



Travel Transformed My Life: A Journey of Growth and Discovery

Description

“A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions”

Oliver Wendell Holmes

The experience of travel goes far beyond visiting picturesque places and seeking thrilling adventures. It can be a deeply personal and transformative journey. Ryan, half of the Wanderes Compass team, opens up and shares his profound story. Upon reading it for the first time, I found myself moved to tears by the sincerity and emotional depth of his words. Ryan’s insightful personal account delves into his pursuit of dreams, his triumph over challenges, his evolution, and the deep impact travel had in shaping his life. It eloquently captures the life-altering influence of travel, a concept that is often challenging to articulate. Ryan has beautifully expressed its impact on his life, and we are honored to present his story to you. It serves as a poignant call to embrace change, venture beyond our comfort zones, take risks, and follow our dreams, as the potential rewards may surpass our wildest imagination.

During my childhood, I didn’t have access to cable TV, so my television viewing was mainly confined to PBS. One of my favorite shows was Rick Steves Europe. Rick’s passionate narration about various captivating and picturesque destinations, along with his beloved calming demeanor, brought to life the history lessons I learned in school. Colors, castles, and ancient stories were now more than words in a book. They were actual places I could fully imagine traveling to one day.



Childhood Years

As a young child, my family grew up relatively poor. My father encountered challenges with a failed business and another struggling to stay afloat. Sadly, he was diagnosed with lung cancer when I was eight years old. He fought for several months before ultimately succumbing to the illness. This loss left us burdened with overwhelming medical expenses, forced the closure and repossession of his second business, and created a void for a father my mother did her best to fill.

I had always struggled in school, and after my father's passing, I shut down, making my struggles worse and extremely difficult to get through the next few years of elementary school. I am forever grateful to my mother and my teachers, who comforted me, held me up, and pushed me through those tough times. Watching Rick Steves' show became a form of escape for me, offering comfort and fueling my hopes for a brighter future. Despite this, I doubted I would ever see my dreams materialize. The idea of affording such experiences seemed out of reach. I lacked confidence and thought I didn't possess the intelligence needed to improve and turn my dreams into reality.

After completing high school, I enrolled in the College First program with the United States Army in 2002. At the time, I found myself in dead-end jobs, working as a dishwasher, as a fry cook, and then stocking shoes without any specific skills or direction. Joining the Army hadn't even crossed my mind. My only exposure to military life was a typical childhood pretending to be a soldier and watching action movies. I frequently would look through various pieces of army memorabilia, like patches and ranks, among my father's belongings, sparking a lingering curiosity that eventually may have led me to the most significant decision of my life.



Entering Army Service

Initially, I planned to complete my college education and repay the Army, which would have nullified my contract and allowed me to remain out of the military. College wasn't something I felt prepared for, but I believed it was expected of me. Regrettably, I struggled and failed. Left with no financial resources or skillsets, I ultimately decided to enlist in the Army.

When I began my basic training at the age of 20, I had only visited a handful of states and had a small circle of friends. Little did I know the next four years of my life would be filled with incredible experiences beyond what I imagined when I was a child. From Missouri to Mississippi and, finally, to my first duty station in Washington State, my journey began. Later, I quickly found myself deployed to Afghanistan for nine months and then again for 15 months. I was introduced to diverse cultures, religions, and people in a land that I had barely even heard of before. It was surreal to experience seeing things many only dream of, yet so few will ever have the opportunity to encounter firsthand.

During my time on active duty, I truly believed those travel experiences I witnessed would be the only ones I would ever encounter. However, my life took an unexpected turn when I was stationed in Washington State. It was there that I met Joelle through her volunteer work with the military, and little did I know at the time this encounter would change both of our lives forever. We quickly became friends, and before I knew it, I had become a part of Joelle's family. Listening to Joelle's captivating travel stories reignited my imagination and my love for travel, something I believed was over when I left active duty.



Continuing military service and travel beginnings

I left active duty, returned home, and continued to serve in the Army Reserves. Years later, following much persuasion from Joelle, we embarked on our first journey to Europe. This trip ignited my passion for exploration and revealed the true meaning of travel to me. It went beyond merely seeing breathtaking vistas, trying delicious food, and immersing myself in diverse cultures. Through travel, I discovered the beauty of life itself and my potential. Unknowingly, I was not just experiencing history but also laying the groundwork for my personal growth and the creation of our travel blog. [CLICK HERE TO SEE MORE ABOUT US.](#)

Today, I am a Master Sergeant, a humbling achievement that I may never have accomplished without the experiences from traveling that transformed me into who I am today. The Army is something I love, and it has forged and guided me to the present. The Army gave me my first exposure to the world, and I am grateful for it. In the time I have left in the military, I will continue to share my experience of world travel with my soldiers in hopes of inspiring them to reach far beyond what is in front of them and grow as I have.

Reflection

As I look back on my travels, I am amazed by how every moment on the road can be life-changing, realizing that each experience is a brushstroke, seemingly imprinting itself on the canvas of my life, adding depth and color to the picture I am painting. I find myself revisiting memories that now feel like fleeting but exquisite dreams: the sight of children playing joyfully in Afghanistan, the feeling of excitement seeing my first castle, the breathtaking beauty and inspiration of a church in France that moved me to the brink of tears, and the overwhelming emotion of standing in a German concentration camp unable to hold my tears back. Each experience becomes a memory, which then becomes color on my brush, enriching the portrait of my life with the profound beauty and complexity of the world.

30th birthday in England during my first trip / 40th birthday 10 years later in Buenos Aires





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What is the point of all my rambling?

Well, I have grown. I didn't become an adult and stay who I was. Instead, I became who I wanted to be, what I felt I was meant to be. I grew, and it wasn't merely acquiring new job skills and gaining knowledge from school and the Army. I grew because I traveled, experienced, embraced change, took risks, remembered my dreams as a child, and followed them. Traveling isn't simply a vacation; it's an opportunity for self-discovery and personal development. It is a chance to learn something new, learn about yourself, and grow. To travel, you must grow; after traveling, you will grow. I have become more caring, curious, confident, cultured, humble, and self-aware. My heart has expanded while my anger, hate, fear, ignorance, and judgment of people and cultures have faded to a distant memory, leaving space for understanding, acceptance, and more growth.

Thank you, PBS, thank you, Rick, thank you to the Army, and thank you, Joelle. You showed me the world, exposed me to new experiences, inspired me to live my dreams. You made me stronger and transformed me into a better person. And a heartfelt thank you, Mom. You persevered despite all the obstacles thrown in your path, and I continue to follow your example.

I have traveled, grown, and lived. Let's all grow together, one trip at a time.

An Invitation

We invite you to join us on this journey of discovery through our [blog](#), where you'll find inspiration to explore the world and step outside your comfort zone. Travel isn't just about the destinations; it's about the connections we make, the lessons we learn, and the memories we create along the way. Our stories aim to spark your wanderlust and encourage you to embrace every opportunity for growth that travel presents. Whether you're dreaming of distant lands or planning your next adventure, we hope our experiences inspire you to see the world in all its beauty and complexity. Explore with us!

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Cliffs of Moher, Ireland

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