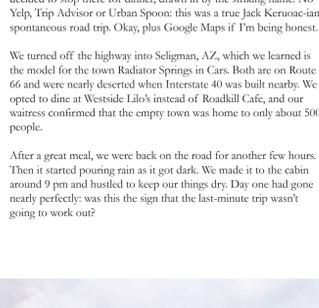




The Grand Canyonians and the Quest for Pasta

Two weeks is known as the appropriate amount of time to give notice before quitting a job. Turns out, it's also a sufficient amount of time to plan a weekend trip to the Grand Canyon.

I. Road Tripping



We made reservations for a cabin about 45 minutes from the Grand Canyon National Park Friday night, but we were counting on luck for the rest of the weekend. We had no planned stopping points for the 7-hour drive and hoped we could get a backcountry permit to camp in the canyon for Saturday night, hike out Sunday morning, and then drive back to L.A.

I set off from L.A. with three friends on a Friday at noon. We stopped at REI first to buy some of the essentials: bug spray, hats, a tarp and huge 1.5 liter water bottles. Feeling slightly more prepared, we drove through desert and windmills on two-lane roads at 100 mph in my friend's Prius. The sand seemingly went on for miles and felt straight out of Mad Max.

We stopped for gas at a crossroads where you could see no other signs of civilization. There, I felt the scorching 100-degree heat outside for the first time. If that was what the temperature was like at the Canyon there was no way we would survive that hike, I worried, before quickly hopping back in the cool air conditioned car.

As we started getting hungry, we saw a sign for "Roadkill Cafe" and decided to stop there for dinner, drawn in by the striking name. No Yelp, Trip Advisor or Urban Spoon: this was a true Jack Kerouac-ian spontaneous road trip. Okay, plus Google Maps if I'm being honest.

We turned off the highway into Seligman, AZ, which we learned is the model for the town Radiator Springs in Cars. Both are on Route 66 and were nearly deserted when Interstate 40 was built nearby. We opted to dine at Westside Lilo's instead of Roadkill Cafe, and our waitress confirmed that the empty town was home to only about 500 people.

After a great meal, we were back on the road for another few hours. Then it started pouring rain as it got dark. We made it to the cabin around 9 pm and hustled to keep our things dry. Day one had gone nearly perfectly: was this the sign that the last-minute trip wasn't going to work out?

II. The Canyon

Thankfully, the next morning the sky was clear. We woke up at 5 am to get to the backcountry office well before it opened at 8, since we had heard permits could be difficult to get. We drove through the Kaibab Forest on our way into Grand Canyon National Park, and I was surprised to learn that a somewhat large part of the park that borders the canyon itself is forest.

No one else was at the office when we arrived. One couple came right at 8 and got behind us in the non-existent line. Christy, our new favorite park ranger, helped us get an overnight permit and chose a campground: both of the ones within a day hike had plenty of availability, she told us. We felt stupid for waking up unnecessarily early, but believed that we had a place to stay for the night.

In the summer, the park discourages hiking between 10 am and 4 pm because of the 100+ degree heat, so we checked out the visitor's center and lookout points along the South Rim. We grabbed lunch and got more last-minute supplies at the general store: another flashlight, more trail mix, and garbage bags.

The garbage bags turned out to be key: we didn't bring a tent because we only had daypacks that wouldn't fit the tent gear and were really counting on it not to rain. We had a tarp to sleep on and all attached sleeping bags to the outsides of our packs. Right before starting our hike down, we began to hear thunder in the distance as the sky grew cloudier. Sure enough, it rained briefly on the hike down, and we used the garbage bags to cover our backpacks and sleeping bags. We may have looked ridiculous, but keeping our things dry was 100% worth it.

A ranger we met inside the canyon told us that 98% of people don't even go below the rim, and most of the people we heard talking below the rim were foreigners. Although we went overnight, there are plenty of options for day hikes, and we saw people of all ages doing short hikes down into the canyon on the Bright Angel Trail, where there's water and an outhouse every 1.5 miles. The perspectives from inside the canyon are totally different than at the top, and you get to walk deeper into layers of geologic history. And no, that's not a quote from the mosaic at the visitor's center.

We made it down to the Indian Garden campsite in about 3 hours, posing for lots of photo ops along the way. We dropped off our things and grabbed peanut butter and bread and hiked out to Plateau Point, which Christy had recommended for a view of the sunset. We were the only ones there as we ate our sandwiches, overlooking the Colorado River. Marveling at the view, I couldn't believe how few people who visited the Canyon actually make it to the beautiful point where I was sitting.

