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Katie DeRosa, Myanmar

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# INTRODUCTION

"ONE DAY YOUR LIFE WILL FLASH BEFORE YOUR EYES.  
MAKE SURE IT'S WORTH WATCHING." (ANON)

Words by Nikki Scott  
Photo by Flash Parker

**A** travel buddy and I used to have a saying that we'd use every now and again to encourage the other to make a big decision that was scary or daunting. "What would be best for the book?" The idea was that one day, when we were old and grey, we would write a biographical tale about all our adventures and we must make sure that the content was as exciting as possible!

Could Shantaram have been written if the author had stayed at home in his PJs in front of the telly? Point taken.

It's easy to stay in one place. It's easy to stick with the familiar and comfortable. It's even easier to stay in and live vicariously on Facebook every night. But what if deep down you fancy a change? What if you harbour ambitious thoughts of travel, adventure and a life of spontaneity? You probably do because you are reading this magazine right now.

And what if you are contemplating leaving behind something that is perfectly good? A relationship, a job, a home? Why change something that isn't broken? Why shake things up? Why head into the great unknown, which contains so much risk, possible danger and downfall. Why not just stand still?

As Steve Jobs said, "Remembering you are going to die is the best way to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart."

Every backpacker learns how to deal with change quickly. You meet best friends who become distant memories of your travels within weeks. You fall in love, fall in love again and then alas - it is time to hitch on the backpack and move to a new place. You have found the perfect beach, the perfect hostel, the perfect chill out bar... but you're a backpacker - you must move on! There is more perfection to be found, and transience is the name of this game.

Many of you probably left behind family and good friends back home, a life that compared to many is enviable. Many of you probably have notions to return home eventually. Some of you perhaps don't.

All of you at some point – desired change. A yearning inside of you that made you step on that plane and seek something different in the first place.

So have you found what you have been looking for? In some ways, I bet you have. In some ways, maybe no. So you must change again, move on, shake things up, keep exploring. In order to keep moving and keep growing, change is always necessary. The secret is to be still discovering new things when you are 90 years old – no?

The anticipation of a big change has been lingering in the air of the S.E.A Backpacker office in Chiang Mai recently. As soon as it was felt, we knew deep down that we must follow our hearts and obey the backpacker spirit that brought us here in the first place.

So, we shut the office. We took our laptops to the beach and became nomadic again. We hired adventurous new people. Revamped our distribution list. Visited the remote jungles of Borneo. Started new projects that had been threatening at the bottom of the to do list for months. We hit the road. We visited Australia and Europe. We started three new websites that in time has the potential to become South America, Europe and Australia Backpacker Magazine. We decided to take our idea to the next level.

We want to take South East Asia Backpacker Magazine (your magazine!) and share it with the world. There is still no other travel magazine on earth that is written and put together by backpackers – a travel diary for everyone – this magazine is truly one of its kind. Are our dreams too ambitious? Too challenging? Will we succeed? Who knows? But all we know is this:

"The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one." (Elbert Hubbard) - See you on the other side!

Read more introductions  
on our website...

## Motorbiking The Bolaven Plateau, Laos

Life's grandest adventures often come about completely unexpectedly. This is a lesson that I've learned repeatedly throughout my around the world backpacking trip - case in point: discovering Laos' Bolaven Plateau.

When I set out on my trip, I had no interest in motorbiking. I found it to be way too fast and downright scary! Skip ahead a couple of months and I had reached the tranquil land of Laos. The country's diverse landscape, friendly locals and wide open spaces (not to mention affordable prices), make it a long-term traveller's dream destination. But public transportation options are slim to none in some areas, and the only practical way to get around is via motorbike. I had come to a crossroads. Would I permit my fears to get the better of me and never venture far from the main tourist circuit, or would I hop on a bike for the trip of a lifetime?

