

**Multimodal backpacking experience in Finland: Sharing experiences through an online travel blog**

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| <p>Backpacking adventures bring about a whole host of experiences to the individual embarking on such endeavors. With elements such as educational and esthetic realms the backpacker is actively participating and immersing themselves in the overall experience. Which garners a whole host of exciting stories and adventures that are just waiting to be shared with friends and family.</p> <p>The goals of this project based thesis are to define the experience elements of backpacking through existing literature, and put into practice those elements most important to backpacking via hands-on field work, subsequently resulting in a two week backpacking adventure to northern Finland, using multi-modal means of transportation and accommodations. And finally to disseminate the experiences gleaned, by way of an online travel blog, and to create interest in the readers about backpacking adventure in Finland.</p> <p>Implementation began in the winter of 2014 with pre-trip planning, consisting of daily hiking and conditioning, plus gear lists were drawn up. The execution of the actual backpacking journey started June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014 and lasted for a length of two weeks. Which consisted of travel via Train, bus, car, and hitchhiking. Accomodations included camping, wilderness shelters, hostels, couschsurfing and hotels. During the journey a travel dairry was kept and photographs taken for documentation. Post trip saw the creation of an online travel blog with content of the experiences gained during the field-work.</p> <p>The results demonstrated the elements and dimensions of experiences set forth in the theoretical framework. And the creation of the travel blog proved an invaluable way to share the experiences from the two week backpacking adventure. Furthermore comments received from the target audience were positive and their interest was piqued, even seeing themselves possibly backpacking Finland in the future.</p> |  |
| <b>Keywords</b><br>Backpacking, hiking, Finland, experiences, travel blog, freedom  |  |

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# 1 Introduction

“Backpacking” the excitement of hitting the open road with a pack on the back, full of supplies and traveling with an open ended schedule is exhilarating, empowering and at times perhaps a little scary.

The thought of backpacking or backpackers may bring to mind the rugged beard wearing adventurer who hikes long distance trails for months on end. Or perhaps the long haired hippy standing alongside the road hitchhiking en route to the next grateful dead gig. Or more common in our minds may be the youth traveller inter-railing across Europe with an overloaded pack and map in hand. Whatever the image may be, backpacking can be considered an adventure experience, many times with an element of freedom attached to the form of backpacking travel.

The question about how to share these experiences with family and friends becomes a relevant issue. Presenting such experiences in the past was seemingly repetitive. Before the internet and online platforms came into being, one would have to make multiple visits to friends and family showcasing the physical photos and sharing the stories time and again. This tended to become rather monotonous. The author has over 30+ years of experience when it comes to back packing and sharing those experiences. So to utilize a technology to make sharing easier is of great importance to the author.

This thesis will present a modern and easier solution to sharing a backpacking experience via an online travel blog. It will describe in theory the elements that make up a backpacking journey and how to disseminate the experience post adventure. It creates a way in which the adventurer can share the journey to readers far and wide, through a travel blog, without the repetition of multiple presentations. It allows friends and family to seek the information on their own time and breaks down any geographical barriers that may have prevented sharing in the past.

A description of the product along with the goals and objectives will now be presented for the benefit of the reader.

## **1.1 Description of the product**

The thesis I will be presenting is a product based thesis. The product is an online travel blog, which was compiled from field notes and photographs that were taken during a 2 week backpacking journey in Finland during the period between June 3<sup>rd</sup> and June 18<sup>th</sup>.

The travel diary within the blog consists of an introduction and background information on the author, the travel blog includes three extra elements. First an expanded photo gallery giving the reader a wider selection of imagery, followed by a map containing the trips route and by what means of transport and accommodation were used at different intervals during the journey, and finally the ability to interact with the stories and photographs by way of open comment boxes.

The online travel blog could be considered more of a private web page rather than blog as the author did not update it during the trip but rather post-travels, with the intention of using it as a convenient method of sharing the memories of the journey with close family and friends. The blog was password encrypted and shared only with those close to the author.

## **1.2 Goals and objectives**

The goal of this product type thesis is to share personal experiences with close friends and family about the joys and trials of backpacking travel throughout Finland, and awaken a sense of adventure and discovery in the readers. Additionally it is the authors' goal to pique interest in traveling outside the capital region of Finland by using multimodal means of transportation and various styles of accommodations to further the readers understanding of the smaller towns, nature and cultural aspects Finland has to offer.

The author set in place numerous objectives to achieve these goals and they are as follows:

- Planning a 2 week Backpacking trip to Lapland
- Collecting the proper gear necessary to carry out such an endeavour
- Executing the backpacking journey
- Writing daily journal entries of the days experiences
- Photographing the sights along the way
- Using multimodal means of transport such as traveling by auto, buses, trains and hitchhiking.

- Sleeping in various accommodations such as tents, wilderness shelters, couch surfing, hostels, hotels and relatives abodes.
- Post trip creation of travel diary blog and photo gallery with comment boxes allowing readers a chance to share their thoughts on the journey.
- Relate the experiences from the journey into a modified model of Pine & Gilmore's realms of experience model

## 2 Experience

What is experience? We all have heard the term, but what does it actually mean? And how does an individual obtain an experience? Equally important, how does one go about sharing an experience?

### 2.1 Towards a definition

One definition describes experience as: “something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through.” (Merriam-Webster, 2014). This definition could on its surface appear too vague or non-descript, is it a good or bad experience? Did it have an effect on the individual in a positive or negative connotation?

To answer the lacking or short comings of the previous definition about experience, B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore tell us in their book “The Experience Economy” that experiences are *memorable*. And can offer enjoyment, knowledge, diversion and beauty. But they also go on to say not all experiences are fun, enlightening, distracting, or breathtaking. (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 17, 241.) Now we see that an experience can be multi-faceted, and not only are experiences good, but can also include the ones that are considered bad.

Sanna Tarssanen gives us some depth to the definition of experience by telling us that. “A meaningful experience is a multi-sensory, positive and comprehensive emotional experience that may provide the recipient of the experience with a personal feeling of change.” (Tarssanen & Näsi, 2005).

There appears to be more behind an experience than just the basic Merriam-Webster definition which only scratches the surface of what an experience is.

Now that we have learned what Sanna Tarssanen, and Pine and Gilmore have to say on the subject how can an individual obtain a memorable, meaningful and positive experience? Is it enough for a person to sit idly on a sofa playing video games to gain a fun experience? Does one have to trek to the top of a snow covered mountain to sufficiently have a life changing or



enlightening experience? Or is the day to day routine of work and sleep befitting of the term Meaningful experience?

Pine and Gilmore give further insight into meaningful experiences and expound on what they term the “Realms of Experience”. Figure 1 illustrates the realms to help us better understand what it takes to bring about the different aspects of experience.

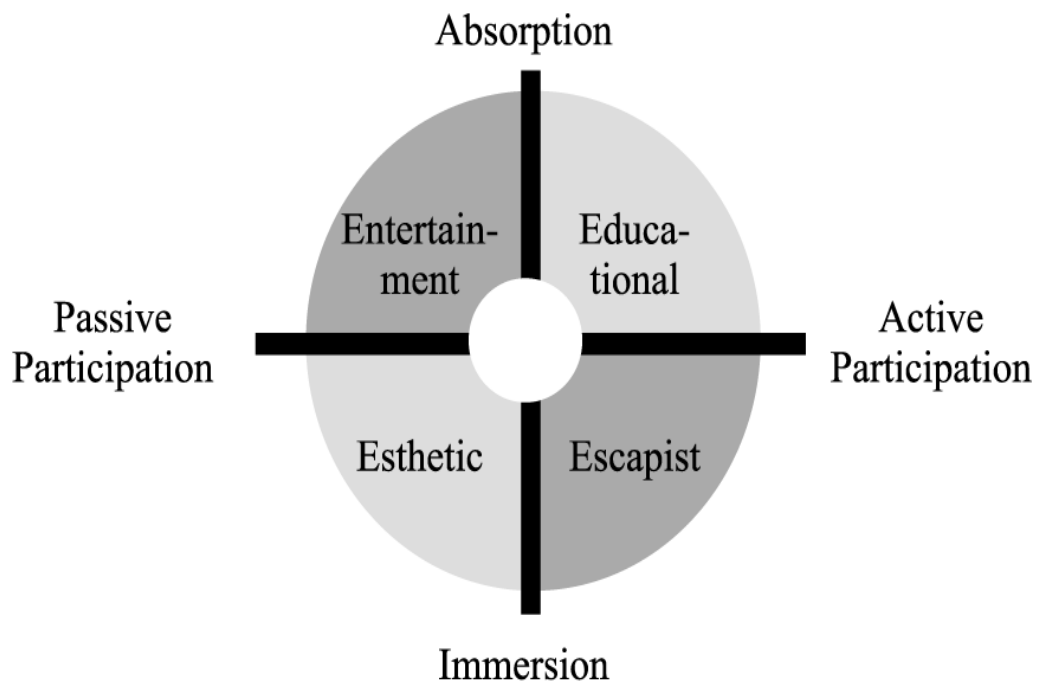


Figure 1 the experience realms (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 46)

