

2-year adventure takes couple around the world

Written by Chris Lee

Roughly 30 countries, 26 months, 119 beds and 35,000 photographs. Those are just a few of the statistics one young couple kept while on their lengthy “vacation.”

Jonathan and Carrie (Roll) Kraft recently returned from a two-year excursion that is sure to be one of many memorable trips they share together.

This wasn't the couple's first rendezvous overseas. In 2006, Jonathan and Carrie, a 2000 HHS graduate, made news after traveling to Tanzania to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. It was there, at the summit, where Jonathan got down on one knee to ask Carrie to be his wife. They were married in 2007 in Colorado Springs.

Jonathan and Carrie first met in German Club at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. The club was at a bar when they first met. “Carrie's German was terrible,” Jonathan joked. “Mine was really good because I had just gotten back from Germany.”



Jonathan and Carrie Kraft have a little fun with the camera in front of the Taj Mahal in India. The couple recently returned from 26 months of traveling around the world and have no plans of slowing down.

Before departing on this massive journey, the couple worked together on their internet marketing business which connects people with things to sell with people wanting to buy things, according to Jonathan.

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Operating an internet business gave them a great opportunity to travel and work. As they planned their next jump throughout the trip, they first made sure there would be good internet access.

During the trip, they worked aggressively four days a week and traveled aggressively the other three.

A small motive for deciding to travel the world was knowing they could live cheaper elsewhere. Other factors were that they both wanted to see the world and what better time than when they were young and knowing their parents were young and healthy.

“We thought at the time, that was a good stage for where our siblings were,” Carrie said. However, during the two years, Jonathan’s brother and Carrie’s sister and their families both had babies. “It wasn’t as uneventful as we thought.”

Off they go

One would think planning for two years of travel would be an insurmountable task. However, Jonathan and Carrie didn’t plan out the entire two years at once. They took it piece by piece. To begin, they knew they were going to Costa Rica to work for a turtle conservation—and that’s about it.

The journey began when the young couple sold just about every possession, rented out their home and took off Oct. 4, 2009.

They spent three months in Central America. They had heard Costa Rica was beautiful but, according to Carrie, didn’t care for it as much as most people. They did, however, fall in love with Panama and Guatemala.

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On Dec. 21, 2009, they flew back to the United States for Christmas and the New Year.

After the short break, they flew back to Panama to house-sit for some friends they had met while there just a few months prior. After three weeks they moved to Quito, Ecuador.

It was in Ecuador where they spent three months taking an intensive Spanish course. The couple spent four hours a day with an instructor learning the language.

From Ecuador, they moseyed on to Columbia and Peru. Carrie said everyone asks if they got to visit Machu Picchu. Due to flooding, they were unable to visit.

One of the more interesting parts of this journey included the Good Friday procession in Quito. Jonathan said there were about 10,000 people in the procession with many more onlookers. He said those walking in the procession would be forgiven of their sins once completing it.

Many of those in the procession reenact the walk that Jesus took to the crucifixion. Jonathan said people actually had real barbed wire wrapped around their heads and were bleeding. They also carried large crosses—some even made of cactus.

“It was just wild,” Jonathan said. “I’ve never seen anything like that.”

In May 2010, they flew back to the United States for five days because it was cheaper to fly home and then to New Zealand than from anywhere in South America to New Zealand.

The plan was to stay in New Zealand for three months but they loved the place so much they stayed for nine. Since they were both under age 31, they were able to obtain working holiday visas.

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During the day, they worked for the government of New Zealand. Jonathan worked in accounts payable and data entry and Carrie worked in accounts payable.

At night, they continued to work on their own business. After three months, they knew they had to stay longer. Not only was New Zealand a beautiful place, they had fallen in love with the nice people.

On a drive up the coast from the south island to the north island, they came across a beach full of seals. Not just a few, but hundreds. “We have missed something here,” Jonathan said. “We didn’t go out and see what we needed to see while we were here. So we decided to stay a little longer. And then we decided to stay a little longer and then, we were there nine months.”

They rented apartments in Christchurch and Auckland during their nine-month visit. They actually moved out of Christchurch five days before the September 2010 earthquake.

Saying goodbye to New Zealand, they spent a quick three months (February-April, 2011) in southeast Asia—or as Carrie put it, “We had a whirlwind in southeast Asia.”

They saw 11 countries during their time there. They spent about a week in each.

The main highlight was the nightly Hong Kong light shows. Jonathan said they take 40 skyscrapers and synchronize them together with lights and music. The show only lasts 15 minutes and Jonathan said it wasn’t all that impressive but said it’s hard to fathom how they can coordinate everything together. The timing and planning are what Jonathan and Carrie found fascinating.

After the lights and music were turned off, the Krafts took a boat tour up the Mekong Delta from Vietnam into Cambodia. Carrie said it was amazing to see the way of life of those living along the river.

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They recall seeing little boys who were barely clothed running out of their huts and gleefully jumping into the river to play and bathe. Others would take their herds of water buffalo into the water with them while they bathed. “You just think, this is different,” Jonathan said. “But everybody waves and smiles and is happy.”

The reason for rushing through Asia was they were scheduled to meet up with Jonathan’s family in Europe in June.

After Asia, came India. “It was a massive culture shock,” Jonathan said.

The couple spent six weeks in India where they found the people to be very, very friendly and generous.

Udaipur was Carrie’s favorite stop in India. They stayed in a house overlooking a lake and palace. But when they went to walk around other parts of the city, they ran into completely opposite living conditions.

Carrie explained the plumbing system as pipes coming out of the sides of buildings which ran into gutters. The gutters were open troughs in the streets where everything was washed away. She said little kids were playing in the streets and animals were drinking out of the gutters.