We hiked back to the campsite in the dark, and I almost stepped on a snake - but didn't, thanks to the flashlight I bought at the general store hours before. Somehow it ended up being a clear night with no rain, no moon, and literally billions of stars.

We woke up the next morning even earlier than the day before, at 4:30 am to hike out of the canyon before the sun got too hot. I was drenched in sweat and exhausted by the time we reached the top at 9:30, but our luck was still going strong. Our main motivation during the grueling uphill hike was our resolution that we would get pasta for lunch.



III. Searching for Pasta, man

And believe it or not, that was when our luck ran out. The whole trip and all the question marks surrounding it (Would we get a camping permit? Would it rain? Where will we stop for food and gas? Do we have the right supplies?) had been answered and gone smoothly, but pasta proved to be too big a challenge after using so much of our luck already.

Right outside the national park in Tusayan, AZ, which we learned is the model for the town Radiator Springs in Cars. Both are on Route 66 and were nearly deserted when Interstate 40 was built nearby. We opted to dine at Westside Lilo's instead of Roadkill Cafe, and our waitress confirmed that the empty town was home to only about 500 people.

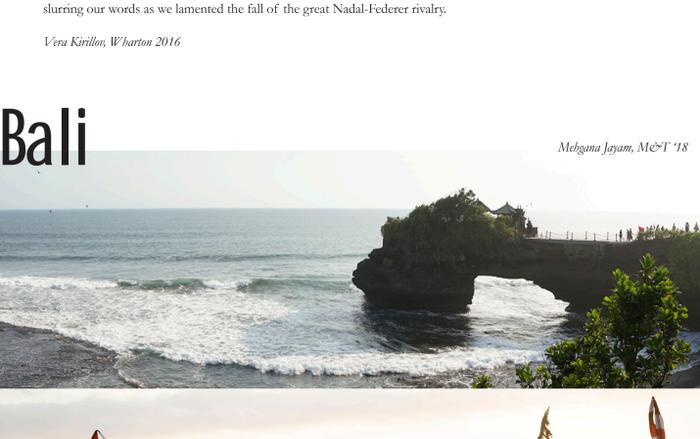
We stopped about two hours later in Williams, AZ, another small town on Route 66, still on the hunt for pasta. The Italian Bistro didn't serve pasta for lunch, only dinner. The restaurant with the awning "Pasta, Steak, BBQ" was really a Mexican restaurant who had yet to replace the old awning. Finally, the third time was the charm, and we found a pizza place. They had bag-made, oven-baked, sub-par pasta, but it was pasta nonetheless and hit the spot.

The weekend had been a series of almost failures, but amazingly none had actually brought us down. We even made it back to L.A. in time for dinner. We debated whether we were presentable enough to go somewhere and ultimately said screw it: wearing the same clothes we hiked out of the Canyon in that morning, toting our giant water bottles and a stench we were unaware of, we waltzed into Sweet-green.

Emma Soren, College '16

journey to the bottom of the world

documents of a trip around the southernmost tip of South America, ranging from the heights of the Andes Mountains to the icy glaciers of Perito Moreno



Maana Pataramalai, College '16

New York, New York

A summer shaped by new relationships and shared memories.

Select favorite moments, in no specific order:

That night we shared perfectly crisp prosciutto-covered pizza and a bottle of wine at midnight and the bartender asked if I was a party chef, and I blushed because I was so flattered at the notion.

Those nights we drank too much wine on random weekdays, drunkenly eating spoonfuls of peanut butter dabbed with chocolate chips, our conversations devolving into ever deeper, more personal revelations and confessions.

That time we giddily clambered down the stairs from our apartment, chasing after the ice cream truck like two schoolgirls whose parents gave them money for an after-dinner treat.

Those afternoon snack breaks when we raided the company store, munching on veggie straws and Terra chips while sharing updates on our dating lives and gossiping about workplace romances.

That bodysculpt class we always took together, making silly faces at each other in the mirrors as the instructor taunted us for looking tired and losing form just halfway through.

That day we stumbled upon a high school from the past of a thrift store, feeling a little intrusive as we used the signatures and inscriptions to try to piece together the owner's history.

That late subway ride back from a night out when we excitedly discussed the best tennis matches of our lifetime, slurring our words as we lamented the fall of the great Nadal-Federer rivalry.

Vera Krillon, Wharton 2016

Bali

Meghana Jayam, McST '18



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