



Rafael Schäfer

**The Nightmare
of Traveling
the World**



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Foreword

Are you among the (probably small) group of people who purchased this book without knowing me personally? Even if not, here is a brief introduction of myself and the journey on which all these stories took place:

My name is Rafael, and I am originally from Stuttgart, Germany. In 2017 I completed my bachelor's degree in Business Administration. It was an integrated degree program so I worked for a company while I studied, and I was hired by the same firm after graduation. Due to financial problems however, the company had already announced that my temporary contract couldn't be extended for more than one year. I decided that, instead of looking for a new job, I would go on a journey indefinitely - for as long as my motivation and wallet would allow. To give myself more leeway with the latter constraint, I used several strategies: I continued to live with my parents, which allowed me to save on rent. In addition to my job, I sometimes gave private tutoring and sold a lot of things online that I didn't need anymore. Besides that, I tried to spend as little money as possible.

Shortly before my contract actually expired, I found two flight deals to begin the trip. My journey would start in October 2018 with a flight to Ireland. A week and a half later, I would travel from there to the US. Apart from these two flight tickets, I had no further plans. My spontaneous travel style later led me to Mexico and from where I continued to travel overland through all the countries of Central America up to Panama. Then I crossed over to Colombia by boat and spent another eight months in South America. My journey ended in Peru in March 2020 due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was stuck in a hostel there for another two weeks before I returned to my

home country on a repatriation flight organized by the German government.

This is a very brief summary of roughly 17 months that I spent consecutively abroad, mostly in Spanish-speaking countries. During this time I not only met great people and saw beautiful places, but also learned Spanish out of necessity. Nevertheless, it is no surprise that not everything went smoothly during such a long journey. Before the trip, I had already predicted some challenging moments. The full extent and absurdity of several negative experiences, however, were beyond my imagination. This is also true for how funny, interesting, and educational these incidents were, at least in hindsight.

You are probably wondering why this diary of my travel horror stories should interest you. Well, perhaps for the following reasons:

- You are looking for valid (!) justifications to remain inside your comfort zone and stay at home
- You need negative examples to dissuade your child from their upcoming “working holiday” in an exotic country
- You have traveled extensively yourself (and therefore you will probably identify with stories here)
- You want to know what traveling can look like behind all the beautified social media content
- You enjoy schadenfreude
- You want to learn a thing or two about various fringe sports such as breakdancing, surfing, and diving

I didn't write down some of these experiences until now, four years after the fact. I have, however, recounted my memories to the best of my knowledge, without exaggerations or invented additions. The same mentality of “keeping it real” applies to the pictures used in this book: I took all the photos myself and didn't edit them so that they reflect reality as much as possible. If

you're interested in similar content, feel free to follow me on Instagram @2lazy4filters (yes, I am shamelessly plugging here).

In the spirit of fairness, I aimed to publish at least one incident from each country I visited. As you might deduce from the different lengths of the chapters, a few countries such as Colombia provided more content for this book than others. Yet this does NOT mean that I had less fun in these countries or had a worse time in general, but rather it roughly indicates how much time I spent in each country. Statistically speaking, more things can occur over a longer period of time. Most of the incidents in this book are just that: silly coincidences that could have easily happened anywhere else. So please don't let this book discourage you from visiting a specific place just because I had a bad experience there.

Chapter 1 - Ireland: Begging on the Bus

Nine days into my trip, I found myself in Killarney, Ireland. I had just returned from a day tour around the Ring of Kerry, a circular route along verdant highlands and rugged coastlines. With that, I had ticked off the penultimate highlight in Ireland from my travel list.



Ring of Kerry view

Two days later I wanted to take my pre-booked flight from Ireland to the USA. I had chosen a small airport on the west coast of Ireland because of a flight deal. It's also close to the world-famous Cliffs of Moher, which I planned to visit on the last day before the flight.



Cliffs of Moher

In order to stick to the itinerary, the same day after the tour I needed to get to a small town called Ennis, in between the cliffs and the airport. I had already booked my accommodation there. To get there I would transfer to another bus in a city called Limerick. According to my online research, there was only one bus going there from Killarney in the afternoon. Thus, my whole plan depended on catching that bus.

