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Diary of a backpacker rockstar: A UNI student's guide to traveling Western Europe

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**Diary of a Backpacker Rockstar:
A UNI Student's Guide to Traveling Western Europe**

A Presidential Scholar Senior Thesis
University of Northern Iowa

by

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Spring 1997

Timothy E. O'Connor
International Programs

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Date

Edward C. Rathmell

Chair, Presidential Scholars Board Date
1 May '97

Personal note

Without my very good friend Jeff and my cousin Tami, I could never have become a Backpacker Rockstar. I know we miss all the true friends we made on European soil. I am always thinking about Chris, Heather, Michelle, Jennifer, Cara, Chris, Rob, and the rest of the backpackers. My thoughts also are for the families of the passengers of TWA Flight 800. As Jeff, Tami, and I flew home from Paris on July 17, 1996, TWA Flight 800 was destined for Paris. My heart aches... -jason james joseph sloan

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Introduction:

During the summer of 1996 I dedicated two months of my life to backpacking Western Europe. It was the most incredible experience of my life. It is my belief that many students at UNI would love to have the opportunity to travel as I did. In fact, a journey across Europe is completely within the reaches of the typical UNI student. Planning such a trip is systematic and reasonably simple. From obtaining passports to buying airline tickets and train passes, all aspects of planning a European backpacking excursion can be accomplished easily.

Jeff, Tami, and I discovered that planning a low-budget trip to Europe is simple. I wish to outline some of the steps necessary to plan such a journey. Although there are countless ways to prepare for a European excursion, I will share the process that worked for me. I consider it a grand success!

Jeff, my good friend, and Tami, my cousin, were my traveling partners through Europe. As our list of backpacker experiences grew, we became aware that our lives were being changed forever. Our perceptions, our interpretations of foreign cultures, our very attitudes about our place in the world were evolving. Jeff and I were lucky enough to meet Chris, Heather, Michelle, and Jennifer in Athens. As the six of us wandered the Greek Isles together in a timeless gaze, each of us felt the true meaning of "world traveler." We had become Backpacker Rockstars...

I will share the steps I took to plan this unforgettable experience. I mention the names of organizations such as *Council Travel* and corporations such as *AT&T* and *American Express* because those are the groups I utilized for my trip. Feel free to use whatever methods you desire to plan your own trip.

Study abroad programs can be an excellent supplement to backpacking Europe. Not only can a student experience a local culture "from the inside", but also the student has the opportunity to gain college credit and to travel extensively. Many study abroad programs already exist at UNI, and more are available to the interested student. I urge you to consider a study abroad program in conjunction with backpacking. You will get excitement, experience, and the best of memories. Your life will never be the same.

Chapter I. Passport

Your single most important document to acquire before traveling abroad is your passport. This legal document will be used by foreign officials to identify your citizenship. Of course, if you are a United States citizen, then your passport will identify you as such. This passport will entitle you to travel through the countries of Western Europe with relatively few hassles.

As a United States citizen, you most likely will not be required to obtain a visa for each country that you visit. Your passport will be your "super visa" for travel in Western Europe. A citizen of Australia, for instance, may have to obtain a visa for each country he/she plans to visit. These visas are legal endorsements that give a specific person permission to enter into, or travel through, a foreign country.

Our passports were often checked when we crossed a border between countries. For instance, immediately after landing in Paris, French customs checked our passports before we were allowed to leave the airport arrival area. When riding a night train from Berlin to Prague we were awakened several times for passport checks by various authorities. These checks were simple; the official would briefly look at each passport. There was more than one occasion when, upon seeing the U.S. seal on the cover of one passport, the foreign official would move on without checking the rest of the passports in our group. Being a U.S. citizen often had its benefits.

To obtain a passport for the first time, one must have proof of U.S. citizenship. This must be presented in the form of a certified birth certificate. Nothing else will be accepted as proof. Also, you need two identical photographs (about 2X2 inches square) of your head and shoulder area. The quality of the photopaper must be

relatively good (ie. don't use the instant photo booth in the mall). Copyworks can make these photographs for you in a matter of minutes. You can get two passport-quality photos for about \$10.95. Most professional studios also make passport photos.

Take your birth certificate and the two photos to the Waterloo Post Office (the post office in Cedar Falls does not have passport processing services). You must apply in person, and there is an application which must be filled out. The cost will be \$65 and the processing will take about four weeks. While traveling, never let your passport out of your sight!!

Chapter II. International Student Identity Card (ISIC)

The International Student Identity Card is essentially a "single uniform document that would be accepted around the world as proof of student status)." This card is administered by the International Student Travel Confederation based in Copenhagen. (ISIC Handbook, 1996). It's basically the international form of your UNI student ID card.

With the ISIC, you gain special access to student discounts while overseas. We used ours to get discount prices at a lot of the museums we visited. Some hotels offer discounts to ISIC holders. The ISIC gives you access to cheap airfare through an organization called "Council Travel." (more on that in the airfare chapter) ISIC makes you eligible for "sickness and accident insurance, including \$25,000 emergency evacuation coverage, plus access to a 24-hour traveler's assistance hotline in case of a medical, legal, or financial emergency (Student Travels, p. 50)." For more information about this card, call 1 800 2 COUNCIL and ask for a free ISIC Handbook.

