

Top Moments, Top Memories

- **What is the single most memorable thing that will stick with you forever?** (Matt)
 - That's a tough call... something that will stay with us forever is a deeper understanding that the people of the world, though they look and act completely different, are, in the end, simply *human*. We realized quickly that people are just people: they want to better their situation, they want safety, happiness, food, shelter... and when a visitor comes to their country, they want that visitor to feel welcome, safe, happy, satiated, sheltered, and so on. If we think someone's acting strangely, it's just that we don't understand their situational story. Something else that will stay with us forever (we know you only asked for one thing, but... too bad!) is that we saw the world, and it was amazing, but we also saw the world being ripped apart and destroyed; we need to stop destroying our own planet / country / city / back yard.
- **Top three best meals eaten in the past year.** (Darrell)
 1. Lamb in [Luhačovice](#), Czech Republic: great food, great friends, and a great setting... sitting on an outdoor patio perched in the hills surrounding Luhačovice as the sun set. Amazing!
 2. Any meal at Eagle Bar, Koh Pha-Ngan, Thailand: read more [here](#) to see what we mean.
 3. Ribs with [Cathy and Will](#), [Hong Kong](#): great apartment, amazing company, and RIBS! What could be better?
- **Top three most interesting encounters.** You must have had at least at 15min conversation with them. (Darrell)
 1. Nocturnal peeing adventures, [Serengeti](#) (Tanzania): for some reason, while camping in particularly precarious situations, the body always feels like it must relieve itself in the middle of the night. At roughly 12:45am one night, Martin had to get up. He unzipped the tent and shone his headlamp to see if he could see any fearsome eyes reflecting back. He didn't, but did notice what he thought were two distinctive shapes twenty or thirty feet from the tent, looking his way, and identified them pretty quickly as hyenas. He stared at these two hyenas, struggling in the dim midnight light, for some time before eventually coming to the conclusion that there's *no way* those are hyenas... must be his imagination. So, logically, he got up, walked behind the tent, turned his back on the hyenas that weren't there, peed, and returned to the tent. Tara then asked if it was safe outside for her to go. Martin replied, "um, yeah, I think so, but hurry up." The next morning, our guide asked us if we'd seen the hyenas that were roaming through the campground ten or fifteen minutes before one in the morning.
 2. 4am tent packing-up, [Chobe National Park](#), Botswana: this isn't really an encounter because we didn't *encounter* anything tangible... we only came face-to-face with fear, really. Because we had a bus to catch from Kasane to Francistown at 5am or so, we had to pack up our tent an hour earlier, in the pitch black of night, next to the swollen, crocodile and hippo infested, elephant playground of the Zambezi River. We could hear the animals all around us as we hastily packed our bags and tent. We've rarely been quite so nervous!
 3. Small world moments: while in Olympos, Turkey, we randomly bumped into a high-school friend of Tara's, [Erin](#), and in [Amritsar](#), India, we just happened to be going up the stairs of an un-guidebook-listed hotel when we ran into Patti and her hubby (friends of Tara's from University). She and her husband, married for almost two years (like us!), quit their jobs (against "proper sense," like us!), and were travelling through Africa, India, Asia, and Europe (like us! (just a different direction)). On the island of [Koh Phi Phi](#), Thailand, we met an Aussie girl named Kim who was at the end of a year of overseas travel. It turns out that she spent a few months in Vancouver, and when we added her on Facebook we discovered that she was friends with a couple of friends of ours. Also, one of the [people we met in India](#) (from England) has a sister-in-law who is married to someone who works with a cousin of Tara's on Vancouver Island. Small, small world!
- **Which country had the most disgusting public bathrooms?** (Paul)
 - [India](#) (all over): the public bathrooms seem somehow to be decided on by rough, de facto consensus, and pop up everywhere (sidewalks, the sides of buildings, stairways, etc.). They *definitely* don't [smell good](#)!
 - Russia (Siberia): public bathrooms tend to be [wood-enclosed](#) pit latrines that soak up people's "misses" like a sponge. We guessed that this didn't

matter much in the winter (everything's frozen), but in the summer, the smell was suffocating.

