



# Retire Early and Often — Gypsies of the New Millennium

By Sheila Moon

*"I plan to travel for two weeks, or maybe forever."* — Lina Martensson

For the past 12 years, her entire adult working life, Lina Martensson, 38, has worked as a software engineer at Google. Offered a job before graduating from Chalmers University in Sweden, she worked in Zurich for one year



Pictured outside Ouray, Colorado, Martensson is always prepared for the road, or trail, less traveled. Her cycling clothes, hiking boots, and hydration pack are neatly stowed and readily accessible for any adventure.

before transferring to their Mountain View headquarters. While she enjoyed the work and was well paid, she began to yearn for something different. The stress of the job, commuting, and the hectic pace of San Francisco were eating into her precious free time.

She decided to quit her job, pack her Volkswagen GTI, and hit the road. She had no plan, no budget, and no schedule. She has allowed herself at least a year before looking for another "real job." Armed with a National Park Pass, she hopes to get as far away from civilization as possible, to sleep under the stars, hike through groves of quaking aspen, ride iconic mountain bike trails, ski fresh powder, and simply follow her heart.

*Continued on page 42*

Continued from page 41

She loves the freedom of traveling on a whim, being pleasantly surprised by the unexpected, and allowing herself ample time to relax and hang out with friends new and old. Once winter hits she plans to work the season at a ski resort, continuing her travels in the spring. She is living a life of “I want to...” rather than “I have to...”.

No stranger to travel, her adventures began when she was young, exploring Europe and the United States with her family. She continued her adventures while in university, with extended backpacking trips through South America, Vietnam, and Taiwan, to study Chinese.

Martensson, an outdoor enthusiast, purchased two pieces of essential gear before embarking on her journey. The first was a comfortable, lightweight, well-fitting backpack, the REI Flash 60 Women. Her favorite feature is the

stinky cycling clothing; the backseat was strewn with toiletries that had fallen out of the bag she had hung from the back of her car seat, shoes, a cooler full of sour milk and cheese floating in tepid water, and an exploded duffel bag; the passenger seat was littered with food wrappers, maps, water bottles, and empty coffee cups. Once home, she turned to her Facebook community in search of a solution.

### *Plastic Bins = The Millennial Steamer Trunk*

The plastic bin is the key piece of luggage for those who opt to convert their car or van and hit the road. Most #VanLife travelers have reconfigured their vehicles around plastic



The freedom and adventure of hitting the open road in a fully-loaded van can quickly give way to chaos and frustration if you don't have a super-organized and well-labeled system of plastic storage bins.

J-Zipper, which allows you to open the pack like a duffel bag. Her second purchase was an Osprey Verve 9 hydration pack. The pack is small and comfortable, yet has enough space for a long mountain bike ride or an all-day hike. She loves the “Oh crap compartment,” an expandable front panel on the outside of the bag, perfect for storing her jacket once the sun begins to shine.

After leaving her job, and before hitting the road for the long haul, Martensson lounged around her apartment, doing little more than decompressing, tackling crossword puzzles, and taking a number of short camping trips. It was on her second trip that she realized she needed a better system if she was going to live out of her car for a year. The trunk of her car was jam-packed with camping equipment and

bins, building platforms that perfectly accommodate bins below and a bed on top. Martensson quickly realized that organization was key if she wanted to maintain her sanity. She has a variety of plastic bins and each one is clearly marked with a specific purpose: cooking, cycling, hiking, clothing, and camping gear. The Eagle Creek Compression Cube Set was the perfect addition to the bin storage system. She can separate summer from winter, cycling from hiking, and most importantly, clean from dirty.

### *The Millennial Generation*

Being born in the Digital Age and entering the workforce during the

Great Recession define the Millennial Generation, those born between 1980 and 1996, give or take a few years. Rather than enter a workforce with an unemployment rate of 10%, many millennials opted to stay in school and obtain advanced degrees, some decided to drop out and travel.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2009 the unemployment rate for 28-year-old men was 18% and 27% for women. Additionally, the recovery period was the slowest of any post-depression recession, taking more than four years to return to pre-recession employment levels. As a result, 47% of millennials have earned a bachelor's degree, or higher, making this the most educated generation.

In 2015, the Economic Policy Institute stated that college graduates earned an average of 56% more than those with only a high school diploma, and that gap is widening. That increased earning potential, and the fact that millennials are choosing travel over buying homes, bodes well for the travel industry.

