

Before I thought X. After an event, I thought Y.

- what is the common perspective?
  - what is the implication of everyone believing that common perspective?
  - what is your unique perspective?
  - what is a personal story that shows me in the middle of this tension between the common and unique perspective?
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I have no house keys, no car keys, and no health insurance.

My flight to the next destination already got canceled and rebooked twice.

It didn't always start out like this. I was raised under the same roof, with the same family - only venturing as far as the next state for our annual summer trip.

The same school, the same house, the same meals (yay, leftovers!), and even the staying in the same same house during those summer trips. Consistency is desired in suburban America, emphasizing the desire to grow up and stay in the same place and to build this idolized stability for my future.

'Prove it,' my father said on the other end of the phone when I told him I would study abroad in Australia during my last semester of college, just two hours from home. At twenty-one years old, I boarded the plane to the University of the Sunshine Coast and have been abroad since.

For fourteen years and spanning twenty-five countries, I have 'backpacked', lived as an 'expat', and now embracing the 'digital nomad' lifestyle.

So, what's the difference?

*Backpacking* - travel or hike carrying one's belongings in a backpack

*Expat* - a person who lives (and works) outside their native country

*Digital nomad*- a person who earns a living working online in various locations of their choosing (rather than a fixed business location)

I am more used to this way of life, this is *my familiar way of being*.

I had my first backpacking experience as a long-term traveler in 2011, spending 6 months in Southeast Asia. It was fun to move around every 3 or so days, spanning 8 tropical countries by plane, mostly long loud buses, overcrowded sleeper trains, and lots of neon-lit tuk-tuks. This young and adventurous lifestyle felt so freeing and invigorating.

'Where should we go tomorrow?' the daily dilemma we faced, tirelessly planning bus routes and hostels for the next destination. The backpacking trail had a common direction, taking us from Malaysia to Thailand and Singapore. Commonly followed by Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and ending back in Bangkok, Thailand for the final hurrah. This common path created many serendipitous reconnections - like when our group of three from Canada, Australia, and US crossed paths with a group from England on one island in Thailand and later ran into them again on a beach in Vietnam some months later.

Before this trip, I had no idea what this backpacking trend was all about. How could anyone want to live out of a bag with all of their belongings on their back? Like a turtle! It took me about one week to realize why. Because of the freedom. With no plan and hardly any commitments in sight.

This instability was so freeing.

In my most recent 'home' in Taiwan, I spent eight glorious years on a beautiful tropical island with a stable community and many great friendships. But after meeting my Canadian partner there, I realized that I didn't want to stay this far away from home forever and was ready for a new challenge. After purging my hoarded belongings, I saved a few memorable things and lugged them to the post office, box by box, on my 120cc scooter. We officially hung up our chopsticks and said sweet goodbyes to our bubble tea and soup dumplings, kissing this comfortable 'expat' life goodbye in Asia.

So why leave it all the comforts behind? Ready to try out digital nomad lifestyle for the next twelve months.

The first destination was Lisbon, Portugal. We arrived on April Fools' day and every lasting felt complete with Pastel de Natas, historic jazz clubs, outside escalators, endless hills, and enough grilled sardines to last you a lifetime. We drooled over European architecture, admiring intricacies of the old cobblestone streets had to have been built by hand, and delighted by the friendly service at the tiny back alley bakery, as the old man behind the metal prison-like bars handed over the paper bag of chocolate croissants and Pastel de Natas with a smile, 'Obrigado!'



I realized the next twelve months would be a constant search for homes and flights. And after many cancellations, delays, and setbacks, we are still here.

This lifestyle may seem scary, but I find it incredibly invigorating.

The invigorating feeling of trying new places, immersing in new cultures, and stimulating my senses with new and pungent scents are still as fresh as the first time I used my passport.

It's not all crazy though, and stability can be easily found or created. So after packing up my life in various places by giving away my things or shipping some boxes on a slow boat across the Pacific, I was ready to optimize this process. I was able to apply many stints of 'expat' living to trying out the next unstable lifestyle, a so-called 'digital nomad.'

Every few months to new destinations.

After you arrive, it begins with an instant desire to settle into a routine, holding onto whatever stability you can integrate back into your life.

The routine can be restarted from 'home,' anywhere and I knew setting-up would get tiring quickly, so I tried to make this process efficient.

**I found my stability with \$20 and a routine.**

The apartment, or whatever four walls you call 'home,' can also be a simple setup to bring the comforts of home inside. I spend endless time working, eating, sleeping, and living all in the same place. So it's important to give it some sense of normalcy. How could it ever feel stable or normal?

For \$20, here's a simple shopping list to make your 'home' feel normal again:

- Candle(s) of your favorite scents
- Hangers - because there are never enough
- A plant - or your favorite desk accessory
- And sticky tack or tape to hang up family photos

And here's the simple packing list to complete this set-up:

- Photos of family, friends, and pets
- Scarves - can double as couch throws, beach blankets, table cloth, wrapping paper, endless ideas....  
(also make the best practical souvenir for yourself or a gift)
- Your favorite notebook and pen - you will always thank your past self for keeping that journal

'If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine, it is lethal.' - Paulo Coelho

The routine in my day-to-day life and the simple home setup is a stress-free way to ease into new environments, whether you decide to sample this digital nomad lifestyle or go all in and move as an expat.

Overstimulating the senses upon arrival can be exhausting, but arming yourself with a simple list is the best way to free your mind to really take it all in. Leaving time for more important things in life.

Spend less time worrying about finding stability and more time living.

'We discovered a new life - the simple life.' - The Minimalists

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## DUMPTRUCK - DUMPSTER DIVE OF OLD TRASHY STUFF...

Instability and uncertainty can be scary words.

I spent one month in America this July and I observed the strongest urge for having a stable life. We spent this family vacation moving my older brother into his new home, from a one-story home to a two-story home, in the suburbs of Denver. What a proud moment to see my brother find his stability.

We are on the long-term game to move to Portugal and establish residency. So we choose to be digital nomads for the twelve months leading up to this new humble abode.

What's the counter belief?

People want stability and certainty and it doesn't exist even if you live in my suburbs.

Stability in expectation there will be instability.

Feeling is everything would work out.

Freedom -

Diff ways talking about stability ->

Trevor: A thought for an opening:

"My life is the hallmark of instability. I have no house keys, no car keys, and no health insurance."

This doesn't 'explain' your life in detail (per Wes' comment), but it doesn't need to (yet). You just need to capture the reader and give us a sense of direction.

Agreed. First it's unstable, now it's stable. Are you in Australia or another part of Asia? There's really good writing and the story that is emerging is intriguing, but it's way too vague.

~~My family spent twenty-six years in my childhood home, with my mom, my dad, two brothers and my dog. Stability surrounded us, but I left nearly 15 years ago.~~

The most frequent question from the stable side of the world, my hometown, is, 'Do you live there?' 'Sure, yeah.'

Living out of a backpack gave me exposure to the big wide world.

Booking flights feels like a marathon. setting up two computers side by side, with endless tabs and incognito windows, scouring for the shortest travel routes and the best arrival times, With attempts not to inconvenience those picking us up on the side at some ungodly morning hour.

It started by scouting out local spots. Lisbon was overflowing with nearby yoga and cycling studios, coworking spaces, healthy food spots, fruit stands, grocery stores, good restaurants, and so on.

whatever you can hold on to bring that stability back to daily life.

I found my stability with \$20 and a routine.