## 2.2 Dimensions of Experience

According to Pine and Gilmore, “An experience may engage guests on any number of dimensions” (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 45). In Figure 1 two of the most important dimensions are

explained. The first dimension depicted horizontally relates to the level of participation. In one hand we see passivity on the part of an individual and they do not affect or have influence over the situation, these individuals may be live music patrons and are in the role of observers and listeners. On the 180 degree of the axis is the active participant and they will in some way personally affect the event, Pine and Gilmore include skiers on this side of the spectrum because they are creating their own experience (Pine and Gilmore 2011, 45).

The second dimension or that of the vertical axis of experience relates to the connection or environmental relationship uniting an individual or group with an event or performance. On one end lies absorption, occupying and delivering the experience to the mind from a distance. Finally on the last end of the axis is immersion where the individual becomes physically (or virtually) a part of the experience. (Pine and Gilmore 2011, 45, 46).

Now that we have an understanding of the different dimensions of experience some light has been shed on the queries posed earlier in this chapter about what makes up a memorable experience. Let us delve deeper into the subject and explore the 4 realms of experience.

### **2.3      4 Realms of experience**

When the two dimensions of experience are combined it creates what Pine and Gilmore call the experience realms (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 46.) The four realms are as follows: Entertainment, Educational, Escapist, and Esthetic, according to Pine and Gilmore, incorporating all four of these realms creates for a compelling experience which creates memories that are distinct (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 64).

For the purpose of this thesis I will concentrate on the educational and esthetic realms, which are of the utmost importance when considering the nature of the product, that being an immersive backpacking trip which garnered new educational and esthetic experiences along the way.

Pine and Gilmore state “education involves the active participation of the individual.” And “educational events must actively engage the mind (for intellectual education) or the body (for physical training). (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 47-48.) like wise (Tarssanen & Näsi, 2005) tell us “a good product offers the customer a learning or training experience and the potential to learn something new, as well as developing and obtaining new information, either consciously or

unconsciously.” This is evidenced in the thesis project which involved actively going into the field and learning about a new culture, especially with regards to the land of northern Finland. Museums were a part of the learning aspect of the trip. Especially representations of what a working farm was like 200 years ago, or a look into one of the oldest wooden churches in Finland. As evidenced by the photo of an old wooden church in Sodankylä below.



Figure 2. Sodankylä church built in 1689

The second realm deemed most important to this project is that of esthetic. Pine and Gilmore state “In such experiences, individuals are immersed in an event or environment, but have little or no effect on it, leaving the environment (but not themselves) essentially untouched. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 53). An example of this from the thesis project includes sitting by the side of a calm lake outside of Kajaani, Finland after a long days hike, watching ducks float by and admiring the lush greenness of the mid-summer forests reflecting off the lake waters. The fresh smell of nature, after a rain storm earlier in the day, then finally at dusk I was greeted to a glorious rainbow. Here I took in the esthetic beauty of the surrounding nature and left it untouched but the experience left a profound imprint inside of me. A visual of this is presented below.



Figure 3. Kajaani photo by lake

The remaining two realms are entertainment and escapist. Pine & Gilmore relate the entertainment realm as something people passively absorb via ones senses, be it music or viewing performances or even something that puts a smile on ones face or engaging in laughing and ultimately experiencing enjoyment (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 47.) The thesis project involved several of these examples such as sitting back and listening to funny or scary stories from the people that gave a lifts during hitchhiking, and also the entertainment of sitting around communal campfires listening to funny stories and sharing laughs with other travellers.

Finally the escapist realm as described by Pine & Gilmore deals a lot with fully immersing oneself in an activity, they mainly relate examples such as playing computer games or walking around in theme parks but they also mention part of the escapist realm as taking part in paintball out in the forest (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 50.) Which better serves the nature of this thesis. As case in point while visiting in central Finland the author engaged in a game of local baseball or Pesäpallo as they call it in Finland. Immersing in the local tradition of game and escaping from the rigors of long travel on the road.

The Experience dimensions and realms will be most visible and evident in the project implementation section of this thesis. These elements are evidenced through the hands on backpacking methods of nature trekking, camping, hitchhiking, coach and rail travel, using all the elements described in this chapter on experience. Let's now take a look at what will make up the project itself and explore further these elements that go into the thesis project.

### 3 Backpacking

Perhaps you have come across backpackers in your travels, maybe on a train somewhere in Europe or sticking out their thumb on the side of the road, most likely you have spotted them in some natural environment such as a wilderness park. But what is backpacking? Why do they hike with a heavy laden pack? And what type of experience does it bring about?

#### 3.1 Motivations behind backpacking

In the book the global nomad chapter 1 titled *drifting towards the global nomad* it states: “The sense of freedom offered by backpacking may well be one of its major attractions.” (Richards, G. and Wilson, J. 2004, 5). And they go on to say, the ability to decide one’s own itinerary, to change travel plans at will and not be weighed down by cultural or physical baggage are features of travel important to backpackers (Richards, G. and Wilson, J. 2004, 5.). So now we see that a sense of freedom and the ability to change travel plans on the fly, are important aspects of what pulls an individual to load up the pack and hike.

Richards & Wilson tell us further that, backpackers often see their travels as a form of self-development, in which they learn about themselves, their own society and other cultures (Richards, G. and Wilson, J. 2004, 5.). This correlates to what Pine & Gilmore referred to as the educational realm in the previous chapter on experiences, in so much that the event of backpacking actively engages the mind (for intellectual education) (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 47-48.). And reaffirms what Tarssanen & Näsi said that “a good product offers the customer a learning or training experience and the potential to learn something new, as well as developing and obtaining new information, either consciously or unconsciously” (Tarssanen & Näsi, 2005).

So we see that some of the motivations for backpackers is that of attaining a certain freedom in their travels plus a form of self development and education from the experience itself.

#### 3.2 Hitch-hiking as a means of backpacking

Chances are if you have driven down a highway, stopped by a truck stop or turned into an on-ramp of an interstate freeway, then you have witnessed people “thumbing” for rides. Many of

these are backpackers as well, out to explore and hopefully gain a free lift. Since part of this thesis project involves hitch-hiking I will briefly talk about the experience of Hitching.

In the book *slow tourism: Experiences and Mobility's* (Fullagar et al.) tell us that hitch-hiking is a way or means of transport which entails the hitcher having to ask people, usually strangers for a free ride to travel a certain distance (Fullagar, Markwell, Wilson 2012, 132,133). We have already covered what motivates a backpacker earlier in this chapter and that freedom plays a crucial role. But what about the hitch-hiker is there any underlying reasons to hitch? Does this form of mobility have any significance to experiences?

In the book *slow tourism* (Fullagar et al. 2012) cite Chesters & Smith and inform us that hitch-hiking is an alternative form of cultural participation associated with freedom, anti-establishment, nomadism, adventure, escape and discovery (Chesters & Smith, 2001). Here again we see “freedom” being used to describe this type of backpacking traveler and the connection to the previous aforementioned theory on experiences. So It would appear an individual wishing to embark upon a backpacking adventure is doing so, because of the great amount of freedom that comes along with loading the pack and hitting the open road in exploration of a memorable experience.

Inevitably hitchhiking is not without its downfalls. Factors that can hamper getting a good ride include foul weather or rain to be more specific, timing also plays a role, setting out too early in the tourist season can mean lack of quality rides and likewise small cars vs. large backpacks can bring the process of hitching to a standstill. Therefore a backpacker must utilize other modes of transport to get from point A to point B. But what are these other modes of transportation?