- All over: *any* train bathroom. 'Nuf said.
- **What was your most embarrassing moment?** (Angela)
 - There were plenty of moments where we felt under-the-microscope and somewhat uncomfortable (ie. trying to get on a [crowded bus](#) in Africa or India with our bulky bags in the heat of the day), but neither of us could come up with anything that was truly *embarrassing*.
- **What was a moment that melted your heart?** (Angela)
 - When we were in Nkhata Bay, [Malawi](#), Tara and I were walking back to our accommodations after picking up some fruit from the market. As we walked, we approached a 15- or 16-year-old girl, walking alone. As she passed by us, she unleashed this magical smile and softly said, "you have bought *nice* things!" Malawi was also where a group of six or eight girls ran up and gave Tara a group hug, the scampered off, giggling, and where we frolicked in the lake with a few anxious-to-mess-around boys. In each case, we both stopped dead in our tracks, floored by the genuine good nature of the Malawian people. Our time in [Bufukhula](#), Uganda, and [Joybells](#), near Dehra Dun, India, were two other moments that made us melt. In Bufukhula, we had the opportunity to visit a community we are intricately involved in through [Food for the Hungry International](#) and see, first hand, the impact of the \$1 a day (peanuts, really) that we donate to help and support our sponsor children. At Joybells we volunteered for a few days and were instantly accepted and loved by children with incredibly difficult and tragic histories. In both Bufukhula and Joybells, we experienced the same phenomenon: the human heart and spirit can often be seen most clearly through a nation's children, little beings too innocent to be deceitful, proud, or malicious.
- **What was the one thing you saw with your own eyes that truly made you reflect on how blessed you are and how content you should truly feel about your life?** (Arif)
 - In Africa and India in particular, we saw people with [nothing](#). No food, no shelter, no water, no work, no easy road ahead. And, to make matters worse, in many cases we looked around and saw the people in these areas tearing apart the natural world they lived in, destroying their world and looking for some hidden sustenance, but ruining any chance that their immediate surroundings could ever grow, flourish, and be productive again. How blessed are we? We are so very blessed that most of us don't even have to *think* about food, shelter, water, or work. How content should we truly feel about our life? Content enough to love the place we live (and long to be there when you're not), but not so content that we begin to forget that some of our own neighbours (yes, right here in Vancouver), might be struggling with some or all the essentials of life (food, shelter, etc.); helping them shouldn't be optional, it ought to be a moral obligation.
- **Who is the most interesting/unusual person you've met on your travels?** (Isabelle)
 - We've met many people, most of whom have very interesting stories. We're not sure we can narrow it down to one single individual, but here are a few of the more... "colourful." In Russia, our [Trans-Siberian](#) train co-travellers all had interesting tales ([Igor](#), the Russian professor of philosophy, [Baba Nina](#), the wide-as-she-was-tall babushka, and Andrei, the commander in the Russian army's nuclear rocketry division). In Tanzania we met [Andy](#), world-wide scuba instructor extraordinaire and our [safari](#) companion. In Turkey we met the amazing Tony, the adventurous, Farsi-speaking, tea-drinking, cigarillo-smoking, retired Brit who accompanied us as we travelled through [Kars](#) and [Doğubayazıt](#). [Michael and Marta](#) are a young Czech couple that we met, also in Doğubayazıt, who were driving their car from the Czech Republic to Mongolia (via all the "Stans") and back again through Russia. No worries, Michael says, since he's already driven [his car](#) to Dakar and back! [Marsali](#) is a Scottish woman working in Kampala, Uganda, helping orphaned street children... and she has been there for the last nine years (she speaks Luganda and everything!) – a far cry from her home in the [Outer Hebrides](#)! Also in Uganda was [Sylvie](#), a Swiss [MSF](#) doctor who we met a week after she left the Congo; the stories she had were unbelievable. [Brendan](#) was a New Zealander ex-Navy man who we encountered seven months into a year-long trip that saw him traverse South America, the Middle East, and Africa.

