

Worldly traveler shares experiences through photos

Written by Jedd Kettler
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A young shepherd in Peru.

ENOSBURG FALLS/HIGHGATE/THE WORLD:

He's looked down toward the Incan remains of Machu Picchu and stood in the snows at the peak of Tanzania's Kilimanjaro. He's taken in the majesty of India's Taj Mahal and the ancient temple-city of Angkor Wat in Cambodia's jungles.

He's biked, hiked and hitched the back roads of Africa, Asia, and South America and looked into the eyes of the children who call all these places their homes.

And 25-year-old Slovenian Zoran Furman's most constant companion has been his camera.



For Furman - a native of Slovenia who works summers in northwest Vermont to help pay for his journeys - travel is about far more than a chance to escape his day job for a few days and return home with some local souvenirs.

"I'm not a tourist. I'm a backpacker," Furman said. "It's like drugs. I'm a travel junkie."

Furman, who has spent the past three summers working at Highgate's Tyler Place Resort, will show photographs of this addiction at Enosburg Falls' music and coffee shop The Flying Disc over the coming month, starting this week.

Furman's travel writing and photography, capturing the people he meets and the places he sees, are published in university travel journals in his native Slovenia, a small coastal Alpine country on the Adriatic Sea, bordered by Italy, Croatia, Hungary, and Austria, which until 1991 was part of Yugoslavia.

Always a new destination

Since 2004, Furman has traveled extensively, pausing for just a few months at a time in either Slovenia or here in Vermont. He has backpacked across Europe and crisscrossed the United States, Asia, South America, and Africa.



A young Indian girl.

These travels have taken him to Nepal, India, Peru, Bolivia, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and most recently, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia.

In September, Furman and his girlfriend will travel to Denver, Colo., and make their way via rented car to the national parks in the western and south western parts of America.

Next year he plans to board the Trans-Siberian Railway from western Russia to spend several weeks in Mongolia, before taking in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, and then crossing China, headed for the mountains of Tibet.

At the heart of travel for Furman is getting close enough to soak in the diversity and detail of a place and its people, to glimpse their joy and suffering, the beauty of natural landscapes that surround them and the human interaction that can cross cultural and linguistic walls.

From a college football game in Salt Lake City, Utah, to the side streets of India, to the children of Laos and the mountains of South America, the contrasts and variety are never lost on Furman. Each place holds a significant lesson, impression or pleasure, and always new subjects for his photographs.



An open market in La Paz, Bolivia.

"In India, walking the streets, it's so colorful. Then Laos is about the people. Then Bolivia, it's about the scenery," he said.

The children in Laos left a particularly strong impression.

"They give some special, positive energy. They're really happy. In Slovenia, a lot of children have a lot of toys, but they're not really happy," he said.

Children also make especially good photographic subjects.

"Children are really natural," he said.

In India the contrast between rich and poor left a deep impression

"You see two sides," Furman said. "India was so hard."

Though he has an extremely limited budget, in most countries Furman is well off compared to local residents. Faced with beggars from India's lower castes can be heart-wrenching: "Sometimes I am so sad. From one side I'm rich, on the other I have \$10 a day."

Traveling on the cheap

Despite the perception that trotting the globe is only for the rich, Furman makes due with a limited budget. He began traveling as a college student in Slovenia.

"If you are a student, you don't have a lot of money," he said. "You go to hitchhiking ... or you don't go." Aside from his camera, some of his most important possessions are Lonely Planet guidebooks, which help find local food and cheap accommodations.

During one two-month period in India, Furman spent just \$1,800. Such a budget - eating all local food, staying in the least expensive hotels, and using local modes of transportation - not only helps make the trips financially possible, but in the end makes them far more rewarding.



Ankorwat, Cambodia.

Furman described interacting with local residents piling on buses in Laos, carrying livestock and food from the market.

"All this atmosphere on one bus," Furman said.

Returning to India from the base camp of Annapurna, in the Nepalese Himalayas, Furman became the victim of a transportation strike and lost his originally planned way home. Making his way piecemeal by other means Furman met a local family.

They invited him to stay a night at their humble home. On bare floors next an open pit-fireplace, Furman and this welcoming family ate dinner with their hands.

"Then you really, really know these people," Furman said.

For all of his travels, though, and for all of the places and people he has seen and met, for Furman the cliché still holds true: there is no place like home.

"I like Slovenia. For now I haven't found a country I want to live in other than Slovenia," Furman said.

Furman's photographs and writings - in Slovenian - can also be found on his website, www.zoranfurman.com. Click on "galerija" to view many of his images.