UNI students can get both the ISIC Handbook and the ISIC itself right here on campus. The Office of International Programs on the lower level of Baker Hall (room 59) can process your ISIC application in one to three working days. The cost is \$19 (payable to UNI). You will need one passport size photograph of yourself (black and white, or color) and proof that you are a registered student at UNI.

To obtain verification of enrollment, simply go to the Registrar's Office in Gilchrist Hall and ask for a verification of enrollment form. You can pick up the verification form the next day.

The photo needed for the ISIC may be of low quality. Don't spend alot of money on the photo. I used the instant photo booth in the mall. You can use a 35 mm camera, as long as the view is a head and shoulder shot of 1-1/4 inches by 1-1/2 inches.

If you have any questions regarding the ISIC card, call 1800 2 COUNCIL. Their customer service representatives are always willing to answer any questions you have.

Chapter III. Hostelling International Membership Card

The Hostelling International Membership Card allows its carrier the privilege of staying in an HI-AYH (Hostelling International-American Youth Hostels) sponsored hostel. A hostel is a cheap form of a hotel, basically. They sometimes have dorm-style rooms with bunked beds. The rooms seldom have their own bath facilities. The card gives access to 5000 HI hostels in 70 countries (Put the World in Your Pocket). Of those, about 150 hostels are in the United States. The card carries special discounts with it. To tell you the truth, I did not use my HI card once.

There is a huge benefit to being an HI-AYH member. Hostelling International runs an International Booking Network (IBN). By calling 1 (202) 783 6161 you can reserve your overnight bed in a foreign hostel months in advance. You can book up to 6 consecutive nights for up to 9 people at any hostel in the IBN system (Put the World in Your Pocket). Mostly the hostels at which you can reserve a bed are in the major cities and the booking charge is \$5 per hostel. That would have been a great deal for my traveling group, since we landed in Paris with no lodging for the night and ended up in a low-budget hotel in a dirty part of town.

The IBN could ideally be used to reserve beds at HI hostels in both your arrival city and your departure city. Also, if your travel itinerary were pre-set, then you could assure yourself ahead of time of having sleeping arrangements in various cities. You would save yourself the hassle of finding rooms, and the reservations would be pre-paid. If I had known about IBN, I certainly would have made extensive use of it.

A Hostelling International Membership Card can be ordered through Student Travels magazine. Put out by "Council Travel", this magazine can be found in the Office of International Programs in Baker Hall. Also, by calling 1 800 2 COUNCIL, you can order a free copy by phone. I ordered my HI card through the mail by writing to:

Hostelling International

Northeast Iowa Council

American Youth Hostels

Box 10

Postville, Iowa 52162.

Include your name and permanent address, your mailing address, your date of birth, your telephone number, and a check for \$25 payable to American Youth Hostels. You must be 18 years of age and the card is valid for one year. This method is convenient, easy, and it only takes a few weeks for your card to be mailed to you.

Chapter IV. International Drivers License

We never had to use our Iowa Drivers License while we were in Europe because we never tried to rent a car. Jeff and Tami and I did meet six students from Canada who rented a single compact car slightly larger than a shoe box and drove it from Brussels to Brugge, Belgium, for an afternoon. I do not know if any of them had an International Drivers License, but I do know that they had a blast! However, Jeff and I were denied the chance to rent motor scooters on Santorini Island, Greece, because the international license was required by law and we didn't have one. If you think that you would want to rent a motorized vehicle on your journey, you will want to consider getting the international license.

The AAA office has International Drivers Licenses available. You can call them at 1 (319) 235 7056 for more information. You will need two passport-size photos, \$10, and you must be 18 years of age. You can inquire with them about the validity of your current state drivers license in specific countries to plan to travel.

Basically, renting motorized vehicles allows you to see new and different parts of an area. If you think you may rent something of this nature, you will want to consider the International Drivers License. It certainly is not a backpacking requirement, but rather something to consider.

Chapter V. Finding Cheap Airfare

Initially Jeff and I had decided that we wanted to spend approximately six weeks in Europe. Jeff called around to three travel agencies to compare airfare prices. He gave them a range of ten days for our departure window, meaning that we really didn't care too much about the actual departure day. He told them that we wanted to be overseas approximately six to eight weeks, but that we were also flexible about that time frame. The calls were made in the first part of the month of February for a May departure. The best price the agencies could give us was \$875 per person round trip.

Jeff also called Council Travel's 1 800 2 COUNCIL phone number. The cheapest ticket we could get through them was for an eight week trip beginning May 21 and ending July 17. They quoted \$520 per person for a Chicago-O'Hare to Paris-Charles de Gaulle non-stop round trip ticket on an Air France 747. What a deal! They only required us to have our ISIC, which we had acquired from the Office of International Programs.

The price we were quoted was a special student discount price. One of the biggest benefits of the ISIC card is its verification of your student status. We got a great deal because we were students. To find cheap airfare, do not be afraid to call around. Give yourself flexibility on both departure and return dates. Call a few months ahead of time, and if you do not get a reasonable deal, keep calling! Many cheap airfares are not highly advertised.

