

The Entrepreneurial Explorer

A 12-step primer for the
working nomad

(Or how to achieve the Eat, Pray, Love*
lifestyle and pay your bills without an
advance from your publisher.)

*With a nod to Elizabeth Gilbert



Once upon a time when I was a naive and hopelessly romantic young student, I packed a fat suitcase, waved goodbye to suburban Southern California, and went to the south of France. A seed was planted. Upon threat of disownment from my mother, eleven months later I returned.

I spent the next few decades in the tireless routine of alarm clocks, freeway commutes, and Monday morning status meetings. Then that seed started to grow. Overtaken by heady optimism, hopeless romanticism, and likely one too many martinis, I quit my corporate job, packed my suitcase, waved goodbye to secure San Francisco and my Potrero Hill posse, and went to Morocco. Then I went to Mexico. Eleven months later I returned. Then I left again. And again. And again.

I've learned a lot. I'm still learning and traveling and working (in spite of what some of my friends think).

I wrote this little guide knowing that there are others like me: corporate employees looking for a meaningful change, dreamers stuck in grinding routines, consultants and entrepreneurs yearning to expand their horizons.

I also wrote this for companies needing to understand how to entice and manage an increasingly mobile, dispersed, and independent workforce.

Being a nomad isn't about running away. Rather, it's about shedding the weight and shackles of a habit-based lifestyle and feeding ourselves with new experiences to create, grow, thrive, and inspire.

Warning: This guide not recommended for people with boarding tendencies, couch potatoes, or those afraid of flying (literally and figuratively). These recommendations are based on my own experience; I can't take responsibility for what you'll find in the end.

1 *Quit Your Job*

Seriously. Meditate, hallucinate, dream, do whatever it takes to change your mind set, and be ready to take a risk. You must walk to the edge of that cliff and be excited about jumping. A little fear (well maybe a little more than a little) is good—it means you're thinking seriously and not being an idiot. I recommend having at least six months of income saved up, so you can really exploit Step 2. In my case I consulted with a financial advisor. I'm particularly adverse to the idiot label.



2 *Give Yourself a Break*

Learn what you love. Learn what you don't. Listen to how you describe yourself and your life to others. Discover who you are. Take a class. Tick a few things off your bucket list... or make one. Breathe. Travel. Begin to redesign your life. Some people might argue that it would be best to explore these things before chucking a steady paycheck, but unless your employer has a generous sabbatical policy, this could be challenging to pull off. Free time, freedom, sleeping in, and a small dose of panic energize the mind—let it wander.



3 Simplify

Loosen the ties that bind. Donate, sell or store your stuff. Practice letting go. Really, as you live around the world, are you going to need those old roller blades that you haven't worn since you cracked your kneecap five years ago in that embarrassing fall where you dragged your date down with you and they never returned your calls? Or those six tangled strings of Christmas lights, half of which don't work? Embrace Craig's list. Do you really need a car when you get back? Maybe a Zipcar will do just fine from now on.

Now think about what you absolutely do need. As you're traipsing around the world, what can't you live without? And what are your must-haves when you return home or find a new one? If it can be shrunk or digitized, do it. If it has real meaning, grant yourself permission to tuck it away.

For Sale



“A place for everything and everything in its place.” I have no clue who coined this but now is the time to take it to heart. Collect all the info you reference regularly and not so regularly: passwords, contacts (your doctor!), credit card and driver's license numbers and their expiration dates—you do not want to try to renew your MasterCard when you are in Malaysia.

Take note of the dates of important payments like insurance and taxes, birthdays, and anniversaries and put them all on your online calendar.

Make copies of all of your prescription meds. Organize all your paper files in case you need to tell someone else where to find an important document (and take the opportunity to shred a few things).

And while you're at it, if you have significant assets or dependents, make a will. It will give you great peace of mind when you're experiencing severe turbulence at 30,000 ft.

Plan what to do with your apartment or house and/or car. Personally I like the idea of having a home base somewhere, so renting out my house and storing my car works for me. Do what works for you.

4 Organize

OTHER CRAP

HOPES

DREAMS



5 *Virtualize*

Embrace a paperless lifestyle. If you only feel comfortable trusting the USPS to deliver your bills and love licking stamps, then reconsider this lifestyle change. However, if you're one of the enlightened who isn't intimidated by "the cloud," then proceed to Go and collect \$200.

Organize all of your logins, passwords, credit card and account numbers—there are many apps that can help you do this such as KeePass, 1Password, and LastPass. Digitize all important paper records. Move all your bill pay online. Register for online access to your insurance/health records (if available) and financial accounts. Opt out of junk mail via DMAChoice.org. Get a virtual PO Box such as Earth Class mail that allows you to manage what little snail mail you do still get from anywhere. Put all your CDs in iTunes.

When it comes to business, investigate and invest in online collaborative tools like Evernote and DropBox. Skype is essential—get a Skype number and voice mail—and it has a good desktop sharing function too. GoToMeeting is great for web conferencing. Collaborate with Google docs. Consider web-based business management tools like Freshbooks, or get a virtual assistant.

Make it easy for clients to send you payments via PayPal or direct deposit. Most of mine send checks directly to my bank (making friends with your banker helps a lot). Put a world clock app on your desktop so you can schedule meetings appropriately and not accidentally wake up your best friend in another continent at 3am.



