel is your gas mileage will be exceptional; expect to get as much as 50+ miles a gallon. Of course you'll have to balance this out with the disadvantage of having to find a place to camp out each night, either in the woods or paying for a hotel.

[image not archived]

Mopeds - It might sound silly, but mopeds can and *have* been driven across the United States on many occasions. They share almost all the same disadvantages of motorcycles along with requiring more maintenance, but they also get better gas mileage, some as high as 75+ miles a gallon. In addition, most states have very lenient laws for mopeds, and some states have no restrictions, license, or insurance requirements at all.

Unfortunately, most moped engines aren't known to go past ten thousand miles without requiring heavy maintenance or complete replacement. Finally, you'll be restricted to highways instead of freeways

most of the time due to the limited power of a moped engine. Besides, driving over forty miles an hour on a moped can be downright frightening, so I can't recommend doing it.

Finding a Vehicle

Once you have the money ready, it's a bit of a daunting task to find your new home on wheels, so here's a few starting points I hope you'll find useful.

Craigslist (www.craigslist.org) - This is your best bet for finding a good deal on a vehicle. This is possibly the largest free classifieds website in the world, and was built specifically to connect buyers with sellers or other services. You can get constant updates using their RSS feeds (see Researching Destinationssection) or even better, try using one of the mobile apps available for accessing the Craigslist website, since many of them support the ability to alert you instantly when new ads get posted.

Search Tempest (www.searchtempest.com) - One of the only drawbacks to using Craigslist is it's specifically meant for connecting people *locally*, so there's no way to search all ads across the country/world. Search Tempest solves that problem by submitting your search to all CL websites within a certain distance, or even in a whole state. This makes it a good resource for finding your next vehicle if you don't mind traveling long distances to pick it up.

GovDeals (www.govdeals.com) - This website takes an auction style approach to selling items rather than listing them for a set price. All of the auctions listed on this site are from city or federal government liquidations, so it's a decent place to find vehicles recently in service (and therefore well maintained). The best vehicles on this website tend to be mostly school and city transit buses, although some cargo vans can be found in decent shape as well.

eBay Motors (www.ebay.com/motors) - You've probably heard of the biggest auction site on the internet, and they obviously have the biggest listing of automobiles for sale in the world. This website will probably have the largest variety of options, as you'll be able to find anything from motorcycles to class b vans for sale to the highest bidder or at a flat rate price. Some are sold by the current owner, others by auto dealers, so make sure to do your research and ask questions!

Used Car Dealer - If you can stand up to high pressure sales pitches, your local used car dealer might be worth a look. A lot of these places offer financing if that's something you're interested in doing. Make sure to have the vehicle checked by a mechanic before you invest in something you might be paying off for quite some time.

Buying a Vehicle

There's definitely a few things you should be aware of when shopping for a new vehicle. The two best pieces of advice I can give is to be *patient*, and *always* get a vehicle checked out by a mechanic before buying it. I got spoiled on my first experience buying a school bus on eBay; I lucked out and it was in fantastic shape. When I went to buy a short bus years later, I didn't get it checked by a mechanic beforehand. I wasn't patient, and like an idiot I just assumed everything would work out.

Despite the owner's assurances that I would be able to get it home without any issues, I couldn't get the damn thing to hobble even half of the 400 miles back to my house and it turned out to be a complete piece of junk. If I'm to be completely honest, I sobbed my heart out as a tow truck hauled away my 1,500 dollar investment to the junk yard hours after buying it.

Don't make the same mistake I did. *Always* have a few extra hundred dollars saved specifically for hiring a mechanic to make sure you're not getting royally fucked. It will honestly be the best investment you'll make in any vehicle that might become your new home.

Also, try and buy as new a vehicle as you can afford. While some will lament the days of precomputerized engines, the reality is newer vehicles will pollute less, get better gas mileage, and generally have fewer problems than older models. If at all possible, try to make sure it uses fuel injection rather than a carburetor, and buy a 1996 or newer vehicle with the fewest number of miles your budget will allow.

In 1996 a major advance in engines occurred when nearly all vehicles were required to have On Board Diagnostics Second Edition (OBD II). This is basically the computer that controls the engine and is responsible for getting better gas mileage in addition to giving a mechanic the ability to plug directly into it so they can know the exact status of the engine.

Vehicle Insurance

Unfortunately in the United States of America, it is 100% illegal to not have car insurance when operating a vehicle. In some states it is so illegal they will impound your vehicle and arrest you for not having it. In my opinion the concept of being *forced* to buy *any* corporation's business is the equivalent of a racketeering scam, but that's the world we currently live in.

If you're living in your vehicle, you're going to have to accept this as one of your living costs. Something you might try in order to lower this cost is to register your vehicle as a 'Recreational Vehicle'. If your chosen transport is an RV, then you're already set, but many other vehicles can be registered as 'recreational' by meeting certain requirements. Sometimes it might be as simple as installing a bed in the back, so check to see what your state's requirements are.

The advantage of registering your vehicle as an RV is that most insurance companies will assume you will be driving it only on vacations and weekends. Less miles driven equals a smaller chance you'll be involved in an accident, so most companies will charge you far less for coverage. This can save you a lot of money in the long run, so don't overlook this possibility!

Also, if you can register your vehicle in a state like North Dakota (which has a lower rate of accidents) this can possibly lower your insurance costs as well.

Moving In

So assuming you didn't get a motorcycle, moped, or other exceptionally small vehicle, you should be ready to move in and make it your new home. I'm going to work from the assumption that you're living in a van, and leave it up to you to adapt any of these ideas to your own circumstances.

Before you even begin, you might want to look at other van conversion and 'van dwelling' websites online for inspiration. Reddit, Pinterest, and the Cheap RV Living website are resources for this (links at the end of the chapter).

First, you're probably going to want to remove the seats. Most vans will have seats that come out fairly easy, and some will have a back seat that folds down to make a bed. It might be tempting to keep this, but ultimately removing it and building your own bed will save space, create more storage underneath, and overall make the bed more comfortable.

Second, you'll want to cover the windows. Especially when sleeping in urban areas, you'll want to avoid attracting attention to yourself so you don't get bothered by the police. A lot of cities have completely unreasonable laws towards people living in their vehicles (they consider you to be 'homeless') so placing some kind of covering over your windows will help avoid this kind of harassment.

Reflectix (www.amzn.to/2jDYFAB) is one the best products available for doing this, since it's a layer of bubble wrap sandwiched between two layers of heavy aluminum foil material. It's about impossible to see through and it does a fantastic job of keeping your vehicle cool in the summer and warm during the winter.

Next, you should create a divider of some kind between your front seats and the back of the vehicle where you'll be sleeping. This can be done by hanging a thick curtain behind the front seats, and doing your best to make sure it somehow seals up enough that light from inside your living space doesn't leak out. You can do this with buttons, Velcro, or even magnets depending on your vehicle and situation.

Your bed is where you'll be spending the most time in your vehicle when not driving, so build it well! Depending on the type of space you're working with, you'll want to either place it length wise along one side, or across the back from wall to wall. Personally I think the latter is best in most situations, but do what works for you!

Last, you'll want to move the rest of your stuff in and organize it. Unless you enjoy wallowing in piles of belongings, it's going to really pay off to keep things as organized as possible.

Drawers under the bed, shoe holders for hygienic supplies, maybe a sink/stove area, etcetera. There's all kinds of things you can do at this point, and countless articles online you can look to for ideas, so do your research.

Stealth Parking

As mentioned before, many cities will ticket you for sleeping in your vehicle. In my opinion is this an attempt to get homeless people to leave the city without addressing the underlying problems of homelessness. To many people, out of sight equals out of mind, so therefore problem ‘solved’.

Unfortunately this causes people like ourselves to be harassed as well, since most ‘normal’ people and law enforcement can’t wrap their heads around this lifestyle. Putting forth some effort to fly under the radar will go a long way towards making sure you don’t get harassed or fined.

Unfortunately some vehicles are natural cop magnets, such as a school bus or a tie dyed Volkswagen bus, and there’s not much you can do about that besides park somewhere out of the way where it’s less likely you’ll be noticed. Choosing a vehicle that blends into the environment is something to consider, and not plastering it with things like bumper stickers will avoid drawing attention to yourself.

Cops also tend to be attracted to vehicles in poor condition, and will pay special attention to yours if it’s a beat up piece of crap. Older vehicles are more likely to be owned by someone that’s late on their insurance payment or vehicle registration and cops love taking advantage of this. If you own an older vehicle, try to keep it in good condition so it’s less of an eyesore.

Similar to squatting, you’ll attract less attention if you come back to your home late at night and leave it early before most people are awake. This will help extend the amount of time you can stay in one place without being noticed.

Keep moving. This is especially true if you’re living in a larger vehicle or something obvious like a school bus, but the longer you stay in one spot, the more likely it is you’re going to run into trouble. Try to move your vehicle to a new spot every two or three days, and have several spots (5 to 10 at least) around the city you can rotate through if you’re going to be there for a while.

At some point you’re inevitably going to be roused by the police and asked why you’re sleeping in your vehicle. It always pays to have a story ready based on the place you’ve chosen to park. For example, if you’re in a Walmart parking lot, have your previous destination and next destination ready along with a story to tell the officer. Even if they’re kicking you out of your current spot, if your story makes sense and you’re polite, they *might* suggest a better spot you can sleep at near by.

Creative camouflage isn’t a bad idea if it makes sense. If you’re living in a plain white cargo van, putting a magnetic sign on the side advertising yourself as an electrician or something similar allows you to blend into your surroundings a little bit more.

Parking can be a bit of a challenge at first, but eventually you’ll learn what works and what doesn’t for the kind of vehicle you’re driving. When I had my school bus, industrial areas worked quite well since hardly anyone was around and there were several other semi-trucks and box trucks parked around the area at night. If you *do* happen to have a box truck you probably couldn’t ask for a better place to park in the city.