Possibly the best deal you will find will be through Council Travel as a student. With the ISIC, you can secure a cheap flight. Most of the friends I know who have

traveled to Europe bought their tickets through this organization. An organization called Student Flights, Inc. also claims to have discount airfare. They can be reached at (602) 951 1177.

Also, consider buying an "Open-Jaw" ticket. This allows you to fly out of a different city than you flew into. If your time is limited, this can save you lots of travel hassles. Remember that peak tourist season, and consequently highest airfare prices, occurs in July and August. Think about traveling early.

Chapter VI. Eurail Passes

A backpacker's main mode of transportation, other than walking, is the train. Europe has an extensive network of railways interlinking cities, towns, and sometimes even villages. Individual rail tickets are obviously available if you wish to purchase city-to-city fares. This practice, however, could lead to the spending of a small fortune on transportation costs. There is an alternative to buying train tickets which is both highly convenient and low budget.

Eurail passes are train travel packages which allow unlimited travel within 17 countries of Europe. The countries, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland (Student Travels, p. 44), comprise most of Western Europe. Unfortunately, Great Britain is not included in the Eurail Pass.

There are several categories of Eurail Passes from which to choose. A traveler must try to choose the package that best suits his or her needs and match that with the

pass of travel companions. For instance, the "Eurail Youth Pass" is discounted for travelers under 26 years of age. It offers unlimited travel (within the 17 country Eurail domain) in groups of duration. For example, I traveled on a 2 month Eurail Youthpass. That means that from the first day of use, I could travel anywhere in the domain for the next 2 months as much and as often as I wanted. That pass cost me just under \$800. A traveler could buy a one month pass similar to mine and the cost would be about \$590 (Student Travels, p. 44). (All prices quoted are Spring 1997 prices).

There are "flexipasses" which allow for a specific number of days of travel within a 2 month period. Again, the cheapest rates are for those under 26 years of age. A Eurail Youth flexipass that allows any 15 days of travel in 2 months will cost about \$570 (Student Travels, p. 44). If I were traveling for two months, I would have to decide between the youth pass and the flexipass based upon my planned number of traveling days.

The costs I quoted were for second class travel. I will not address first class travel because it is unnecessary. Second class travel is adequate for most people, including backpackers. A first class traveler would not only pay more for a pass, but would also miss out on alot of social interaction because all the other backpackers are going to be in second class. If you buy a first class ticket, you are wasting your money.

There are several other categories of Eurail Passes to study, including no-age restriction passes and National Rail Passes that are valid within a single country. You can find a listing of Eurail Pass descriptions and prices in Student Travels magazine. It can be found in the Office of International Programs. Also, a group called Student Flights, Inc. sells Eurail Passes. Call (602) 951 1177 to order a catalog. It must be noted that a Eurail Pass has a fixed price regardless of who is selling it. The only price discrepancies occur from service charges and shipping costs. Jeff and I bought our rail

passes from Student Travels by calling 1 800 2 COUNCIL and ordering over the phone with my credit card. It was quick, easy, and reliable.

Eurail passes must be validated within six months of purchase. Validation requires that you take your Eurail pass to any ticket window in a train station (in one of the 17 countries indicated, of course) and get it officially stamped. The window operator may charge a fee to do the procedure. Once stamped, your Eurail pass is "good to go."

If you are traveling with a youth pass, you must carry your validated pass with you at all times. If you have a validated flexipass (certain number of travel days in 2 months) you must write the date on your pass before boarding the train. A traveler can face a fine and loss of flexipass for riding a train without marking off the day. There are ways around the system; I don't recommend them because I have never tried any of them. But I traveled with backpackers who got away with these tricks.

Some backpackers use erasable ink on their flexipass. The method is simple enough. They just erase the date after they depart the train and save an entire day. The trick works only about two times per date box, since the eraser damages the paper. Some numbers can be turned into others (1's into 7's) etc. These alterations look a bit more suspicious. One guy, Mark, took his Eurail pass into a printer's shop in Prague and paid them to copy it off onto paper of a similar background as the original pass. He then had two copies to use up. The two passes apparently looked identical. I wouldn't try any of these tricks unless I were in a serious jam.

We met two girls who ran into trouble with their passes. They were writing in the date on their flexipasses as the conductor was checking tickets. He suspected them of fraud and the girls were fined.

Chapter VII. Telephones and Calling Cards

Learning to use the telephones in Europe is something I have come to regard as an art form. Some phones require coin deposit while others use credit cards. Some phones require pre-paid phone cards while some work on U.S. calling cards.

I used the phones to call home every two weeks and to try to make reservations for lodging in other countries. I had not known, until my journey, that there were country codes and city codes and all those types of things. I learned soon enough.

I used an AT&T Universal Mastercard as my calling card. AT&T provided a list of access numbers by which I could reach an English-speaking operator from any country. Although a fee was incurred each time I used the service, I found that the operator had a lot better chance of making the connection than I did.

