

IN THE WAKE OF A NEW NORMAL, WE ASKED OUR CONTRIBUTORS TO REFLECT ON TRAVEL EXPERIENCES THAT MOVED THEM, SHAPED THEM, AND CHANGED THEM. THESE ARE THEIR PERSONAL REFLECTIONS.

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TRIP OF A LIFETIME

ANDREW HUANG



CALIFORNIA

2019

IT'S JUNE 2019. I'M GOLD AND MY NOSE IS RUNNING, AND NONE OF THAT IS A SURPRISE BECAUSE I'M WALKING ALONG OCEAN BEACH WHERE COLD PACIFIC CURRENTS BUTT UP AGAINST THE WESTERN BOUNDARY OF SAN FRANCISCO. I'M ON VACATION, WHICH MEANS I'M LOOKING TO MAKE PHOTOGRAPHS.

I find myself squinting through the afternoon glare toward the beach's seawall, and I realize I'm looking for myself—or rather, I'm looking for a version of myself that almost came to be.

The weather was the same the last time I'd walked this surfline. That was mid-December, 2017. I'd just finished a breakfast sandwich (scrambled eggs, pepper jack, bacon, avocado, and lemon-garlic aioli on a buttermilk biscuit) from Devil's Teeth Baking Company on Noriega, and I wanted to see the Pacific Ocean before flying back east.

I was in San Francisco for the prospect of work, an interview at an impossibly cool company. The interview process—office tour, meeting potential coworkers, answering questions, pitching hypothetical campaigns/lookbooks/editorial ideas—took the entire previous day, and I'd planned an extra day to just absorb the city and think about what my life might look like in the Bay. A studio in Sunset; trail runs in Golden Gate Park; Sunday dim sum at some Richmond hangout where the owners know me; a daily commute via whatever Silicon Valley transportation startup has the biggest pile of angel investor cash at the moment; regular visits to Unionmade, Self Edge, and all the other cool stores I've only ever browsed online. That December morning, I watched the surfers as they came trotting out of the surf, their daily devotionals complete. "A lot of really great photographs to make here," I thought. A week later, I turned down the offer.

Now standing here again before the great Pacific, reflecting on the path I chose not to follow, I wonder if perhaps the ghost of who I would've become is on this beach; if the life I imagined exists in some alternate reality. *Fauxstalgia*—is that the word? A longing for something that never was?

It's a momentary indulgence. There are still a lot of photographs to make.—**ANDREW HUANG**



© STEVEN TINGLE



NORWAY

2019

Last October, my fiancé, Jess, and I left the southwestern city of Bergen in the morning and drove northeast through a foggy mist that floated over the mountains like a gray specter. Norwegians drive on the right, so Jess was finally comfortable letting me behind the wheel. During our time in Scotland, I had been relegated to the passenger seat.

We stopped in Skulestadmo to see the Tvindefossen, a 500-foot waterfall that seemed to flow in slow motion—graceful strands of water cascading with the soft blur of a long-exposure photograph. The temperature was low, but an aversion to cold evaporates in Norway. The views are just too magnificent to worry that the air in your lungs has been replaced with Freon.

At a gas station in Vossevangen, I bought a bag of foam candy called Salt Skum. I only ate one, since it tasted like a marshmallow soaked in motor oil.

In the early afternoon we arrived in Flam and boarded an electric-powered catamaran that glided through the Nærøyfjord in an eerie silence. In some places the fjord is only 1,600 feet wide, and the steep, ice-covered cliffs cast a permanent shadow over the water. The cabins that dot the shoreline seemed inaccessible by land, even though a few lanky dirt roads disappeared into stands of linden trees and pine.

The boat docked in Gudvangen where we hopped on a small bus for the return to Flam. The view of the fjord from our small hotel room was so breathtaking it was disorienting.

That evening over dinner at the Ægir microbrewery, I wore my jacket, scarf, and knit cap. The servers wore short sleeves. Without the landscape to distract me, I finally realized I was freezing.—**STEVEN TINGLE**

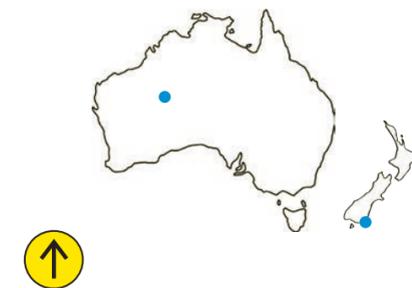
(opening spread) Ocean Beach, San Francisco, California;
(above) The Nærøyfjord, a UNESCO site, in Norway



MELISSA REARDON

(above) Arthur's Pass on New Zealand's South Island; Aboriginal rock art in Australia's Northern Territory; the Devils Marbles Conservation Reserve in Australia's Outback

“My career job prospects were nil, which was a heartbreaking reality. Yet I had a positive, if not naive, outlook of the world and an incredible thirst to explore it. So I spent a year planning and saving for a backpacking journey that changed my life forever.”



