

# LIVE IT OUT

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## A Journey Like No Other

The scale of the journey we were about to embark on was something that neither of us had ever experienced before. Two and a half months in completely unfamiliar territory, with unfamiliar languages; the only part of home that we had was ourselves. For the first time, we were entirely responsible for everything, any mistakes or mishaps that happened along the way we had

no one to blame but ourselves.

This was also the first time we could discover for ourselves how we liked to travel. Any opportunity or event that came up we could seize with no hesitation, and we were going to be free to make our own decisions and choices. The myriad of possibilities was both overwhelming and exquisitely exciting. We never really knew

where we were going to end up next week or even tomorrow in some cases and that in itself was such a new experience. Europe is such an exciting and famous frontier for travelling, with so many well known landmarks, history, and cultures that completely change over small distances; and we had under 90 days to experience it our way.

**Gavin Clarkson**

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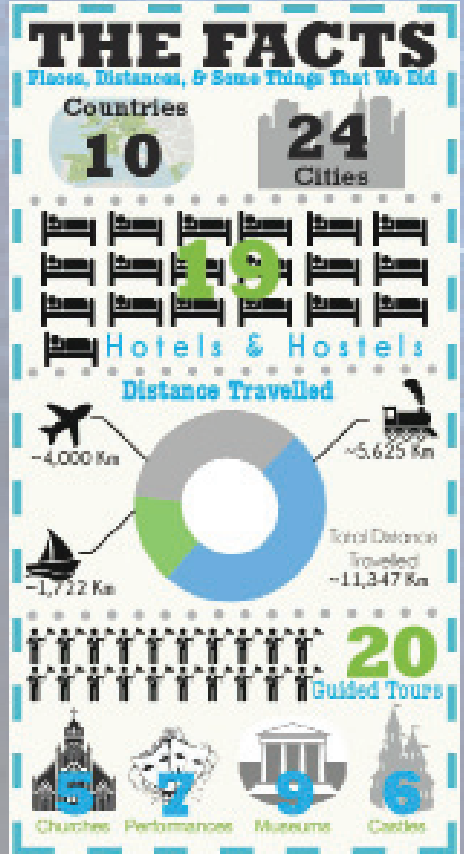
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# Travel Itinerary

02/26	Departed Vancouver, <b>Canada</b>	04/05	Lyon, <b>France</b>
02/27	Arrived Ansbach, <b>Germany</b>	04/07	Paris, <b>France</b>
03/11	Munich, <b>Germany</b>	04/11	Brussels, <b>Belgium</b>
03/12	Athens, <b>Greece</b>	04/13	Day Trip: Bruges, <b>Belgium</b>
03/18	Contiki Cruise: Mykonos, <b>Greece</b>	04/14	Amsterdam, <b>The Netherlands</b>
03/19	Contiki Cruise: Kuşadası, <b>Turkey</b> & Patmos, <b>Greece</b>	04/19	Berlin, <b>Germany</b>
03/20	Contiki Cruise: Rhodes, <b>Greece</b>	04/22	Prague, <b>Czech Republic</b>
03/21	Contiki Cruise: Crete, <b>Greece</b> & Santorini, <b>Greece</b>	04/26	Day Trip: Kutna Hora, <b>Czech Republic</b>
03/22	Athens, <b>Greece</b>	04/27	Vienna, <b>Austria</b>
03/24	Barcelona, <b>Spain</b>	04/30	Munich, <b>Germany</b>
03/26	Madrid, <b>Spain</b>	05/01	Ansbach, <b>Germany</b>
03/29	Day Trip: Segovia, <b>Spain</b>	05/04	Day Trip: Munich, <b>Germany</b>
03/30	Barcelona, <b>Spain</b>	05/07	London, <b>England</b>
04/02	Day Trip: Port Aventura, <b>Spain</b>	05/12	Day Trip: Oxford, <b>England</b>
04/03	Barcelona, <b>Spain</b>	05/14	Arrival Vancouver, <b>Canada</b>



## Munich



From Top: With our Australian friends at the Hofbräuhaus in Munich, With our tour guide Ozzy in Munich, At the Temple of Zeus in Athens, Ruins of Ephesus in Turkey, our Contiki Group.

We began our journey in Munich. We had been here about a month or so before, making it the perfect familiar place to start our journey. We stayed in the best hostel in Munich, and without any effort made friends with a random group of Australians. With our new friends we ventured off to the famous Hofbräuhaus, and ate Bavarian sausages and schweine haxen (otherwise known as pork knuckle). Our night was exhilarating and exciting; It showed us the limitless possibility of how fun the next few months of our trip would be and we loved it.