- **What place surprised you the most?** (Catherine)
 - Two places surprised us the most. [Malawi](#), for the amazing warm-heartedness and unfettered warmth of its populace; and [Namibia](#), because we were amazed at every turn at how varied a country's landscape can be and also because we were (are) surprised at how much we could love a country with almost no vegetation and very few people. And, of course, Mongolia surprised us, but for a very different reason: it *is* exactly like you've heard (nomadic people, gers, endless grassy plains, and so on).
- **Misadventures, or unplanned / unexpected events often suck at the time and then turn into great memories (good or bad). What's one misadventure that has become a great memory for you?** (Steven)
 - One misadventure (among more than a few) that we always end up chuckling about is the bus ride between Doğubayazıt and Trabzon, Eastern Turkey. We ended up having to traverse [this](#) crazy flood in the bus, and despite our cockiness before we entered the raging torrent, the fact that the bus was almost washed over the edge brought us back to sanity (near-panic, in fact), and it did so pretty quickly.
 - The train between [Varanasi](#) and [Agra](#): this train ended up being seven hours late (it was only eleven hours long to begin with), but rather than be a totally infuriating experience, we ended up sitting with half-a-dozen other travellers who were all in the same boat. It was a great bonding experience and kept us all sane. We ended up meeting up with [Kat and Gary](#) again a month later in [Goa](#).
- **What was your most 'profound' experience with a local person on your trip? Define 'profound' any way you want.** (Steven)
 - Any discussions with the village elders in [Bufukhula](#), Uganda, were very insightful, meaningful, and profound. They had a true knack for asking the questions that matter, the questions that make you *think*. We also learned *so, so, so* much from listening and talking to [Chalam and Bain](#) on Koh Pha-Ngan, Thailand. Thirdly, there were a few profound moments as we interacted with Chinese people: the most interesting, perhaps, was a Chinese student we met on a train who, after looking at our Lonely Planet guidebook's map of China, asked why Taiwan was a different colour from the rest of China (for example, [map 1](#) versus [map 2](#)). Hmm... where to start in that regard without offending anyone?!
- **What's the weirdest / craziest animal that you saw?** (Steven)
 - Aside from the endless weird bugs, beetles, and creepy-crawlies that we were constantly encountering, we had a few crazy encounters with snakes in Africa: the bridge at the border between Tanzania and Malawi runs over the Songwe River, and as we walked over the bridge we joined a group of children watching some other kids throwing rocks at a [green mamba](#), one of the most poisonous snakes on Earth. While in hiking in the [Brandberg](#) region of Namibia, Tara stepped right over a [spitting cobra](#), and Martin was about to do the same but heard the rustling sound as the snake passed over some dry leaves. "Don't worry," said our guide, "it's OK because they spit before they bite." What, what, *what??!*
- **Where did you find the happiest people on your travels and why do you think they stand out? How did they make you feel?** (Dave)
 - The good people in [Bufukhula](#) were remarkably happy, despite having next to nothing, as were the people we met in [Malawi](#). This could be attributed to a variety of factors, but the presence and influence of *hope* cannot be overlooked or ignored. What it is that actually *gives* or *provides* them with hope is another question. In terms of how it made us feel, it made us appreciate more profoundly that it certainly isn't worldly goods that drives the happiness factor. It *is* possible to have next to nothing and still be happy. It made us wrestle with the question of what it is in their particular circumstance that provides these people with hope. For our thoughts on that question, give us a shout and we'll chat face-to-face!
- **Was there a time when you went out of your way to help someone out of a bind? If so, tell us about it. What about the other way around - did anyone get you out of a big hole?** (Dave)
 - We did everything in our power to help other travellers and the locals that we encountered overcome whatever was ailing them at that particular moment. Travellers are the first to give advice to other travellers, but perhaps more revealing were the everyday citizens who helped *us*, and there were many of them. We began to call them our "guardian angels." These people would seemingly pop up out of nowhere, just when we needed some

help, talk us through the situation, and then vanish. A mystery man turned up in Nairobi and managed to get us out of what could have been a rather uncomfortable situation. This happened time and time again. It acted to reinforce our belief that *people are only people*, and inherently want good for you.

- **I've heard about travellers who show up in a town and immediately love the place. They feel that they could live there. Did you and/or Tara ever have this feeling? If so, where?** (Steven)
 - While on this trip, we didn't fall in love with anywhere to the extent where we were prepared to simply drop our bags and move there. There were many places we instantly liked: here are some little random towns or villages that we enjoyed: [Kraków](#) (Poland), [Harburg](#) (Germany), [Vilnius](#) (Lithuania), [Píng Ān](#) (China), and [Amritsar](#) (India). We would walk around a place, even as a stop on a bus or train, and after a few minutes say, "I like it here," and not have any particular reason for feeling this way. There is indeed something in the air of places, an atmosphere or feeling. Perhaps more revealing are the places where we felt distinctly uneasy. [Kenya](#) was one such place, which is why we didn't dawdle there, and in [Russia](#), while we enjoyed our experiences, there was a heavy feeling weighing down on you. The centuries of secret policing leaves a very tangible and lingering sensation of suspicion and watching eyes, we discovered.
- **In which country did you feel the most relaxed and at ease?** (Belinda)
 - With the exceptions of Kenya and Russia, we felt relaxed and at ease everywhere. Thailand, however, it must be said, is an amazingly easy, relaxing, and restful place to be. Good food, amazing people, a great tourist infrastructure, cheap prices, and incredible natural surroundings make it a wonderfully tranquil country.
- **Which country did you feel most welcome or at home and why?** (Bev)
 - We've already talked a little in these questions about our Malawi experience, but we must add South Africa to the list, partly because we have so many *wonderful* family members there, but also because everyone we talked to seemed pretty carefree and jovial, despite the various issues plaguing the country at the moment. And, given our answer to the previous question, Thailand is certainly on the list.
- **Maybe not a question for parents to view, but were you ever in any real danger? This could be anything from sketchy bus rides to wild animals to rough neighbourhoods.** (Steven, with a very similar question from Belinda)
 - We felt remarkably at ease and unthreatened throughout the vast majority of our travels. We've outlined our slightly (OK, *very*) dangerous safari camping experiences earlier, but another instance that left us feeling in danger, even a little bit, was our arrival in Nairobi. We took a [matatu](#), the little Toyota vans that seem to transport everyone in Africa, from Nakuru into Nairobi. Gradually, as the van passed through the various outskirts and suburbs of Kenya's capital, the other passengers began to jump out, leaving us as the only two remaining on board. We couldn't get off because our bags were in the back, accessible only by opening the rear hatch. The van seemed to go deeper and deeper into the depths of the city, eventually reaching a grinding halt into one of the busiest and most hectic sections that we'd yet come across. As we opened the sliding door and jumped out, someone opened the van's rear hatch and our bags tumbled down onto the street. As we gathered them up, we were surrounded by people – not in any threatening capacity, but intimidating nonetheless. We knew we were in the wrong part of town (sometimes you just *know*) and knew we had to get out of there, and fast. There was a very tense vibe in the air, and, somehow, at just the right time, one of our "guardian angels" showed up. He spoke perfect English and asked where we were trying to go. We told him, and not knowing the place, called our guesthouse and asked them for directions. He then escorted us away from the area and to a more open, non-threatening street, put us in a taxi, told the driver where to go, and vanished.