This generation values their free time, strives for a healthy work/life balance, believes that a positive work culture and interesting work is essential, and 58% would take a 15% pay cut to work for a company that aligned with their values. LinkedIn research has described millennials as “serial job-hoppers.” Not only do they change jobs more frequently, they are 50% more likely to relocate for a better job and 16% more likely to switch industries completely. Between jobs they often take time to travel in order to reflect on their priorities and career choices. In today's information age, working remotely is more and more accessible, leading to a larger number of “digital nomads,” an individual who needs nothing more than a computer, a power source, and an Internet connection to work. This ability is creating a truly nomadic work force.

Many millennials opted to delay entering the labor market in favor of traveling. The average trip for those who opted to travel was 58 days. In lieu of the traditional two-week, “if this is Tuesday I must be in Rome” tours, or the “all-inclusive, bake in the sun all day and drink all night holidays,” they were interested in traveling abroad, off the beaten track, looking for meaningful experiences. Many backpacked, stayed



The challenge of packing their essential worldly possessions for a 10-month, slow-travel, world odyssey was made possible by two Eagle Creek ORV Trunks, two matching Eagle Creek carry-on backpacks, and two child-size rolling bags which made Noah and Ada feel like true explorers.

in hostels, worked in exchange for room and board, volunteered in underserved communities, learned a foreign language, taught English, and considered their travel as job training. They used this time to experience the world and evaluate their opportunities and potential career paths.

Today, there are 75 million millennials; they make up 30% of the voting population and 25% of the total population. Next year, they are poised to overtake the baby boomers as the largest percentage of the total population. More importantly, according to the AARP 2018 Travel Trends Report, they already spend more per year on travel than any other generation. In 2018, Generation X is expected to spend an average of \$5,400 on travel, while baby boomers are predicted to spend \$6,400, and millennials \$6,800.

Millennials are more likely than preceding generations to use all of their annual vacation time, bring work on personal trips, and add personal vacation days to business trips. While many claim that millennials are not brand loyal, the AARP suggests otherwise. Fewer join loyalty programs, but those who do are much more loyal. They also prefer to fully immerse themselves in their destination, renting in residential neighborhoods through Airbnb rather than staying on hotel row, eating at neighborhood restaurants, and enjoying unique, small-group tours, such as a walking tour of Puerto Vallarta that features taco and tequila pairings at a dozen specialty taquerias.

### *Married With Children*

Nine years after their engagement, Kathryn Aaker Salant, 40, and her hus-

band, Alon Salant, 45, finally found the opportunity to pursue their dream of traveling the world together. Both are software engineers and Salant has started and managed two successful Internet start-ups. Instead of jumping head first into another high-stress position, they decided to rent out their San Francisco house for 10 months, pack up their two children, Noah, 6, and Ada, 4, and travel abroad. They wanted to escape, spend quality time with their children, surf, do yoga and CrossFit, explore new countries and cultures, and finally relax.

Aaker Salant, a self-described luggage junkie, set about finding the perfect combination of luggage. They needed something that could fit all their essential worldly possessions and still negotiate airports with ease. She opted for two Eagle Creek ORV Trunks, two Eagle Creek Carry-on Backpacks, which could double as daypacks, and two child-sized rolling bags. Toting their own treasure-filled bags, Noah and Ada feel like true explorers.

Their first destination was the small resort town of Ericeira, Portugal where they rented a house through booking.com and plan to stay for two months. After that, their rough plan is to visit family in South Africa, tour Israel, rent a campervan in New Zealand, check out Chiang Mai, Thailand, and maybe stay in Madeira, Portugal for a spell. Their guiding light is the sun and surf. Once the temperatures drop in Portugal they plan to travel to warmer climates. Aaker Salant tells me that one of her son's greatest joys is walking down the middle of the street in his bare feet; he loves that there are no rules.

Aaker Salant does not sound completely committed to returning to the

United States after 10 months. She has considered pursuing an advanced degree online, teaching English, and the possibility of working remotely. For the moment, she is content "world-schooling" her children, working out, and enjoying the surf, sand, and bare-foot lifestyle.

Millennial families are the driving force behind the growth in travel this year, according to MMGY Global. They are the only segment projected to spend more on travel this year than last and they are expected to take 35% more vacations. After delaying parenthood, millennial women are beginning to have children, at a rate of more than one million per year, according to the Pew Research Center. If the trend of traveling millennial families continues, it is a very bright spot on the travel horizon.