Otherwise, smaller vehicles like vans that can fit into normal parking spots should consider the following list of parking spots.

Since 24 hour grocery stores and restaurants are open all day and night, they are decent places to park since no one is likely to notice you amongst all the other people coming and going, especially if you’re there for one night at a time.

Walmart has long been a refuge of the rubber tramper, since most stores have a policy allowing campers to stay over night in their parking lots. In recent years though many stores have been revoking this policy, so you should go inside and ask if you’re unsure.

Auto Repair Shops have many kinds of cars parked around their garages waiting for repair, so you can park next to these cars and most will assume you're in line to be repaired with the others.

Often times you'll see old parking lots that aren't in use by anyone except a few people parking their cars there and putting 'for sale' signs on them. Generally these lots aren't owned by anyone and locals have figured out that they can park there to advertise the automobile they are selling. It's fairly easy to slip in and just look like another car for sale.

Residential Areas will probably be the most common places you'll find free parking if you have a reasonably sized vehicle. As long as you're quiet and don't bring attention to yourself, it's unlikely anyone will notice you.

Boondocking

In the world of rubber tramping, the term boondocking means to camp on public land without paying for a campsite. This is obviously ideal to our goals of living cheaply, so you should try to do this as much as possible when you're outside the city.

All across the country there are National Forests and BLM (Bureau of Land Management) land that's open to the public for recreation. You've probably already been to one of these and stayed at one of their many paid campgrounds. In addition to these paid spots, most national forests have areas for what's called 'dispersed camping' which means these areas usually have no services like bathrooms, electricity, or water. These are 'unofficial' campgrounds, and are available in almost all public lands.

If you're in one of these public lands, all you have to do is drive down the road until you're far enough away from other people and find a good spot to set up camp. While laws vary from place to place (always do your research!), on most BLM land you can stay in that spot up to fourteen days before you have to move somewhere else. As long as you keep moving, you can stay in that area for months at a time if you like. It's possible to stay longer than fourteen days if the forest rangers don't see you, but I wouldn't push your luck, since that's a very generous amount of time and you should be doing your best to not make a nuisance of yourself.

It's definitely possible to boondock on non-public land, but much like stealth parking in the city, it pays to be discreet. There are a ton of places listed on the web that you can park at, make sure not to spoil good spots outside of public lands. Enter late, leave early, and pack out what you pack in, and no one should notice that you were even there.

Gas Juggling

Panhandling for gasoline is often referred to as 'gas juggling'; This tactic consists of walking up to strangers at the pump (preferably with an empty gas can in hand) and asking if they could spare a gallon of gasoline to get you on your way. Since they are filling up their own tank at that moment anyway, it doesn't take much effort to stick the nozzle in your can and give you the gallon of fuel you need. Since you're asking for something specific they literally have in their hand right now, most people are inclined to help you out without giving it too much thought.

That makes this method of fueling your route work fairly well.

Unfortunately, much like panhandling in general, it's easier to ask people for something than it is to go earn it yourself, so this method often gets abused, and I've seen a few travelers go coast to coast without any intention of paying for their own fuel. I would encourage you to only employ this tactic if you are actually in desperate need to get to your destination. Otherwise, you're just taking advantage of the kindness of someone that had to work for the gas you're now getting for free. Be a responsible adult and save up the money you need before setting out; this way you can get yourself and your vehicle to your destination without having to depend on charity that may or may not arrive.

Breaking Down

If you're planning on living and traveling in your car, one of your biggest fears is probably that you'll break down and be stranded somewhere. It's bound to happen sooner or later, but if you invest in a good vehicle and take care of it, it's not something that's likely to interfere with your travels very often. Still, it pays to prepare for the worst, and hope for the best.

This is why I would encourage you to have a little bit of money put away in a savings account for vehicle repairs. Very few people in the travel punk community do this, instead preferring to panhandle to pay for repairs as they happen. Personally, I'd rather be prepared ahead of time rather than put myself at the mercy of a stranger's kindness.

Saving money for repairs doesn't have to be a daunting task either. You could take a small portion of what you're earning each month and put it in your savings account, or stash a few full paychecks in a short period of time. If I'm in the off season of traveling (and therefore, working a job), I prefer to stash a little away each month, as that doesn't impact my budget nearly as much. You're likely to go months or possibly years (if you're lucky) between major repairs, so it's not impossible to have 500, 1000, or even more dollars tucked away for when the shit hits the fan.

Especially if you've prepared yourself as I've suggested above, breakdowns are rare (if your vehicle doesn't suck) and when it actually happens, they're never quite as bad as they will seem in your imagination. With money in the bank for such occasions, you can be back on the road in no time and continuing your adventure. In most circumstances, having this repair out of the way will get you to your next destination where you can find more work and start putting money back into the repair fund again.

In the event you do have a total breakdown and are stranded, one of the biggest expenses can be getting your vehicle towed to the repair shop. This can cost up to several hundred dollars depending on the vehicle and how far it needs to be towed, so that's coming out of your pocket before the repairs are even done. While I've mentioned already the concept of 'insurance' is generally a scam, I actually do think having insurance from the American Automotive Association (AAA) is a good idea, and it really doesn't cost all that much in the long run (a little over \$100 a year). AAA gives you a certain amount of towing miles a year, so if you do get stranded somewhere, they'll pay for the tow truck to come get you. I think having the piece of mind that you'll never be truly 'stuck' in the middle of nowhere is worth the cost, not to mention that in most situations a year of AAA costs less than a single tow. The Good Sam's Club offers similar services as well so compare the two and see which one is right for you.

Additional Resources

As this chapter is just a brief introduction to living in your vehicle, there are a multitude of other resources available that you should absolutely check out for more detailed information. These additional resources include:

Cheap RV Living - This is probably the best resource on the web for learning all the ins and outs of living in a vehicle full time. This website has all kinds of articles on everything from conversion examples, to break downs of living expenses so you can budget your van life accordingly. It also has an active forum and hosts the biggest gathering of rubber trampers every year in Quartzsite, Arizona. Overall an amazing resource you'll spend hours learning new things from.

<http://www.cheaprvliving.com>

How to Live in a Car, Van or RV by Bob Wells - This book was written by the owner of the Cheap RV Living website. It will answer any question you could imagine about the van dwelling lifestyle and contains much more detailed information than I could include here. It's nearly 200 pages and is available as a Kindle Ebook on Amazon for *three dollars*, so there's no reason you shouldn't pick it up if this lifestyle is something you're serious about.

<http://amzn.to/2oWcfkO>

Boondocking - One of many boondocking websites available today, this one is pretty old school in it's design and doesn't function well on mobile devices. One handy option is the ability to list all entries in the database and to download them all in GPX or CSV format.

<http://www.boondocking.org>

Free Campsites - This website provides a searchable database of user-submitted camping spots all around the world. Locations are organized into pay, free, permit required, and 'research needed' categories. Users can submit their written review of each location as well. Highly recommended.

<http://freecampsites.net>

Vandog Traveller - A simple photo essay blog by a vandweller who is traveling all around western Europe. Some really good advice on doing a custom van build, and the fact that it's based in Europe makes it a little more interesting than most of the US-centric blogs I usually come across on the internet.

<http://vandogtraveller.com>

From Van to Home by Mike Hudson - The creator of the Van Dog Traveller website also has a really nice ebook for sale that is 276 pages and has over 300 full color photographs; so it's a worthwhile investment if you're interested in learning more about doing your own camper van conversion.

<http://vandogtraveller.com/van-conversion-book-from-van-to-home/>

Technomadia - A long running website with a ton of articles about various aspects of boondocking. Lots of information on RV living as well.

<http://www.technomadia.com/boondocking/>

Into the Mystery 13 - Just one of a plethora of van dwelling oriented YouTube channels that have popped up in the past few years. This one takes the audience through the conversion of a Ford Astro Van, has a weekly Q&A and includes a video blog of his travels. Tons of useful info for those interested in becoming a van dweller, and there's always new content every week.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGu5fPDi4-KTNPI_3nVcnsQ

Finding Simon - Simon documents his travels in a Class B camper van on his YouTube channel; it mostly acts as a video blog for his travels but does show off some epic destinations and includes a few videos specific to his van setup.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzOdwGHROHbeJgJgxl0XP8w>

Skoolie: The School Bus Conversion Network - One of the best online resources for converting school buses into RVs. The bulk of content is contained in their forums which are quite active and are a perfect place to do research and ask any of your school bus related questions.

<http://www.skoolie.net>

Select and Convert Your Bus Into a Motorhome on a Shoestring by Ben Rosander - A very visual guide for those interested in converting a school bus into an RV. Lots of photos and floor plans to inspire you for your own school bus conversion, including plans on how to raise the roof or do other more extreme modifications.

<http://amzn.to/2qoT1lt>

Vandwelling Subreddit - This section of the Reddit social media site is an excellent place to get inspiration for building the interior of your vehicle, getting advice on your next vehicle, and ask questions about the vandwelling lifestyle.

<http://reddit.com/r/vandwelling>

11. Bike Punk

What is Bike Touring?

'Bike punk' is the clever name we've given to bike culture as it relates to the punk rock community. Bike punk usually results in 'mutant bikes' put together by anarchistic welders, games like 'bike jousting' that leave the contestants bruised and battered, and regular old bike touring but with a much more DIY, cheap-or-no-cost flare that yuppies with their \$4,000 bikes couldn't hold a candle to.

For this guide we'll be focusing on the travel aspect of bike punk culture, and that means bike *touring*. This form of travel involves riding your bike long distances between destinations. You carry your gear in 'panniers' (i.e. saddle bags) or a bike trailer pulled behind the bike, and stealth camp where you can to avoid paying for expensive campsites and hotels.