The following day we decided to do a free tour called OzTours Munich with our tour guide Ozzy. This tour was amazing and completely changed our perspective on how we were going to plan our backpacking trip by giving us great insight to the city itself and travel in general. Ozzy took the time to teach us the history of the city and lead us to the Viktualienmarkt to taste some delicious local food. After the tour Ozzy took the group to a local pub where he recommended local beers and we chatted. Before long it was time to leave Munich and catch our flight to Athens.

## Athens

The quick pace and excitement we experienced in Munich completely slowed down when we arrived in Athens. There wasn't too much to do in the city so we did all of the standard site seeing. We went to the Acropolis

Museum before experiencing the actual Acropolis nearby, perched atop a great hill that overlooks all of Athens. We saw to the Panathenaic Stadium where we visited the Olympic Museum which held every poster and torch for all of the Olympic games ever held. After our Contiki Tour we visited the grounds of the 2004 Olympic Games. We were pleasantly delighted by Greek cuisine. We ate fresh Greek yogurt with honey, milk pies, semolina, spinach pies, Greek salad, calamari, moussaka, lamb souvlaki, gyros, taramasalata, olives, fresh bread and pitas. On our last day we got caught in a riot on the way to the airport. By the end of our time there, we couldn't wait to continue on to new places.

## Cruising the Aegean

The reason why Gavin and I went to Athens was because we had decided to do a Contiki Tour. We had never done such a tour before but had heard nothing but great things. We decided to do a cruise on the Aegean that would take us to the islands of Mykonos, Kusadasi, Patmos, Rhodes, Crete, and Santorini. The islands were so beautiful and unique, even if the weather didn't always agree. On every island we had a few hours to explore or do an excursion. The excursions were organized by the cruise ship who provided us with a tour bus and a tour guide to see the sights of the islands. We signed up for two excursions, one in Santorini and one in Kusadasi, Turkey. Our tour of Santorini was beautiful but uneventful. In Kusadasi we got to see the ruins of Ephesus and tasted some authentic Turkish Delight.

We loved the Contiki Tour because we made new friends from South Africa, Australia, and England,



saw a lot of places in a short time, and had a tour manager who could provide insights on every island we went to.

## Barcelona

Barcelona was one of the most beautiful cities I had ever been to. The entire city was surrounded by eccentric architecture from the famous architect Antoni Gaudi. The first site we visited was the famous catholic cathedral Sagrada Familia: Gaudi's legacy. The cathedral has been under construction since 1882. We were in shock and awe over how one of a kind, elaborate and detailed the architecture was. We then walked down the famous Passing de Gracia where Gaudi's La Pedera and Batiló were built. After a brief trip to Madrid we returned to Barcelona to visit the Magic Fountain, Mágica de Montjuïc at the 1929 World's Fair Pavilion; The Barcelonnetta beach front; and the Parc Güell (Gaudi's park). The warm Mediterranean air and unlimited sunshine made our stay in Barcelona feel very relaxed.

## Madrid

Madrid offered the social excitement we had longed for since Munich. On our first night we joined a Tapas tour with our hostel and met Grace from San Francisco. The following day we visited the Palace Real, a local market, before going to an authentic flamenco show. The flamenco show was very passionate and intense, we had never seen anything like it before. On the way back, we ran into a late night Easter procession. After having a fantastic time we extended our visit in Madrid by another day. The next day we enjoyed more delicious tapas while walking through the Museo del Prado.

## Segovia

On our last full day in Madrid we decided to go on a day trip to Segovia. Segovia was home to an aqueduct that was an international historic civil engineering landmark. After viewing the aqueduct we ventured inside an elaborate Cathedral on the way to the Alcazar castle. We took a

self-guided tour inside the classic castle and climbed a winding stone stair well to the top towers where we saw a breathtaking view of the countryside. The castle was once one of the world's best artillery academies for about one hundred years in the mid 18th century, and also had a museum dedicated to the science and manufacturing of cannons and mortars. After visiting the castle we travelled back to Madrid.

## Port Aventura

Port Aventura was the highlight of our vacation. For the first time we weren't carefully planning our days or running from station to station; for once we could relax and be kids. We enjoyed the fastest tallest and craziest roller coasters in Europe. Our favorites were Shambhala, Dragon Khan, and Furious Baco. Shambhala was the tallest roller coaster in Europe at 80 meters high. Dragon Khan was considered one of the best roller coasters in the world with 8 inversions (second most in the world). Furious Baco was the fastest



**Top Row:** Me at Sagrada Familia in *Barcelona* • Gavin at the Barcelonnetta in *Barcelona* • Gavin at Gaudi Parc in *Barcelona* • Gavin and I at Plaza Mayor in *Madrid* • Grace at the Center of Spain in *Madrid*  
**Bottom Row:** Gavin and I at the Aqueduct in Segovia • Gavin and I at the Alcázar Castle in Segovia • Gavin and I at Port Aventura near Barcelona

accelerating coaster in Europe at 135 km/h in less than 3 seconds. We spent two full days riding all of the coasters in the park and relaxing in the nicest hotel of our entire trip. Port Aventura was a definite high in our journey.