### **3.3 Other modes of transport for the backpacker**

One of the options for a backpacker when they do not own, or have access to a car is a bus or coach travel. Bus travel is attractive to tourists because they travel to destinations they want to see (Janet Dickinson and Les Lumsdon, 2010, 153). Like wise there is an intrinsic value to bus or coach travel due the the scenery viewed enroute (Dickinson, Lumsdon 2010, 153).

Another option for the backpacker is rail transport. In the book *Slow Travel and Tourism* our authors reveal how train travel offers great views of the land and creates a romanticism for

some. They also add that because of encounters with other travelers, such as trading stories with fellow backpackers and interactions with staff and subsequently choosing how to spend your time onboard, the travel experience is not one of passivity (Dickinson, Lumsdon 2010, 114). This lends credence to the Dimensions of experience mentioned by Pine and Gilmore (2013, 45). Regarding passive participation and that of active participation.

A backpacker then, has several options or multi modes of transport when it comes to getting from point A to point B. And we can see that both coach and train travel certainly do make up the utility purpose of travel, but they can also provide the backpacker with stunning vistas and opportunities to interact with fellow travelers. Therefore enriching the transportation involved with backpacking.

### **3.4 Wilderness backpacking**

The overwhelming purpose of this thesis project is to experience northern Finland's natural beauty and seek solitude amongst the forests and lakes. What is nature backpacking? What does one need to know before setting off on an adventure in the woods? I will give some insight on the steps that should be taken to assure a safe and enjoyable backpacking trek in the great outdoors.

In the book *Hiking and Backpacking* edited by Marni Goldenberg and Bruce Martin we get an overall view of what it takes to make it when hiking or backpacking in nature. First they differentiate between hiking and Backpacking. They say that hiking is a simple endeavor that can last minutes or the whole day and generally requires only a decent pair of foot ware and preferably a natural setting. In contrast they tell us backpacking involves a little more effort and the ability to carry all your needed supplies on your back, and that it lasts multiple days or even up to several months. (Eastep, Goldenberg, 2008, 6,7).

Next the authors tell us where to go hiking and backpacking, starting with city parks, which takes minimal equipment and is close to people in an urban setting. Next is district or regional parks, these are typically larger than those of the city parks and offer more opportunities to hike, with generally wider tracts of nature to explore. Some may even have pre-set camping sights. Finally they inform us that national parks are usually large and have vast amounts of wilderness available to hike. It is possible to make a multi-day backpacking adventure in these types of parks. (Eastep, Goldenberg, 2008, 14-16).

An important part of any hiking trip is planning for it. Jack Drury explains what should be considered when planning a backpacking experience. “Each season of the year you can pick up the regional newspaper near a wilderness area and read about someone who died while participating in some form of outdoor recreation” (Jack Drury, 2008, 212).

First Drury says starting a list is paramount, knowing your needs is important and writing down the tasks that will need to be completed, such as a shopping list, equipment list etc. All the while trying to plan ahead as to what might happen on the trip, thus ensuring there are contingency plans in place. Next Drury says knowing the purpose of the trip is important, are you just going to relax by the lake or set about on a epic mountaineering climb? He tells us that having answers to these queries can prevent a miserable experience, because the purpose was not met. Moving along our author says we should set an itinerary that matches the purpose well. “Good itinerary planning encourages fewer miles with more time to explore and rest” (Drury, 2008, 217).

A serious matter when planning a backpacking trip is emergency planning and Drury recommends knowing what you should do in case of serious injury, and to leave nothing up to chance. He also recommends designating a contact person and leaving a copy of your itinerary with them (Drury, 2008, 218).

The literature presented in this chapter correlates with the pre-trip project planning and what needs will have to be carefully considered and accomplished in order to carry out the field work in a safe and successful manner, as well the backpacking literature serves as a guide to what the project implementation phase will entail.



## 4 Communicating travel experiences

Experiencing a backpacking journey for oneself can create a lot of memorable and wonderful moments. There is a multitude of emotions that can be taken from the trip along with seemingly hundreds of photographs and stories. But how is someone supposed to share their journey with friends and family? In the days before the internet and social media, a slide show served the purpose, a friend or relative whom had just gotten back from vacation would invite you over and proceed to click through the sometimes seemingly endless photos and relay their stories. But in modern times is there an easier way to communicate the experiences of your trip?

### 4.1 Blogs

Merriam-Webster defines a blog as “a web site on which someone writes about personal opinions, activities, and experiences” (merriam-webster, 2014). So here we have a basic definition, which for the purpose of the thesis appears acceptable. It describes a platform i.e. web site. for which a person can write or share personal experiences, it would appear that the backpacking journey of an individual would fall into this category if shared online.

Another view from Dan Gilmore author of *We the media* says that blogs are a way of communicating news events in a better way, than traditional news outlets (Dan Gillmor, 2006, 136). However he argues that a big criticism of many blogs are that they are self-absorbed and really only interesting to the author of the blog, and their friends and family. (Gillmor, 2006, 138). I agree with Gillmor, even if he does point it out as a criticism, when he says a lot of blogs are self-absorbed and mainly meant for family and friends, mostly because that is exactly the purpose of this thesis, to communicate my personal experiences to friends and family.

Who else are writing blogs and why? Samuel Bradley informs us that people who have survived cancer are writing about their battles, also those with opposing viewpoints write blogs attacking each other, even the youth in schools are blogging about the horrors of going through adolescence. Bradley goes on to say that there are a select few that make a good living solely by writing blogs, but he cautions that they are in the minority (Samuel D, Bradley, 2010, 167,168).

## 4.2 Blog content

From cave drawings, oral stories, movies and books, storytelling has been an important part of humans (Bradley, 2010, 81). The story content of a blog is much like the traditional sense, as Bradley just pointed out and goes on to say we should approach the storytelling in the same manner, that is to keep in mind who we are writing to and therefore choose what words are written wisely, and to of course make the story compelling (Bradley, 2010, 81). The big difference though, when we use a blog as a medium is that the traditional model changes. Rather than only being an online travel diary it now becomes a dialogue allowing for viewers to comment on blog content and creates a conversation between the blog writer and blog reader (Bradley, 2010, 81).

Another element that makes for good blog content is the use of photographs. According to Darren Rowse a photo can transmit many elements that are necessary in storytelling these include emotion, ideas and narrative (Rowse, 2014). He goes on to say that a lot of people think they have to capture every element of the experience and put every picture into the story. But instead the correct way would be to take a series of them in the same manner that a movie might be shot, using logical narrative progression with the photographs to tell the story in a clear way (Rowse, 2014).

This chapter utilizes the experiences of the pre-trip, and field work phases and creates the results from the first two implementations of project planning and project implementation, and allows for a platform of disseminating the experiences garnered during the thesis project. Through a travel diary or online blog. It also allows for an assesment of the overall project plan to see if everything went accordingly. And some results can be drawn and feedback gathered through the dialogue on the comments section of the blog.

## 5 Methodology

The purpose of this thesis project is to plan and execute a two week backpacking adventure for two people (the author and his wife) to northern Finland, using multimodal backpacking methods, with the purpose of collecting personal experiences along the journey, which were recorded in a personal travel dairy, photographs and stories from the trip. The goal was then choosing the best method to disseminating or communicating the outcomes to family and friends in an easy and convenient platform. This was done in the form of a travel blog.

The trip was planned during the spring of 2014 and the execution of the field work began on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014. The post trip communication platform was set up in July of 2014 by means of a written travel dairy and then converted into the digital media of an online password encrypted blog, meant for close family and friends.

### 5.1 Pre-trip

We are reminded of the dangers that are associated with outdoor wilderness treks as was pointed out earlier in chapter 3 when each year there are stories in the papers about how a person perished whilst on a wilderness trek (Drury, 2008, 212). For one to have a safe and fun outdoor adventure, proper care must go into the planning of a backpacking trip. Such factors that need to attention are creating lists of needed supplies and gear, planning ahead and creating a contingency plan, and further more knowing the purpose of the trip (Drury, 2008, 217).

