

# *ONCE AROUND THE WORLD*

Alone as a young woman through Africa

An inspiring travel guide with exciting adventure stories

from six months of backpacking in Africa

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## Route

1. Uganda: 28.09. – 29.11.2015
2. Tanzania: 29.11.2015 – 07.01.2016
3. Malawi: 07.01. – 27.01.2016
4. Zambia: 27.01. – 08.02.2016
5. Botswana: 08.02. – 13.02.2016
6. Namibia: 13.02. – 19.02.2016
7. South Africa: 20.02. – 05.03.2016
8. Lesotho: 05.03. – 11.03.2016
9. South Africa: 11.03. – 14.03.2016



You can see all details of my route [HERE](#) on my blog.

## Prologue

Dissolving your apartment, terminating your job, leaving everything behind you and simply traveling the world – how does this sound? I dared to do it! In September of 2015, I packed my backpack and began a journey into the unknown. I started only with a one-way ticket to Uganda, into the heart of Africa, and with a proper portion of optimism. I had not the slightest idea what would await me on this continent, how my route would look like, or how long it would take me. It was my first real backpacking trip, my first time in the depths of Africa, and my first journey on which I was completely on my own. These were the best prerequisites for the adventure of my life.

I can still remember very well, how I sat in the airplane to Uganda – just then I realized what I was really up to. Suddenly, I got very excited and nervous. I had never sat on my own in an airplane before. The thoughts were revolving in my head. I was feeling helpless and alone, but I knew: This journey was a dream I had longed for quite some time. If I would not fulfill it now, when else would I? I was young, single, and did not have any children. There would not come a better time. If I did not start immediately, it would be too late.

My journey across Africa lasted roughly six months. I started my journey in Uganda and traveled on the land route all the way through to South Africa. Along this route, I traveled through Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho. Driven by my limitless desire for adventures, I traveled with a low budget and stayed mostly away from the worn-out tourist paths. I wanted to see and experience untouched nature as much as possible. I wanted to discover remote tribes, which live far from any civilization and are still hunting their own food. All that and a lot more, I have experienced in unforgettable ways.

When I left Africa, my heart bled. These mythical countries that appear to be so different to us, were something I really liked. I really fell in love with this fascinating continent. Most people know very little about Africa. When I tell someone that I have stayed there for half a year only equipped with my backpack, I always see horrified faces – “Africa? That is way too dangerous!” I want to put an end to these prejudices in this book. Above all, Africa is a continent, and each single of its countries is very different from another. Therefore, one can never claim that whole Africa is insecure.

Originally, it was never my plan to write a book. I started a blog, at the beginning of my journey, so my friends and relatives could stay up to date with my trip. Astonishingly, I had more visitors on my blog as I had imagined. Time after time, I received e-mails with questions about my trip. Since I love to write, one day, I decided to write down my impressions and tips in a book for interested and prospective Africa travelers.

I have never been the perfect backpacker from the start – it was quite the reverse. Principally, I have to admit that I started quite naive into this journey. But with time, I learned and developed more and more to a really professional backpacker. I want to share my experiences with you and would like to encourage you to also embark on such an adventure.

If you are unsure what any words or terms mean, please take a look into the ***Glossary*** at the end of the book.

In case of further questions, please visit my blog or write me an e-mail:

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## Who is this book for?

This book is the right one for you if you are planning a backpacking trip or are interested in it. If you plan to travel on your own for the first time and still have doubts. If you feel the urge to try something new and adventurous. If you want to escape everyday life. But this book is also for those, who are simply interested in Africa or adventurous travel stories.

My goal is to give you general, as well as practical tips and tricks about backpacking with the main focus on Africa. I would like to guide you from the preparations up to what to do during your journey. Additionally, I want to share my travel stories with you, in which I write about my adventures in an Africa away from the worn-out tourist paths. This book should encourage you to dare to do the same.

## 1. Chapter – Why travel?

Why should one travel? That is indeed the first question that you will ask yourself. For most people, traveling means going on vacation – driving by car to Italy for a few days or going on an all-inclusive holiday to Turkey. That is quite the standard version of traveling for most.

But what I mean is a lot more than just a few days of recreation. I am writing about going on a long-term journey. Or you could call it a gap year.

Who has not dreamt about simply leaving everything behind and to escape the daily hamster wheel – as my dad used to call it? To never know, what the next day or even the next hour brings, not to have any liabilities, to be able to freely manage your time, and to experience new adventures every day – no more routine.

In the year 2013, I started on a somewhat different trip for the first time. No package holiday, no baggage, without booking anything upfront – I just went for it. Driven by curiosity for the big, wide world and by the desire for adventures. Together with a friend, I went to the Indonesian islands *Bali* and *Lombok* – only equipped with our backpacks.