I also made use of pre-paid phone cards. With the AT&T calling card, I didn't know how much each call was costing. The pre-paid phone cards, on the other hand, recorded the cost and simply inactivated when their credit limit had expired. These cards were usually only valid in the country in which they were purchased.

Overall, learning to use the phones is a trial-and-error experience. AT&T does have a pamphlet called "The AT&T International Calling Guide for Students Abroad-A Crash Course in International Communication." The number for that free guide is 800 972 0247. To apply for an AT&T international calling card, call 800 224 5610. Other telecommunications companies probably also have similar services. I mention AT&T because I found that it worked for me.

Chapter VIII. Money

Money was a critical factor in backpacking. Jeff and I were not sure how much money we would spend while traveling. As it turned out, my budget evolved into \$30 USD per day. That was definitely low budget.

I decided to take American Express Travelers Cheques with me to supplement the use of my instant cash card. I carried \$800 in travelers checks, but only spent \$300 worth. I relied mainly on my instant cash card, which was issued by my home town bank for use in the United States. The bank assured me the P.I.N. would work in Europe. There are plenty of ATM machines in Europe, so getting money was easy. Since the instant cash card withdrew electronically from my account, I always got the current international exchange rate for my U.S. dollars. Although cashing in the travelers checks was easy, I was charged a transaction fee of about 1% each time if I used an American Express office. Otherwise, the fee was even higher. The USA Today® International Edition publishes current exchange rates. It was a useful source prior to shopping around for favorable exchange rates

Jeff took \$1200 in American Express Travelers Cheques. He, therefore, didn't rely as much on his instant cash card. The money issue can be approached from many different angles. You can vary the ratios of the types of money you want to take. Just make sure that you will not run out of money while overseas. That could result in a difficult journey home.

Chapter IX. What to Pack

Almost every travel guide you find will have lists of travel essentials. The Passport® has a list, as well as Let's Go®. Basically, choose everything you think you need for your journey, and then throw half of it out. I left with a pack that weighed 33 pounds, and returned with 38 pounds. In retrospect, I could have lightened my load by several pounds.

A few suggestions:

- Take gray clothes. I ruined everything white that I took, including T-shirts and socks. Whatever leaves the states white will return gray anyway.

- Take a 2-in-1 shampoo/conditioner combo. Two bottles adds weight and wastes space. I used the combo as a body soap also.

- Buy a compass. I used mine at least ten million times. The maps are easier to use and a compass allows you freedom to get lost in a city without losing your direction.

- Take along a combination knife with a can opener and bottle opener.

- Take plastic Zip-lock® bags. They are great for keeping things dry.

- Take a metal spoon and fork.

- Wear a money belt. It is a lightweight pouch worn on the hips under your clothes. Your passport, Traveler's Checks, airline tickets, and train pass will all need to be carried there for safety from pick-pockets.

Those are just a few suggestions. My pack was an internal frame pack with an approximately 5000 square inch volume. That cost about \$170 and worked very well. I

also took my school backpack that I used for classes. It was very handy when I locked up my full-size pack at a hostel or train station and wandered the city. It could carry bottled water, camera, journal, and whatever else I needed.

You must decide for yourself what you feel will be necessary for your trip. Make sure that your pack is not too heavy. If you forget something that you need desperately, buy it in Europe.

Chapter X. Trains

Traveling on trains is relatively easy and very convenient. My Eurail pass (2 month unlimited) let me travel at will. We had to purchase additional tickets to ride the Chunnel to London and to ride a ferry back to France, since Great Britain is not one of the 17 countries on the pass. However, our Eurail passes got us a discount. Our train ride from Berlin to Prague was interrupted by the conductor's opinion that we owed a 'supplement'. He did not feel that we had paid enough money to get to Prague, so we were encouraged to pay up, or be stranded in the middle of nowhere.

The train system was easy to learn. Second class cars were marked, and among those were designated smoking and non-smoking cars (though the designations carried little weight most of the time). Finding the correct platform at a train station was certainly interesting at times. We discovered that having only three minutes to find and board our connecting train was a definite adventure. I can remember sprinting the length of a train station with a fully loaded pack on more than one occasion. We never missed a train.

Trains are divided into groups of cars. One group may be destined for a completely different city than the adjacent group of cars. Hence, in the middle of the night the train may stop, separate, and continue on in two different directions. It was important to make sure which place our particular group of cars was going. So catching a train was as simple as sprinting to the correct platform, finding second class cars, and then making sure we had picked the correct section of the train. It was all part of the fun.

Trains proved useful for lodging when we traveled through the night. Sleeping could be accomplished in several ways. Sleeping cars and couchettes contain various combinations of bunks. These must always be reserved and require a supplement (more money). Although they provide possibility for horizontal sleep, these accommodations did not fit into our low budget. Sleeperettes have reclining seats, although they certainly don't recline very far. Sleeperettes also require a supplement. Instead, we chose other alternatives.

Cars were divided into compartments of six-person capacity. There were two opposing benches facing each other, and each bench was divided into three seats. On occasion, Tami and Jeff and I would be lucky enough (on a non-crowded train) to obtain a whole compartment. A person could sleep on each bench, and one person could take the floor (Jeff always got the floor). Otherwise, in a crowded compartment sleep could only be secured in an upright position with the shoulder of a stranger to serve as a pillow.

