

The 2 Idiots Travel Blog

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What We Learned on Our Sabbatical (And What it Means for Your Vacation)

People often ask us to tell them about the vacation we took in 2017—and we often offer a gentle correction: When you're traveling for eight and a half *months*, that's not a vacation. It's a sabbatical. And the difference is more than just semantic. It represents a totally different state of mind.

On our sabbatical, we found ourselves doing things much differently than we would if we were just on the road for a week or two—and in the process, we picked up some valuable travel tips that we will carry with us into our next vacation.

But before we get to those lessons learned, it's important to briefly consider the differences between the sabbatical and vacation mindsets.

Food

When you're on vacation, you generally eat out a lot—three meals a day, even. And if you only have a week to try out all the local cuisine—plus, you don't mind gaining a couple of pounds—that just makes sense.

But when you're away from home for an extended period of time, all that goes out the window. Eating out every meal can become tedious; and, it's bad for your pocketbook as well as your waistline!

That's why we always had at least two daily meals in our Airbnb; we'd hit the local grocery store as soon as we arrived in a new city, and we'd cook meals at the home where we were staying. Then we'd have one really nice meal a day out at a restaurant, allowing us to try some of those local delicacies.

This saved us a lot of money—and it also helped us to remain relatively trim and energetic!

Exercise

Again, if you're on vacation and only have a week at your disposal, spending time exercising doesn't always make sense. That's time you could be using to explore or to have fun!

But when you're on a sabbatical, it becomes *necessary* to exercise. We didn't push ourselves to work out every single day, but we aimed for at least three days a week. We did a simple "beach body workout," which kept us from gaining any weight—and, it helped us to have more energy for long days spent walking around and seeing things.

Shopping

When you're on vacation, you may feel the need to buy mementos from every place you travel—but what if your travels span *months*, and you have to carry all that stuff around with you? And what if you only have a couple of suitcases in which to put things?

Buying a lot of stuff just isn't an option in these situations. In some cases, we actually made the decision to buy something, but then throw something out to make room. Something we didn't particularly consider was buying things and shipping them back home—because frankly, a lot of shopping is about instant gratification. Any kind of a delay just made us want to forget the whole thing. (We *did* buy a magnet everywhere we went—because of course, those are quite portable.)

Pace

It's not uncommon for vacationers to be going *hard*, from sun-up until sunset, just to make sure they see everything. When you have just a day or two in town, that's probably wise. When you're on a sabbatical, though, that kind of pace just can't be maintained.

Pacing yourself is very important; your sabbatical is a marathon, not a sprint, and you need to protect yourself from physical and emotional exhaustion. Our suggestion? Don't feel like you have to be a tourist all the time. Factor in some chill time in the Airbnb or at the pool.

A related point? When you're on vacation, it's tempting to plan your itinerary down to the last detail. Again, when you're on a sabbatical, you have the luxury of being a little more spontaneous and giving yourself time to simply *explore*.

Lessons Learned

With all of that said, we'll note that not everyone has the privilege of taking a sabbatical. Maybe a week-long vacation is all you can swing. We would still say that there are some lessons in all of this for you—things we learned on our sabbatical that we'll *definitely* carry with us on our next vacation.

1. Even if you only have a week or 10 days, don't feel like you have to rush to fit everything in. You're not required to do or see everything. Enjoy some real, in-the-moment experiences; that's really what counts! Ideally, you'll spend at least three nights in each location, and leave some room in your itinerary to just explore and enjoy soaking up

some of the local culture. These unscheduled explorations were some of the highlights of our sabbatical!

2. Airbnb is really worth it and can help you feel like more of a local. We will be using Airbnb over hotels for *most* of our future travels.
3. You *can* enjoy local cuisine and still be reasonably healthy, so long as you go in with a plan and stick by it—even if it's as simple as choosing salads for lunch and making dinner your big meal of the day.
4. Don't worry about planning and booking everything a few months out. Book things closer to your departure date, when you can actually score a lot of great discounts on hotels and Airbnb rentals. (The one caveat we'll give here is that cruises tend to get booked up earlier, so we would recommend to book those early; also, if you are concerned about any specific booking, checking in once very few days to make sure there is still availability can give you peace of mind.)
5. Focus on pictures, videos, and your own memory to help you cherish your trip—not just purchased souvenirs. These things come with less hassle, and they're more valuable anyway. We still love refrigerator magnets though! 😊.

Anyway, those are the lessons *we'll* carry with us—and we hope some of them might be useful to you, as well.