The Backpacking Lifestyle

By Nikki Scott

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“Do not go where the path may lead... go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sometimes you can’t write something better so there is no need to try. This is one of those cases. Below is an article written by Nikki Scott, editor of the magazine Southeast Asia Backpacker from January 2011. If I had the chance, I would write exactly what she wrote. I read this while living in Huay Pung Mai, Thailand last year. I had been out of America on my new adventure for only three months at that time. It rang so true then, and 21 months later it still rings so true while I contemplate more serious future plans or continuing living this vagabond lifestyle. I’ll post a new blog about my Outback exploits soon (kangaroo spotlighting and a new nickname!), but for now enjoy this gem. Cheers!

“The most important lesson that travel has taught me is that there are many different ways to live your life. The longer I stay in Asia the more open-minded I become and the more I lose grip on what I once considered to be the path to aspire to.

Many people in the West tend to follow a similar route – we leave school, go to university and get a job. Student loans, mortgages, relationships and careers are the commitments that keep us on the straight and narrow. Stuck in the day to day bubble of routine and security, it becomes harder and harder to break free.

In the Western mindset, success is measured in assets and achievements. It can be scary and daunting to imagine a life that strays from this structured ladder. Stuck in the office in the UK I kept thinking – what is at the top of the ladder?

Backpacking is a once in a lifetime experience. It’s a time when you break away from the regimented order of Western society and get a taste of a different way of life- adventure, excitement, spontaneity. Once sampled it may be hard to go back to ‘normal life.’ I decided not to.

Earlier this month I was interviewed by a journalist who was writing an article about young people who had left the UK to pursue a different path. It appeared in Company Magazine as a feature called ‘Hello World- Say Goodbye to the 9to 5.’

Alongside my story about starting SEA Backpacker Magazine was the tale of a girl who had set up her own film and events company in Ho Chi Minh City –competing with over 3,000 applicants for one job in the UK, she’d decided to leave it all behind and live life on her own terms.
These are the types of people I meet every day here in Southeast Asia. I am constantly inspired and intrigued by the stories I hear that would make page turning novels.

Ambitious entrepreneurs, enthusiastic journalists, designers, artists, photographers, DJs, founders of NGO’s, adventure companies, passionate volunteers and teachers. Not millionaires, but people making a difference to the world in their own way however big or small. There are many young people who have discovered Asia as a place where they are able to forge their own paths and pursue their dream against the convention of their home countries.

With the recent downturn in the economy making it difficult to find a job in places such as the US, the UK, and Europe, there is a growing trend of young people escaping overseas to seek out new challenges and exciting opportunities. Fed up with selling themselves short, working long hours, paying high rent and saddling themselves with debt; this new group of pioneers head east with open eyes. What begins as a backpacking adventure becomes a whole new way of life!

For me, SE Asia was that land of opportunity. Since leaving an office job two and a half years ago to go backpacking with no clue about where I would end up, I was able to accomplish one of my dreams. Bound by red tape, rules and expensive set-up costs, starting a travel magazine would have been impossible for me back home with my limited funds. It’s not until you leave the cubicle behind do you start to realize that there is a whole world of opportunity to explore!

At times life can be bound by what you ‘should’ do in the eyes of parents, peers, teachers, employers and by society itself. It takes initial courage to step back, ask yourself why you ‘should’ do something. You might just realize to your astonishment that you actually don’t HAVE to do what you think you do!

Going against the grain and doing things just a little bit differently than everyone in your hometown may not be as difficult or as scary as you may think. In fact, once you get started- it can be easier!

For those of us who are lucky enough to have been born in a free and safe country with access to clean water and food let alone the luxury to travel- the world is an adventure playground.

We must never forget that our biggest privilege is choice- something that millions of people in the world do not have. It is up to us to make the most of it- by living your life to the fullest, helping other people along the way and being a part of something that you are proud of.

When people say to me that they would love to travel the world, be a travel writer, live in Thailand or own their own business, I say- you can!”