The washrooms aboard the trains were fascinating. One could get a view of the railroad ties racing below the moving train simply by flushing the toilet. You see, there is just a single divider between the toilet and the underside of the train such that flushing the toilet dumps the waste unto the tracks. The flushing of a toilet while the

train is parked in a station is, consequently, prohibited. The water in the washrooms is certainly not drinkable. Bottled water should be carried onto the trains.

Chapter XI. Lodging

We planned to sleep by staying overnight in hostels. Hostels offer low budget sleeping accommodations. Some have large rooms filled with bunk beds, some have private rooms. We, of course, always chose the cheaper bunks. Some hostels have separate rooms for shower and bath facilities. In essence, there is much variation among hostels.

Sometimes we were lucky enough to get bread and jam for breakfast. For instance, CHAB Hostel in Brussels, Belgium, was \$10 USD per night for a bunk bed in a 40 person dormitory. A bread and jam breakfast was included. The showers were in a separate building. The office supplied lockers for storing our packs(padlocks were not included), and beer was sold in the lobby during evenings.

Often there is an afternoon lockout time when travelers are required to leave so that rooms can be cleaned. Late night curfews might be enforced, but generally there is always security personnel to let in the late night stragglers.

HI sponsored hostels, I have heard, tend to segregate travelers by gender. Women sleep separate from men. I did not stay in an HI hostel. We never encountered that rule in our hostels or hotels. Tami always slept in the same room as Jeff and I.

One accessory that may be required by some places is a 'sleep sack.' We made ours at home by folding a large white flat sheet in half lengthwise. Then we

stitched along the bottom and half-way up the side to make a sleeping bag. Some hostels require this if they do not provide bed sheets. I always slept in my 'sleep sack' and felt that it was certainly necessary. I doubt that many of those bed sheets were ever washed.

Hostels are certainly one of the best places to meet and hang out with other backpackers. At times, we found ourselves in cheap, one-star hotels that offered little chance to meet other travelers. Although the prices were comparable to hostels, the social atmosphere resembled that of a morgue. We always met great people in hostels.

Pensions are similar to hotels (I suppose there are certain defining characteristics of a pension, but I couldn't tell the difference.) They were also cheap.

When we weren't staying in hotels, pensions, or hostels, we slept on trains. When we weren't sleeping on trains, we were sleeping outside on the ground. I will not claim that sleeping outside is perfectly safe. We didn't carry a tent and we never stayed in a campground. The basic plan was to find a secluded spot and sleep under a bush for cover. Perhaps only the hard-core backpackers sleep like this, but it can be done on a low budget plan.

Generally, we learned of available hostels, hotels, or pensions through the Information Office of the train station. Almost every train station had one of these info offices. They have listings of local accommodations. Some offices offer reservation services for a small fee. In that case, the service representative calls the hostel for you (this is very convenient if you don't speak the native tongue and are too tired to even try). The service fees add up quickly, so the best option is to call the hostel yourself or to walk to it. The people can understand English well enough to rent you a room.

Perhaps the most effective way to find lodging is to ask other backpackers who have been to the city in question. Backpackers are almost always willing to help you, and sometimes you can return the favor with useful info of your own. The information received from backpackers is trustworthy and priceless.

Sometimes local residents of a city will approach you and encourage you to stay in their accommodations. We encountered this in Amsterdam, Prague, Budapest, and all over Greece. In general we found the people to have very adequate living arrangements to rent. I would recommend exercising caution, however, before taking off with these people in their car. Ask to see identification and a government permit that gives them permission to solicit travelers.

Chapter XII. Health

While we take the health care system of the United States for granted, backpackers must realize that they are far from home and may need to rely on the care of a foreign doctor. Traveling Western Europe doesn't require the need for vaccinations. I had received Hepatitis B vaccine years ago and decided that I wanted Hepatitis A vaccine before I left. Jeff, on the other hand, had received neither vaccination. Neither of us encountered any serious medical trouble.

Jeff and I had contemplated buying a water purifier to take abroad. The purifier would have been very unnecessary. We survived on bottled water and tap water on many occasions. The weight of the purifier would make it a burden. Travel to Eastern Europe may warrant the use of a purifier, however.

The ISIC carries health insurance related to hospital stays, medical expenses, death and dismemberment, and things of that nature (ISIC Handbook '96, p. 10). Jeff, in addition, had investigated his own health insurance to determine coverage while he was overseas. I, on the other hand, had no clue about my health insurance. That could have proven to be a serious problem had I fallen sick or injured. I strongly recommend that travelers study their health insurance policy before traveling overseas.

The Office of International Programs has free pamphlets titled "Health Check-for Study, Work, and Travel Abroad." The pamphlet, sponsored by the same organization that sponsors the ISIC, offers health suggestions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can be visited at <http://www.cdc.gov> for information. Also, the State Department Overseas Citizens Emergency Center telephone number is (202) 647-5335 (Health Check).

