

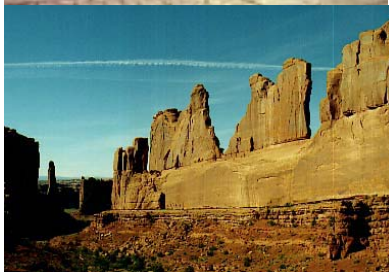
Planning the Route on your road trip dream

When we first began fantasizing about our trip, we mused, "Gee, we can stop anywhere we want, anytime we want -- we've got a whole year!" Well, that is true, but you can't stop everywhere you want, every time you want. This is another case in life where choices have to be made. We've often said that we could do a whole additional year and never visit any of the places we went the first time. This country is really amazing!



You can't do it all

As much as you might think you will be able to see everything you want in the time frame that you choose, you won't be able to. We suggest that you pick a theme or areas of interest to help focus your trip. Even then, you probably won't make it to everything. Things will happen to make you change your itinerary, or you'll add other things that necessitate reprioritizing your list. But that is OK! It shows that you have allowed the flexibility in your schedule which is so important to a successful trip.



We chose national parks, historic architecture, small towns, and college football stadiums (guess who chose that one!) as our areas of focus. During the trip, we added state capitals, mostly because the capitol buildings across the country are such historic buildings, filled with interesting stories and beautiful architecture.

Our focus on seeing all forty-three of the national parks in the continental United States --plus we threw in about fifty of the monuments, seashores, historic parks, and so on -- gave us a reason to go places where we wouldn't have otherwise gone. That total commitment to seeing all of them provided us with some of the most spectacular scenery and serendipitous moments of the trip.

It seemed we would never get to Big Bend National Park -- way down in southwest Texas. Through sandstorms, heat and miles of nothing, we forged on, and it turned out to be one of our favorites. Four parks can only be reached by water, which added another challenge to seeing them. They were all well worth the trip, and getting there was half the fun. Glimpses of some of these adventures are in the second part of this book, and for those who are interested, a complete travelogue can be found on our website.

Your trip may not have you on the move as much as we were, but again, make this your dream, not ours. Find those experiences that you will treasure and share over and over again both with each other and with other people.

Picking a theme

Some of you may have a firm idea of what your adventure will include. You have thought about it and planned it in your head for a long time. Others will have only a vague idea of what they would like to do



We began visualizing our trip on a weekend getaway. Because you are relaxed and away from the hubbub of everyday life, this is an ideal time to bounce those ideas off each other and begin focusing on your dreams. One last piece of advice: Don't get so locked into your plans that you don't allow room for spontaneity. This is the trip of a lifetime, and you do want the opportunity to "be a kid again" and explore unexpected twists and turns along the way.

Here are some additional ideas to get you thinking about your own aspirations:

- Play at least one famous golf course in every state.
- Trace the development of our country through the railroad expansion.
- Follow the Lewis and Clark Trail (or some other historic theme).
- Visit the headquarters of every company in which you own stock and see their operations up close.
- Ride all the famous roller-coasters in the country.
- Visit historic inns.
- "Antique" your way around the country.
- Visit all the famous baseball/football stadiums.

- Hike on all the famous trails (i.e., Appalachian, Pacific Crest).
- Visit museums in every state.
- Paint or photograph sites in every state.

The ideas are endless. It is just up to you to fulfill your dreams



Don't over-plan

This brings us to a major piece of advice. Do not, we repeat, do not try to plan each day of your trip before you leave. Don't even try to plan each week in any detail. Now, we know that this will make some of you very nervous. Where will we stay? How will our friends know when to expect us? What if we can't get into our favorite museum? And on and on.

If you try to plan your every move, you will begin to feel like you are on a forced march to that next commitment, not on a trip of joy and exploration. In fact, we will go so far as to say that you will end up hating yourself and not enjoying the experience. Frustration will set in when you can't keep up with your schedule, reservations, and false deadlines. You just can't predict that far ahead.

Breadth versus depth



When we left on our trip, we didn't realize that playing every day and living your dream could be so tiring! One of our motivations for taking our trip when we did was health and fitness. We were both in our fifties, pretty fit, and in good health. But you never know how long that will last, so do it while you can.

Depending on the kind of trip you have envisioned and your personal lifestyle, you will need to discuss how to best execute your trip. If your goals lend themselves to seeing fewer places but with more exploration in each area, then consider a vehicle and itinerary that allows you to stay in one place longer and to explore in a "hub and spoke" pattern rather than continuously moving forward like we did. Because you will be setting up and breaking down as well as packing and unpacking less frequently, the wear and tear on your minds and bodies will be less!

