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The Glove Box Interview: Karen & Eric of the Trans-Americas Journey

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Over the past 20 years journalist Karen Catchpole and photographer Eric Mohl have explored more than 50 countries, often spending months in each one. In 2006 they left their home and quit their jobs in New York City to embark on their latest project, the Trans-Americas Journey, a 200,000 mile working road trip through 23 countries in North, Central and South America. After nearly six years and 140,000 miles on the road they've thoroughly explored 10 countries in North and Central America. They plan to enter South America in early 2013 and then keep heading south all the way to Tierra del Fuego. You can keep up to date with their adventures by checking out their Trans-Americas Journey travel blog.



blog.arguscarhire.com



Q1. If you had to offer fellow travellers one 'golden' tip what would it be?

Expect nothing and accept everything. Yes, that's easier said than done.

Q2. What do you never leave the country without?

We're not shoppers or collectors so all we generally take with us when we leave a country are pictures (lots and lots of pictures) and awesome stories to

tell and, we hope, contact information for a few more friends.

Q3. What if any is your travel philosophy?

Slow is best.

Q4. What is your favourite city and why?

After more than 20 years of travel (and counting) we've visited many fabulous cities so it's impossible for us to pick just one global favourite. However, our favorite city (so far) during our current Trans-Americas Journey has been Mexico City. Eric was born in New York City and we lived and worked there for years before embarking on the Trans-Americas Journey. Mexico City, to us, is a Latin version of NYC. From the neighborhoods to the culture to the beautiful freaks that live there it feels like home only with the kind of twists we love.

Q5. In your opinion, which country has the best cuisine?

We've eaten our way through more than 50 countries and Italy and Thailand run neck and neck for us when it comes to cuisine. The hands-down winner, so far, on our Trans-Americas Journey is Mexico again. We dream about the tacos, the carnitas, breakfast at Café Popular in Mexico City, anything from Ideal Bakery, the cheap fresh squeezed orange juice sold on the street, the tlayudas in Oaxaca the tequila (of course) AND the mezcal. We're sure we'll be eating and drinking well in South America too (looking at you Argentinean beef and Peruvian ceviche) once we get down there.

Q6. What is your favourite travel memory?

Finally leaving New York City back in 2006. We spent years working hard, saving hard and planning hard. As we shoved the last of our gear into our truck and pulled away from our empty apartment freedom set in.

Q7. Where do you go when you want to take some time out to relax?

We're on the road full time, so relaxing for us involves finding someplace interesting, comfortable and affordable where we can stay put for a few weeks. That's why we're getting into house sitting. Not traveling for a period of time allows us to relax and focus on work since we don't have to spend time planning travel. Q8. Of all the countries you've visited, where could you imagine yourself moving? Again, we have to say Mexico because of the people, the food, the value for money, the opportunities, the range of things to do and places to live...And, no, we don't work for the Mexico Tourism Board.

Q9. Which destination offers the best value for money?

No country in the world beats India for budget travel whether you're after sheer cheapness or value for money. You can travel there for just a few dollars a day or you can spend not much more and get the kind of food and accommodation that would get top dollar anywhere else. During our Journey

through North and Central America Mexico has been the best value for money so far. It's far cheaper to travel in Mexico than in the Central American countries where food, accommodation, transportation, entrance fees, tours and guide fees are all pricier. And don't forget about the astounding generosity of Mexicans. When they say "my house is your house" they really, really mean it. It doesn't take much to find yourself being hosted by fabulous new friends in Mexico.

Q10. What has been the most dangerous country that you have visited?

We were in Pnom Pen in the 90s and the market was full of hand grenades for sale. They were so cheap that people were using them as their own personal problem solvers. When we were there a policeman tossed one into his bedroom when he caught his wife with another man. They were all killed. The availability of major weapons coupled with the general "anything goes" vibe in Cambodia made us feel like anything could happen at any moment—good or bad. That said, nothing bad ever happened to us there. Many of the countries we've visited so far during our Trans-Americas Journey are considered dangerous as well but, again, we've never, ever felt in danger. The worst things that have happened to us are: Someone stole the side view mirrors off our truck while it was parked (stupidly) on the street in Guadalajara and Eric caught a pickpocket's hand in his pocket during Semana Santa in Antigua, Guatemala. Oh, and the world's dumbest thief stole our camp stove, cooler and camp chairs very early one morning at Ipala Volcano in Guatemala, but our friend who was camping with us happened to work with Proatur (Guatemala's tourist police) and he helped us get everything back—the thief basically just started dropping stuff since he couldn't carry it all and he was pretty damn conspicuous running through the village with all that stuff. We might have had more problems with crime had we simply remained in New York City.

Q11. What is your favourite thing about travel?

The freedom and the unexpected nature of most days. Part of the reason we travel so slowly (it's taken us nearly six years to get through just 10 countries) is that we also really, really enjoy building a comprehensive, deep knowledge of the places we travel through.

Q12. Which destination has surprised you most?

El Salvador. We were pleasantly surprised by its good roads, affordable prices and huge range of things to do from surfing to coffee tours to hot springs to hiking up volcanoes. We even went falconing in El Salvador! The Salvadorans also have a natural hospitality that we haven't seen since Mexico and that was a really, really pleasant surprise.

Q13. What are your top three travel books/writers?

We love Bruce Chatwin and can't wait to read *Under the Sun* which is a collection of letters he wrote. It was recently given to us by the owner of Poas Volcano Lodge who went to school with Chatwin. We also love Tim Cahill and Pico Iyer. However, the sad truth is that we don't have much time to read books. Ours is a working road trip so in addition to travel planning

and actual traveling we have to find time to keep up our website and spend time pitching stories ideas and completing assignments for the magazines and newspapers we contribute to.

Q14. How do you deal with/avoid jet lag?

No jet lag to deal with. We're on a road trip!

Q15. Where are you travelling next and how do you plan to get there?

We are on the road full time and have been for the past six years. At the moment we are in Nicaragua and we will be traveling back through Costa Rica then south to Panama next, all by road.