Our first aid kit included anti-bacterial salve, Band-Aids, anti-diarrhea medication, Pepto Bismol, aloe vera gel, and acetaminophen pain reliever. We believed any problem that couldn't be solved with that kit probably deserved professional attention.

Chapter XIII. Resources for a Backpacker to Study

To get the most out of a backpacking experience, you will want to research your trip in the weeks prior to leaving the States. This research shouldn't be considered a stressful chore. Instead, it can be regarded as an interesting journey through the history of your trip before it even starts. Through research, you can learn about places in Europe which sound exciting. Jeff and I learned of a series of villages called Cinque

Terre on the coast of Italy by reading a travel book. We found it to be just as beautiful as the book described. Several resources are available here on campus to supplement your pre-trip learning and planning.

Student Travels magazine, by Council Travel, contains interesting articles written by backpackers about their exploits. Some articles chronicle the journey of a backpacker through a specific region. Others give tips related to health or travel planning. Reduced airfares and Eurail Passes are available through the magazine. The Office of International Programs in Baker 59 has free copies of the magazine. You can call 1 800 2 COUNCIL to order a free copy.

The Passport[®] is a book designed specifically for the backpacker. This can also be obtained in the International Programs Office free of charge. The book can be read cover-to-cover in less than two hours. The book gives a list of 'USEFUL ITEMS' which are handy to have on the journey. From a clothesline to ziplock plastic bags to keep things dry, this list is right on target for essentials. The Passport[®] addresses issues ranging from safety to health to language to saving money. The book is littered with quotes and tips from experienced backpackers. I highly recommend reading it several times because it is so packed with useful information.

Today the Internet contains almost unlimited information for research about travel. Forrest Roberts, a fellow backpacker, planned an entire travel itinerary through Eastern Europe by using resources on the Internet. Forrest recommends the use of various "general search engines" in researching travel information. These search engines are programs on the Internet designed to locate useful information on almost any topic. (A brief listing of some search engines is included in the appendix.) Forrest also recommends some "general budget travel information and accommodations" sites

(also in appendix). For instance, <http://www.city.net/> allows one to research the web sites of many major world cities. Attractions and lodging can be found on the 'web'. One can obtain region-specific health considerations by visiting <http://www.cdc.gov/>, which is the site for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Any areas of political upheaval or instability may be listed as questionable for travel on the U.S. State Department Travel Advisories; <http://travel.state.gov/>.

There are countless travel guides published and/or updated each year. Any bookstore probably has several guides for Western Europe specifically. Often these guides include maps of major cities, addresses and phone numbers of offices (Tourism, Embassies, etc.) information about lodging, and places to eat. Possibly the most famous guide carried by backpackers is called Let's Go®: The Budget Guide to Europe, published by St. Martin's Press. We saw hundreds of these books in the hands of backpackers. Tami carried a Let's Go® while we traveled. Forrest Roberts recommends travel guides published by Lonely Planet®. Whatever guide you choose (you will need a guide overseas), you must consider several things.

First of all, if you are carrying a popular travel guide, then obviously many other backpackers are also carrying it. That means the lodging it suggests tends to fill up quickly. If it suggests cheap restaurants, they might get crowded with hungry travelers. In essence, the secrets revealed in the travel guide are no longer secrets. This does not mean that the information is no longer useful. On the contrary, the travel guide's information can be effective in helping backpackers congregate at those restaurants or hostels. This always results in vibrant conversations of journeys already experienced. Sometimes, though, there is a need to get away from the crowd.

Some backpackers search for the secluded spots in European cities which attract more local residents than foreign visitors. In this case, it may be advantageous for those backpackers to obtain two different travel guides. Hopefully the two books will share twice as many secrets. If traveling in a group, the task of carrying the books can be shared. Otherwise, lugging even two large books around not only adds weight to the pack, but it also takes up valuable space. I would not recommend taking more than one travel guide per person.

Skim a history textbook to learn or review the history of Europe. Brush up on your knowledge of the Cold War Era. The feelings and emotions associated with the Berlin Wall will come alive for you as you stroll past its few remaining sections. Look through art history books at the library. The Louvre contains many more priceless works than just the “Mona Lisa”, as I discovered. As you gaze up at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City, you will realize that the photographs capture only a fraction of its total beauty. Grasp a history of the ancient Acropolis in Athens before wandering through its time-forgotten ruins. Backpackers travel to Europe not to see it, but to experience it.

If you know someone who has backpacked Europe, take some time to speak with them about their experiences. They might be excited to tell you about the hostels with the greatest parties, the trains that require reservations, or the cities with the friendliest people. Fellow backpackers are one of the best sources of priceless travel information. If you are lucky, you may learn some of the secrets that even the travel guides haven't yet figure out.

Chapter XIV. My Journey through Europe: A Summation

Backpacking through Europe was the most fantastic thing I have ever done. I lived a major adventure at least every other day. I became part of the greatest sub-culture that I believe exists: the Backpackers.

Originally the motivation to travel Europe came about in a conversation between my cousin Tami Jurgensen and I. We simply decided to do it. I also asked my very good friend Jeff Doolittle to go with us. In a simple reply, he answered "Ok." At that moment, the toughest decision had been made.