The pre-trip phase of this project began already in the winter of 2014 when it was known that a backpacking adventure would be carried out the following spring. A conditioning regiment was set in place to assure the physical state of the participants was sufficient and that the likelihood of injuries was minimized. Initially short hikes around the nearby forest trails in Malminkartano were enough to gently ease the legs and feet into walking, as the date of the trip neared the focus was shifted to a more rigorous method, with daily hikes to the top of Malminkartano hill which is the highest point in Helsinki at 90 Meters ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org), 2013). The hikes lasted 1 hour and on several occasions fully loaded backpacks were used to give a realistic sense of what the upcoming trip would feel like.

Next planning the adventure was necessary and as Drury spoke earlier about knowing the purpose of a trip so you can plan accordingly. We did just that, and concluded the purpose of the trip would be non regimented or that of no specific itinerary to capture the experience of freedom. The journey was set for a length of two weeks and during the trip we would live with the supplies carried in our backpacks e.g. tent, gear and food, and resupply along the route, so we planned on heavy packs. The gear lists were drawn up by the author, relying on previous extensive wilderness treks in his past and his understanding and knowledge of proper gear and food items needed for two people on a 2 week backpacking trip. The full list of items taken for the trip can be viewed in attachment 2. under “gear list”, and in the online blog Attachment 1. under the same heading.

The budget of the trip was 500 Euro which was deemed sufficient, because majority of the gear was already obtained prior to this trip, due to previous backpacking journeys. Several new medical items were purchased along with the initial food supplies. Camping and hitchhiking were to be the primary means of shelter and transport. The trip could be considered budget travel.

Safety was a big concern and needed to be thought about in the pre-trip planning phase. Rather than draw up a safety and risk management diagram on paper, which the author deemed unnecessary due to his extensive experience. The safety concerns and solutions were realized through discussion with the second traveler, and all scenarios were brought to light and solved before the trip. Possible risks and dangers considered were:

- snake bites, bee stings, and allergic reactions (solution: medications)
- cuts, bruises, burns, blisters and muscle sprains (solution: medical supplies)
- weather related scenarios and lack of proper gear (solution: experience and necessary gear)
- hydration and nutrition (solution: water treatment tablets and proper food)
- wild animals (solution: food stuff bag hung away from camp, knives and knowledge)
- hitchhiking (solution: personal awareness, choosing our rides carefully, and bright reflective clothing and also knives)
- lost (solution: maps, compass, cellphone, and emergency kit)
- major injury or illness (solution: emergency numbers)
- not checking in with family (solution: daily updates of ever changing current itinerary)

The purpose of the pre-trip planning phase was mainly to ensure a safe and enjoyable backpacking adventure. And it is one of the most if not the most important aspects of any wilderness or road trip journey. Prevention is the name of the game.

After discussions with experts in the field of outdoor recreation in Finland, the author deemed it appropriate to draw up a document called risk charting, for the purpose of clearly identifying the trips risks and to what extent and probability they pose. According to the travel industry safety passport handbook (Travel Industry Safety Passport Committee, 2011, 32). They advise creating a risk chart which lists as many possible risks that can be foreseen and rate them on how likely they are to happen and to what their severity is. In this risk chart numbers are assigned such as for probability (P) 1-3 with 1 being unlikely and 3 likely, furthermore the chart takes into account the consequences (C) 1-3 with 1 being slightly harmful and 3 registering as very harmful. These numbers are then multiplied together  $P \times C$  to create the risk coefficient with a value from 1-9 where 1 is very insignificant and 9 correlating to intolerable. Finally at the end of the chart is the management method or how you will deal with said risk. Below is the risk chart for this trip.

Risk Chart template (Travel Industry Safety Passport Committee, 2011, 36)

| Risk                      | Probability<br>(P) | Consequence<br>(C) | Risk coefficient<br>and classification<br>(P)x(C) | Management<br>method   |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---|--|
| Bites, stings             | 3                  | 1                  | 3   | Medications  |
| Cuts, burns,<br>sprains   | 3                  | 1                  | 3   | Medical supplies   |
| Bad weather               | 3                  | 2                  | 6   | Experience and<br>proper gear                                |
| Lack of water<br>and food | 1                  | 2                  | 2   | Water treatment<br>tablets and<br>proper food                |
| Wild animals              | 2                  | 2                  | 4   | Food bag hung<br>away from<br>camp, knives<br>and experience |

|   |   |  |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| Visibility when hitchhiking and Crazy person gives hitchhiking ride | 1   | 3  | 3  | Brite reflective clothing<br>choosing our rides carefully, and also knives |
| Lost in forest  | 3   | 3  | 9  | Maps, compass, cellphone, and emergency kit                                |
| Major injury or illness   | 2   | 3  | 6  | Emergency numbers and experience   |
|   | Probability (P)<br>1=unlikely<br>2=possible<br>3=likely | Consequence(C)<br>1=slighty harmful<br>2=harmful<br>3=highly harmful | Risk coefficient (PxC)<br>1=insignificant<br>2=minor<br>3=moderate<br>4-5=significant<br>6-9=intolerable |  |

Figure 4. Risk chart

So we see from the chart that being lost in the forest is a real possibility and the consequences are quite severe whereas lack of food and water are quite low due to planning in advance and packing enough food and even water treatment tablets negate this risk.

## 5.2 Project implementation

Like skiing or other outdoor leisure activities, backpacking travel involves active participation or the ability to affect the experience (Pine and Gilmore 2011, 45). The opportunity to hit the open road and actively be involved in the creation of ones' own adventure and to start each day with a new and exciting experience is what drew the author to choose hands on field work for this thesis project.

The fieldwork phase of the project was originally scheduled to kick off May 29<sup>th</sup> the day after attending a Metallica, Slayer concert in Helsinki. However the weather was rainy and tempera-

tures hovered around 40 degrees and upon waking up the day of the original trip both participants were stricken with colds and made the decision to embark on a wait and see basis. It was nearly a week later when it was considered safe to travel. This was not problematic as the entire month of June was set aside to complete the field work and freedom was a major element of this backpacking trip.

### **5.3 Multi-modal transportation**

There was no pre-set itinerary for the trip but rather an overall goal to reach Utsjoki by hitchhiking and travel back to Helsinki within the two week time period. This however did not go as planned. Due to rainy weather conditions the participants first drove a car from a friends business in Helsinki that needed it delivered to Kuopio. Next the rain prevented any hitching and therefore a bus was chosen to travel towards the city of Kajaani further north.

From Kajaani to Oulu, hitchhiking was utilized however the rides were few and far between. And the journey took the whole day. From Oulu to Simo an old rural bus was used and then from Kemi to Rovaniemi passage was done via train. When it was time to leave Rovaniemi hitchhiking was attempted and after many hours of no rides, a bus was used to reach Sodankylä.

Due to the lack of quality rides and the inclement weather the participants decided to camp for several days to wait out the weather. During the stay at the campgrounds they were offered two separate lifts to Utsjoki, however in the end these did not pan out and it was decided to head back south to Helsinki. The same circumstances were encountered on the journey south leaving Sodankylä attempts were made to hitchhike but to no avail. After busing it to Rovaniemi and coming to a realization that hitchhiking was in vain, the remainder of the trip saw both bus and train used as the means of transportation homeward.

### **5.4 Accommodations**

In keeping with the experience of backpacking and freedom set forth earlier in the thesis, multi-modes of accommodations were used. First what was used is a 2 person Mountain hardware 3 season tent, it was used to camp at various locations such as in Oulu and Sodankylä. Secondly a wilderness 3 sided shelter was used in Kajaani though it was not a good barrier against the torrential rains that permeated the gear. Also because of the inclement weather we were forced to seek drier accommodations several times, these included a roadside motel near

Kajaani called the Vanha Kulkuri, and in Rovaniemi a night in a youth hostel named Rudolf, in addition two nights were spent in the Rantasipi Pohjahuovi in Rovaniemi, the latter was done to ease the cold and tired muscles after a week in the cold climate of northern Finland even though it was an extra expense to stay at this pricy hotel the travelers deemed it a welcome and justified expense to gain rest and peace of mind. And finally couch surfing was used in Simo along with relatives and friends couches in Ilmajoki and Tampere.

