



- Expert Interview with Dave Thompson for HotelsCheap.org

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According to blogger Dave Thompson, anyone can leave the comforts of their home to visit a foreign locale, but that doesn't necessarily count as traveling.

"You can travel (physically move yourself from one part of the planet to another)," he told us recently. "But in my opinion, if you don't have or seek out experiences you aren't really 'traveling.'"

To really travel, Thompson believes you have to have intent and openness to having experiences unique to the region you're traveling in. Experiential Travel, as he calls it, is about getting out, doing things, trying things, seeking new experiences, personal exploration, and broadening one's own perspectives.

"This may be sitting down with a local family in their home and enjoying local food. It may be wandering through a local market. It may be climbing mountains," he said.

Thompson shares his travel philosophy, photos, guides and advice on [Dave's Travel Corner](#). He recently answered some questions for us about his blog, Experiential Travel, traveling on a budget, and more.

### **Tell us your story: How did you come to create Dave's Travel Corner?**

I discovered I enjoyed writing when I was young. Next came my interest of the still fledgling Internet world in the late 1980s and early 1990s where you connected to Bulletin Board Systems (the precursors to the Internet) with agonizingly slow dialup modems. But then came my love for International travel. It was cultivated on a trip to Nepal — it was my first major trip outside of the USA and my eyes were opened by everything that was so "different" from what I grew up with. The foods, the culture, the experiences — plus, the world's greatest mountains, the stunning Himalayas, tend to leave one in awe the first time you fly by them and every time after. I had never seen such stunning tall mountains like that before.

I combined my interest in writing, the online world, and international travel in 1996 when I first placed the original content for Dave's Travel Corner online — it was just a single page at the time — devoted to photographs and notes from my trip to Nepal.

**When arriving in a new place, what's the first thing you do or where's the first place you go to find unique cultural experiences?**

Depending on where I am visiting — local markets are a great place to see what people are eating and meet the locals. I also try to find something that is unique to that particular region or city. I find tourist offices are also good points of contact for arranging short trips and itineraries.

**What have been some of your favorite cultural experiences on your travels? The ones that you tell stories about over and over again?**

Invariably these involve some sort of exotic cuisine! I won't spend anytime disgusting your readers with stories of eating semi-raw local cuisine which varies from worms, fat grubs, and a variety of insects and odd items from the sea — but I do enjoy shocking my friends with these stories (although by now they know I have an eclectic appetite!).

I have enjoyed home stay in a number of countries. This is an easy way to “embed” yourself for some time in a local culture with a local family and get a window into how they live their daily lives. This has been particularly valuable for me in rural settings.

**What tips do you have for creating unique travel experiences while on a budget?**

Explore independently. Take public transportation. Let experiences come to you — rather than trying to always actively seek them out. If you want to take a tour, find a local guide who knows the area extremely well. Often their personal perspectives are invaluable.

**What tips do you have for finding unique and affordable lodging while traveling?**

If in a city, stay out of the city center — often lodging is cheaper the farther from the center. Major cities often have a backpacker district or particular street with cheaper lodging. Koh San Road and a number of other streets near Koh San Road in Bangkok is a good example of this.

Travel off season — if there are fewer people visiting an area based on a certain time of year the prices will be more competitive not only for lodging but other things as well. Avoid visiting during major events — for example, Carnival in Rio, the New Year's Fireworks in Sydney, and Mardi Gras in New Orleans just to name a few.

**Advice for eating well (and eating locally) without spending a mint?**

When traveling cheaply I try to use local supermarkets for both breakfast and lunch and then splurge a bit for dinner. This really stretches your budget. Also seek out local cuisine, whether it is from markets or street food.

**What's your best advice for staying safe while traveling?**

Be aware of your surroundings. Pack light. Blend in. Avoid dodgy areas of a city after night, especially if you are traveling alone.

Make digital copies of your passport and have them backed up somewhere that you can access them from an Internet cafe. Have a PayPal account containing at least some emergency funds there (i.e. if you lose your passport, credit cards, cash — everything — you can potentially transfer money to someone else with a PayPal account at an Internet cafe or by borrowing a smart phone, and then they can give you cash).

Trust your gut, it is your most important compass.

**What destination do you keep returning to and never seem to tire of?**

This would be Peru — it is a country that offers many experiences for all types of budgets and interests. The Andes form the jagged spine of the country: With mountains over 6,000 meters, jagged glaciers, and aquamarine lakes, it is a trekkers' and climbers' paradise.

This country also has plenty of jungle. Iquitos for example, is the largest city not connected to anywhere else by a road and is a great place for exploring part of the Amazon and the prolific wildlife here. The country has high deserts, some of the world's deepest canyons, great ruins, sand dunes, and kilometers of ocean and ocean related activities.

**What destination currently tops your bucket list? Why?**

I've only visited once but the diversity of both outdoor and historical experiences are hard to beat in Jordan. There are the impressive artifacts and ruins of Petra, breathtaking beauty of Wadi Rum, the challenges of fighting your way up the fast moving river surrounded by steep canyon walls on both sides at Wadi Al Mujib, walking around covered up in the natural mud on the shores of the Dead Sea — and then trying to sink but being unable to in its waters and diving in the clear waters of the Red Sea while exploring some of the world's northernmost coral.

Find Thompson on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

## About the Author:



Rob works out of the Dallas office for HotelsCheap. He has worked in the travel industry for 17 years, and has written articles for several travel publications. Rob is married with 5 kids. In his spare time he enjoys soccer, tennis and hiking. His favorite travel destination is Papua New Guinea. You can follow Rob on Google Plus [+Rob Bruce](#).

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