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Two travelers, one globe, zero fights

By BONNA JOHNSON • Staff Writer • August 3, 2008

They'd break in their hiking boots better and make sure to wear leech-proof clothing when jungle trekking in Borneo, but other than that, there's not much that Derek and Shanna Hughey would change so far about their yearlong honeymoon around the globe.

The Nashville couple left after their September wedding, and they've frolicked on remote beaches in India, topped towering mountains in Chile and trekked to far-off spots in Laos and Borneo that aren't in any guide books.

Now 11 months into their voyage and nearing the end, Shanna, 30, has started to miss the routine of going to an office every morning, while Derek, 36, misses watching American sports from his favorite chair.

Both lawyers, the couple gave up jobs in Nashville for a yearlong honeymoon that would include sightseeing around the world as well as meaningful volunteer experiences. They've also chronicled their adventures at OneYearOnEarth.com.

They've fallen in love with the people and places they've seen: the near universal passion for food the French have; the incredibly deep faith and reverence for the holy in Tibet; low prices and huge smiles in Thailand; universal, world-class health care in Brunei; pride in the past in China; respect for elders in India; the efficient system of buses in Chile; the wildlife in South Africa; and the ability to slow down and enjoy life in Laos.

Along the way, they raised money to buy cushions for babies who slept in wooden cribs at a Chinese orphanage, volunteered at a micro-lender in India to help impoverished women get small-business loans and created a library for South African children orphaned by AIDS.

As of July 29, they'd been to 26 countries and taken 63 flights, 52 boat rides, 14 trains, 65 buses and experienced only 11 days of rain.

The newlyweds swear they haven't had a single fight, mostly because they've fallen into a comfortable routine: Derek drives while Shanna navigates; he books flights while she makes [hotel reservations](#); he makes videos for the blog; she writes the restaurant reviews.

The experience, they say, has strengthened their relationship and confirmed their compatibility.

"We've gotten really good at reading each other's moods and knowing how to respond and when not to," they said in an e-mail sent from a hotel in the Drakensberg mountains, or Dragon's mountains, in South Africa.

The journey starts

The globetrotters met and fell in love in Music City. A lifelong Nashvillian, Derek was a partner at Bass Berry & Sims law firm and an avid [traveler](#). Michigan native Shanna worked as a law clerk for U.S. District Court Judge Aleta Trauger.

Derek had been planning an around-the-world trip for years and already had 44 countries to his [credit](#). Shanna, it turns out, not only made the perfect life partner but ideal traveling companion, as well.

"We're still enjoying each other's company, perhaps more than even we would have expected, particularly given all of the 'my spouse and I would kill each other if we spend that much time together'

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warnings we got before we took to the road," they said.

They've romanced each other along the way, less with wine and roses than with their abilities as savvy [travelers](#).

"I have been shocked by the man's incredible adeptness at travel planning," Shanna says. "I knew before we left that he had a knack for dealing with logistics, but I am starting to think that he should abandon the practice of law and do this professionally."

For his part, Derek says, "I continue to be amazed at how people are affected by and drawn to Shanna. Her personality and smile immediately put people at ease; it seems everyone wants to be her best friend."

Her infectious personality has made it easy to meet people and benefit from travel perks, he said, such as discounts on rooms, free honeymoon gifts at hotels and late checkout times.

"Some of the hardest days were our first few on the road," they said. "From that vantage point, 365 days looked like a long time to be away from home."

Christmas in India, where the major religion is Hinduism, was particularly lonely. They holed up in a nice hotel in Agra, ordered room service and watched downloaded versions of *It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Christmas Story* on their laptop computer.

"Given how much we plan to overcompensate next year for this holiday season's deprivation, you'll probably be able to see our Christmas lights from space," they said.

They plan to return to Nashville on Sept. 5, the anniversary of their departure.

They can't wait to look at hard copies of their wedding photos for the first time, drive their own cars, put on clothes that they don't have to pull out of a backpack and, in Shanna's case, drink American Diet Coke.

"We'll be spending as much time as possible with our family and friends and preparing for a move to Washington, D.C., which will occur a couple of weeks after our return," Derek said.

There's little about the way they planned their trip that they regret.