## **5.5 Budget**

The budget of 500 Euro proved to be unsuccessful. Upon embarking on the journey and encountering rainy, cold and inclement weather for the majority of the two weeks, money was spent on bus tickets, lodging and more restaurant food than was expected. The cheap camping food was not realized and restaurants put a large dent in the budget. All and all in the end it is safe to say that 800 euro was spent, putting the trips budget over by 300 Euro. But this is not too concerning as the participants loosely set the original budget earmarked for the trip, it was in keeping with the spirit of freedom.

## **5.6 Documenting experiences**

For the purpose of gathering content to use in the online blog a Nikon Coolpix S3300 digital camera was utilized along with three 8 gig memory cards. Photographs were taken often to document the journey, both of the nature scenery and of the participants themselves. This helped provide a visual aid for the storytelling and complement the daily travel diary which was written at the conclusion of each day of travels, in some instances though the dairy was made the following morning depending on the tiredness of the participants.

## **5.7 Safety issues**

There were no major safety or health issues to report, aside from the sore backs and feet that normally accompany such endeavors. The first-aid bags were left untouched with the exception of the ibuprofen for aches and pains.

## **5.8 Post trip results and assessment**

The post trip phase consisted of sorting through the field work documents such as the written travel dairy and photographs and weeding out the information and photos which were



deemed unusable or too personal. This was done over a two week period of time at the end of June. First the travel diary was converted to Microsoft word 2010 for the use as an attachment in the final thesis. And then starting in July an online blog was set up with the help of a relative who gave technical assistance and advice when it was needed.

The raw data was put into the blog and stylized for the ease of user navigation. The photos were given their own section or gallery, while four select photos were chosen to accompany each daily entry into the diary section. The blog was completed and encrypted with a password, as it was the authors' intention to only share the journey with those closest, such as family and friends', it was not meant for a wide circulation on the platforms of social media.

In assessing the thesis project, questions about how to obtain a backpacking experience and then share it with family and friends was met, through hands on experience, including the two week journey to the north of Finland. Although the original plan of solely hitchhiking and camping did not come to fruition. The fundamentals remained the same and the memorable moments were documented and ultimately shared with those the author set out to enlighten. The emotional frame of mind in both travelers was talked about in the travel diary and included the times we were happy and things were going smoothly, but also our emotional state of being down in the dumps was related as well. It became clear through the diary that times will get tough but a traveler must push on through and know that there is light at the end of the tunnel. By sharing these emotions via the travel diary many people able to see the ups and downs of backpacking travel. The blog received very positive feedback both in comments left by visitors but also through e-mail messages, phone conversations and personal interactions.

## **5.9      4 Realms of experience as relating to the trip**

I will now put the various experiences from the trip in a visual figure, using the Pine & Gilmore model Realms of experiences as a template, and adding the trips experiences were they fit into the different realms.



Figure 5. Realms of experiences adapted from (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 46)

Here a framework of Pine & Gilmore's Realms of experience has been modified and includes several examples of the experiences gained on the backpacking journey and related to what category that experience falls into. And furthermore giving credence to what (Tarssanen & Näsi, 2005). Spoke of in the experience chapter about a comprehensive emotional experience. Both participants went through highs and lows in terms of emotions, depending on if the weather was bringing us down or if eating a hot meal perked us up the emotions were varied and never became too extreme. The duo manages to complement each other if one is down the other can lift their emotional state while on the road.

## 6 Summary and conclusion

The goals of the thesis were to share the experiences of backpacking in Finland with Family and friends. And showcase through the trip the smaller towns outside of the capital region. The objectives set forth were, a pre-planning phase including proper collection of gear paired with proper planning to ensure safety and enjoyment. Followed by executing the journey including documenting the trip via a written travel diary, and photographs, as well as utilizing multimodal methods of transportation and accommodations. The post trip objective was to create an online blog with the content of the travel diary and photographs and ultimately share the blog with close family and friends allowing for comment from the readers on the different sections of the blog. However after consulting my thesis advisor I decided to open the travel blog to the general public thus allowing more of a reader base for my backpacking trip.

### 6.1 Conclusion

The results can be considered successful and can be related back to the theoretical chapter of this thesis. First the experience that was hoped for on the trip was a dimension of active participation through immersion. This was met by choosing a hands-on approach and actively venturing into the field on the backpacking adventure, making for a meaningful and memorable experience, one that the author was able to shape and form during the trip.

Realms of experienced were introduced in the experience chapter and two were paid close attention to, they were educational and esthetic realms. Which played a big role especially in the inner-self of the author, esthetics were a daily part of the journey, viewing the scenery and smelling the fresh air were definitely a welcomed realm of the experience. The educational realm was realized in the new towns that were visited, touring museums, hearing others stories, and experiencing hands on the trip in and of its self.

The experiences of various backpacking transportation was talked about in its own chapter. And this played a major role in the sense that it was the means to get to all the other experiences, and created that freedom of the road that was referred to earlier. Whether it was cars, trains, buses or hitching rides the experiences were plentiful and memorable when relating what it is like to venture on a backpacking trip.

Finally the post trip phase that relates to sharing the experience of the journey was a success, in that a comprehensive travel diary was written along with photographic evidence, then converted into an easy to navigate online travel blog with the ability for the readers to comment on the shared experience.

It is hoped that through the process of the thesis, an individual could attempt to re-create a similar backpacking journey. But it is cautioned that one must adhere strictly to pre-trip planning and meet all necessary safety precautions. The author of this thesis is a skilled and experienced outdoorsman and adventurer and had the advantage of 30 plus years in the field, and so advises the beginner to fully prepare in advance. This trip if duplicated should be done by persons with some knowledge and experience in backpacking.

Future recommendations for this type of thesis work could be to concentrate solely on one aspect of the journey. In the case of this thesis, multi-modes of transport were utilized to bring about the experience, however further considerations could involve selecting only backpacking via train travel, or backpacking long distance by way of walking for several weeks. This could allow for a more in depth and specific look into that singular method of backpacking. And perhaps the hitchhiking aspect could be realized in a future study, with better timing and weather conditions the author feels it is possible to carry out a successful hitchhiking/backpacking trip.

## **6.2 Personal learnings and outcomes**

The overall process of the thesis was in my point of view, a fairly demanding portion of my studies. However I feel a great deal was learned about content and structure of writing at the university level. The preparatory course or thesis work shop served as a solid base to endeavor towards the thesis itself. Without that course many troubles could have arose.

The technical or academic aspect of the thesis writing was troublesome at first and it took several months before I could grasp how to voice the different sections or chapters. However after much thought and deliberation the framework and content were easier to handle.

The project phase or hands-on field work was by and far the most pleasant part of the process. It allowed me to utilize a vast wealth of knowledge and experience from previous out-

door adventures. This allowed for the motivational level to stay quite high and encouraged me to put my own stamp on the project.

The ability to be able to choose whether the thesis was research based or project oriented kept my interest. Had it been only a research based academic thesis I don't feel I would have had any motivation to complete such a work.

A part which I feel I need to pay attention to in the future is time management. Just getting started on the first word took several weeks, and once writing had commenced in full I found it difficult to stick to a schedule of tasks that needed to be completed. The overall thesis process of planning, executing and compiling, took several months longer than what was expected. Though I should point out I had no immediate vital date such as graduation to spur me on. This created a sort of mentality of I will get to it when I get to it.

Having finished the thesis I feel much more confident in my abilities to write and use the tools needed for writing, such as Microsoft word skills, I learned to use the tool bar to make the process of reporting much easier. Prior to the thesis my level on Microsoft word was average, however I feel more confident now.

The body of knowledge gained in writing a thesis will continue to serve me in working life and will add to the professionalism needed in the workplace. The benefits will be seen for years to come.

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## **Attachments**

### **Attachment 1. Product**

Here you will find the complete product, travel diary, photograph gallery etc. The blog is password encrypted. You must enter the following password.

Password: 6789

Web address: <http://yooperbackpackingfinland.wordpress.com/>

As of January 15, 2015 the travel blog has been made public and you no longer need a password to view.



## Attachment 2. Travel diary as a word document



travel journal  
color.docx

### **Attachment 3. Travel blog introduction**

My story takes place in a country called Finland, a sparsely populated nation with just under 5.5 million inhabitants [1], Small in comparison to my home country of the United States of America. I moved to Finland in the spring of 2011, as a 34 year old offspring of Finnish immigrants who emigrated to the U.S.A in the 1870's. I was born and raised in the town of Hancock Michigan, the epicenter of Finnish-American culture in the States.