Since the tour ended punctually, I was back at the hostel with some extra time before the bus departure. I couldn't buy a ticket online because of credit card problems. (This would be far from the last time that my credit card caused trouble with online payments.) I decided to simply buy a ticket on site. I figured the bus couldn't be fully booked. I left the hostel on time and headed to the bus stop. A sign there indicated that a replacement stop was set up due to construction work. It was five minutes away, but I had ten minutes till the bus left, so I walked there in no hurry.

The bus was already waiting at the replacement stop. The bus driver took my backpack and put it in the storage compartment. In the meantime, I got in and was delighted to see a pretty traveler I had met on the tour the same day. The bus ride would

definitely be more fun with someone to talk to. The driver soon came back and wanted to sell me the ticket for 10 euros. I opened my purse and gasped. I was out of cash. I don't know why either. Maybe I had forgotten to visit the ATM. Maybe I had expected they would accept card payments. Remaining calm, I thought through all my options.

I asked if I could pay with card. He declined. Could I try to buy a ticket online? I could no longer do that for the current bus, he replied. Could I buy a bus ticket for the next day and just use it today? He wouldn't accept that. I was getting nervous. Would he know where the nearest ATM would be and could wait a bit? He replied that he didn't know. Furthermore, he had to leave on time in two minutes. I was getting annoyed at how uncooperative the bus driver was being. I was aware that it wasn't his job to help me with my problem, but he could have shown a little consideration. Turning away from the driver, I asked the traveler from the tour if she could lend me 10 euros. Unfortunately she had also run out of cash. At this point, my adrenaline was kicking in. In my mind, I was envisioning how I would be thrown off the bus and how I would miss the Cliffs of Moher. Such a First World Problem.

It was time for more drastic measures. There were five other people on the bus, and one by one I asked for a 10 euro loan. I'd return the amount immediately using PayPal or bank transfer. With adrenaline, I was able to suppress the obvious embarrassment of the situation at first. Of course the people further back in the bus had watched how I was rejected by the first person. Nevertheless, I couldn't leave any stone unturned and begged all the other passengers one after the other. Some of them even made the rejection a little more pleasant. I was brushed off under the pretext that they didn't have any cash with them or needed it themselves. In the end I had a total of 0 euros. That was somewhat expected. If a random person had asked me for a tenner on the bus, I probably would have refused

too, without considering their offer of a (highly dubious) payback. Nonetheless, my sympathy for people's "stinginess" didn't help me to pay for the bus ticket.

The actual departure time had now arrived and the bus driver had enough of my acting up. He wanted to stick to his schedule and not be late at the departure because of me. He retrieved my backpack from the storage compartment and left me standing on the curb with it. In the meantime, I could no longer suppress the unpleasant feeling inside me. It was the embarrassment of begging combined with the humiliation of a fare dodger being thrown off the train. My adrenaline drained and I realized I had failed because of 10 euros. Devastated, I saw the bus leave.

In this situation, not only would I not be able to visit the Cliffs of Moher until my flight, but I would also lose 25 euros for the prebooked hostel. I was also aware that it wasn't really that bad. Still just First World Problems. Yet my ego had just received a terrific beating, and that had only happened because

1. buying a bus ticket online hadn't worked,
2. I had no more cash,
3. there had been no time to withdraw money at the relocated bus stop,
4. the bus driver ~~hadn't given me a free ride~~ was unwilling to compromise, and
5. the passengers had been just as stingy as I probably would have been in their place (Karma is a b*tch).

After further contemplation of my life, I checked the Irish public transport website again for another connection, and indeed there was one more. However, this meant three different trains and a four-hour longer journey with an arrival after 1am. In addition, it was a total of 30 euros more expensive. For these reasons, when I had checked the website the day before, I had

mentally blanked them out and forgotten them. I had thought that nobody would take such a stupid, money-and-time-wasting connection. Now this option turned out as a blessing in disguise. After all, this connection allowed me to stick to my schedule. At the train station I even met two other people from the tour, with whom the first train ride was very entertaining. I had also learned something that proved to be true again and again on the trip: cash is king.



Happy End!

Chapter 2 - USA: Mediocre Memories of Miami

There was hardly a place on my trip that I really regretted visiting. Most of the places even surprised me positively and offered a lot more than I initially thought. However, I have been asked where I was most disappointed. The undisputed number 1 on the list of unfulfilled expectations is Miami Beach, and I was even looking forward to it so much. Beforehand, I toured the big cities on the east coast of the US. I visited Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington DC. All of these cities were already quite cold in fall. The high accommodation prices didn't make it attractive to linger for long either. Therefore, I spontaneously booked a cheap flight to a warmer climate. That's how I ended up in Miami in early November.