A U S T R A L I A / N E W Z E A L A N D

2004–2005

“You’re going to Australia and New Zealand? For six months? By yourself?” My mom questioned me with dismay. I was 23, just a year out of my graduate studies for fine art, and living in Asheville, North Carolina, doing what a lot of other bohemian types with futile degrees do—waiting tables. My career job prospects were nil, which was a heartbreaking reality. Yet I had a positive, if not naive, outlook of the world and an incredible thirst to explore it. So I spent a year planning and saving for a backpacking journey that changed my life forever.

I took a seaplane to an outer island of Fiji, where I scuba-dived the reefs for two weeks. In my three months in Australia, I took in so much of the country, from Sydney and the Gold Coast, to the furnace that is Darwin in the central north, straight down through the red center and around the wind- and wave-sculpted southern coast. I sailed the Whitsunday Islands, dove the Great Barrier Reef, worked on a goat farm for a stint, and camped in the outback. In New Zealand, I lived out my nomadic dream of living in a van, which I bought with an Irish girl and we sold at the end of the two-month sojourn; we even made a \$2 profit. Our travels led us to endless pristine landscapes that photos can never do justice. I even went skydiving.

That was over 15 years ago, and since then I’ve traveled to most of the continents, but that trip still stands out. While the places I visited stay with me through photos, it’s the people I met and lessons learned that have shaped who I am today. I learned the difference between being alone and being lonely. I learned to always be aware of your surroundings and to trust your intuition. I found that to be kind and open to others will always serve you well, and that it is possible to live a rich life with very little. But most of all, I learned that in the hardest or scariest of circumstances, the world has a way of providing and that people are inherently good.—MELISSA REARDON



CALIFORNIA 2019

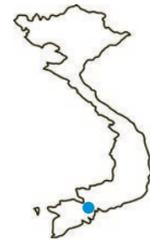
I will never get over the light in California. Gold, round, dusty in an ethereal sort of way—it slants through twisted eucalyptus trees and down vineyard rows, backfilling every scene in cinematic perfection. If this trip were a movie, surely it'd be a boring one. Montages of Sonoma scenery, wine tastings with small producers, idle afternoons by the pool, late dinners, and moonlit drives back to the hotel. No conflict, all cake.

Maybe it's lazy to describe this weeklong wine-country jaunt with my husband as perfect. The "trip of a lifetime" narrative is the foundation the tourism industry rests on, and like most advertising narratives, it never quite delivers. I've experienced enough vacation food poisoning, canceled flights, dank AirBnBs, family squabbles, and overpriced dinners to realize that flaws are the truth of travel and, sometimes, even part of the beauty. I've long made my peace with the gaps between expectations and reality.

Hear this, though: mysteriously, California held no flaws. For us, suspended fortuitously between the fires of 2017 and the future fires of late 2019, it was a golden state. I can't credit our magical time in Sonoma solely to the food, the wine, the views, the herb-scented air—although I do understand now why some come to California and never come back. I think in some inexplicable act of grace we parted the folds of time and escaped into another world. And I don't expect to find it again.

There will be other trips, other destinations to see in some distant day when the shadow of the pandemic has passed. And when they arrive, there will be lost luggage, crying babies (my own), frustrating wrong turns that become family legend. I no longer expect a perfect trip—that kind only comes once in a lifetime.

—KATHRYN DAVÉ



VIETNAM 1988

Before traveling to Southeast Asia, I had most recently visited Honduras, El Salvador, and Cuba—hardly garden spots—and at that time, in 1988, U.S. law prohibited Americans from going to Vietnam. Undeterred, I flew to Hanoi during the twentieth anniversary of the Tet Offensive, and my father's second deployment flying helicopters, during the Vietnam War.

Dad rarely talked about the war—until after I returned home. Then came some stories: the occasional hairy airborne incident, steaks on the rooftop of the Rex Hotel in downtown Saigon, and club crawls on Tu Do Street in the "Pearl of the Orient."

Starting my 10-day adventure in the northern capital city, I saw the creepy Hanoi Hilton and Ho Chi Minh's imposing tomb. At dusk, thousands of bicycles spun Hanoi's dusty air to gold, swathing the butterscotch-colored French-colonial buildings.

Next: Hue, the ancient imperial capital. In the intense silence, you could hear the lotus flowers floating in the moats and the sampans plying the Perfume River. The Citadel felt haunted—5,000 U.S. Marines died there.

On the drive down the famed Highway 1 to Saigon, which it was still called at the time (it's Ho Chi Minh City today), I stopped at Dad's former posts, now beachside resorts. We passed rice paddies and rusting hulks of U.S. military hardware and saw jungles scarred from Agent Orange.