I am currently in my final year of studies at HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences located in Helsinki, Finland. My degree program is Experience and Wellness management or EXWEL for short.

The contents of this travel diary are part and parcel written for my thesis project. The scope of which entailed a backpacking road trip from Helsinki to Lapland with my wife Katja in early June 2014, spanning over a 2 week time period. Originally, we planned to hitchhike the entire journey but had to adjust on the fly due to unfavorable weather conditions and lack of motor vehicle traffic along the way.

We travelled with complete freedom, going where the wind directed us each day and had no set plans. Following is a road diary of our travels and the wonderful feelings of experiencing a new adventure every day.

I hope you enjoy!

## **Attachment 4. Planning the trip**

Let's face it! Planning for a road trip in the 21st century is easy, right? Just type into Google for whatever info you need on a destination or check Hotels.com for a nice cozy hotel room, or break out the smart phone and use an app for the nearest restaurants, lodging's, or transport schedules.

But where has the adventure gone? That feeling of truly letting go and seeing where the open road takes you. Putting away that smart phone and letting your instincts guide.

On this particular trip I sparingly used the internet, aside from checking out weather trends during the month of June the trip was based mostly on past experiences of backpacking and hitchhiking knowledge I had acquired from previous trips in the U.S.A, Canada and Europe and a general knowledge of Finland, plus my wife is a native Finn so her expertise was invaluable. The next pages document our list of equipment I deemed essential to successfully make the journey to Finnish Lapland.

The gear is for 2 adults (1 male, 1 female); time of journey is 2 weeks. The food resources are estimated at 1 week of self-sufficient survival, with another week of food stuffs bought along the way.

## Attachment 5. Gear list

### Male Traveller

Backpack- Vortex 5800 series (73 litres, 4300 cu in.)  
Tent- Mountain hardware “mountain jet 2”  
1 insulated foot print  
Sleeping bag- North face “cat’s meow” + mat  
4 bungee cords  
1 regular cotton towel 1 micro fleece  
3 under wear + 7 cotton socks  
1 pair cotton long johns  
1 pair rain pants  
1 rain shell mountain hardware “crucial” GORE-TEX  
1 cotton t-shirt+ 1 muscle shirt + 1 long sleeve shirt  
1 pair Speedo’s  
1 pair shorts + 1 pair sweatpants  
1 pair gloves  
1 pair running sneakers + 1 pair crocks  
1 sitting cushion  
1 five inch retractable knife  
2 black permanent markers + cardboard  
Road map of Finland  
Flash light  
1 phone + 1 extra phone (charged in case of “emergency”)  
1 two quart pot  
1 Candle stove with 2 extra candles  
2 Tupperware bowls  
2 forks, 2 spoons  
2x 1 liter Nalgene bottles  
4 pouches dried mashed potato  
10 granola bars  
10 pouches tuna  
12 pouches instant coffee  
12 pouches dried soup  
1 tube anti-itch cream  
6 alcohol swabs  
14 Pepto-Bismol chewables  
2 large band aid  
4 wet wipes + babywipes  
5 bacitracin  
5 small Band-Aids  
5 foot blister aids  
4 antihistamine  
6 ibuprofen 400mg  
1 emergency foil blanket

### Female Traveller

Backpack- Jansport medium size (40 litres, 2500 cu in.)  
Sleeping bag- Everest “Nordic”+ mat  
1 swimsuit  
6 under wear  
4 shirts + 2 pair pants and 2 pair shorts  
8 socks  
2 light blocking eye patches for sleeping  
1 mosquito net  
1 rain coat + rain pants  
3 hats + a scarf + gloves  
1 unscented shampoo + conditioner  
1 unscented lotion + deodorant  
2 unscented bug spray  
6 bug repellant wrist bands  
1 bottle sunblock  
1 knife  
1 phone + tablet + chargers  
10 Mama’s noodles + 10 granola bars + 2 liters of water  
First aid kit- same as male travelers kit + Kyy (snake bite) Kit

The reason for loading our packs with a fairly large amount of supplies was our initial intentions to live self-sufficient for as long as we could, my pack weighed in at 39 pounds (18 kilos) and Katja’s weighed in at nearly 28 pounds (13 kilos)

## Attachment 6. Travel diary

June 3rd 2014

Morning arrived too quickly, my sleep last night was sporadic at best and my thoughts kept me up almost the whole night, as has become a custom the night before a big trip thinking about what lies ahead and what kinds of situations we will be encountering. Though I am not too concerned for our supplies, I feel confident we could spend the next few weeks camping in the forest and survive comfortably, although I am thinking maybe we have packed a little too much for this trip. My bag is rather cumbersome and when both of ours are combined, I am concerned as to how the hitchhiking is going to go? "This ain't America" the cars are much smaller here in Finland, oh well, we will be testing that soon enough.

"Zero hour 9:00 a.m." [2] The voice of Elton John is humming in my head as we put the pedal to the metal and boogie out of Malminkartano (Helsinki). You guessed it, at 9:00 a.m. Our first leg of the trip might seem strange as to how we came upon our transportation. A friend of Katja's posted on Facebook that he needed someone to drive a car to Kuopio, because his company was transporting used busses to the city and they needed a pick up car waiting at the bus garage so they could drive back to Helsinki.

The reason I say it sounds strange is because he gave us an address nearby our apartment and said the key would be on the back tire and that we should just take the car and when we arrive in Kuopio to just leave the key in the same place. We never saw him or anyone else in person. The car was a brand new Toyota with less than 400 kilometers (250 miles) on the odometer. For some reason on the whole ride that morning I kept thinking to myself, how well does Katja know this man? I mean what if he has the car packed secretly with contraband, what if the cops pull us over, are we unknowingly being used as mules? But we soon pulled into the bus garage and dropped the car off and headed on our way to the center of Kuopio.

The weather was dark and cloudy the whole ride but when we arrived in Kuopio the sun was shining strong, however it appears we are riding on the very front of this rain storm. As we make our way downtown, about a 4 kilometer (2.5 mile) hike, our packs feel heavy and legs tiring already on the first day... oh boy what have we gotten ourselves into.

We meet up with Katja's cousin and she takes us to eat at an amazing Italian restaurant. While eating, it starts to pour outside. This is fast influencing our plans of travel, we wanted to hitchhike farther north today, but in this kind of rain it would be fruitless and miserable. So we hike it to the bus station and luckily just make it to hop on the north bound Kajaani bus. We notice in a guide book that 5 kilometers (3 miles) before Kajaani city center there is a campground, so we figure we can find someplace suitable to set up camp in the nearby forest. But after getting off the bus we find that the area is very swampy and swarming with mosquitoes. We opt to walk into town and 3 kilometers (2 miles) down the road we ask an Inn keeper where we can stay and he directs us to a lake that has a built in shelter. Wow what a paradise, lush greens surrounds the picture perfect lake, ducks galore keep us company. This is where we will lay our heads tonight.

Day 1 pics





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June 4th 2014

It rained all night and the shelter wasn't exactly rain proof! All our gear is soaked and coldness permeates our bones. We were roused from our slumber around 5:00 a.m. by a man collecting cans, in my sleep deprived state he oddly administered a geography quiz asking me what the different state capitals were in the United States, I obliged and answered his questions to great satisfaction on his part, I gleaned he must have been a retired geography teacher or just perhaps an eccentric out of work quiz show host, hmm interesting way none the less to start the day.

Katja and I make the decision to back track to the Inn keeper who directed us here. Hoping to get a room, and dry all of our gear. After checking in, the friendly man heated the Sauna for us and we quickly heated our spirits back up. The gear is hanging from every which place in the room and the smell of campfire is strong in all our belongings. The heavy packs have taken a toll on our bodies. We order pizza and eat some of our food stuffs hoping it will lighten the load a little.

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June 5th and 6th 2014

Bodies are back to health and the weather looks to be improving, after a healthy breakfast from the Inns' buffet we pack up our gear and look at the forecast. It is still looking spotty,



they say rain to the north and south of us but it appears from Kajaani to Oulu we are in the clear today.