### *The Carry-on Generation*

After nearly 15 years working in the biotech industry, Gnat Matthews, 42, decided to quit her job and complete her Bachelor's degree in Industrial Technology. Studying online afforded her the opportunity to travel. Over the course of 18 months, she visited 13 countries: Scotland, Spain, Canada, China, Australia, Belize, Mexico, Greece, Bali, Peru, Egypt, Jordan, and Costa Rica. She traveled solo for about half of her trips, the other trips she was accompanied by her husband or her father. When traveling alone, she was frugal, staying with friends or in hostels, walking or taking local transportation, and cooking at least one

*Continued on page 44*

Continued from page 43

meal per day. When traveling with her husband Chris, a Silicon Valley marketing executive, their travels are a bit less frugal. They book through Airbnb or Glamping.com, take Uber or taxis, skydive, rock climb, kayak, and feast on traditional victuals.

For experiences that are a bit more curated, but still off the beaten track, she travels with boutique tour organizations such as Gadventures. These trips are one to two weeks in duration, there are never more than 12 people, and they visit the less-explored side of popular destinations. Her greatest pleasure in travel is “food, glorious food,” especially different and exotic

roll gracefully through airports while wearing outrageous shoes. The duffel fits as much as her rolling bag and squishes easily into the overhead compartment. Most importantly, it comes in Powerberry Pink.

## The Perfect Toiletries Bag

For something that seems so inconsequential, the toiletries bag was one item that was extremely important to everyone I spoke to. Martensson bought a new bag that didn't dump half its contents when she hung it from the headrest of her car. Aaker Salant is not

a built in scale, electronic locks, and a GPS locator that can track your bag worldwide.

Smart luggage designs run the gamut from the very simple Samsonite Spinner Underseater with USB Port to the Modobag that doubles as a motorized scooter. The only drawback to the check-in smart luggage is the lithium ion batteries, known to be a fire hazard on airplanes. Airlines now require you to remove the batteries and stow them in your carry-on luggage. Most manufacturers offer easily removable battery packs.

While this seems like an incredible benefit to the so-called “constantly-connected” millennials, not one person

Armed with just her carry-on, Matthews frequently breezes through SFO (San Francisco International Airport) on her way to off-beat, gastronomic, two-week adventures such as Scotch tastings in Scotland and slacklining in Belize.



foods such as “saffron and oregano and salt bombs and negronis and whole shrimps and yo-yos and crocodile burgers and blood sausage with nips and tatties and kangaroo salami.” While traveling, Matthews splurges on one extremely indulgent meal every day.

Considered the Carry-on Generation, millennials are known for spur of the moment, long weekend trips, often booked online from their mobile device. Matthews' one travel crisis was finding the perfect “rolly bag” to replace her pink snake print carry-on that had died. The Apera Performance Duffel is that perfect bag. It has separate pockets for two water bottles, her laptop, two pairs of shoes, and her collection of convertible travel clothing. In addition to the bag being durable, it has strategically placed mesh and good venting. The only two drawbacks she foresees is the potential for the over-the-shoulder duffel to be uncomfortable to carry for an extended period, and she cannot

a big fan of make-up, but now that she is in her 40s her skin care regimen has become very important. Her solution was the Invoda waterproof cosmetic organizer bag, a fabric-covered cylinder with a drawstring closure and hook for hanging. She sets it on the counter, turns the fabric down over the sides of the cylinder, and has easy access to all her toiletries. Matthews chose to create a personalized, airline-approved, toiletries kit through Muji. She loves breezing through security without a care.

## Inspector Gadget Approved

In the past few years, a new category of luggage has hit the market with a big splash – Smart Luggage. This has been touted as the latest and greatest for the tech-savvy business traveler. These bags are equipped with a battery pack, USB ports to charge all your mobile devices,

I spoke to mentioned the need for tech specific luggage. Quite the opposite was true. With the exception of Matthews, most are seeking to escape today's hyper-connected reality. Becoming a digital nomad is a shared dream of both Martensson and Aaker Salant. They want to commune with nature or with the person who is sitting across the table from them at that moment. That said, Matthews hopes travel will be a large part of her next job.

As we all know, travel is addictive. A healthy addiction, for sure, but once the bug bites the need to hit the road never subsides. Some might dismiss the Millennial Generation, but given their numbers, earning potential, and already strong predilection to travel, I believe we should embrace them and encourage their desire to explore the world. If we can capture their imagination now we will have a whole new generation of loyal and devoted customers.