Jeff, Tami, and I flew into Paris on the 21st day of May, 1996. We had no set travel itinerary and no hotel in which to spend the first night. Every decision we made was spontaneous. Our goal was simply to make a clockwise sweep of Western Europe. Since we would fly out of Paris, we decided to begin traveling right away. We traveled by train to Brussels, Belgium. From there we took a day excursion to Brugge, Belgium.

London was accessible by train via the Chunnel. We stayed in Oxford with Forrest Roberts and Heather Martin, two friends. Staying with locals saves money and provides an excellent guide. Since we had traveled to Great Britain under the English Channel, we decided to go back to the mainland by ferry boat.

Amsterdam was our next major city. It is a crazy place. When you travel there, you will learn.

Berlin occupied several of our days, and then we hitched a train to Prague in the Czech Republic. From Prague, our whims carried us into the beautiful city of Budapest. We stayed at a house up in the hills and loved it.

Salzburg, Austria, became our next temporary home. After that was Munich, Germany. Interlaken, Switzerland, followed Munich. The Swiss Alps may be one of the most beautiful places on earth.

Rome and the Vatican City kept us busy for a couple days before we journeyed by boat to Greece. Although Jeff and I hadn't considered Greece to be one of our destinations prior to our trip, we spent almost two weeks there. That was the beauty of spontaneity.

Tami joined a sailboat cruise around the Greek Isles, so Jeff and I traveled together for the second four weeks of the journey. Jeff and I traveled through Venice, Florence, and Pisa before finding ourselves camped out on a mountain top in the hills of the Italian coast. We didn't have a tent, but the ground suited our needs after several intense days of rail travel.

Monaco was a blur, but the beaches in Cannes, France, were more than relaxing. Barcelona proved to be a beautiful destination. Jeff and I found ourselves in Villajoyosa, a town in Southeastern Spain. From there we rushed up to Pamplona for the San Fermin Festival to celebrate the "Running of the Bulls." That same night we sat beneath the Eiffel Tower to watch the Bastille Day fireworks celebration in Paris.

Tami met us in Paris and on July 17, 1996, the three of us returned home to our native soil.

A backpacker has thousands of travel options available. Almost any travel itinerary can be chosen, and the duration of the trip can be completely flexible. Plans can range from detailed to spontaneous. Backpackers spend anywhere from weeks to months in Europe. Keep in mind that, regardless of your travel preferences, you will have a fantastic adventure.

Chapter XV. Study Abroad Programs

Study abroad programs are an excellent chance to travel Europe and earn college credit. UNI has many opportunities for students to join a study abroad program (see appendix for a complete listing). The UNI Exchange Agreements are set up to allow students from those schools to study here while UNI students study there. The Iowa Regents Programs are not student exchanges, but simply study abroad programs (Interview with Dr. Virginia Hash).

Dr. Hash, of the Office of International Programs, explained some points about study abroad programs from UNI. First of all, she explained that UNI can send a student almost anywhere in the world on a study program. The cost of these programs varies. If a UNI student goes to one of the schools involved in the UNI Exchange Agreement, then that student pays only UNI tuition to attend that foreign school.

Also, she says that the Office of International Programs works very hard to get the study abroad classes to count for UNI credit. A high percentage of the credits will transfer to UNI. Almost all the study abroad schools have classrooms that teach in English. Therefore, although Dr. Hash recommends a foreign language background for the country in which you will study, this is not a requirement. General education classes can be taken and, at some schools, business classes are offered (Turku, Finland, for example).

Information about UNI's study abroad programs can be found in the Office of International Programs. The people there are more than happy to answer any questions you might have regarding study abroad programs. Also, general study

abroad info can be searched at <http://www.studyabroad.com/>. I took the opportunity to learn about one specific study abroad program to the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, from Brad Horton. Brad spent five months studying and traveling in Europe.

To study at Klagenfurt for the spring semester (which allows for summer travel afterwards), a student should decide by November of the prior fall. A student needs to fill out a simple one-page application (found in the Office of International Programs). The Office of International Programs will contact Klagenfurt to mediate an exchange. Generally, ten UNI students are allowed to go to Klagenfurt per semester while ten Klagenfurt students are allowed here. For this exchange, tuition is waived to each school. So a student with a UNI tuition scholarship will have tuition for that semester refunded and that money can be put towards room and board or airfare. UNI students may choose from a listing of housing choices that is pre-arranged by Klagenfurt.

An application for admission to the University of Klagenfurt must be completed. Spring term at Klagenfurt goes from the beginning of March to the end of June. A listing of tentative class offerings is available prior to leaving, so you can apply to have your Klagenfurt classes count for UNI credit. Brad said that the entire process to arrange study abroad to the University of Klagenfurt was very simple.

"Study abroad is one of the best experiences of my college years. If you have the opportunity to do it, you should," Brad explained. Brad commented that he traveled every weekend to countries around Europe. He felt one of the best things about study abroad was feeling "at home" in Austria. It was possible to learn about the local culture because everybody there treated him like a resident. Brad knew the German language, but mentioned that two of his best friends didn't at first. He said that after an introductory course in German at the Klagenfurt school, they knew enough to have a great experience. (Interview with Brad Horton).