We rented mopeds, which was a complete bargain thanks to the help of our couchsurfing host. On the other hand, they were in a corresponding state. To make the matter worse, we were still missing skill in driving mopeds. It did take only a few minutes, and we already had our first prang behind us. Not to mention the crazy road traffic in Indonesia.

In other words: It was a real adventure. What a feeling of freedom it was, when we drove along the fantastic coast roads of Lombok, only dressed in shorts and t-shirts and to enjoy the breathtaking place. All concerns and any stress seemed so infinitely far away. The first time in our life, we tried out couchsurfing and met the most lovely and craziest people. People that we otherwise would have never got to know. Daily, we had unforgettable experiences and met a lot of new people.

Amongst others, we got to know a girl from Germany. Together with her, we traveled a few days through the region. This young woman aroused my interest for traveling. She had already been a year on a journey around the world – solely on her own! For this courage, she received my whole admiration. Never could I have imagined this for myself.

But from that time on, a dream seemed to have awakened in me. This backpacking trip to Indonesia had given me the travel nerves. More and more I started to think about if I would indeed be able to go on a real journey around the world – on my own! Silently and secretly I started planning, how I could realize this dream.

**There are so many reasons to travel.**

For one, there is the desire for adventures and the curiosity.

One wants to see beyond the box.

What else is on this big, wide world?

How do people live in other countries?

Are people elsewhere also happy or even happier?

How are we different and what do we have in common with other people?

**Traveling changes.** You get more cosmopolitan and more self-confident. You learn that you are able to do the impossible in difficult situations, and that there are more good than bad people in this world. Before my journey, I always had the impression that the majority of people are evil and egoistic. But this journey has opened my eyes. More than once, I have been in hopeless situations and have been completely desperate. But always there has been a solution, or some person came that saw my problem and offered help. People shared completely selflessly the few they had with me. Also, I have learned to approach strangers, which had been a thing that has always been difficult for me, before. Partly, I have been really surprised of what I was able to do.

When I told my circle of friends and relatives about my big plans, naturally, I initially got confronted with lack of understanding, or some believed I was joking. Especially the fact that I wanted to start in Africa was completely suspicious for them. Traveling alone as a young, blonde girl with a backpack across Africa – something like that seemed completely impossible. Some cannibals from pristine forest would surely devour me.

Initially, I reacted somewhat insecure to such claims. But with time, they encouraged me even more. I wanted to prove them that it was indeed possible to travel Africa on my own as a young woman. And those wild tribes from pristine forest would not devour me. I wanted to leave my comfort zone, and to see how people live in simplest circumstances and still can be happy.

If you also ...

- want to make more of your life,
- are not satisfied with the idea of two weeks of vacation per year,
- want to discover the big, wide world – since you only live once,
- have a slumbering dream of Africa inside you,
- are dissatisfied of buying even more useless things *or*
- want to tell your grandchildren exciting stories when you are old

... then pack your backpack, and go on the adventure of your life. Simply DO it! Everything that you need is a tiny little spark of courage.

I do not know anyone who has ever regretted such a journey. It does not have to be a complete year or even more for the start. Dare to have big dreams and believe in yourself. Do not let yourself be

dissuaded from your goals by the doubts or fears of other people. Especially not from those people, who have not been on a journey for that long or have never been where you want to go.

Naturally, there is always a long list of things that will divert us from our dreams. Some of them are for example: an apartment or a house, that needs to be paid off, monthly fixed costs, a partner or a family, a pet, a job ... – the list could go on forever. Old habits die hard. It is our nature to be very critical about everything that is new. How many people are there, who do their job for their entire life, which does not even fulfill them; or who live in a partnership, in which they are unhappy? Mostly, the reason for this is their fear of change. Who knows, if a new job would make me really happier?

A very nice proverb says: „Nothing ventured, nothing gained.“ If we never give in to change, we can never get better. Time has become a luxury good in our western civilization, and stress controls our everyday life. Is this what we want until the end of our life? Many do not even know that there are other options. It is our own decision what we make of our life. Just because the others live by the norm – school, job, family, pension – it does not mean we have to do the same. Especially you should not wait until you are old to enjoy your life. We never know, when it will be over.

But you also have to regard a few things, when you plan a journey of this kind.

You have to:

- ... be absolutely cosmopolitan and respect people, regardless of color, culture or religion.

- ... inform upfront about the customs of a country and to respect them.

- ... be without any prejudices.

- ... be prepared for adventures that you surely will never forget again!

## 1.1 The difference between backpacking and package holidays

As you might already have noticed, this book is about a particular style of traveling, namely backpacking. But what is the difference between backpacking and package holidays? For most of you, backpacking is certainly a term that you might have heard at least once.