Touring on a bicycle can be an awesome way to travel at a relaxed pace and a great way to get exercise. Since biking long distances doesn't require much in the way of money (beyond initial setup and minor repairs) it's an ideal way to travel on a limited budget. It's also good for those who don't want the limitations of train hopping (you're stuck to the tracks) or hitchhiking (you're stuck to busy roads) and would like to go wherever, whenever they like. Over the course of this chapter we'll look at the basics of putting together your first bike tour.

Buying a Bike

The adventures you have ahead of you could cover thousands of miles, so it's important to choose the right kind of bicycle. You'll want something comfortable, but durable, so you don't regret your decision after the first day of riding. While these qualities are important, keep in mind you don't need an expensive super-bike that costs more than a used car. A lower-end used bike will generally perform as well if you know what to look for.

Most brand new bikes in your average bike shop start around \$400. If you *really* enjoy bike touring, you might think about going a step up and getting a new high-end bike starting around

\$600 and top out at \$1200. This is the absolute limit I would consider for buying a brand new bike, and *only* if you need the extra features or durability that come with the cost. Anything more and you're going to end up paying too much money for features you don't really need.

If even \$400 sounds like too much money to you, don't panic! These are the prices for *new* bikes. The real treasure trove of bicycles lies in the vast world of used bike listings. Whether you're looking in your local newspaper, garage sale, Craigslist, or on eBay, there is going to be thousands of options available. Better yet, you'll be able to get some of the exact same brands you'd see in the bike shop for a fraction of the cost. In fact, I usually budget no more than \$200 for a quality bicycle completely capable of lasting through your average bike tour. Due to the plethora of used bikes available, this is going to be the best option for most of you.

Now I know some of you are going to say, 'Hey, wait! What about those super cheap bikes from Walmart? They're like, only a hundred bucks, brand new!' and while you would be right about their price, the sad truth of these bikes is that they are made very cheaply, with very low quality parts. They have a lot of plastic where there should be metal, and poor quality metal in many of the most important components, like the derailleur and brakes. These bikes *will* break very quickly, and were built to be cheap toys for kids who will eventually become bored of them. While there have been exceptions, your chances of completing even a short bike tour on a Walmart bike are very slim; even the steel frames of these bikes are known to come apart at the seams, causing nasty accidents when they do.

If you are flat out broke and can't see yourself even spending a hundred dollars on a bicycle, there's *still* hope! Many cities have community bike projects you can visit; in an effort to promote cycling, these projects offer a community space to teach folks how to maintain their own bicycles. Most of these shops even let you build your own bike from used parts they have lying around the garage. Your finished bike can be bought very cheaply, or paid for by volunteering a few hours of labor. Even if you don't know the first thing about bicycle maintenance, they guide you through everything you need to know until you're ready to hit the road with a recycled bike you put together all by yourself.

Types of Bikes

There are many different styles of bicycles out there, but for touring purposes, I'm going to cut to the chase and say you want some kind of road bike. As the name implies, road bikes are built specifically for running on pavement, which is what you'll be biking on about 90% of the time. These bikes have small, thin, high pressure tires designed for going fast on paved roads. They are also fully equipped with multiple chain rings for making hills easier to traverse, and have a full brake set for maximum stopping power. Ideally, any bike you are considering should have at least three rings in the front (where your pedals are attached) and as many as you can get in the rear. A lot of road bikes only have two rings in the front, which is okay, but more rings equal more gears, and having that third ring up front is going to be a huge help when going up steep hills. In general though, eighteen speed bikes are more than enough to handle most situations you'll find yourself in while touring.

Bikes that are poor choices for touring include mountain bikes, trikes, fixed gear bicycles, and any other slow moving bike that makes it difficult to cover as many miles a day as possible. Mountain bikes have fat tires and often front/rear shocks designed for going over extreme terrain, but they are slow, and usually lack a place to put a bike rack for storing gear. Trikes are three wheeled bikes that are great for stability and hauling goods, but are far too slow and lack the gearing required for hilly terrain.

[image not archived]

Fixed gear bicycles are bikes that have a drive train with no freewheel mechanism. This means you cannot pedal the bike backwards while in forward motion like a freewheel bike does. Also, the pedals of the bike always spin forward at the same speed the bike is currently going.

The advantage is these bikes don't necessarily need brakes, since pushing backwards on the pedals will lock up the rear wheel and stop the bike by skidding it to a halt. Other perceived advantages are a lower overall bike weight, making for a faster bike.

Frankly, I think fixed gear bikes are ill suited to bike touring because they're terrible at climbing hills. This is due to the fact they have only one gear you are forced to use no matter how much of an incline or decline you're biking on. Road bikes have multiple gears to match whatever terrain you're biking across. It's important to keep in mind that when bike touring, you're going to be going over a *lot* of hills.

[image not archived]

"Kettwiesel-rot" by *Drahkrub* / *WikiMedia Commons* - <http://bit.ly/2yJihYB>

One kind of bike I haven't mentioned yet is the recumbent bike. These bikes are much different than most in that you sit down on an actual seat with back support, and the pedals are directly ahead of you instead of below. This makes for a very comfortable ride, which is great for long distances. They include all the standard gear you'd get on a road bike but also sit very close to the ground, which can make it difficult for drivers in vehicles to see you. This is why most recumbent bikers have a tall orange flag hanging off the back to alert drivers to their presence.

While I have no personal experience riding recumbent bicycles, I think they would be an excellent choice for long distance riding due to their comfort. If you can find a recumbent trike (three wheels instead of two) that would be even better as you wouldn't have to maintain balance when coming to a stop. Unfortunately, the biggest drawback to recumbent bicycles is they are almost always more expensive than your average road bike. While you can certainly find a used one for a good price, the cheapest *new* recumbent bike I've seen was around \$600 and it looked pretty cheap in terms of build quality.

In conclusion, I think it's safe to say for most of you reading this, the best kind of bike for your first time touring is going to be a road bike. They're easy to find, cheap, and a good one will get you safely to your destination with a great story to tell your friends.

Sizing a Bike

It's important to choose a bike that fits you properly. If you ride a bike that is too large for you, you won't be able to reach the pedals. A bike that is too small forces you to pedal with your legs coming up too high while you're riding in the seat. This obviously makes for a very uncomfortable ride. Generally speaking, you want a bike that has a top tube (the length of metal that goes between the seat and the handlebars) to be around 2-3 centimeters below your crotch when you're dismounted from the seat and have your feet flat on the ground.

[image not archived]

The size of a bike is measured in centimeters, and this is the distance from the ground to the top tube when the bike is standing upright. You can measure this height by placing a book tightly under your crotch and measuring from the bottom of the spine to the ground. This is your inseam length, and the book gives enough space to give you your stand over height. When shopping for a bike you'll use the stand over height to know if a bike is too big or small for your body.

Special Gear

The following is a list of gear you'll need in order to travel via bicycle. These items should be brought along with you in addition to the gear we've already covered previously in the What Should I pack? section of this book.

Bike - We've already covered this in detail, but your bike should be comfortable, have functioning brakes and gears, and mounts for attaching bike racks to the front and back.

Bike Helmet - Some people think these make you look like a dork, but a good helmet can literally save your life in an accident. Always wear a helmet when riding. Helmets can be fairly cheap at thrift stores, but aren't really all that much brand new either. Once a helmet is cracked, it's no longer usable, so keep that in mind when looking at used ones.

Saddlebags / Panniers - *Panniers* are just a fancy term for saddlebags you can attach to your bike rack and use to carry your gear. If you go with this versus a trailer (see below) get at least four decent sized bags (two for the front, two for the back). There's saddlebags made for handlebars and other smaller areas of the bike, and while these are handy, they're also optional. I generally recommend panniers over a bike trailer since weight is distributed around the bike more evenly and it's easier to maintain a fast momentum.

Panniers can be a bit expensive depending on the brand, so if you're on an ultra-tight budget, you might consider creating your own saddlebags. There's tons of instructions online, but most methods involve using bungee cords or something similar to attach five gallon plastic buckets (preferably the square kind) to your rear bike rack. Five gallon buckets of cat litter work perfectly for this (they're usually square) and can be found for free by dumpstering your local Petco or asking your local cat lover.

Bike Trailer - There are a lot of different brands of bike trailers, but really the only significant difference between them is whether the trailer has one wheel or two. This will be a matter of preference; some find using a one-wheel trailer prevents it from getting caught on curbs and whatnot (which can pull you to an abrupt and uncomfortable stop). Two wheels have a little more stability, and allow you to store more gear. Either option means dragging your gear behind you, and it's worth noting a decent bike trailer will almost always be more expensive than a set of panniers.

Tires - Almost any kind of road tire will do as long as it's in good shape. That said, if you have a little extra money, you can save yourself a lot of time and frustration by investing in nicer tires that have a Kevlar weave in them, which will stand up to sharp objects that would puncture weaker tires. Gatorskin and Armadillo brand tires are the most well known, and cost around fifty dollars per tire.

Tire liners - I don't see these mentioned often, but I'm a hardcore believer in using tire liners. These are plastic strips that go between the tire and the bicycle tube. This gives you another few millimeters of protection from sharp objects you might accidentally ride over. I've seriously gone from patching a tube once a week to patching one every six months with these installed, so I highly recommend using them. They're also cheap (\$10-15 for a pair) so there's really no reason you shouldn't at least give them a try.

Bike Racks - These will be essential in carrying your gear around; otherwise you'll be stuck putting all your gear on your back, and we don't want that. Get whatever is cheap but won't break under the weight of your gear. Make sure the bike rack will fit into the mounts on your bike, and that the front rack won't interfere with your brakes.

Bike Lights - It's likely you'll be biking down some dark roads during your journey, so make sure to have good lights to illuminate the road enough that you don't collide with a branch or trip over a pothole. Also, some states (like Texas) will ticket you for not having lights on your bike at night, so

front and rear lights are a must-have. I personally hate carrying around batteries, so try to get a set of lights that can be recharged via a USB cable.