Today is our first chance to stick the thumbs out and hitchhike. We position ourselves close by the Inn at the nearest on ramp to highway 5. I am eager with anticipation, I have thousands of kilometers of hitchin' experience in the States but this is Katja's first time and my first major hitch in Finland. We waited 30 minutes and got the first ride, it was a man in his late 30s. He told us we weren't in a good spot to get traffic and drove us 25 kilometers (15 miles) north to highway 22. He informed us we will have better luck there.

We find a bus stop that has room for cars to stop and now patiently wait, it is growing hot outside, the sun is beginning to beat down on us and we are getting sweaty just standing. After an hour we begin to grow restless watching car after car drive by, many motioning with their hand that they don't have room enough for us and our packs, it is becoming all too clear that my fears about the smaller cars in Finland are going to be a problem in our hitchhiking adventure. But just then we get a ride from a man in his early 40s, he offers to take us 16 kilometers (10 miles) up the road near a rail station just in case we don't have much luck hitchin' we have the option of taking the train to Oulu. Along the way he tells us that he has heard stories of Russian hitchhikers robbing people when they stop to pick them up and that we may not have such good luck getting rides.

So now we are in between Kajaani and Oulu on highway 22 set up at a bus stop. The sun is now so intense we are starting to develop farmer's tans. First an hour goes by and there is quite a lot of traffic but people just aren't stopping. I am pretty sure it is also due to the large packs we have. Then 2 hours passes, I am really starting to lose faith that we will be picked up at all. Around 2 ½ hours later, we are ready to head to the rail station and hop a train.

We decide to give it a couple more cars and no sooner than we do we get a lift. It is from a man in his 30s and he offers to give us a lift all the way to Oulu... Wow what a relief. He was on his way back from the Russian border where he got denied entry because he had his old passport by mistake. Katja keeps conversation the whole way as she did for all our rides today, they would say a few words in English to me but then preferred to speak Finnish with Katja, oh well I'm not complaining I finally don't have to be the talker when hitchin'.

The man drops us off at Nallikari campgrounds located on the sea in Oulu. We set camp and explore the city staying a total of 2 nights in the tent. The following morning it proceeds to rain for the rest of our stay there, but luckily we did get the first nights evening filled with sun and were able to take the winter coats off and swim.

Day 3 and 4 pics





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June 7th 2014

Today we traveled to Simo north of Oulu. We are couch surfing with a friend of the families. Judging by how long some of the waits were the other day, we opted to take a bus. It is an early start to the day awake by 5:30 a.m. and a lovely 4 kilometer (2.5 mile) walk to the bus station, luckily my bus tickets are half off because I have a student card, so that is making it bearable to travel via bus and is not breaking our wallets.

We arrive and are picked up by the family, we are given an entire basement living room to throw our packs and use for sleeping quarters. The day is bright and sunny and we hang out in the back yard for quite some hours. During our stay the host family shows us wonderful hospitality, they take us down to the harbor nearby to look at the scenery and on the way home we walk past the old school house and a road that they say is hundreds of years old, I wonder if perhaps one of my ancestors traversed this old trail on their journey to Tornio 150 years prior, hmm I'm filled with nostalgia.

Today is truly the first test of endurance when it comes to dealing with mosquitoes, prior to our trip we had been told horror stories from various folks about how bad the bugs will be up north and I am beginning to believe their forewarnings. No matter though we had a fun filled day soaking up some of the midnight sun, grilling wild game, tippin' back a few cold ones and to top it off some good ole Finnish karaoke.

On a final note it rained from late evening well into the next day, it is quite wet outside.

Day 5 pics







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June 8th 2014

It rained again! And looks like it could keep raining. We decide not to risk hitchhiking today so we get a lift to the rail station in nearby Kemi and from there hop a train to Rovaniemi. Our thoughts are that maybe we can get a better lift once we are farther north. Sadly we are mistaken. Dark, cold wet weather greets us in the gateway to Lapland. We also take notice that traffic along the highway is sporadic at best. We try our luck at the on ramp near downtown to no avail; the traffic just is not plentiful enough. The original plan of lifting most of the trip is falling apart with each raindrop, drip, drip, drip. After two hours of thumbin' it, we decide to stay the night.

We don't feel like setting up the tent in a nearby campground in Rovaniemi due to the cold wet weather so we book a cheap room in a hostel. We apparently have arrived before tourist season as the empty streets and restaurants can attest. Our spirits are a bit low as we contemplate the options for the rest of the trip. In the original plan we were going to visit Utsjoki in the extreme north, but are recalculating due to the fact that we are not getting free hitchhiking rides and having to spend money on rooms due to the weather.

We decide we will give it one more try in the morning and as a backup hop a bus north.

Spirits are low today but still enjoying being on the open road.

Day 6 pics





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June 9th 10th and 11th

We get up around 8:00 a.m. I did not sleep so well and am quite drowsy; we manage to use up some more of our food stuffs with the help of the hostels' kitchen. The rain held off and we made an attempt from the same onramp as the day prior. I think I could almost count on 2 hands the number of vehicles that passed us. We give it just under two hours and throw in the towel. It is eerie how the empty roads have the sound of silence.

I think we have just given up on hitchhiking. Time to bus it!

We were close to turning around and heading back home today, but instead mustered the will to keep on keeping on. Although our original budget is dwindling, we decide we can afford to make it at least to Sodankylä by bus then play it by ear.

Arrived to the northerly town and strolled around with our packs trying to figure out where to camp as the weather is a bit better we are directed to a nearby campground across the river. We have the place to ourselves but are warned that in a day or two the whole town, campground included, will be overrun with considerably more people, I guess we happened upon the Midnight film festival unknowingly.

We really like this small town and have a good vibe, time to set up the tent and walk back to town and explore. Nothing much going on except lots of set up for the festival. So back we head to the tent and make an early night of it.

The following day Katja and I rent bikes from the reception of the campgrounds and like I did so many times in my youth, we sped off for a day of adventure and fun. Not having to lug the heavy packs around is feeling light and freeing. We manage to rack up 10-15 kilo-



meters (6-9 miles), visiting an old museum and then one of the oldest wooden churches in Finland as well as the tourist center; we also made it to two different cemeteries and walked around them.

We return to the camp later in the afternoon and hang around the covered fire pit, grilling makkara (sausage) and meeting more and more of the film festival attendees. There are interesting folks from Austria, Germany and Finland. After striking up a conversation with a man from Berlin Germany, he offers us a ride to Utsjoki in his caravan, WHAT LUCK! Only down side is he wants to stick around Sodankylä for several more days. But we'll see, maybe he will be ready to leave in a day or two.

Now it's time to take a midnight sauna that Katja and I rented, figured it's the midnight film festival in the land of the midnight sun, and so might as well take a midnight sauna ha-ha.

It is now the morning of our third day and upon waking up we see the German fellows' caravan is gone. After talking to some other people he was hanging out with, it becomes clear he blew this pop stand, Not sure why? I hope we didn't scare him somehow... Huh scratching my head.

Oh well, back to hanging out around the campfire, which has attracted a whole host of new festival goers. Now the entire field, which just a few days earlier held our lone tent, is bursting at the seams with a plethora of tents and caravans. We even run into someone we know from Helsinki, small world. Katja and I have managed to stay away from the festival activities, as that was not our intentions of coming here; we have been enjoying exploring and meeting new people around the camp area. The weather is turning rainy again; time to turn in for the night.

Day 7th, 8th and 9th pics







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June 12th and 13th 2014

Woke up sore and a bit worn out, maybe because of the biking the other day or late hours around the camp fire, but either way we have decided to pack up and start the trip towards home. It has been an amazing journey thus far, even though the hitching has been troublesome, the whole of the journey north bound has been exhilarating and fresh.

We hike to the south part of town and stick the thumbs out at a bus stop, this time there is a little more traffic but they are mostly heading north. We give it 40 minutes with zero luck, still with the film festival going on, there is not much traffic heading towards Rovaniemi at this hour in the morning.

Got to Rovaniemi by bus and decide to treat ourselves with an off day. We checked into the Rantasipi Pohjanhovi and spend the next 2 days relaxing in the Sauna and pool and eating good food at various restaurants including the most northern McDonalds.