## Lyon

After the excitement of Port Aventura, Gavin and I needed some time to recharge before we continued our journey; for this reason we stopped in Lyon. Lyon was a delightful change of pace, we ate French brioche, bread, macarons and pastries. We stayed in the city for two days before departing for the city of love.

## Paris

Paris was a non-stop adventure. When we arrived we took part in our usual walking tour but also a tour of the Montmartre district and the exquisite Palace in Versailles. We also saw a show at Moulin Rouge, visited the Musée d'Orsay, and went to the top of the Eiffel tower. One of the highlights

was eating Macarons at Laduree and ate French Onion Soup and Escargots. Gavin and I even put a lock on the lovers bridge. Paris was way better than I remembered and I can't wait to return.

## Brussels

We didn't know much about Brussels before arriving and it became an opportunity to be social. We made friends with two hostel mates, Amanda from Ireland and Jordan from Vancouver. Amanda and Jordan took us with them on a tour of the last Lambic beer brewery: the Cantillon Brewery. Following the tour we explored downtown Brussels, where we experienced incredible Belgian waffles, a taste that has not been replicated anywhere else. The next day we went on a day trip to Bruge, a nearby historic village with old beautiful architecture and winding canals. When we returned from Bruge we went and visited the Atomium, a gigantic 102 meter model of an atom. The Atomium was built for the 1958 Worlds Fair and held exhibits inside each orb.

After visiting the Atomium we caught a train to Amsterdam.

## Bruges

Our Irish friend Amanda urged us to take a day trip to Bruges. She told us of how the town was a romantic and classic example of old Europe. The town was covered in brick and lined with canals. Everywhere we went we saw horse drawn carriages pull people around. Gavin and I took a boat tour along the canals and tasted some Belgian Chocolates. We purchased some hand made candy from a sweets store and enjoyed Belgian fries and waffles. It was the perfect day trip until we got rained out of town.

## Amsterdam

Amsterdam was one of our busiest cities. In between walking around and enjoying the general splendour, we did five tours and a cheese tasting. We enjoyed a historical walking tour; a red light district tour; a bike tour; a "coffee shop" tour; and a canal tour. The



**Top Row:** Gavin and I at the Eiffel Tower in Paris • Gavin at the palace of Versailles in Paris • Gavin and I at Sacré-Coeur de Montmartre in Paris • Me Eating a Belgian Waffle in Brussels • Gavin and I at the Cantillon Brewery in Brussels • Gavin and I at the Atomium in Brussels  
**Bottom Row:** A horse drawn carriage in Bruges • Me in Bruges • Me at a Candy store in Bruges • Gavin and I during our bike tour in Amsterdam • Gavin and I ate our cheese Tasting in Amsterdam.

highlight was probably the bike tour because we were able to enjoy parts of Amsterdam that were not in the tourist district. After all of our tours we visited the Anne Frank Museum. When we finished visiting the museum our last night in Amsterdam came to an end.

## Berlin

We started off our trip to Berlin with a free tour starting at the Brandenburg Gate. We were shocked to see our friend Amanda from Ireland who we had met in Brussels. On the tour we saw the controversial Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe; the location of Hitler's Bunker; Checkpoint Charlie; a preserved section of the Berlin Wall; and the preserved foundations of the former Gestapo headquarters. Following the tour we went on a

pub crawl with Amanda. The next day, my uncle Klaus had time to show us around some of his favorite sites. He drove us to the 1936 Olympic Grounds; a great red clock tower, the Grunewaldtrum; the grounds of Potsdam, the city of German Kaisers and the home of their most famous palaces.

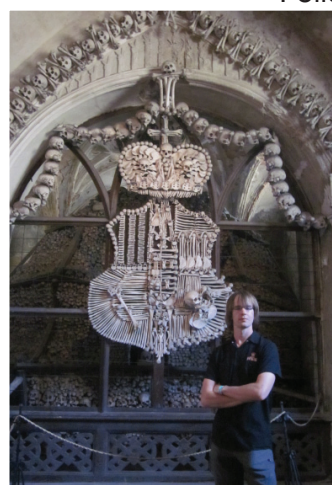
The next day we visited the Pergamon Museum. The museum had exhibits and collections from Greek and Middle Eastern antiquity, including the fully reconstructed Pergamon Altar. This marked our final day in Berlin. We said goodbye to Klaus, and boarded yet another train towards the city of Prague.