Welcome to Miami!

Besides the expected warm weather, the city would also have several strange acquaintances in store for me. Maybe it had to do with the fact that I chose one of the cheapest hostels. 12 dollars a night would attract a certain clientele. I was also aware of that but I didn't expect that there would be that many "special" people at once...

The day after I arrived, I was on the phone with my parents while sitting in the hostel lobby. A slightly older man in a polo shirt and sunglasses sat next to me. After my phone call, he started to speak to me in German. He turned out to be Swiss. His clothes also fit well, because he was actually on a multi-week sailing trip at the moment. He would be leaving for the Bahamas tomorrow. I couldn't quite understand why such a vacationer stayed in the cheapest hostel in the whole city. Then he said that I was correct in what I had said about the "fake" courtesy in the US. I had talked to my parents about it a few minutes earlier. People asking "How are you?", seemingly without interest in my actual wellbeing, had gotten on my nerves a bit. With his statement he revealed that he had probably listened in on the entire call. I wasn't really happy about that. Although I hadn't said anything bad, I felt my privacy had been violated. That's how it had to feel for native English speakers who can't say anything anywhere in the world without running the risk of being understood by some stranger.

However, that wasn't all. He then badmouthed Americans. He literally claimed that everyone here wouldn't give a damn if he died tomorrow. Nobody would care. He used a very pejorative tone. He didn't have many kind words for the culture and the people of the country he was visiting. That made me uncomfortable too. Up until now, all the Americans I had met personally - and not just superficially - on this trip and on a student exchange a few years earlier had been nice and generous people. I couldn't understand why he thought so negatively. But this would change...

A short time later I met a Black man in the hostel, who seemed about 40 years old. One of his arms was fixed in an arm sling. We got talking and I asked him what had happened. I was expecting a more or less interesting event that had led to the fracture of his arm. Yet his answer surprised me greatly. Apparently he had been shot in the arm. I didn't believe him at first, but he then told me the complete story. Unfortunately I've forgotten the details. Yet in the US, sadly, it wasn't that extraordinary, I thought. To make matters worse, he had recently separated from his wife. So he needed a break now. Since there are no paid leaves for going to a health resort in the American "health care system", he was taking a self-funded hiatus in Miami at the moment. He had been here for a few weeks already and still wanted to stay longer. Since I wanted to explore the city a bit that afternoon, he joined me. Granted, he wasn't exactly the travel companion I was expecting or looking for. However, not many other guests were hanging around the hostel. It was definitely better than alone. So that afternoon we explored a few parks, a boardwalk and the nearby beach nearby.



In fact, exploring the city with him turned out to be pleasant. Thus, in the evening we wanted to grab a drink together. Better not in a bar or restaurant, as that would be a waste of money, we agreed. So we bought liquor at the supermarket. The consumption of alcoholic beverages in public isn't permitted in the US. Our hostel also forbade bringing booze from outside. You would have to buy it at the in-house bar. But these hurdles shouldn't keep us from our plan because my companion had a special trick up his sleeve. At a convenience store, he bought juice to mix the liquor with. He also took two large paper cups with him, which were actually meant to be filled in the soft drink machine. After adding ice cubes as well, he then poured the liquor and juice into our two cups in front of the store. Cops hate this trick. He proudly presented this technique to me as if he had just made a Nobel Prize-worthy breakthrough.

We walked the streets back to the hostel, drinking the concoction - which was too strong by my standards - through the straws from our soda cups. As we passed a police car, he wanted to prove to me how safe our method was and demonstratively greeted the police officers in the car with a raised hand. I got a bit jittery for a moment. The cops nodded back. Of course nothing had happened. Why he was inviting a possible confrontation, I didn't know either. Nevertheless, I knew that the life of crime wasn't for me. I couldn't handle the psychological pressure. Once at the hostel, we made ourselves comfortable with drinks in hand in the outdoor jacuzzi.

My companion and I really enjoyed this place to relax after the hot day. However, he had to keep his bandaged arm out of the water. That this cheap hostel even offered a free jacuzzi was surprising. I was even more surprised that I hadn't seen anyone else bathing in the past two days. That evening, too, nobody joined and we had the warm water to ourselves. My companion left the hot tub a short time later as he couldn't relax as much because of his arm. He was going to sleep. I wouldn't see him