Jonathan said they had their clothes washed in Udaipur because it was super cheap. They said when their clothes came back they looked clean but definitely didn’t smell clean.

Later, while on a walk, they noticed some ladies in a river with borax and sticks beating and washing clothes.

Jonathan and Carrie thought to themselves, “That’s how our clothes were washed.”

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“It was just different, and you just have to realize that’s how it is,” Jonathan said. “What else can you do?” Carrie added.

On the flip side, the food was amazing and the people were above and beyond generous—even though they gave Jonathan a hard time as he learned how to eat.

The generosity really showed one night when they were walking back from a restaurant and Jonathan accidentally fell into a nine-foot hole full of chunks of cement and what they like to think of as just mud.



Jonathan and Carrie Kraft pose in front of an Oktoberfest party in Germany. Carrie is wearing a traditional dirndl outfit.

An onlooker helped get Jonathan out of the hole, walked with them the mile back and helped wash him up. He spoke no English but did everything in his power to make sure Jonathan was OK.

“It was really neat,” Jonathan said. He said he thanked the helpful man and in return was thanked. The Krafts found it weird that they were being thanked but knew the man was very grateful for being able to help.

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Another fun aspect of their time spent in India was their first-ever Indian wedding. “The loudest experience of our lives,” they described.

Since the town where they were wasn’t really a tourist area, there weren’t many white people around. Jonathan and Carrie said they were asked to be in the couple’s wedding photographs since they were such a novelty.

There were over 1,000 guests at the wedding and Carrie and Jonathan found themselves on stage with the bride and groom—a neat and overwhelming experience.

In mid-June, the traveling couple packed their suitcases, off to Italy to see familiar faces. They met up with Jonathan’s family and rented a villa in Tuscany.

After a week with family, Jonathan and Carrie attended an Italian friend’s wedding and then housesat for her as she went on her honeymoon to Canada.

Following Italy, they traveled to Slovakia to meet up with friends they had made while in New Zealand. They spent two weeks there learning the culture.

One morning, their host wanted to make sure to cook an American breakfast. On the menu—French fries. Jonathan and Carrie found this to be very funny because that was the stereotype he had of Americans.

Before Slovakia, in August, they visited Auschwitz, Poland where ancestors of Jonathan’s were exterminated. “That was a really emotional day,” he said. But it is a place he recommends people should see.

Slovenia was the next stop on the map. Both of Jonathan’s grandmothers’ parents came from Slovenia. One of his grandmothers visited 22 years ago but no one has been back since. He wrote a letter to relatives telling them they may be passing through the area.

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He received an e-mail saying, "Please stop by and visit." In two days, Jonathan and Carrie met 40 people that Jonathan was, in one way or another, related to. "It was amazing to connect to all of these people," he said.

Having both studied in Germany before the trip, they were really excited to meet up with old friends in their next country. They visited four different cities in five weeks in Germany.

A highlight was Oktoberfest in Munich. "Once was enough," Carrie said. They did however enjoy experiencing it. Carrie even got to borrow a traditional outfit called a dirndl.

Apparently the way the apron is tied on says if one is single, married or widowed. Carrie said she made the mistake of tying hers on in a fashion that said she was widowed.

From Germany, they traveled to Finland to visit friends. They spent a month trying different foods including reindeer, moose and bear.

A ferry ride from Helsinki landed them in Estonia where they spent three days in Tallinn. "It was awesome," Jonathan said.

From Estonia, they flew to Barcelona where they spent three days. They then flew to Mallorca, an Island off the coast of Barcelona.

"All of those places have stories," Jonathan said.

The reason for landing in Mallorca was to catch a cruise ship home. This was the cheapest way they could find to get back across the ocean and home. This was their first-ever cruise and they enjoyed it, however, it wouldn't be their preferred way to travel. They did find it a neat way to get from point A to point B though.

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After a day in Panama and then Texas, the mountains opened their arms to welcome the Krafts home.

Favorite parts of the trip

If the United States was ever to kick this travel-happy couple out of the country, they said they would love to move to Munich, Germany or somewhere in New Zealand.

Their favorite foods came from India and Thailand. They now enjoy cooking Thai food after taking a five-day course while in Thailand.

As for indigenous culture, they really liked Guatemala.

The people of India and Vietnam really grabbed the hearts of Jonathan and Carrie. They feel these two races were their favorite authentic people.

One would think on a trip around the world, many souvenirs would be purchased. Not for this couple. In the 26 months they were gone, they sent only four small boxes back to the United States with things they accumulated.

They each traveled with one suitcase and a backpack. They each had around seven shirts and three pairs of pants. Each morning they woke up and asked themselves, "What's clean?" Whatever was clean was what they would wear that day.

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They both can speak German and English fluently. Conversationally, they can speak English, German and Spanish.

They found knowing English puts people way ahead of those who can't. English was spoken just about everywhere they went.

Future plans

The plan from here is to continue traveling. They hope to find a condo in Denver that will be easy to rent out when they scamper off on their next adventure.

They are looking forward to regrouping and spending some much-needed time with friends and family first, however.

They hope to put together a travel book full of tips and things they learned while exploring other parts of the world. They also hope to sell some of their 35,000 photographs.

Of course they will continue to build their online business and may even look for jobs to help them pass the days.

Their next adventure may not encompass two years like this last one did. "As much as we would like to, I think it's difficult for our families and also difficult for us to be away from our families."

In one way, two years went by really quick and in another, it took a long time.

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It's impossible to capture all of the stories and memories of this 26-month journey in one story. For every detail and numerous photographs of the trip, visit www.carrieandjonathan.com.

"The opportunities and abundance that exist in America are amazing," Jonathan said. "I think people forget that every day."

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