The following is a list of the most important **differences**:

- A backpacker is someone who travels the world only equipped with his or her backpack.
- Backpackers travel for a longer timeframe than a single week.
- Backpackers like to dive deep into the culture of a country and want to see more than only the pool from their hotel site. They want to get in touch with locals, try local food, etc.
- Backpackers mostly travel in a minimalistic way, meaning, they try to take as little baggage as possible with them and try to get through the days with a low budget. This also means they prefer longer bus rides over expensive flights. Some thrill seekers also travel by tramping. They mostly sleep in cheap hostels or use couchsurfing websites to find a stay at the home of locals.
- Backpackers often travel alone.
- Backpackers organize their journey on their own and individually.
- Backpackers love adventures.

**The life of a backpacker also can be very hard:**

- You sometimes sleep with fifteen other backpackers in a sleeping room, from which minimum one snores loudly, and five would urgently need a shower.
- You never know what the next day will bring, not even where you will sleep.
- You wait hours for a bus or for a car that stops for you and picks you up.
- You sometimes have to negotiate prices on the market for way too long.
- You will get weird or compassionate looks, when you are tormenting through the streets in the midday heat with your heavy backpack on your shoulders to find an accommodation.
- You will be squeezed in between people, living chicken, and dozens of goats, while almost not being able to move.

For some, all of these points will probably sound really terrible, but exactly these experiences are, what will make your journey an unforgettable adventure.

Additionally, backpacking also has many **advantages** compared to package holidays:

It will give you an incredible feeling of freedom. You can do or stop doing (almost) anything you want to do, and you will not be trapped in some giant hotel complex, where you will be told that it anyway would be way too dangerous to go on the streets.

You will experience new adventures every single day and will be miles away from your boring everyday life at home. You will have to deal with and overcome your own fears. It will make you more courageous. You will have a lot of time to reflect on yourself, by which you will grow as a human being and strengthen your character.

## 1.2 Traveling alone?

For most, traveling alone will be the worst imagination on a long journey. But exactly this idea impressed me from the beginning. It has been exactly this what fascinated me when thinking about the young woman that I had met some years ago in Indonesia: She traveled the world on her own.

Many associate the word “alone” with loneliness. But loneliness and being on your own is not the same. You can also feel alone when you have a partner. The majority of people does not even know what to do on their own or will feel helpless.

But in my opinion, it is very important to be able to get along on your own. After all we got on this world alone and will also leave it again alone. Also if we live in a happy relationship, one day it may come to a breakup or the partner dies before oneself.

For those people that have never learned to be on their own, in this point in time their complete world will break down. It is the same with good friends: The fewest will stay with us for our whole life. This is the reason, why you need to be able to be on your own. To feel good with yourself as a person. To be able to enjoy the time on your own and your own thoughts. To love yourself.

To travel on your own does not mean to travel unhappy. It is quite the reverse: You can enjoy your complete freedom. Every day you can do and stop doing what you want, and you do not need to take care of others. Especially on longer journeys, when you will be together for 24 hours a day, there will be small bickering or disagreements. Maybe one prefers to see cities and museums, but the other prefers to go into nature and on adventures. One wants to sleep comfortably, the other prefers to travel on a low budget and, so for example, to go camping or to sleep in hammocks. One likes to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning, the other wants to sleep until 11 o'clock.

There is an infinite amount of other examples. I do not want to claim that traveling with a friend, partner, or in a group, is always bad. You only have to think it through in advance. Everything that might cause disagreements should be talked through in advance, so for example the style of traveling or the budget.

Anyway, the first big problem is to find another person that wants to join you on such a long journey. If you have found someone, you need to talk through every detail with him or her. The best would be to agree upfront on splitting up, anytime you want, so that each person goes their own way from that point, should traveling together not work out as expected.

You see, it will almost certainly not be easy to find a companion for your journey. If so, it can really work out, and you may have an unforgettable time together. Indeed, it is really nice to be able to share great moments together. If you are on your own, you have the feeling that no one can understand all the things that you have experienced.

If you are courageous enough to start your journey on your own, or if you simply cannot find a companion for your journey, then: Congratulations! Ahead of you lies the best and most exciting time of your life. You will see that you are able to do things, you would have never dreamt of before.

Of course, this does not mean, you will be alone during your whole journey, just because you start on your own. It is quite the reverse. If you travel alone, it will be a lot easier to get in touch with other people – both with locals and with other backpackers.

For one, people will reach out for you a lot more often. No matter if you are sitting in the hostel or if you are standing on a zebra crossing – if you are alone, most often it will not take long before someone starts a conversation with you. You yourself will probably also approach a single person much easier than a group of people. When you get to know someone in a hostel, and you both have the same plans or preferences, it will be easy to join each other on the next part of your journey. This way the advantage of traveling with another person is that it will be more casual, since both sides know that the time with each other will be limited. If you notice that each other's interests vary too much, you can simply split up again without any disputes.