Bike Tool & Chain Breaker - You'll need a way to repair most things on your bike, so invest in a good bike tool. A good bike tool should have every allen wrench you could need for making adjustments to your bike. Always have a good quality chain breaker tool on hand in the event your chain breaks or needs to be disassembled/reassembled for some reason. Fortunately both of these tools can be bought for very little money (around \$10-20 dollars).

ACA Maps - If you're going on an extended journey across the United States, you might consider purchasing these bike maps from the Adventure Cycling Association. They're sold in sections or a complete set, depending on the trip you plan on taking. They can be a bit pricey at around seventy-five dollars for a whole route (i.e. The whole Pacific Coast) but are pretty useful. These maps include camp grounds, mileage, elevation, and specific warnings about certain sections of the route. They're not necessary, but worth considering if you want to ensure a smooth trip.

Rain Gear - Depending on the kind of environment you plan to encounter, it's almost always a good idea to invest in some cheap rain gear to keep you from getting totally soaked while cycling. Rain gear can get quite expensive, but there's almost always cheap versions of the fancy stuff if you look around sporting goods stores or online. The trade off is the more expensive the rain gear, the better it breathes and lets air flow through while keeping you dry. Cheapo rain gear can get quite stuffy and uncomfortable after a while, so keep that in mind. Fortunately you can find a decent rain jacket for around \$15-25, and you don't always have to buy rain pants if you don't mind your lower half being occasionally soaked (in this situation, store valuables in your bags, not pockets).

Camp Stove & Utensils - Eating nothing but cold food for weeks on end sounds kind of unpleasant, so I would strongly consider taking along a camp stove to make hot food. This could be a fancy camp stove, or simply the DIY beer can stove discussed in the general gear section of this book. The GSI camping pots and pans also mentioned in that section are

ideal for bike touring. Of course it's a bit pricey, so you might want to pack along a simple pot and utensils you might have lying around your house.

Planning Your Route

When it comes to actually navigating your route when bike touring, your best bet is going to be a small road atlas; having a smart phone with you couldn't hurt either, but isn't totally necessary. I say this because (assuming you don't have the ACA maps listed in the previous section) looking up your route via Google Maps is extremely helpful, especially when trying to plot a route that takes elevation into account. The Google Maps app has the option to display cycling directions and walking directions, but only the cycling directions take into account elevation when displaying the 'easiest' route. Google Maps can also store map information for offline viewing, which is handy if you don't have cell phone reception. If you're not interested in carrying technology with you on the road, I would encourage you to invest in the ACA maps as they will include this information and make your first few bike tours more enjoyable. Combined with researching other destinations along your route using the websites previously covered in this book, you should have no trouble planning your next bike touring adventure.

Food

Food for bike touring is the same as any other mode of travel; pack what you normally would on your average hiking trip. Easily prepared foods that are lightweight and won't spoil quickly are the way to go. While dumpster diving and the other methods of staying fed mentioned in this book can be used, you'll probably want to have hot food on occasion, so I would recommend using a portable camp stove.

Additional Resources

Bike touring is a big subject, with a lot of resources available both online and in print form.

What I've covered over this chapter is the bare minimum you need to know before going on your first tour, so if you have the time I would strongly encourage you to take a look at these additional resources.

Planning a Bike Tour via Tom's Bike Trip - This blog is an excellent source for traveling via bike on little to no budget. There's a lot of inspiring stories of bike tours around the world mixed with dozens of useful articles answering almost any question you might have about bike touring.

<http://tombiketrip.com/planning-a-bike-tour>

The TomsBikeTrip.com Guide to Adventure Cycle Touring by Tom Allen - This book was written by the owner of the website above; while it has some of the same content you'll find on the website, this book delves much, much deeper into the subject, and is a *huge* resource of information. Everything from route planning, bike selection, physical training, and a ton of other information you probably didn't even know you needed is all covered here. I highly recommend this book as it will definitely inspire you to get out there and hit the road, especially if you're looking to bike tour abroad.

<http://amzn.to/2qlcKDo>

Bike. Camp. Cook. by Tara Alan - This is a resource for those who are curious about eating well during a bike tour. It contains useful information on the kinds of ingredients you should pack, the ideal cooking gear, and enough recipes you'll still be eating like a king several weeks into any bike tour.

<http://bikecampcook.com>

Warm Showers - The Warm Showers community is a free worldwide hospitality exchange for touring cyclists. People who are willing to host touring cyclists sign up and provide their contact information, and may occasionally have someone stay with them and share a few good stories and a drink. Overall it's very similar to organizations like Couch Surfing and Trust Roots.

<http://warmshowers.org>

12. Boat Punk

What is Boat Punk?

Sailing is a huge subject, and there's been countless books written about it, so instead of writing about everything you need to know specific to sailing (and essentially re-inventing the wheel so to speak), I'm going to take a much different approach to this chapter and simply relate to you my experiences living on a sailboat and general instructions for how you can do the same. My goal here is to inspire you into doing this yourself (if it's something you're interested in) at which point you can do the research needed to make sure you know enough about the actual techniques involved in sailing before you hit the water. Of course, I'll end this chapter with a few resources to get you on your way.

What we'll be referring here to as 'boat punk' can be thought of by most normal people as just a cheap form of sailing. The difference is in the do-it-yourself nature we've adopted from punk rock culture that takes what was previously a rich man's hobby and makes it into something anyone can do with a little bit of hard work and imagination. As you'll see here shortly, you don't need a ton of money, but you do need to be a semi-responsible adult, so if your daily sixpack comes before fixing your mainstays, you should probably stick to drinking under a bridge. On the other hand, if you lust for a very cheap form of travel that can *literally* take you anywhere in the world, keep reading!

Finding Cheap Boats

What really brought the costs of sailing down and into the hands of the middle class was the invention of the fiberglass boat in 1932. Fiberglass boats were cheap to manufacture, and (although this was unknown at the time) could outlast wooden boats by decades. I've met one individual that was sailing to Belize with their family on a fiberglass boat from the 1960's, and that was in 2012! This revolution in boat manufacturing led to an explosion in the number of boats sold through the 1950's onward.

The long lasting nature of fiberglass sailboats resulted in a ton of old boats abandoned at some time in their life, and still sitting around, waiting to be re-purposed someday. Some can be found lying grounded on a beach, others still tied to marina docks, waiting to float away into the night. Still, there are others in great shape sitting all alone on the docks, victims of owners who are no longer willing to pay their slip fees. Marinas often sell these boats at auction or for a flat rate to get the space open once again so they can start collecting slip fees for another boat. The prices of these boats are almost always a fraction of their value, since there are far more boats for sale than people willing to buy them.

Since there's so many boats available, your best chances of finding one of these derelict-butprobably-sea-worthy boats is to seek them out in person. While Craigslist in certain boating towns will have good deals, the best deals will generally be found going to the marina or boat yard yourself and asking what they have available.

My First Sailboat

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My first experience buying a sailboat brought me to Key West, Florida, where I'd convinced my friend to join me in finding a boat of our own and learning how to sail. After a few weeks searching around various dry docks on the island, we found our vessel: a 1976 twenty-six foot long Grampian with two sets of sails, working kitchen (with oven), two berths for sleeping, an inflatable dinghy and an outboard motor; all for \$2,200. To be totally sea worthy all it needed was a new coat of paint, so two weeks later the newly christened *Liquid Courage* hit the water.

Including daily dry dock fees and the cost of having the boat dropped into the bay, I believe we spent somewhere around \$3,200.

Before we arrived in Key West, the two of us had been working on the assumption we'd be hanging out with old timers and other retirees. We were fine with this, since that was the stereotype we'd come to accept. Surprisingly, we met a small group of punks on sailboats about our age while we were working on repainting our boat. This group of people were our first exposure to 'boat punk' culture in person, since previously we'd only heard of punks living on sailboats in the documentary *Hold Fast*. Not only were they living on their own boats, but they were more than happy to help others new to sailing, and it is through these people we learned the majority of what we know about sailing.

Dinghy Woes

There's a lot of things we'd failed to consider before going on this adventure, and one of the most crucial was having a working dinghy. If you're not familiar with the term, a dinghy is the small boat you use for going back and forth from your sail boat to the shore. This is *essential* in getting supplies like food and fresh water. Without one, you're stuck looking longingly at the shore from your boat with a grumbling stomach and a parched throat, wondering why you didn't buy a good dinghy *before* you bought the sailboat in the first place. This was the case for us, since once we'd finally set anchor, we'd awoken the next morning to our inflatable dinghy floating about three feet under water.

This led to weeks of bumming rides from passing dinghies while we attempted to patch the leaks on ours. Eventually we gave up on it entirely and bought a wooden dinghy from a friend. Like the first, we woke the next morning to it floating inches below the waterline. This eternal struggle with our dinghy continued for months before we finally got it sufficiently patched up. The moral of this story is, investing in a good dinghy is nearly as important as making sure your boat floats. Not doing so will certainly take most of the fun out of your sailing experience.

Life on a Boat

Life on a boat will be immediately strange, if for no other reason than the utterly constant, never, ever ending, motion of the sea. If you're the type to get seasick or get motion sickness, you'll want to reconsider this method of travel. While I never got physically sick, there were a few times I woke up hungover from a rum binge the previous night and severely regretted it. No matter how bad you wish for it, that motion will continue on every day, every hour, and every minute, for eternity, and there's nothing you can do about it.

That said, you do get used to it. So much so, that after spending enough time at sea, you'll return to shore only to have a 'sailor's gait,' which is a slight sense of vertigo. Basically your body has gotten so used to correcting itself against the back and forth motion of the sea that it subconsciously attempts to do the same when walking on dry land. Since the land is in fact sitting still, can makes you walk wobbly for a little while until your body re-adjusts.