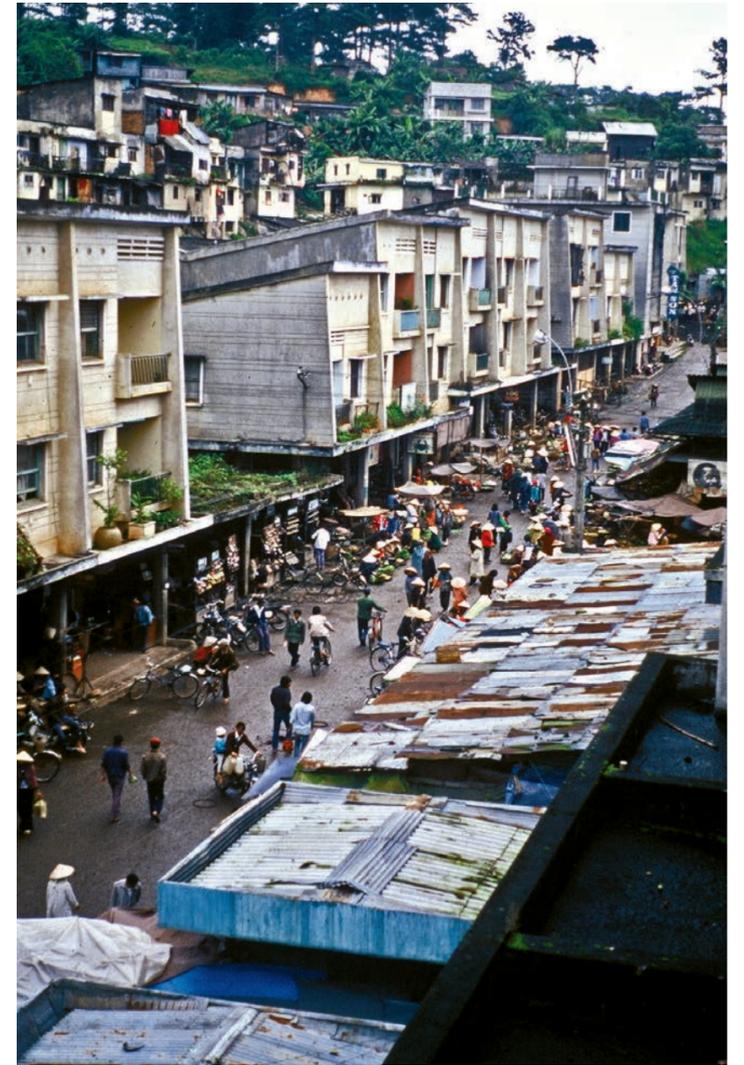
Louder and crazier than Hanoi, Saigon was jammed with far more *tuk-tuks* (motorized rickshaws) and cars. A teenaged Amerasian girl—another long-gone GI's child left behind—took me to the War Museum, a must-see, filled with ghastly photographs, a downed U.S. jet, and fencing fashioned from flattened Schlitz cans.

Ever since that transformative escape, I've continued to seek out exotic travel destinations, as risky as I believe myself capable of handling, to go with no expectations, and return with more stories than just my own.—JOHN JETER

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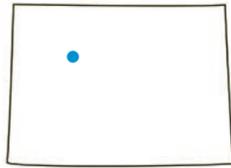


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(left) Palm trees in Sonoma, California; (above) a scene in downtown Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam

Scott Gould (below, right) walks with his sister during a family trip to Trappers Lake, Colorado, in 1972.



COLORADO

1972

Another one of those trips. The parents pack us in a station wagon—a Fairlane, I think—interrupting July and baseball season, and we head west again from South Carolina, toward mountains and campgrounds and trout streams. For days worth of miles, my sister and I fight our private skirmishes in the back seat. I tease her about her pixie haircut and point at her bird legs. She draws imaginary borders with her finger and dares me to cross. When we pull over at rest stops, I lean toward her and whisper, “This is where mom and dad leave you,” and she believes me just enough to matter.

My father, the forester, wants us to see Trappers Lake, in Colorado. He is fascinated by the dead trees, killed off in the '40s by a spruce worm. And he wants to fish for native cutthroat trout that move like gray missiles in the clear, glacier-cold water. He and my mother set up the campsite at the edge of some trees that survived the blight, and my father suggests the two of us walk down to the lake together. Explore some, he says. See what you can find. Then my mother says, “Take care of your sister.”

If you look at the picture, you can barely make us out. Her, with her short hair and skinny legs. Me, carrying a fly rod like some sort of warrior's lance, a net hanging from my hip. I have to tell you—that was the moment it happened. *Take care of your sister.* I remember feeling something different in that second. Like I wasn't a kid anymore, that I had reached a new destination that had little to do with Fairlanes and miles and rest stops. Take care. You can see us there, heading toward the lake, side by side. I was changed, walking down that path, my sister beside me. And the world was changed. It was larger suddenly. Scarier. There were dead trees that could blow over in a strong wind. There was deep water. My sister and I walking right toward it, together. But we made it down that path, the two of us.

I should give my sister a call. See how she's doing.

—SCOTT GOULD

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PROVIDED BY SCOTT GOULD