6 *Design*

Create your business. Let's assume you started this in Step 2. For obvious reasons, not every kind of business is suited to the nomad life. Owning your own little dress shop... maybe not,

if you're the kind who loves chitchatting with customers every day. Then again, think Etsy. In my case, my office is my laptop and wherever I have a broadband connection. Warning: research the internet speed in your desired destination *before* you go. I learned a little late that my new landlord's idea of "fast" didn't quite jibe with my Bay Area expectations.

Of course, it's not always necessary to be your own boss to lead the nomad life. Perhaps you already have a job that takes you on the road most of the time, or an employer who embraces outsourcing. So take a shorter break and start negotiating your flexibility.

Think about your ideal work style—are you a true loner or do you enjoy the juice that flows from a collective of colleagues and collaborators? Are you more productive at a desk or in your PJs? Be sure your remote digs are suitable to your style. If you need a desk and water cooler chatter, consider joining The HUB in your location, or starting one of your own.

Design your website. Even if you're not running your own business, you'll want to keep friends and colleagues up-to-date on your adventures. WordPress is an excellent tool (and my favorite) for building easily maintainable sites for my clients and myself. If you're not a web pro, consider hiring one.

7 *Create a Backup Plan*

We all deserve the right to change our minds. The point of being a nomad is to explore and that includes moving in all directions, even backward. Sometimes things don't work out quite right the first time—so who knew you were *that* allergic to mosquitos? It's OK to go back to square one and start again... just be sure you still have a square one to go to. Instead of selling all your furniture and terminating your lease, consider a sublet and a one-month trial.



8 *Back up Your Hard Drive*

Yes, this one bit of advice merits its own paragraph. Your entire office and IT department are now in your carry-on. Carry a backup hard drive or consider automated cloud backup (personally I find this option kinda scary, but your choice). Sign up for world-wide tech support. Make friends with your favorite tech geek/neighbor's kid/former IT guy who is online at all hours. You will inevitably suffer a hard drive freeze four hours from a deadline in a city that has no Genius Bar—consider yourself forwarned.



9 *Pack Light*

If you managed not to freak out in Step 1, you're on solid ground to make it through this step. If you are a serious nomad, you will probably be going away for two to six months or more. Bring sensible shoes and not so sensible ones (hint: tango dancing gives you an excuse to pack multiple pairs of light-weight stilettos). Buy a travel towel and a head lamp (you will thank me when you're trying to find the WC in the desert at 2am). Get an unlocked cellphone and buy a local SIM card at your destination. Take personal items that will keep you grounded—your favorite cologne to spritz on your sheets, a family photo for your bedside.

But be forewarned, tears may be shed when you realize that special sweater bumps you over the 23kg limit or having arrived at your



destination, you left behind five essential things you need on day one. Remember that cloths are easy to buy just about anywhere; your favorite face cream probably is not. There are millions of Google results about how to pack for a long trip. I recommend a good search based on where you're going and for how long, and then ask your nomad friends.

10 *Go*

Don't look back. Get where you're going and jump right in. Explore, go to events, make new friends, network. Bring your business cards wherever you go—be sure they have your local contact information or global contact info. Random encounters can be surprisingly lucrative.

Work comes when and where you least expect it. If it's not coming your way, immerse yourself in your surroundings, get inspired and think about the unique talents that got you where you are. Focus on those to generate new business leads or marketing ideas, or make adjustments to your business plan. Trust yourself. You've made it this far.



“Let's talk about your brand image...”

11 *Hold on to a Few Routines*

In spite of the advice in the previous step, don't go native too fast. If you have a favorite morning or bedtime routine like yoga, reading the news or savoring a nice cup of tea, stick with it. It's balancing and sets you up well for the all the surprises you'll encounter during the day.

Keep to your regular work schedule initially. The anxiety of trying to stay productive while succumbing to the temptations of tapas crawling, trinket buying, sightseeing, and surfing will either ruin your digestion or your revenue stream. A fellow nomad maintains a Mon-Fri 9-5 routine regardless of where she is. I prefer a looser schedule but with maximum on-call availability.

And break a few

Expand your mind and embrace change. Don't be afraid to try on other aspects of your personality. Taste a new food, play with a new language, try a new shampoo. My old company maintained the mantra 'evolve or die'—this is exactly what I'm talking about.

12 *Keep in touch*

As you roam, don't forget your friends and colleagues. Traditional workplace associates can be a valuable source of inside information (OK, gossip) on what's happening in the market, industry, and with competitors. They can also be a grounding influence since they still carry on between the traditional four office walls, paychecks, and weekly status meetings.

Use online social networks like LinkedIn and Facebook (though set limits and don't let it suck your day away). Appreciate that others are living vicariously through you. Be generous. Share your experiences, but don't be a snotty jet-setter. While your life may seem thrilling and new and you'll want to crow about all the details, don't forget that your home-based friends also have experiences worth inquiring about.

Finally, form a community of like-minded nomads or independents. The wanderer's life, while genuinely amazing, isn't always rosy. It's nice to have someone who can empathize with the hiccups, share the joy, and remind you why you chose to do it in the first place.



Breathe.

Enjoy.

People and references that make me want to hop on a plane...

Timothy Ferriss
fourhourworkweek.com

Derik Severs
sivers.org

Rick Steves
ricksteves.com/plan/tips/pack-light.htm

The HUB
the-hub.net

Projects Abroad
projects-abroad.org

Immersive Journeys
immersivejourneys.com/blog

LuxeNomads
luxenomads.com

Send me your tips and stories. Or RPFs.
Sharing is great. (See Step 12)

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