

10 Lessons I Learned While Traveling

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From August 2016 to July 2017, I lived in, worked remotely from and explored 10 countries and 12 cities with 70 people through a program called Remote Year. At the beginning of each month, I traveled to a different city, while balancing working full time for the

North American Retail Hardware Association. As I reflect back on all the cultures, languages, accommodations, remote work and travel madness, there are 10 lessons I learned, one from each city I called “home.” Read more about my year at [TheRedT.com/nrha-abroad](https://www.theredt.com/nrha-abroad). ➔

1. Lisbon, Portugal

Lesson: Stay true to yourself.

Five years ago, I crashed while mountain biking and have felt skittish on bikes ever since. In the first month of Remote Year, I found myself on a three-hour bike ride up and down hilly sidewalks in 90-degree heat. Afterward, I vowed never to sign up for something I anticipated I wouldn't enjoy ever again. I'll be the first one to preach on trying something new that scares you, but everyone has things they don't love.

2. Rabat, Morocco

Lesson: Understand people from backgrounds different than your own.

I spent Eid al-Adha, one of the most celebrated holidays in Morocco, with a local friend and his family. Despite the language barrier, they warmly welcomed me to learn about and participate in their celebration. This experience radically altered my thoughts on Morocco. Though our cultural and religious norms are different, we now understand each other a little better.

3. Sofia, Bulgaria

Lesson: Be cool when things don't go exactly as planned.

When an eight-hour bus ride turns into a 15-hour bus ride that leaves you stranded in a small Romanian town in the middle of the night with nothing in your stomach but gas station snacks, it's easy to get a little cranky. But when your negative attitude might impact the other 40 people you're traveling with, staying positive and adaptable keeps things from going from bad to worse.

4. Split, Croatia

Lesson: Recognizing the past is important.

Split is a ghost town in November after its tourist-ridden summer. So, I hit the road. I visited Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and learned about the 1990s Siege of Sarajevo, toured the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and visited the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site in Germany. While learning about the past can be sad and sobering, it's important to be knowledgeable so we don't let the same mistakes happen again.

5. Prague, Czech Republic

Lesson: Appreciate the little things.

I think fondly of Prague more so than the other European cities I visited. Even in blistering cold December, I simply enjoyed day-to-day life. I loved the easy-to-navigate public transportation, the local coffee shop around the corner from my apartment, cobblestone streets, detailed architecture, tender beef goulash, cheap beer...the list goes on. Finding joy in the small details that make up everyday life is important.

6. Valencia, Spain

Lesson: When the going gets crazy, embrace the crazy.

During January, I traveled to the U.S., Switzerland, France and Sweden with stops back to Valencia in between. I was busy, but I made the most of it by being completely present wherever I was and making the most of every moment I had. Instead of always looking ahead, I focused on who and what was in front of me, whether it was my computer, a retail store or a friend.

7. Mexico City, Mexico

Lesson: You can't judge a book by its cover.

I love Mexico City. However, prior to visiting for a month, it was never on my list. I figured it couldn't be all that great. How could it compare to the beaches in Cancún? Well, there are no beaches. But the city offers a bright spirit, energetic attitude and laid-back personality with some of the most delicious food, lively parties and smiling faces you'll ever see. I guess it's true that you can't knock something until you try it.

8. Bogotá and Medellín, Colombia

Lesson: Invest in learning a new skill.

After residing in Spanish-speaking countries for two months, it was time to get a language tutor. Although I'm seven-months deep in Spanish lessons and I ventured around Spanish-speaking countries for six months, I would still consider myself a beginner. Learning a second language isn't easy for me, but I'm committed because I know it's a sound investment for my future as a traveler and a professional.

9. All Around Peru

Lesson: Turn your personal challenges into opportunities for growth.

During May, I woke up next to a tarantula in a rainforest treehouse. I visited a poverty-stricken village along the Amazon river. I experienced mild heat exhaustion while hiking up Machu Picchu. I slept under coats and blankets on a block of salt and went showerless for days while road tripping in Bolivia. Travel isn't always glamorous, but every challenge made me stronger.

10. Córdoba and Buenos Aires, Argentina

Lesson: Follow your heart, reflect often and love your family.

At the end of the program, I thought a lot about my decision to participate in Remote Year and determined it was one of my best. My days in Argentina were mostly spent holed up in restaurants, coffee shops, co-working spaces and apartments with my Remote Year family. Everything I did and saw was awesome, but the people I met and lessons I learned were most impactful.

