

Sarah Lipman: The final stamp on the passport

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DAHAB, Egypt -- After countless cities, nine countries, six months, three continents and one political protest later, it's time to come home.

Since leaving Bangkok in the beginning of June, I have been grappling with the reality that the time I initially planned to stay on the road was a lot longer than I would actually last. For weeks in Israel, it pained me to reconcile with this -- to give up plans to rejoin my friends in Europe -- and spend a month longer in the Middle East, before heading home.

I'm torn between my desire to keep traveling and taking in everything the world has to offer, feeling the tugs at my purse strings and a bit of a burnout.

Before leaving on my one-way to Bangkok six months ago, I made a promise to myself that I would return with enough money in my depleted bank account to be able to stand on my own feet; to have the money to buy a cell phone plan, resume car payments and hold me over while I begin the dreaded job search. Had I gone on into Europe, despite the most favorable exchange rate in four years, this wouldn't be possible.

While I'm pleased with the responsible choice I've made, I suffer from bouts of uncertainty. I expected my jaunt around the world to be a trip of epic proportions and feel as though I let my former self down in ending earlier than anticipated. It feels like giving up on a dream, a feeling to which many people can relate. At the same time, I'm relieved that I'm keeping in line with my budget and not letting greediness get the best of me. Every couple of days though, that uncertainty and greediness rear their ugly heads to tell me I should cancel my flight from Jordan to New York and continue on, running dry the little savings I have.

No matter how I spin coming home, one thing is for certain. This trip, spawned as a result of an unfavorable economy, has worked miracles for me. I have seen and experienced more in six months than many will see in a lifetime. I lived in Bangkok, where two months of protests culminated in my neighborhood being declared a "live firing zone." I befriended more than 100 Cambodian orphans working to better their lives, watched almsgivings to monks at sunrise in Laos and drove a motorbike down the coast of Vietnam. More recently, I ushered in the change of plans by riding a camel through the desert to see the Great Pyramids of Giza and had an intelligent debate with Egyptian medical students who do not understand why Israel needs to be recognized as a legitimate state.

Upon landing in New York at [John F. Kennedy International Airport](#), I anticipate experiencing a fairly heavy dose of reverse culture shock. The prospect of paying more than \$5 for all three meals (though

my Middle Eastern pit stop helped alleviate this a bit) scares me, as does the still-cutthroat job market. I already miss using motorbike taxis or large animals -- elephants, horses, camels, etc. -- to get from Point A to [Point B](#). **However**, for all the things missed about traveling, there are just as many to look forward to coming home for: improved hygiene and wardrobe, family, friends and the [New York Mets](#).

Though this trip is over, it is not the end of travel for me. I'm coming back to the United States with a new appreciation for the East Coast and an excitement to explore my home and travel to the surrounding cities. Travel is more than sightseeing; it's getting to know a place and its inner workings. I'm the first to admit that after moving to Stamford in 2008, I never gave the city a fair shot and I look forward to remedying that.

In the meantime, I can take solace in planning my next big adventure (hopefully in the not-too-distant future). I still have the lofty goal of visiting every country in the world at least once and the even loftier goal of hitting all seven continents before I turn 30 in the fall of 2017.

This trip wasn't my "once-in-a-lifetime journey," but rather the first of many "once-in-a-lifetime journeys."

Visit [Sarah Lipman's](#) blog, Passport: The World, at www.stamfordadvocate.com. To read Sarah's blog, go to <http://blog.ctnews.com/lipman>.

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