They've tried to stay away from places flooded with sightseers, although they're not disappointed with their stops in tourist-saturated Ubud, Bali, and Guilin, China, they said. "We're glad we didn't skip them," they said. "If we had, we'd always be wondering what we missed."

Traveling light with just two backpacks each, their obsessive organizing beforehand paid off. The only thing they haven't found useful is a fancy, laser-powered water purifier. "Bottled water is available pretty much every place where we can't just drink from the tap," they said. They are in desperate need of an extra laptop battery, though.

They long for home

The things they're homesick for are as all-American as cheeseburgers at Rotier's, which they actually do miss.

Shanna pines for blue jeans. "We're all North Face and Columbia gear all the time now. It packs up small and washes easily," she said.

A former D.C. insider, she also misses American politics, especially in an exciting election year.

And, she says, "Strangely, I kind of miss working. It is not so much that I long to go to an office, sit at a

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desk all day and have to meet deadlines. It is more that I miss being productive."

Derek misses small moments in everyday life, like going to lunch with co-workers, playing softball, hearing live music, working out at the YMCA and riding his motorcycle on the Natchez Trace "with a quick stop at Loveless Cafe for some biscuits and gravy."

With just a month left in their journey, they're starting to sweat the thought of returning to a 9-to-5 life.

"I am getting a little worried that Derek and I will miss each other once things return to normal," Shanna said. "I'm about to start a job that will require me to work long hours and to travel once in a while. That'll be a big change for us — right now, we're rarely apart for more than a couple of hours at a time."

While Shanna has a job lined up with a law firm in Washington, D.C., Derek left his options open.

"I've heard many travelers discuss how difficult 're-entry' can be," he said. "When you are on a trip like this, each day is full of something exciting and new, filled with interesting people, unusual tastes and difficult challenges. As you enter into the routine of life back home, it can sometimes feel a little easy and, well, boring compared to life on the road."

But moving to a new city and entering a new job should keep boredom at bay, he said.

Road offers lessons

Given all the new sights, experiences and food they've encountered, the thing that sticks with them most was a young girl they met in a slum school outside Delhi.

The 4-year-old girl, who is the primary caregiver for her 2-year-old sister, illustrated to them how her lot in life — her "place" in this gigantic world — all but pre-determined her future.

"By place, we mean not just geographically," they said, "but also the time, the family, the financial and educational situation, the color, the caste, the gender and more — has a terrifyingly large impact

on the rest of . . . her life."

The shoeless girl will get little education, marry in her teens and become a mother soon after. "Unless her situation changes dramatically, she probably will never use a computer, drive a car or travel to a foreign country," they said.

In contrast, their 5-year-old niece spends her day in preschool, has plenty of toys and clothes, and "her extended family and her community all will join efforts to educate her and to remind her that she can be whatever she wants to be when she grows up," they said.

"Until we began this trip and met more little girls like the first one that we described, we did not fully understand how few children have upbringings like the second," they said, "and how lucky we were to be two of them."

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The advertisement features a smartphone displaying the USA TODAY AutoPilot app interface. The screen shows flight information for a meeting on Sep 21, 2009, including flight A6 from BNA to IAD, weather for Washington (IAD) as Partly Cloudy, and a link to view a Flickr gallery of Washington. Below the phone, it says 'Articles: Hotel Check in Hilton Hotels picks'.

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Nashvillians Derek and Shanna Hughey hiked on Wulaia Island off the coast of Chile in Patagonia during their yearlong honeymoon around the world. The lawyers budgeted \$48,000 for the trip, which kicked off Sept. 5. They plan to return to Nashville on the same date this year.

A Nashville connection in South Africa

Derek and Shanna Hughey shot this video at the Sihawukelwe Lauren's Children's Home in Umzinyathi, a small, rural town in the Zulu area of eastern South Africa. The orphanage, for children whose parents died of AIDS, was a project founded by Christ Church Cathedral in Nashville and is now an independent non-profit entity run by Nashvillians. The Hugheys learned of the orphanage before their trip and arranged to volunteer there. In this short clip, Shanna plays a game with some orphans, Derek gets a few of the boys to bust some dance moves and Shanna shows off the library she helped organize of books donated from Nashville.

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