In my opinion, the best part of living on a sailboat is the actual *sailing*. While my friend and I often failed completely in doing about *any* sailing at all (due to the problems listed above and more) we did in fact go on a few sailing adventures with our friends on their own boats. The best of which was a trip to the Dry Tortugas, which is a series of small islands about seventy miles west of Key West.

[image not archived]

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[image not archived]

The trip itself took about two days, but the highlight of the journey is Fort Jefferson, an old Civil War era fort on one of the islands. The fort itself looks like a small castle and even has a moat going around it. Since there's only one park ranger and a small handful of campers each night, we essentially had free run of the place. We snorkeled in crystal clear water, played with sea urchins, ran around in a multi-story abandoned fort, and watched the migration of thousands of spiral-shelled crustaceans work their way from the beach into the ocean, all over the span of two days. It was an amazing trip that absolutely made all the bad times (when we weren't sailing at all) worth it.

My point here is that while this was one very small trip a fractional distance away from the United States, there's hundreds if not thousands of similar epic destinations all around the world, and the only way you're going to be able to see most of them is with a sailboat. That is what makes sailing completely unique from every other form of travel in this book. It's a great way to adventure around the world and see things very few others have. If for no other reason than that, I would encourage you to at least try living on a sailboat, if only for a little while.

Mishaps & Dangers

Although this directly goes against the advice laid forth in the *Hold Fast* documentary, I highly recommend those new to sailing have a good and dependable engine. Having a dependable motor in your boat can save you from very dangerous situations such as running aground during a storm (if, say, your anchor comes loose). There's too many reasons why you *should* have a motor and not enough reasons *not* to. If you want to become a sailing purist, you can certainly turn off the engine for good once you know what you're doing. Until then, keep it around and make sure it's in good working order in case of emergencies.

In yet another one of our many mishaps, my friend decided to put our sailboat's outboard motor onto the wooden dinghy and motor to shore. The motor was clearly too big for the dinghy and not designed for this task at all, so of course it stopped working after two or three trips.

Despite taking it apart several times, I never managed to get the motor running again. I hated not having a motor, and it forced me to keep a fairly paranoid watch on the anchor every time a storm blew through.

Having the right kind of safety gear on hand is another important part of being prepared for life at sea. Things like life vests are essential for safety and you're also required by law to have one for each person on your boat or dinghy. Failure to do so will have the coast guard on your ass and get you fined. You can find a complete list of required safety gear for your vessel here:

<http://www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/requip.htm>

In another great example of something that can happen when you don't have the right safety gear; on one of our many trips to shore with a friend, our dinghy started to fill with water after being hit by the wake of a passing fishing boat, and in seconds the entire boat was suddenly underwater, motor and all. Unfortunately at the time, there wasn't a single life vest aboard, so in a panic I let folks know that I didn't know how to swim, and grabbed the nearest object I could. Fortunately, it turned out to be a quite buoyant beer cooler that kept me afloat until help arrived.

Which brings me to another point. I started living on a sailboat having never touched one before, nor ever learning how to swim. While many others have done the same before me, I did *eventually* learn how to swim well enough that I felt more confident in the face of an emergency. Until that point though, I was all too aware of the dark abyss that surrounded me on all sides, and even with a life vest on, it made hauling up an anchor in a storm a fairly terrifying experience. I'm not going to say that you shouldn't sail if you don't know how to swim, but I *am* going to encourage you to pick it up as quickly as you can, since it can certainly save your life. In addition, being one of the only people in a group of sailors that can't swim is a bit of a bummer, so learn for the fun of it so you can swim with your friends if nothing else.

The last thing I'll mention about boat safety when starting out is to simply not sail alone if you can avoid it. While many sailing maniacs have done things like sail across entire seas with little experience by themselves, there's too many things that could go wrong without someone to back you up. In the tale I told of sailing to the Dry Tortugas in the previous section, what I didn't mention is that one of our friends was following us in his trimaran sailboat. Things were fine on the way to our destination, but on the way back he disappeared. We heard nothing for over a month, when word finally came back that his ship had been found in Cuba. Unfortunately his body was found tangled up in the lines dragging behind it.

It's unlikely we'll ever know exactly what happened, whether he got hit in the head by his boom and fell overboard or if he simply got trapped underwater trying to untie a line. The point is that it would

have been much less likely to happen with another crew member on board, and this tragic accident would have been avoided.

Remember to take every precaution possible and don't take unnecessary risks. The ocean can be a very dangerous place if you're not careful!

Try it Out First

You might still be wondering if sailing is right for you, or maybe you're not ready to commit fully to a life at sea. If that's the case, try to find some friends who are doing it and join them for a while. This way you can take some time to get a feel for it without spending a big chunk of change and a mountain of your time. There are also 'Yacht Clubs' in most cities with sailing classes and boats to borrow for a membership fee. If you enjoy the experience and could see doing it yourself, maybe it's time to go get a boat of your own.

While I jumped into sailing having virtually no experience whatsoever, I did learn a lot and had a lot of fun. Being a part of the sailing culture was enough for me to walk away with a new life experience that gave me an entirely new perspective on travel.

Despite all this, when I finally did leave Key West, I knew I'd never live on another sailboat again. While it was an utterly fascinating experience with limitless possibilities, in the end I knew I'd be much more comfortable traveling over the ground; the sea was a far too dangerous and uncomfortable place for me to be. There's a bunch of ways to wander the world, so if you decide the same, don't feel too bad about it.

For the rest of you, I wish you the best of luck on your adventures at sea!

Special Equipment

Some special gear to consider for your life at sea include the following:

Pelican Cases - These are waterproof cases you can put things in you don't want getting soaked. These cases are absolutely essential for wallets, papers, cell phones, other electronics, etc. Without a case, these items *will* get wet, no matter how careful you are. 'Pelican' is the most common brand but there's plenty of other options and sizes available as well.

Dry Bag - Another item that will prevent things from getting wet. Dry bags are generally designed for larger items like clothing. These bags are made of fold-able plastic, and roll up at the top; usually with some kind of clicking mechanism to keep them closed. Even if the dry bag goes overboard, there's a very good chance your items inside will be dry if you can retrieve the bag quickly enough.

Sunglasses - Sunny days reflect light from the water back up into your eyes, and can cause the same effects as snow blindness, which is where your eyes get essentially 'sun burned' from too much exposure to sunlight. Having a good pair of sunglasses on hand will prevent this from happening.

Dollar Store Tools - Cheap, shitty tools are popular amongst sailors, since the salt in the sea will ruin an expensive set of Craftsman tools as quickly as the dollar store variety. Once they break or are too rusted to use, toss it and buy a new one.

Non-ocean Travel

While I have only talked about ocean travel so far, it's definitely not the only way to get around on the water. Canoeing or floating down the river on a homemade raft is probably the most popularized version of DIY water travel, at least here in the United States. In American culture this method of travel has been largely influenced by famous books like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, which is a tale of a boy and his adventures wandering down the Mississippi on a home made raft. Since the popularization of this book, many have made the same journey down America's longest river, whether it was by canoe, fishing boat, or a selfmade floating barge.

In my opinion, one of the most interesting versions of this journey was the *Miss Rockaway Armada*. Started around 2007, this group came together with the idea to float down the Mississippi river on a raft they built out of trash. Starting in Minneapolis and ending in New Orleans, this group of artists, builders, and travelers spent several months traversing the river, playing music, showing off their barge (an art piece in itself), and showing the world what could be done with a dream and the help of a few friends. At least, that's the way I picture it. While there's still a website for the project, and many pictures and videos to be found online, I wasn't personally involved, and it's somewhat difficult to find the exact details of how it all came together.

The same group decided to put on a second project, the *Swimming Cities of Serenissima*. This time they set out to navigate the Adriatic Sea from the Litoral region of Slovenia to Venice, Italy in May of 2009. Unfortunately once again, complete details of this journey are scarce, since the website that probably had most of the best information about it is no longer around. Fortunately, there's still a Facebook page around that describes it thusly:

“Designed by the visual artist SWOON, the floating sculptures are descendants of the Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea (Hudson River, 2008) and the Miss Rockaway Armada (Mississippi River, 2006 and 2007). SWOON's boats were inspired by dense urban cityscapes and thickly intertwined mangrove swamps from her Florida youth. The Swimming Cities of Serenissima were built from salvaged materials, including modified Mercedes car motors with long-tail propellers. The boats' crew was made up of 30 collaborating artists from the United States. As the Swimming Cities moved toward Venice, the crew collected and installed keepsakes in an arklife cabinet of wonders that was displayed on the boats when they arrived. Once in Venice, the boats and crew offered intimate performances that incorporate music, shadow puppetry, and story. The vessels were imagined as a hybrid between boats and bits of land broken off and headed out to sea. Watching them approach the shore was like seeing a floating city in the distance, as improbable as Venice itself. To the real life crew, the boats were a place of refuge – both a home and a way of moving through the world. To those who encounter the boats for the first time, they were a reminder that anything that can be imagined can be built.”

While there hasn't been anything on the same scale as the SWOON art rafts since, there are other projects; most recently, Wes Modes, a former train hopper and graduate of University of California Santa Cruz, set out to document river communities throughout the south eastern United States. He's been doing so by floating down various rivers on a 'shanty boat' he made himself and interviewing those he comes across along the way. The project's website has all kinds of interesting pictures showing how the boat itself was built, along with videos of said interviews, and a very good twenty minute documentary about the shanty boat itself that you can find here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OttgPFvGQYI>

A few people have tried floating the Mississippi on even smaller vessels; Pat Daley just finished an attempt to go from New York City to Mexico via canoe calling the project *Canoe York City*. Although

he didn't quite reach his goal, he did paddle his canoe over 800 miles to Savannah, Georgia before calling it quits. That's an impressive distance, and you can check out videos on his YouTube channel to see what the journey was like first hand.