I wish I could say I immediately chose the latter option, but that would be a lie. In fact, I teetered towards the 'no motorbike' side for over a week until I serendipitously overheard two strangers in a bar chatting about Laos' Bolaven Plateau. They spoke on and on about the famed coffee growing region, detailing the area's cool weather, copious number of waterfalls and of course, stellar coffee. Then they said something that sounded like music to my ears, "The Bolaven Plateau has few, if any, mosquitoes". That's correct, none of the annoying disease carrying little devils that I had been fighting off for months throughout Vietnam, Thailand and Northern Laos. I was sold!

With this, I created a plan. Not just any plan though, an awe-inspiring, spine-tingling heck of a plan! First, I would fly into Southern Laos' major transport hub, Pakse. Next, I'd rent a motorbike (actually, I'd spend an entire afternoon stopping in every single shop in Pakse to find a motorbike in adequate condition), buy a map and outline a route. Finally, I'd depart on the trip of a lifetime around Laos' Southern Loop, including a lengthy stop in the Bolaven Plateau.

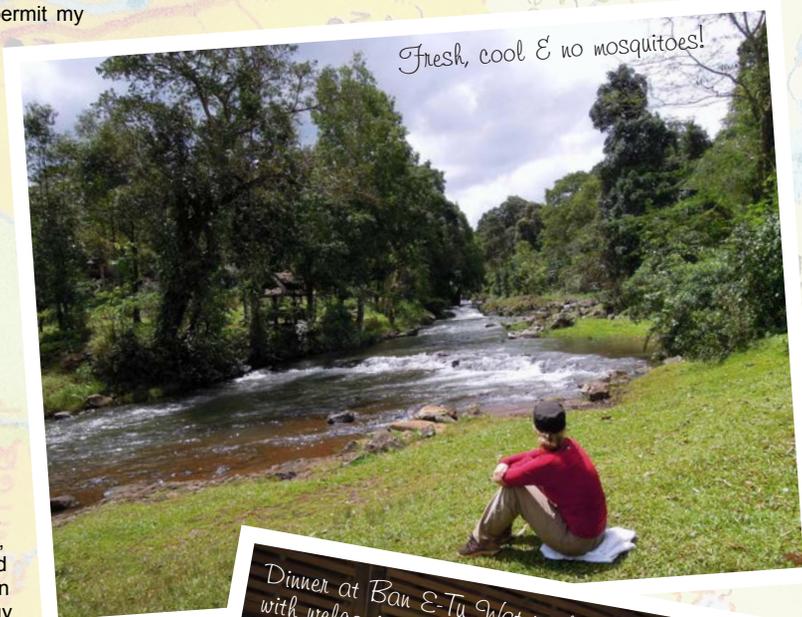
Voila, we were off (the 'we' being my travel partner and me, with him as the driver and me as the passenger). I may have gotten over my fear of riding on a motorbike, but thankfully I was able to leave the driving up to him!

After two weeks of exploring Laos' Southern Loop, I rode towards the Bolaven Plateau with very high expectations. So far, I had lunched with elephants, hiked amid lush jungle scenery and encountered some of the friendliest locals on the planet. Now I was finally heading to the very place that inspired my liberating motorbike journey to begin with - the much revered Bolaven Plateau.

However before reaching the Plateau, I ran into one little, itty-bitty problem. It began to rain. More specifically, Laos' rainy season decided to show its true colors leaving me in a pelting, foggy downpour for over three hours. Wet, cold and horribly muddy!

Now, here is where the bad part of the story ends and the good part begins. Once the sun broke through the fog and the white fluffy clouds replaced the ominous grey ones, I was stunned, practically hypnotized, by the Bolaven Plateau's striking beauty. The afternoon mist evaporated away to reveal a landscape of rolling hills cloaked in blooming coffee plants. Marigold-coloured flowers sporadically sprouted up in between the green leaves and red berries, resulting in both a feast for the eyes and nose (oh, how sweet a smell!).

As if the illustrious surroundings were not enough, my home for the week, Ban E-Tu Waterfall Resort, surpassed all of my humble



Fresh, cool & no mosquitoes!



Dinner at Ban E-Tu Waterfall Resort with welcoming host - Khambay!