Day 10th and 11th pics





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June 14th and 15th

We leave Rovaniemi feeling refreshed and invigorated, though the pocket book took a hit, but hey sometimes it feels good to not stay in a hostel.

We made our way to Pohjanmaa (East-central Finland) via train-bus-train. It was a long journey and my brother was waiting at the station in Seinäjoki when we arrived Saturday evening to pick us up. It is great to see my brother and his family. We spend the weekend playing mölkky and pesäpallo with whole family, as well as going to watch a pesäpallo match in Koskenkorva. I still admit for an American the rules seem a bit weird. Also, we walked around Ilmajoki checking out the scenery, different monuments and museums. Great food, Great Sauna and Great Hospitality. It is a real treat to stop off in Pohjanmaa on this journey.

Day 12 and 13 pics







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June 16th and 17th

Before Katja and I leave Seinäjoki we make a quick pit stop at a local watering hole called Härmän Häjyt to enjoy the traditional shot of Koskenkorva schnapps. We catch the bus to Tampere, [Note to self the busses in Finland are comfortable and really a good value for the money, use them more in your future travels.]

We planned on camping today in Härmäla just outside the city, but inclement weather has dictated otherwise. Instead we decide to stay at an apartment we found online, it was not too expensive, plus it included a full kitchen, a bedroom and it's very own Sauna.

The following day it is cold and windy and to our disbelief it is snowing this morning!! We proceed to check out and make our way to our friend's apartment and hang out with them. The weather is so inclement that we don't really go explore the city until evening. We go to a bar and sing karaoke for several hours and then catch some live music at Henry's pub. Fun times!

My journal writing has been slowing the closer we get to our home in Helsinki... I really wonder where the summer has gone.

Day 14th and 15th pics





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June 18th Final day “Back to Helsinki”



The journey has come to an end. We travelled by bus from Tampere to Helsinki today. It has been an amazing 2 weeks of adventure with hits and misses along the way. My wife Katja made for a perfect travel companion and we enjoyed waking up each day wondering what the day would bring and where we would end up that night.

I learned a valuable lesson when it comes to hitchhiking in Finland, less is best! In the future I will pack a smaller bag in the hopes of optimizing lift opportunities.

Though the summer did not accompany us upon this saga, our hearts were warmed by the hospitality of all the friendly folks we met along the way.

Thank you for reading my travel journal and I hope everyone gets an opportunity to travel where their heart leads them. Here's to the love of the road and adventurous spirit! Cheers!

Sincerely,

Juhani Bohjanen



## Attachment 7. Photo Gallery













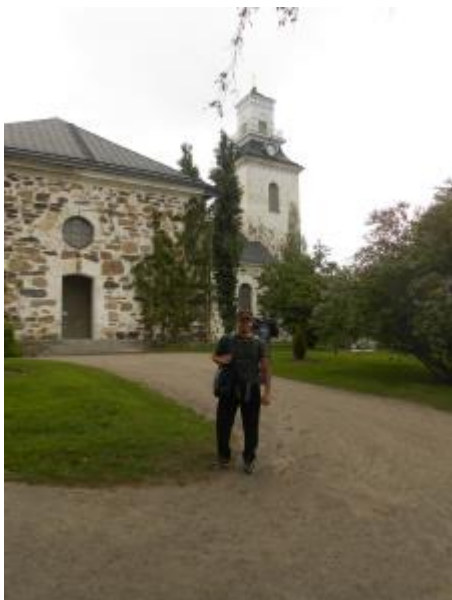




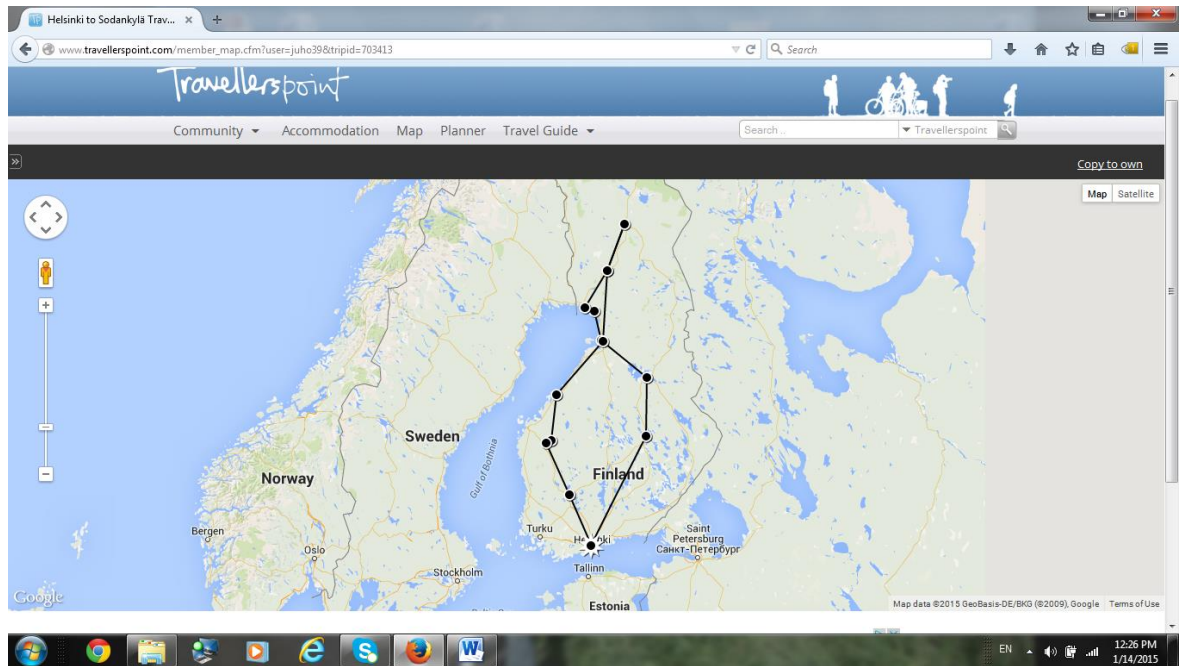








## Attachment 8. Trip map



## Attachment 9. Tips for the future backpacker in Finland

Hello all, I decided to add one more section to the travel blog. For those of you that may one day want to go backpacking in Finland I will give some tips from my journey.

First when traveling to a new country it is always a good idea to know a little bit of the local language, which can be gleaned from an easy Google search, just type in useful Finnish phrases or follow this link <http://www.omniglot.com/language/phrases/finnish.php> However I do not speak the greatest Finnish and managed quite easily as most Finns speak English rather well, but perhaps the more rural towns you will find it a bit harder to get on in English, but never worry I have not found there to be a problem yet.

Next know the purpose of your adventure. I say this because I planned for mostly wilderness hiking when I got farther north and packed a heavy laden backpack, but the reality was it turned out to be more of a city to city backpacking trek and I found I did not need to pack so much extra supplies. That being said I did manage to use up all my food resources just to lighten the load, and the clothes I packed all came in handy as the weather was very cold. On that note DO study the weather patterns of the various seasons you plan of visiting. But please take into account it can still snow in June as I experienced on this trip. And rain can be a tedious companion at any time of the journey.

As for my gear list which is mentioned in the blog I recommend using your experience to dictate what you will carry along. I do not regret taking any of my gear along even if I had a heavy pack. The only downside you should take into account is if you are hitchhiking. I found that two people with rather cumbersome packs did not create a good situation when looking for lifts while hitchin. The cars are smaller than we are used to in the states and space is limited. And another tip is beware of how little traffic there can be. We set out a few weeks before the summer tourist season started and as we got farther north we noticed the traffic was almost non-existent sometimes, we waited hours and hours alongside the road. So be prepared for long waits, and double that time if it is raining.

Safety is always an issue when backpacking, so plan ahead and be sure you are well prepared. If you are hitchhiking do as any hitcher would and use common sense when accepting rides. But overall it is still quite safe to hitch in Finland. Carry a cell phone with emergency numbers Finland's is (112) and always have a map.

Wild animals were not a factor on our journey, but there are bears in Finland along with smaller food seekers, if you are tenting it is always advisable to eat away from your tent and don't keep food in it either. Bring some extra cordage so you can make a bear proof food sack to hang away from camp.

As always be safe, plan ahead and enjoy your travels in Finland!!

Thank you,

Juhani