Richart Sowa decided to build his own island out of discarded plastic bottles south of Cancun, Mexico in 1998. Using 250,000 bottles wrapped in plastic nets, he dumped sand on a support structure made of plywood and bamboo and planted many kinds of plants, including mangrove trees. The final size of 'Spiral Island' was 20 x 16 meters, and supported a two story house, three beaches, and a self-composting toilet. Unfortunately, the structure was beached and mostly destroyed by a hurricane in 2005.

In late 2007, Richart finished building a replacement called 'Joyxee Island'. This time using half as many discarded plastic bottles (about 100,000) he built an even larger structure, expanding to just over 25 meters in diameter. Along with a house and three beaches, other additions were made, including a solar-powered waterfall, two ponds, a wave-powered washing machine, and solar panels.

There are many others who built various kinds of boats, rafts, and barges to traverse various parts of the world, so while it's something you won't hear about every day, people *have* done it, and so can you. All it takes is a little planning and the courage to go out and make it happen. If you think this mode of travel is for you, I encourage you to check out the resources in the next section for additional information.

Additional Resources

So now you're (hopefully) pumped up on my own experiences or the experiences of others living on the water in a DIY-fashion, here are some resources I hope you'll find useful for various kinds of water travel.

Yacht Crew Jobs - There's quite a few websites out there that claim to help you find a job on a boat, although I don't have any experience with any of them. Most are free though, so it couldn't hurt to send in a resume if you're interested in working your way across the ocean on a boat.

<https://www.findacrew.net> <http://www.desperatesailors.com><http://floatplan.com>

http://www.latitude38.com/crewlist/cruising/skipper_results.lasso<http://www.crewfinders.com>
<http://www.crewnetwork.com/Yachting-Jobs>

Hold Fast - This DIY documentary was created by Moxie Marlinspike as he joins up with a few friends to rebuild a boat they purchased in Florida for \$1,000. Upon finishing, the crew sets sail for Haiti and the documentary covers their mis-adventures along the way. While a flawed documentary missing some important details for the new sailor, it will definitely inspire you to get out there and find a boat of your own.

<https://vimeo.com/15351476>

Blue Anarchy - This is the website of Moxie Marlinspike and it contains quite a few stories about DIY sailing, and includes a mailing list exclusively for anarchists who are interested in networking with other anarchist/punk sailors.

<http://blueanarchy.org>

Sea Assault Fest - From the website: "Sea Assault Fest is an event for merfolk, boatpunks, nomads, DIY sailors, anarchists, and any landlubber who dreams of a salty life to come together for a week of skill-sharing, networking, celebrating, and helping each other actualize our dreams for a life by sail-power." In short, this is a gathering of DIY sailors that takes place in Rio Dulce, Guatemala every two years.

<http://seaassaultfest.org>

How to Get a Job on Board Cruise Ships by Derek Earl Baron - This book explains everything you need to know about getting a job on a cruise ship, told by someone who's been doing it themselves for years. Cruise ships are a great way to travel and save money, since there aren't too many opportunities to spend it while working and living in the middle of the ocean. There are plenty of resources on who to send applications to, the interview process, and what it's actually like to live day to day on a luxury cruise liner.

<http://www.wanderingearl.com/how-to-get-a-job-on-board-cruise-ships/>

Miss Rockaway Armada - The first sailing art barge project designed by Caledonia Curry (aka 'SWOON'); the armada's goal was to float down the Mississippi river to New Orleans. Fortunately, the website for this project is still online, and while it requires a lot of digging through old blog posts, there's much to see and learn through various photos and video of the project.

<http://www.missrockaway.org>

The Swimming Cities of Serenissima - Another sailing art barge project made with the help of artist SWOON. This one sailed the Adriatic Sea from the Litoral region of Slovenia to Venice, Italy in May of 2009. The original website is no longer online, but there is still a Facebook page and SWOON's website with many pictures, videos, and press articles.

<https://www.facebook.com/swimmingcities><http://caledoniacurry.com/serenissima.php>

Tod Seelie Photography - Tod has been photographing various parts of punk and other subcultures for quite some time, and has documented some fascinating underground events, including the Swimming Cities of Serenissima project mentioned in this chapter.

<http://todseelie.com>

Canoe York City - Trick Daley set out to canoe by himself from New York City to Mexico in 2016. This series of YouTube videos documents his adventure, and although he didn't quite reach his final destination, he did go over 800 miles before deciding to end the journey in Savannah, Georgia.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyW9gKNeaBRvulqKHvNqDhIm7fij5fnJw>

A Secret History of American River People - Wes Modes set out on a shanty boat he built himself to interview people who live along the waterways of the south eastern portion of the United States. The website includes some of the video interviews along with pictures of the process of building the boat itself.

<http://peoplesriverhistory.us>

JUNK - This blog documents the journey of two sailors as they make their way from California to Hawaii in a raft made of junk to call attention to the environmental problem of plastic trash accumulation in the Pacific Ocean.

<http://junkraft.blogspot.com>

The Floating Neutrinos - This group was one of the first to cross the Atlantic Ocean on a self-built boat made of scavenged materials in 1997 and served as the inspiration for countless trash boats and rafts since. It takes a bit of digging but the website has a lot of useful information, including pictures of the boat along with a few details of how it was constructed.

<http://www.floatingneutrinos.com>

Spiral Island & Joyxee Island - While there is no official website for the Joyxee Island project, there is a Wikipedia page with some basic information. Aside from that, doing a Google search for 'Joxee Island' will pull up countless videos and articles about the place that are far more in-depth if you'd like to learn more.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiral_Island

Sailing Related Zines in the StP Library - The collection is small, but slowly growing! We are collecting zines about punk-diy-sea travel here and there's already a few worth checking out. If you have one you'd like to contribute, upload it to our library so everyone can enjoy it!

<https://squattheplanet.com/files/categories/boat-punk-sailing.43/>

13. Other Forms of Travel

Charter Buses

These days it's possible to get about anywhere via bus, and it's more than likely that a bus ticket is going to be your savior at some point between destinations. For example, you might get kicked off when train hopping in the middle of nowhere, or when your last hitchhiking ride swears they're dropping you off at the best hitchhiking spot ever and it's a complete ghost town. Bus routes are usually affordable and prevalent enough you could even travel exclusively by bus if you wanted to. With that in mind, here's some basic information about various bus companies that are available to you in the United States.

First off, let's talk about the big kid on the block; Greyhound Bus Lines (www.greyhound.com) is going to be the most common option anywhere you go in America. They have the most routes, connections, and destinations for a somewhat decent price, that is, if you're smart enough to plan ahead. Most Greyhound tickets can be bought for around 100-150 dollars if you can buy them at least a month in advance. If you're going coast to coast this can be a pretty good deal. Otherwise, your best bet is to buy a ticket a short distance to somewhere you can hitch or hop out from for free, since last minute tickets can be pretty expensive.

The main issue with Greyhound is — being the biggest ground transportation company in the country has made them give fuck-all about customer service. They know if you're buying their services, you probably don't have any other choice (depending on what area of the country you're in), so most of their employees have free reign to treat you like shit. I'm not sure if it's due to cutting costs or employees that don't care, but almost every Greyhound bus station you find in a major city is going to be a filthy hovel with bathrooms straight out of a horror movie. Also, since Greyhound is usually the cheapest option around (that people know of) it tends to attract the worst of society, which usually means you're going to be surrounded by drunk/drugged out assholes blasting their radios at full volume throughout your journey.

Greyhound has earned the nickname 'the dirty dog' from most travelers you'll meet, and the reputation is well deserved.

The good news is it's possible to avoid riding Greyhound buses *entirely* in two-thirds of the country. It wasn't always like this, but fortunately some competition has come into play in the past decade or so, giving travelers a few more choices and forcing Greyhound to reduce it's prices a bit.

[image not archived]

The biggest and best Greyhound alternative is Megabus (www.megabus.com), a company originally started in England, but branched out to the USA and has been wildly successful due to their incredibly low prices. Megabus often advertises seats for as low as one dollar, which is true if you book far, far in advance (at least 1-2 months) as the first few seats are sold at this price.

It's certainly possible you could book an entire tour around the country for a few dollars if you booked the tickets two months in advance and didn't miss any of your connections. For those of us who don't want to plan that far ahead, the cost is still very reasonable at around twenty dollars per route.

The main disadvantage of Megabus is you can't buy one ticket for a journey between major destinations like you can on Greyhound. Instead, Megabus routes are sold in segments, so if you wanted to go from Austin, Texas, to New Orleans, Louisiana, you'd have to buy one ticket from Austin to Houston, then another for Houston to New Orleans. The good news is even purchasing tickets in segments still comes out to be vastly cheaper than Greyhound, and the Megabus vehicles themselves are luxurious in comparison; they have bigger seats, electrical outlets, wifi, and sometimes even movies playing on the TVs installed every few rows.

A few other caveats include your ticket for Megabus is only good for that route and date.

There are no transferring of tickets for different destinations or scheduled times, so if you miss your bus, you're screwed; you'll have to buy another ticket. Megabus also does not have any official bus 'stations' that I am aware of. Most of the time, you'll be told to go to a specific street corner and wait for your bus to arrive. Unfortunately for those of you bike touring, you can't take a bike on the bus, even if it's in a box.

Megabus' routes cover about everywhere east of the Mississippi, and is slowly crawling up the west coast, with routes going from Los Angeles as far north as Reno, Nevada. So it's possible we'll see them running up to the Pacific Northwest very soon, which would eliminate the need to take a Greyhound bus everywhere except the mid-west.