If, on the other hand, you want to cover as much ground as possible and see a wide variety of things in this vast country, make sure your physical and mental condition can keep up the pace. We mentioned earlier about taking "vacations" from your trip.



We know that sounds ridiculous, but it's true! No matter how wonderful every day is, you will still need some downtime. We simply acknowledged that we were "road-weary" and looked ahead to a spot where we wanted to stop and spend a few days, and then we planned our "vacation."

One such stop was along the shore of Lake Superior in a wonderful little Wisconsin town. Bayfield was one of those finds along the way. People we had spoken with at a restaurant one night said it was not to be missed. They were right. We golfed, we sailed, we lazed around in the sunshine, we did laundry, we shopped, we cooked, we attended a wonderful concert at Big Top Chautauqua, and we generally recharged our batteries for the next leg of our trip. During the course of the trip, we took one of these little mini-vacations about every two months. They made all the difference in our mental, if not our physical, outlook!

Laying it all out

Once you have your theme or goals set, then you should begin to lay the trip out, not in a detailed way, but at least in a general way. Believe it or not, it is easy to let a year slip through your fingers and not see everything you have envisioned. A general schedule, perhaps month by month, will ensure that at the end of the time you will have covered the ground you wanted and will have seen most things you planned, along with many things you didn't plan. Your memory will be overflowing with the knowledge and perspective you have gained, and the stories, both funny and uplifting, will be etched in your mind forever. This is the beauty of a long trip, and it absolutely cannot happen in a couple of weeks or even a month or two.



Naturally, your goals will somewhat dictate your route, but weather, specific events you want to attend, and other personal factors will also help mold your route. For us, weather was a big factor, as we wanted to avoid ice and snow at most any cost. We didn't want to sightsee in the cold, and we certainly didn't want to drive in it. We know, we're wimps! For the most part, our plan worked. Naturally, November and December along the eastern seaboard weren't like summer, but we had appropriate clothes and really enjoyed some great days, even with some pretty low temperatures.

By the time we got to the Southwest, it was starting to heat up, but again, you plan for it, dress for it, and think of the people who live in that heat! One of our favorite hot spots was the Furnace Creek Inn in Death Valley. Temperatures ranged from the high 80s at night to over 110 degrees during the day -- but what a true oasis in the desert this was. Because it was off-season, the rates were more reasonable, and it was a real treat. We felt like we were in the Casbah!



Friends along the way

You will come to crave visiting friends along your route. No matter how well you get along with your companion, you two will soon be sick to death of talking to each other!

The stark reality of this trip is that weeks and sometimes months will go by where you will see not one other person you know. Read that sentence again and let it sink in: not one other person you know.

You will come to crave these visits with friends, family, and even other people you haven't seen for a long time.



Make these visits part of the excitement of your trip. Contact your friends and relatives as you make your plan, share with them what you are doing, and let them know approximately when you will be in their area. At this point, don't commit to anything more specific than "in the spring." You don't want to have to sprint to be at their house on a certain day unless it's for a wedding or an important event you have agreed to put in your itinerary. Be sure to add them to your e-mail list and take their phone number with you so they can track your progress and you can keep in touch with them as you get close to their area. Most people will understand your need for flexibility and make accommodations for your crazy road trip.

When to schedule ahead



Never schedule ahead. Well, that's not totally true, but it is close. If there is something so high on your priority list that if you didn't get to do it (and if it can only be done on one date during the year), it would be a great disappointment, then by all means, book a room ahead and make sure that your plan will accommodate being in that location at that time -- even if it means you have to backtrack, speed up, or slow down.

The other time to schedule ahead is if you want to plan a trip home during your adventure. If you decide to go for a whole year, you may want to come home for a special event such as a wedding, birth, or holiday.

Since we went from June to June, Christmas was a perfect mid-trip break. About two months before the holidays, we began projecting where we might be and which airports could be handy. We then began watching the airfares on the Internet from various choices until we nabbed a really good fare. Again, flexibility played a key role since we could choose to be in one of several places and our exact travel dates were immaterial.

So, you see, planning your great adventure isn't really that hard. Stay loose, plan loosely, and have the time of your life!

(Excerpted from *Live Your Road Trip Dream: Travel for a year for the cost of staying home*, RLI Press, July, 2004, www.roadtripdream.com, pictures by Carol White)