Traveling on your own allows you to learn the language of the country much faster. For example, when you sit in the bus, most often it will not take long until a conversation with your seat neighbor starts. And believe me, most Africans are very chatty. Additionally, you learn about a lot of secret tips about each country.

### **My experiences with traveling on my own**

There has almost been not a single bus ride, on which I did not have a conversation with anyone. Africans are also a lot faster with making friendships than we in Austria. Most often, just after a few minutes, I was asked for my cell phone number. Since I bought a new SIM card in each country, I willingly gave out my number, anyway. To my astonishment, most of the people I met on a bus ride actually called me one day. Sometimes, just to ask how I was or to invite me to their home.

The absolute highlight for me was, when I met another person with white skin in the bus, since it was a very rare thing to meet other backpackers, especially in eastern Africa. I quickly made friendships.

I remember very well, how I got on an extremely jam-packed bus – with Alex, a young man from Germany – that would bring us to a small village of the Maasai near *Lake Natron* in Tanzania.

Since we wanted to see real Maasai and not just those who made a show for tourists, we asked around a little. Someone gave us the tip to go *Lake Natron*. We spent a few hours in this bus in the sweltering heat, pressed against each other and numerous locals – especially Maasai.

The street was not asphalted and partly led through raging rivers. I wondered how this bus was able to drive here. The speed varied between 5 km / h and 20 km / h. Besides us, living chicken and other belongings were transported.

The Maasai stared at us curiously. It was probably not commonplace that Mzungus (that is how Africans call people with white skin) got on a bus here. Also I never had the chance to see a Maasai at close range. Some of them were barefoot. Others wore sandals with soles made of old tires. They explained to us, those were supposed to be especially solid and durable. They were dressed in colorful cloths that they had wrapped around their slim bodies. Both men and women had very short hair. The women wore a lot of jewelry and earrings. The men all had a wooden rod with them. Some even carried a machete.



We passed numerous small Maasai villages. Additionally, we saw a small herd of zebras, which grazed only a few meters away, and ostriches, which ran over the dry meadows. Small children watched after their herds of cows and goats and waved very excited to our bus.

The heat became more and more unbearable. My clothes were already completely wet from my sweat. We were very glad when we finally arrived at the small Maasai village that had about 30 huts. Numerous people got off the bus.

Suddenly, Alex said: „Look over there, a Muzungu“. I did not trust my eyes. There indeed had been a blonde, tall, and young man with us on the bus. He also seemed to have discovered us. The young man instantly approached us and asked what the hell we were doing here. He had never assumed to meet other white people here. We thought the same. It proved to be, that the young man came from Lithuania, and his name was Danas. He loves to take photographs, especially far away from the worn-out tourist paths.

We instantly decided to continue traveling together. This was the beginning of a very good friendship. After a few days in the Maasai village, our paths with Danas separated again. Three weeks later, I met him again on the island *Zanzibar* in Tanzania. Together, we celebrated Christmas and had a lot of wacky experiences. The absolute highlight was, when I later discovered, that Danas was in Cape Town, the capital of South Africa, at the same time as me. We instantly organized a meeting. The world of those who travel can be very small sometimes.

I had another very wonderful encounter in the *Mpanga Forest*, a rain forest in Uganda. I was couchsurfing in *Mpigi*, a small place not far away from the capital *Kampala*. My host Etienne had recommended me to go on a hike through this jungle. So I searched for a Boda-Boda (moped taxi) with a driver, who could bring me there.

At the entrance to the *Mpanga Forest* was a small wooden hut. It seemed as if one was supposed to pay an admission fee to get into the nature reserve. But there was not a single person, as far as I could see. No cashier, nor any other tourist. I was a little surprised, since I had not expected that this was such a lost place. This small rain forest was not entirely unknown. But this was even better, since as you know, I love untouched nature away from mass tourism.

At the beginning, the way was very wide. But with time, it got very narrow and there were numerous junctions. Etienne had recommended me to hike across the jungle, and after about an hour I would get out on the other side of the rain forest. In the meantime, the way did not seem as if anyone had gotten through here in the last days or weeks – it was really feral and accrued. Time after time, it rustled in the bushes, and in the crowns of the trees I could see giant bird species I had never seen before.

When I walked along a pool, there suddenly was a loud splash, and I saw something giant and dark appearing. In complete panic, I began running. What could this have been? A crocodile? Or an anaconda? I had been on the hike for almost two hours by now, and it did not seem as if there was an end in sight. But turning around and going the whole way back, did seem pointless to me. So I hoped to get to the other end of the forest soon.

From now on, I only moved on slowly and looked in all directions. A few minutes later, it rustled above me in the trees. I looked up and stopped like mesmerized. I wanted to scream loudly or start crying right away. An about 1.5 meters long snake in poisonous green looked into my eyes. It was at most two meters away from me. It must have been the green mamba! My last hour had struck!

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