## Prague

Prague was so exciting that we extended our trip by a day. The local cuisine was tasty and the city was far cheaper than anywhere else we had traveled. On the first day we did a free tour which started in the Old Square. On the tour we saw the Astronomical clock (the third most disappointing tourist attraction in Europe), The Charles Bridge, the Old Jewish Quarter with the Jewish Cemetery, and learned many facts about the city and its history. Following the tour we did a beer tour with our tour guide Bara. The following morning we wandered the city. We ended up making our way to the Prague Castle which was on the other side of the river and up a large hill. The highlight of Prague would probably be all of the friends we made at the most social hostel we had ever been to.

## Kutna Hora

While in Prague we took a day trip to Kutna Hora; a historical town that minted the silver for most of Europe hundreds of years ago. The town was also the home of The Sedlec Ossuary: a bone chapel. The Ossuary was decorated with the bones of 40,000 to 70,000 people. The human remains took the form of pyramids, chandeliers and coats of arms. After the chapel we went to the local museum and took part in a tour of the medieval Hradek silver mine. The tour took us inside the mine and showed us the methods used to mint the silver. Following the tour we returned to Prague.



From Top: Me in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin; Gavin in Prague; Gavin in The Bone Chapel in Kutna Hora; Gavin at Dachau Concentration Camp in Munich.



## Vienna

While we were in Vienna we made sure we tasted some of that world famous Wiener Schnitzel. We stayed next to the Naschmarkt a huge foreign street market. We explored the museum quarter which had five huge museums in former palaces. We wandered around the city and enjoyed the beautiful parks incredible architecture and music. While Vienna was one of the most beautiful cities we had been to it was definitely the most uninteresting.

## Munich

Gavin and I were excited to return to Munich to see our favorite tour guide, eat our favorite meals, and just have an all out amazing time reminiscent of two months before. Unfortunately our stay was nothing like our previous visit: no one was social, and Ozzy was taking a day off. Not feeling completely defeated we decided to go and visit the Dachau Concentration Camp. Visiting Dachau was a very emotional experience. Afterwards we left Munich and went back to Ansbach. A few days later we returned to Munich and spent the day in the Viktualienmarkt. Later that day we got to see Ozzy and he took us to a few local pubs and showed us an amazing time, reminding us of the fantastic city that Munich is.

## London

London was the most expensive city we had ever been to but this did not detract from how much fun we had. We saw all the usual sites like Picadilly Circus, Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, The Queen, and Westminster Abbey.

We saw four West End musicals, Les Miserables, Wicked, Singing in the Rain and Book of Mormon. On our second night we were lucky enough to see my friend Billy and Adam while they were on their way to Spain. We also visited the British Museum, the Natural science Museum (where Gavin got to see three massive Geology exhibits) and the Victoria and Albert Museum (where I got to see a massive in-depth David Bowie Exhibit). On our last full day we took the time to go to the Harry Potter sound stage and toured all of the props used to film the movie.

## Oxford

While in London we took the time to take a day trip to Oxford University and visit our friend Grace, who we met in Madrid. Grace showed us around the famous university and took us to the Eagle and Child, a famous restaurant where J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis wrote their respective chronicles. After a wonderful visit we returned to London.



From Top: The Queen of England; Gavin in the Natural Science Museum; Billy and I; Grace and I in Oxford; Me with some Lederhosen wearing Bavarians; Gavin and I at the Harry Potter Soundstage.

# What Does it All Mean?

If we were to quantitatively look at our journey one could say we backpacked for two and half months; visited ten countries; twenty-four cities; slept in nineteen hostel beds; participated in twenty guided tours; visited five churches; watched seven live performances; visited nine museums; and six castles. We travelled over 11,000 kilometers through the use of planes, trains and a cruise ship.

Qualitatively speaking, Gavin and I each brought a backpack filled with only the necessities. We never knew how little we could live with; especially when you have to carry everything on your back. We also shocked everyone by surviving our entire journey without a cell phone or a GPS. We made so many friends, some of which we will never see again and some we are determined to visit. We tasted some of the best cuisine in the world and in the same week experienced being caught in a local riot. We observed how crossing the most arbitrary state boarder automatically changed the mentality and mannerisms of locals; and how trying to speak a little of the local language made a big difference.

A trip like this is so complicated to express and explain that living it was the only way for us to truly experience backpacking through Europe. So many friends and colleagues told us of how they always dreamed of backpacking through Europe. We used to have that dream until we lived it out!



From Top: Gavin and I in front of Furious Baco at Port Aventura, Spain. Gavin and I with Apple Tea at a rug factory in Turkey.



## Live it Out

Live It Out is a publication of Sheena Grant.

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