[image not archived]

Not a lot of people know about 'Chinatown buses', but they were the first to give Greyhound a run for their money. These bus lines started operating around 1997, and still exist to this day, ferrying passengers from the 'Chinatown' area of one city to another's. Chinatown bus territory runs from Boston, Massachusetts, as far south as Miami, Florida, and about as far west as Chicago, Illinois. These bus lines were entirely owned and operated by non-English speakers, so negotiating a bus ticket to your proper destination usually involves a lot of exaggerated nods, hand gestures and repeating your destination city until you get a ticket going that direction. It's a bit of an adventure getting on the bus, and I believe the ticket sellers on the street get paid on commission as they're pretty aggressive. I've had one elderly Chinese woman take me by the arm and practically shove me on a bus going the opposite direction I wanted.

Chinatown buses are some of my favorite bus lines to ride, as it's clear they simply *do not give a fuck*, and I mean that in a *good* way. For example, there's no security, so you could take with you just about anything you want, and I've literally thrown three bikes (not in boxes) in the luggage compartment under the bus and no one even blinked an eye. Considering it costs an additional forty dollars per bike on Greyhound, this is a pretty nice benefit. I also appreciate they don't sweat the bullshit or try to nickle-and-dime you for every little thing. I haven't witnessed it as much in recent years, but many of these buses would even play kung-fu movies on the TVs during your trip (I love martial arts movies). There are too many Chinatown bus companies to list here, so do a Google search to find who is operating in your area.

[image not archived]

With all this extra competition, Greyhound was forced to start their own version of these budget bus lines called BoltBus (www.boltbus.com). It only operates in the northeast (Boston to Washington DC) and portions of the west coast (Vancouver, BC to Eugene, Oregon, and Los Angeles to San Francisco). It's pretty much a carbon copy of Megabus (nicer buses, electrical outlets, wifi), and even offers reduced fares if you book a few weeks in advance, or if you book your ticket for travel during non-peak times. For example, I was taking BoltBus from Seattle, Washington, to Portland, Oregon, every Friday morning for as little as fifteen dollars one way (compared to Greyhound's \$25-30 for the same route). So if you happen to be in an area that has BoltBus, (but no Chinatown or Megabus routes) there's still no reason to buy a Greyhound ticket, you're paying more money for the exact same service. I've also noticed BoltBus will let you throw your bike on the bus at no extra charge and doesn't require you to have it in a box, just like the Chinatown buses.

I've also heard rumors about Mexican bus lines that operate similarly to the Chinatown buses, the main difference being they run from Mexico and go north up the west coast of the United States. I've yet to locate any of these bus companies, but if you're in that region, it might pay to keep an eye out for them, as anything beats riding the dirty dog.

Ride Sharing

Another form of hitchhiking that is a little more mainstream is using ‘ride share’ websites.

These websites are designed to match drivers with passengers so they can split the cost of gas, or have someone to keep them company on the ride. It’s definitely possible to score free rides on these websites, but your chances of doing so are much better if you make it clear you’re fun and entertaining to be around. This way the driver knows at least you’ll keep them occupied and make the trip less boring.

If you decide to split gas costs, keep in mind how much it would cost you for a Greyhound bus ticket to your destination. Use this as a baseline for negotiating your share of the gas costs.

It’s obviously not worth it to you to ride with a complete stranger for hours on end if it’s going to end up costing you more than a bus ticket would. Also, it’s very possible the driver will have other passengers kicking in as well, so paying about 20% of the total costs of gas is usually pretty fair and a good deal for everyone involved. For example, it wouldn’t be all that unusual to pay as little as twenty bucks to go from San Francisco to Los Angeles, since most ride share drivers would rather knock the twenty bucks off their gas bill and put up with a stranger for a few hours than have to pay for all the gas themselves.

Craig’s List - This is by far the most popular source for finding ride shares. It’s free, and all you have to do is to post an ad or reply to the ones already listed, and negotiate your terms from there. Since this website is based on locality, you’ll have to find the site for your city using the link below, then click on the ‘ride sharing’ link for that city (it’s under the ‘community’ section).

<https://www.craigslist.org/about/sites>

Gumtree - While Craig’s List will be the best source of ride shares in the United States (and many other countries) Gumtree is a close second if you’re in the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, or Singapore.

<https://www.gumtree.com>

BlaBlaCar - A carpooling website for people in Europe, the name comes from their personal rating system, where you can specify how chatty you are as a driver or passenger. Bla (quiet), bla bla (relatively chatty), bla bla bla (blabbermouth).

<https://www.blablacar.com>

Flying for Cheap

With all the lovely forms of travel I've mentioned in this book previously, at some point you'll need to book a flight to reach the destination you have in mind. Flying *can* be stupid expensive, but it doesn't have to be if you don't mind doing a little preparation. If you follow the tips I cover in this section, flying can even be cheaper (and less stressful) than riding the dreaded 'dirty dog'.

First, Protect Yourself

Airlines employ all kinds of tricks to make more money, and one of them is tracking the websites you've been to before visiting theirs. For example, if you've been shopping around various airline websites and search engines, those websites leave what are called 'cookies' on your computer. These cookies are necessary for essential functions like login information and making sure you don't lose your search information while using their site, but can also be used by airlines to see where you've been searching for tickets and what route you are trying to book them for.

For example, if you searched for a ticket from Seattle to Los Angeles on a booking search engine like Expedia, and then went to the American Airlines website to compare prices, the American Airlines website could potentially use the left over cookies from your session with Expedia to see what you were searching for and how much the lowest ticket price was. Without that information, they might have charged you only \$100, but now that they can see the price on Expedia was \$150, they can then change the price on-the-fly to be \$140. The way cookies work is a bit complicated and I'm just using Expedia/AA as an example. It's hard to tell which airline websites do this and which don't.

You can prevent this from happening to you by using your browser's 'privacy' mode. This is called 'private browsing' in Mozilla Firefox, and 'incognito mode' in Google Chrome. Once you turn on this mode, cookies are not stored on your computer and are disposed of once you close that window. So, using this mode it's essentially impossible for websites to use cookies from visits to previous websites to make price changes like the one mentioned above. I highly recommend using your browser's privacy mode anytime you are shopping for a plane ticket on any airline website or a multiple-airline search engine.

When to Purchase a Ticket

Believe it or not, the actual day you choose to buy the ticket matters as well. Studies show tickets purchased on Tuesdays are usually cheaper than the day before; this is due to most airlines announcing new prices on Monday evenings. By noon the next day (Tuesday) other airlines are scrambling to match or beat those prices, making it a good day to search for the lowest price (Wednesday is okay as well). Also, the price for tickets purchased on the weekend are typically about 5% cheaper than those bought during the week.

If possible, it's generally best to purchase your ticket well in advance. If flying domestically, you should start looking between three months and thirty days before you leave; domestic tickets typically are their lowest price six weeks before your date of departure. If flying internationally, your shopping window increases to between 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ months and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ months before departure.

During peak seasons such as June, July and August, the U.S. holiday of Thanksgiving and the December holidays, it's best to purchase tickets two months in advance. January is a good month to

purchase tickets, since most people are tapped out from the holiday season, so many airlines lower their prices to meet that lack of demand.

Choosing a Day and Time to Fly

The biggest difference in ticket price will come from what day you choose to fly. While

Friday and Sunday are the most expensive, fewer people fly on Tuesdays. With less demand, prices are typically lower, making it the best time to fly at the lowest price. The time of day can make a big impact as well. If you're willing to book a red-eye flight at 4 a.m., you'll often save a ton of money by dealing with the fatigue and inconvenience since not many people are willing to do the same.

Book Flights Separately

Sometimes it can be much cheaper to book portions of your flight through budget airlines (more on that in a bit) than booking the entire itinerary all at once through one airline. It takes a bit of experimentation, but I've found flights where it was cheaper to book two legs individually rather than together, or two one-way flights instead of one round trip flight. It takes a lot of time and experimentation, but the results can often outweigh the extra time and inconvenience involved.

When booking travel for two or more people, start off by booking one ticket. While I mostly fly alone, I've read that some airlines that sell multiple tickets in a single transaction must all be the same price. So for example, an airline has only one ticket for \$50, and the rest are \$100. If you shop for two, you will pay \$200 total, but if you shop one-at-a-time, you will pay \$150 in total. Be careful doing this though, since I'd hate to get one ticket to find out it's the last one, making your friend have to get a seat on another flight.

Be Flexible

Being flexible on the dates of your departure will save you the most money, since there might be a fantastic deal on the route your shopping for a week later (or earlier) than you intended on leaving. So try to avoid the need to be at a specific place at a specific time unless you've planned far ahead in advance.

Keep in mind alternative airports at both your originating location and your final destination. Check the fares for each of them, as sometimes traveling by bus to or from a different airport can save you a lot of money on flights. Sometimes it's worth taking a \$10 Chinatown bus from one city to another if it will save you \$100 or more on the price of your airline ticket. Some booking search engines let you include nearby airports automatically.

Use a VPN

Now if you want to get really hardcore in your search for the perfect flight, you might want to look into getting a Virtual Private Network (VPN). Like the name states, this is a (usually paid) private connection encrypted so no one can see what you're doing on the internet. Most importantly for our purposes here, a VPN gives you the ability to seem like you're coming from another country.

One sneaky way airlines attempt to make the most profit is by charging different fares for people in different countries. For example, booking domestic flights from outside the country will often be more expensive than booking inside the country. Prices may change based on where the transaction is completed, or the "point-of-sale".

So if you're in the USA and want to book a plane ticket domestically across Thailand, it might cost you \$300. Upon arriving in the country though, that price drops to \$30! So, using a VPN to make a website think you're inside the country can save you a significant amount of money.

Currently my favorite VPN service is TunnelBear because it's incredibly easy to use, and they offer a free 500 megabytes a month, which is more than enough to spend a few hours searching for the cheapest flight.