- **When did you feel the “smallest” (i.e. standing in front of a beautiful place, you looked at it, and thought, how small are we?!)** (Mariëtte)
 - It’s easy to feel small in a place like Russia, China, or India (particularly Russia), but lost in the enormity of barren [Namibia](#), hearing the thundering of the [Victoria Falls](#), or surrounded by the sheer vastness of the [Serengeti](#), the feeling of being dwarfed is incredibly profound. And, Mariëtte, when you, Rickardt, and us were hiking in the [Drakensburg](#), we were definitely feeling the “*how small are we?!*” sensation, especially when we were having lunch mid-hike. 😊
- **Which country was your all time favourite and why?** (Belinda)
 - [Istanbul](#) certainly ranks high on our radars, perhaps as the undisputed number one. [Běijīng](#), [Cape Town](#), [Sarajevo](#), and [St. Petersburg](#) are all high ranking cities.
- **What was your best 'find'? (Could be in terms of restaurant, hostel, flight tickets, something random in the street)** (Sarah)
 - Eagle Bar, on Koh Phangan, Thailand, was an amazing find, a real gem. It added a whole new dimension to the pleasures of relaxing after coming overland between Istanbul and Hong Kong and before the rigours of India. And, when we were approaching the end of our ropes in India, we figured out how to inquire about and purchase train tickets online, rather than fight with the infuriating train station procedures (or lack thereof). This seems simple enough, but sometimes it’s the little things in life that make all the difference.
- **Where did you get the biggest “wow”?** This is a two part question: one “wow” would be the obvious picture-perfect holiday spot kind of thing: “WOW, this is a beautiful spot that I want to remember forever, maybe return to if I can.” Another “wow” would be on the other end of the spectrum and/or can be for any other reason. “These people really make life happen even though they have nothing / have been torn apart by _____”; or “wow, these people really do these sort of things (eg. the story about the river [Ganges, Varanasi] in India)”, and really makes you realize what we take for granted in here at home. (Darren)
 - In response to the first “wow,” we would say we felt that way while immersed in the vastness of the dunes at [Sossusvlei](#), Namibia. As for the second “wow” moment, we would have to refer again to the amazing people in [Bufukhula](#), Uganda.
- **What is the "happy place/experience" from the last year, a place you would most like to return to in your mind, censored for parental hearing, of course?** (Isabelle)
 - This might be a slight bit repetitive, but the fondest of our “happy place” memories are all in Africa. To narrow it down a little is tough, every sunrise and sunset easily making the mark, each one sheer magic. Interestingly for Martin, especially for a history guy, it’s not his time in cities that are the most “happy place”-esque... it’s his time out there in the great wilderness of Africa that are the most wonderfully surreal.
- **Out of all the places you visited, if you had to choose one place to live in where would it be, and why?** (Cheryl)
 - Out of the places we visited, somewhere in the Western Cape of South Africa would be our choice of where to live. It’s a stunningly beautiful country full of amazing people. Unfortunately, it is probable that neither of us would be able to find work, thanks to the current (and, apparently, on-going) affirmative action push, so it’s not really realistic for us to talk about living in SA. One day, perhaps, it will be a possibility, and that’s a day to look forward to.