Studying abroad at the University of Klagenfurt is just one of many opportunities available to UNI students. I write about Klagenfurt to illustrate that study abroad programs are both easy to set up and rewarding to experience. Although the costs of tuition and other expenses vary from program to program, you can learn about all your options by doing simple research. Ask at the Office of International Programs in Baker Hall for more information. Visit the study abroad website. Never be afraid to speak with students who have studied in Europe. I did not take advantage of a study abroad program, and I regret that. My European backpacking experience would have been even more fantastic if I had taken the opportunity to live in a European culture for just a few months.

Conclusion:

Planning a trip to Europe is completely within the abilities of a UNI student. Obtaining passports and airline tickets may seem like a tough task. However, the steps you need to take are relatively simple and straightforward. The toughest part about becoming a backpacker is making the initial decision. Once you set your mind to the idea, the details will fall into place.

Study abroad programs can be an excellent way to not only see Europe, but to live it. You can earn UNI class credit and travel to all the countries of Western Europe at the same time. It is a terrific opportunity for UNI students and I urge everyone to consider studying abroad.

In conclusion, you can become a backpacker with experiences of a lifetime. If you are considering traveling or studying abroad, take a couple of hours to research the idea. You may be headed for the best journey you could ever imagine. Once you say "I will do it," you've made it past the highest hurdle. The rest of the journey depends on your creativity and your open mind. Good luck!

-jason james joseph sloan

References:

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- International Student Identity Card: Handbook '96. 1996. Council on International Educational Exchange. New York, N.Y.
- Let's Go: The Budget Guide to Europe. 1996. St. Martin's Press. New York, N.Y.
- Put the World in Your Pocket. (map). Copyright 1994. International Youth Hostel Federation. Hertfordshire, England.
- Student Travels: magazine for international travel, study, and work. Spring 1997 edition. Copyright 1997 by the Council on International Educational Exchange. New York, N.Y.
- The AT&T International Calling Guide for students Abroad: A Crash Course in International Communications. Copyright 1994 AT&T.
- The Passport: A Traveler's Best Resource Overseas. Copyright 1991, The College Connection, Inc. Westport, Connecticut.

Interviews:

- Hash, Dr. Virginia. Office of International Programs, UNI. April 1997.
- Horton, Brad. Study Abroad in Austria (Klagenfurt). April 1997.
- Horton, |Scott. General Study Abroad. April 1997.
- Roberts, Forrest. Research via the Internet. April 1997.

Appendix A.

Exchange Agreements

UNI Exchange Agreements

Austria - University of Klagenfurt
Chile - Universidad de Tarapaca
China - Guangzhou Institute of Physical Education
China - Hebei Teachers University
China - Shaanxi Teachers University
Denmark - Aalborg University
England - University of Hull
Finland - Turku School of Economics and Business Administration
France - Groupe Ecole Superieure de Commerce
France - L'Universite Catholique de L'Ouest
France - Ecole Nationale Superieure de Chimie de Rennes
Germany - Dresden University of Technology
India - University of Delhi
Japan - Kansai Gaidai
Japan- Naruto University of Education
Mexico - Universidad Autonoma de Baja, California
Russia - American Council of Teachers of Russian
Slovakia - Comenius University

Iowa Regents Program

Austria - Vienna
France - Lyon
Spain - Hispanic Institute in Valladolid
Wales - University of Swansea

copied with permission from Dr. Virginia Hash, Office of International Programs,
University of Northern Iowa, 1997.

Appendix B.

Helpful Addresses and Phone Numbers:

Hostelling International

Northeast Iowa Council (319) 864-3923
American Youth Hostels
Box 10
Postville, Iowa 52162

Council Travel

CIEE: Council on International Educational Exchange 1 800 226 8624
National Reservation Center
1030 Massachusetts Ave., Ste 200 <http://www.ciee.org/>
Cambridge, MA 02138-5335

Waterloo Post Office (319) 274-2200
300 Sycamore St.
Waterloo, IA

Copyworks (319) 266-2306
corner of College St. and 23rd

AAA Travel Office (319) 235-7056
3068 Kimball Ave
Waterloo, IA

Office of International Programs (319) 273-2182
Baker Hall Rm 59
UNI campus

AT&T

For "International Calling Guide for Students Abroad"
call 1 800 972 0247

To apply for an international calling card
call 1 800 224 5610

Student Fights, Inc. (602) 951 1177

Appendix C.

Web Search Pages:

Various Search Engines:

<http://home.microsoft.com/access/allinone.asp/>

AltaVista Search Engine:
<http://altavista.digital.com/>

Webcrawler:
<http://webcrawler.com/>

Yahoo:
<http://www.yahoo.com/>

General Budget Travel Information and Accommodations:

<http://www.eurotrip.com/>

<http://www.city.net/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/> Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

<http://travel.state.gov/> U.S. State Department Travel Advisories

Study Abroad Information:

<http://studyabroad.com/>