<https://www.tunnelbear.com>

The Search Begins

There are an utterly ridiculous amount of flight search engines out there, but only a few of them are worth your time. Make sure to check several search engines (even ones not listed here) since not all of these cover all airlines. My personal favorites are:

Google Flights - Unsurprisingly, the king of search has an excellent search engine for finding cheap flights. It will notify you if there are cheaper flights before or after your chosen departure date. One of its best features is the ability to 'explore' within flexible date periods to find the lowest price using an easy to read graph.

<https://www.google.com/flights> <https://www.google.com/flights/explore>

Skyscanner - While there are many, many flight search engines that check multiple airlines for you, I've personally had the best luck with this one, especially for international flights.

<https://www.skyscanner.com>

Kayak - Another flight search engine much like Skyscanner that I often find myself checking since it checks many different airlines at once.

<https://www.kayak.com/flights>

ITA Matrix - If you want to get downright nerdy with your search, this is the search engine to use. It powers both the Kayak and Google Flights websites and covers every special need you could possibly have when looking for a flight. You can see a calendar of prices or book for an exact date. You can book a round-trip ticket that arrives and departs from two different cities. You can even change your "point-of-sale" in hopes of getting a cheaper ticket (more on that below). While you can't book directly through this website, it gives you the fare codes a booking agent needs to find the same deal.

<http://matrix.itasoftware.com>

Skiplagged & AirWander - These websites make flights cheaper by booking routes to major cities that have a layover in your destination city. Instead of following through to your ticket's destination, you simply get off the plane at the layover that is your actual destination. This is possible due to the fact that flights are often cheaper between major cities than it is to fly directly to your chosen destination. Really only useful for domestic travel within the USA and flying without checked luggage.

<https://skiplagged.com><http://airwander.com>

Check Budget Airlines

Another part of your search could include looking on the websites of various budget airlines.

Budget airlines often do whatever they can to give customers rock-bottom prices, including charging extra for amenities standard on any other airline or cutting them out entirely. This could be anything from charging extra for checked baggage, tacking on fees for using a credit card, to having to pay to use the bathroom. Make sure to check the fine print before handing over your hard earned money. Still, if you're willing to put up with some sub-standard conditions, you can save a boatload of money on these flights. Check out this list of budget airlines to find a carrier that goes to your desired destination.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_low-cost_airlines

Currency Conversion

Airline companies sometimes adjust their prices to ensure they get business from all corners of the globe. For example, if you live in a ‘first-world’ country like the USA, you’ll probably be able to afford that \$800 flight; but if you live in Argentina, that’s not as likely to be true.

So, using this sliding scale pricing, we can use other forms of currency to see if we can get a flight for a lower price than we’d spend if using the US dollar. For example, if we search Google for an Argentinian version of the airline you’re looking at, we can use Google translate to read that page in English and search for flights. The results should return the prices in Argentinian pesos, which we can then check the rate of exchange to US dollars using Google search. If the result is cheaper than what we would pay for the same flight in US dollars, we book the flight.

Sign up for Fare Alerts

Fare alerts give you some downright shocking prices on flights if you’re willing to sift through a lot of email and check the emails you’ve been sent. I highly recommend signing up for a Gmail account and becoming familiar with using email filters before signing up for these alerts, as these emails can start to fill your inbox quickly. The following sites all announce interesting deals about every day if you’re willing to follow them closely.

TheFlightDeal.com AirfareWatchdog.com

HolidayPirates.com SecretFlying.com ScottsCheapFlights.com AgencyFlight.com

Many airlines offer their own email newsletters in which they announce discounts or special prices. The Airfare Watchdog website has a list of these newsletters you can subscribe to:

<http://www.airfarewatchdog.com/blog/3802135/how-to-sign-up-for-deal-newsletters-and-farealerts-from-us-based-airlines>

Mistake Airfares

These are airfare prices that happen completely by accident. Sometimes the person entering the data will miss the zero on a 1400 dollar ticket, making it 140. Or someone will forget to add in the fuel surcharge when calculating the final price, making the ticket 400-500 dollars cheaper than it should be. Or an airline accidentally applies a promotion to *all* of it’s flights instead of the few it was meant for. Either way, these things happen, but they’re almost always corrected in a few hours, so you gotta be quick to take advantage.

It’s important to note you should not book accommodations or make any other plans around the mistake fare until you’re 100% sure it will be honored. Airlines aren’t always bound to honor these prices, but due to the social media backlash that occurs when they don’t, they often will take the hit to make the customer happy.

Since mistake fares can happen literally at any time, it’s best to follow websites like The Flight Deal (www.theflightdeal.com) to be notified of the latest mistake fares.

Throwaway Ticketing

One of the big hurdles involved in going abroad is many countries require you to show proof that you are going to leave their country before they will let you in. Most of the time this proof takes the form of an airline ticket you’ve already bought, showing the customs officer you are leaving at a specific date.

FlyOnWard (www.flyonward.com) allows you to ‘rent’ airline tickets for a small fee (currently, \$10 USD). These tickets are good for 24 to 48 hours before your journey and are immediately canceled after that period of time. These ‘throwaway’ tickets are a way to travel if you’re not sure how long you’re going to stay in a particular country.

Unusual Promotions

This is an incredible shot in the dark, but I still think it’s worth mentioning, if for no other reason than you’ll know what to look out for when it happens. In 2005, AirTran put on a promotion with the Wendy’s fast food chain in which they placed coupons on the sides of their drink cups. These coupons were good for free airline miles with AirTran to anywhere they fly to.

At the time, around 64 cups were worth one round trip flight to anywhere AirTran went.

While I did not live in an area with any Wendy’s near me at the time, many of my friends in the punk community took advantage of the promotion by dumpster diving every Wendy’s restaurant they could find. For months afterwards I was sent many pictures of my friend’s travels as they wandered from country to country on AirTran’s dime. AirTran repeated this promotion in 2013 but after being absorbed into Southwest Airlines, who knows if this particular promotion will ever return.

Hitchhiking Airplanes

While it's incredibly rare, it's definitely not impossible, and folks have apparently been doing it since the late 60's. This is a short list websites with more information on the subject:

The Expert Vagabond - Matthew Karsten managed to hitchhike a ride on an airplane as part of his hitchhiking journey across the USA:

<https://expertvagabond.com/hitchhiking-america-part-8>

Jet Hiking - Amber Nolan was also able to hitchhike airplanes to almost every state in the USA (minus Hawaii). Although her personal website seems to be offline, you can still access most of it, including the blog posts and pictures of her adventures, via the Wayback Machine:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160502011256/http://jethiking.com:80>

SkyPool - There used to be a website for matching pilots with hitchhikers called SkyPool (www.skypool.com) but it's been offline since October of 2016 with a vague message about reviewing the rules and regulations of the FAA. You can see how that site used to work via the Wayback Machine here:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20160620161929/http://skypool.com:80>

Hitchhiking Airplanes - The good folks at HitchWiki have a little bit of information about this subject on their website with a few experiences and some advice:

http://hitchwiki.org/en/Hitchhiking_a_plane

Conclusion

If you made it this far, I hope this guide has given you a more comprehensive understanding of the various kinds of travel possible if you're willing to make a few sacrifices. Thank you for taking the time to read the suggestions, advice, and general information contained in this book. I hope it serves you well!

It's hard for me to imagine this book has finally come to an end. I've worked on this project almost every day for the past year (and it's been in planning stages for almost two years!), and I believe it is one of the only projects of this scale I've actually *finished*. So that's a big deal for me personally!

The majority of this book was written while living in the squatter town known as Slab City, aka, 'The last free place on earth'. If you've never been there, I highly recommend checking it out. The ability to relax and work without interruptions (minus an explosion or party every now and then) in a post apocalyptic setting in the desert vastly accelerated this project. I would like to thank everyone that supported me during this time, especially Cornelius Vango, Caveman, Andy Barrera, Anna Angio, and anyone else who put up with me while I was there. I'd also like to thank my family for being patient with me and believing I could accomplish something of this scale.

While about 95% of this book was written by myself, I would like to acknowledge many of the contributions given by members of the Squat the Planet website community. This was especially crucial for the section on Finding People to Travel With. A huge thanks to MolotovMocktail, Kim Chee, EphemeralStick, salxtina, iflewoverthecuckoosnest, and Bedheadred; without their input on the original article the re-written version for this book would not have been possible.

Additional thanks goes out to all the people who anonymously contributed to the Brief Guide to the USA, as there were a small handful of cities I hadn't been to in quite some time; these folks were nice enough to contribute more updated information than my personal experience could offer.

The amazing artwork found on the cover of this book (along with the illustrations found inside) were all created by Shelby Criswell. They are an amazing artist and I definitely think you should visit their website (shelbycriswell.com) and go buy all their awesome comics and artwork.

Finally, if you are not already a member of the Squat the Planet online community (squattheplanet.com), I hope you will come join us and create a free account. While I've worked hard to provide the answers to most basic questions on underground travel, you might still have questions you need answered. Rather than email me directly, I suggest you join the community and start a discussion on the topic. This way you can get answers from not just one person, but dozens or possibly hundreds of other people sourced from their personal experiences. It's also a wonderful place to post the stories, photos, and videos of your travels for an audience especially interested in what you have to share.

Of course, for all other inquires, suggestions, constructive criticism, and contributions for future editions of this book, please feel free to contact me anytime via email at feedback@squattheplanet.com.

See you on the road, and safe travels! Matt Derrick

About the Author

Matthew Derrick got his first taste of traveling in 1998, just after graduating high school. He has spent almost every year since exploring the United States with an annual income that has never exceeded \$7,000. When not traveling, he is an avid gamer, web developer, and urban explorer. Although he now lives in an RV, bike touring continues to be one of his favorite activities and he still manages to ride a few freight trains now and then just for fun. He can be reached via the community he's built around underground travel, www.squattheplanet.com.



The Library of
Unconventional Lives

Matthew Derrick
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A Manual for Future Hitchhikers, Hobos, and Other Misfit Wanderers
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