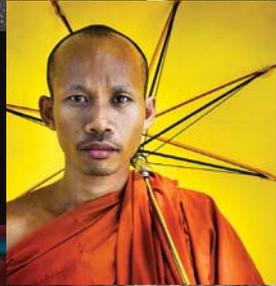


The Happiness Toolkit



The Joy of Travel

In this 1st anniversary edition of the Happiness Toolkit, Amelie explores the surprising reason why travel makes us happy.

by Amelie Yan-Gouiffes



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I met Caroline, a clairvoyant, when I was just 18 years old. She was the first tarot reader I'd encountered, and I don't really know why I decided to go and meet her. Maybe it was curiosity, or perhaps it was my mother's influence that nudged me. It couldn't have been because of fear. I was too young to be fearful of my future; I still felt that the world—and all the time in it—belonged to me.

All those years ago, I was studying law. I wanted to become a lawyer so I could defend the defenseless: orphaned children, the poor and those whose voices weren't heard. Protecting and fighting for the people who needed help the most was my passion, and I was committed to it.

When I wandered into the room to see Caroline, I was an ambitious law student who had no idea what to expect from a clairvoyant. What would Caroline say to me? What would she predict about my life's journey?

Well, I couldn't have predicted what happened when she saw me: Without saying hello she blurted out, "I see a dead person standing next to you!" Shocked, I asked myself if maybe it'd be safer to get out of there and fast. But I stayed. Caroline read tarot cards to me and revealed a range of insights about my life, from the romantic to the weird to the utterly amazing.

About halfway through the reading, Caroline looked deep into my eyes and asked if I was a tourism student. My heart sank. I was becoming a super lawyer who'd bring justice to the places in the world where there was no justice! I didn't want to work in a hotel, on a plane or at a travel agency. While noble, a career in tourism was simply not my dream. I rejected her guess, feeling a bit upset. Then Caroline explained why she'd asked if I was in tourism. She said she could only envision me on planes and carrying luggage up and down, again and again. Moving from country to country, again and again.

Well, that part she got right. Before I knew I would spend a lifetime traveling and working in over 20 countries, it seems that Caroline already knew. What she didn't know, and what I would learn in my journeys, was what the notion of happiness actually meant—and, even more important, what understanding it would



HAPPINESS TOOLKIT IN REVIEW

Wanderlust's Happiness Toolkit is now 1 year old! To celebrate, here's a summary of the happiness lessons we've learned over the past year.

1. OUTLINE CLEAR GOALS & PERSISTENCE

Know exactly where you want to go, and you can arrive at your destination. The Universe will conspire to get you there. If you face crises, remember that challenges are unique opportunities to start anew. Sometimes after the heaviest rains come the most gorgeous rainbows.

2. GIVE ALL OF YOU

Many of my life's most meaningful moments happened during my 17 years of managing humanitarian projects—when I focused on giving to others. Your sense of worth blooms when you concentrate on how to contribute to the lives and missions of other people. The more you give, the more you receive.

3. BALANCE SPIRITUALITY WITH MATERIALITY

I have seen people in the aftermath of natural disasters and war zones—people who lost everything—who were still able to continue choosing happiness. The secret was their ability to connect to a higher power, something bigger than the material: Mother Earth, the Universe, God, or simply Inner Purpose. When you connect with your inner purpose—what I like to call your inner diamond—you bring sparkle and joy to your life and to the world. When you lack the material, lean on your inner purpose for the strength you'll require as you work to replenish your worldly needs.

4. LISTEN CLOSELY

Listen without judgment or fear but with great curiosity and empathy. The best listeners don't assume and they are always primed to learn. So remember to practice active listening: Stand in the shoes of the person speaking and ask questions to help her express herself. Listen, ask and share to empower your spouse, children, friends and colleagues by helping them realize their own solutions.

5. EMBRACE CHANGE

Accepting change requires a mindset adjustment. To do this, imagine the worst-case scenario that could occur after an impending change. You may realize the worst-case scenario is not so terrible after all. This reassurance will help you realize you can survive despite the discomfort you're facing. Change is often for the good. Remind yourself that you are powerful enough to embrace it.

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mean to everything I ultimately chose to do.



Not long after my reading with Caroline, I ventured on my first—of what would be many—international trips: Leaving my French family behind, I rode a night train to Madrid to go and meet the world. I'd only planned to stay in Madrid for a year, but one year became two and then three. Before I knew it, I'd lived in Spain for six years, never returning to live in France, my home country.

At first blush, life as a young woman abroad might sound sweet, but it was not only the *dolce vita* for me. In Spain, I struggled with daily communication because I could not speak the language. I had to work hard. I was very young and inexperienced, and I wept tears of despair more than a few times. Despite ongoing challenges, I realized that every day was this wild, wonderful mix of novelty, overwhelm, and excitement. Each day was a journey—not always a pleasant one. But it didn't matter because I was happy.

My hardships faded into the background—and my happiness pushed further and further to the foreground. I was happy to be an explorer, as wide-eyed as a Disney cartoon, when I set out to discover my adopted city. I was happy to learn about an unfamiliar country from the ground up, with Spain's culture, food, and people growing increasingly familiar the more I travelled the country.

I was too young to realize it back then, but the reason why I was happy in Spain was not because I was traveling. Travel, in itself, was not enough to afford me happiness. The key back then—and today, as well—was a conscious effort to focus on the beautiful aspects of life,

whatever those may be. And, for expats and world explorers, travel happens to offer a lot of beauty and many things about which to be happy. Travel or no travel, the truth remains: Happiness is a choice.

I joined Amnesty International Spain as a volunteer in 1995. It was through Amnesty International that I was inspired to meet the people who—despite torture and deprivation—bravely fought for the basic human rights that we in developed nations take for granted far too often.

The only way for me to make this shift in my life was to enroll in a humanitarian aid organization. I applied and was offered a post in Iraq. One week before I was meant to move to Iraq, I was sent to the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina where I worked for a year as an aide in this war-torn region.

Then my life as a humanitarian worker really took off: I lived in Colombia, Haiti, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. I spent time working in Vanuatu, Jamaica, Mexico and Guatemala, too—in these countries and in many more places, where children do not have enough food, where war devastates countries and lives, where earthquakes bury dreams and loved ones.

Through my work with these people in many countries, with people who had lived through chaos, I learned that even the powerless and impoverished can teach us a secret to happiness: choosing

happiness as a way of being. No, it does not mean smiling and giggling all day. Choosing happiness is an approach—a conscious decision not to allow the circumstances of life decide your happiness for you.



One day, when I was living in Kathmandu, Nepal, I stopped in a shop where I found a postcard with words I would never forget: "There is no way to happiness; happiness is the way," it read.

These words resonated with me so much that I wanted to engrave them on my mind and my heart just to be sure I would never forget them. So, I did the next best thing: I got a tattoo. On my body, I now have a permanent reminder that happiness is a way of life.

Try as we might, there is no concrete way to *get to* happiness. We can't take a train or plane to it, like we can to reach Madrid or Kathmandu or Bangkok—however much we wish we could. Postcard wisdom says that happiness is a way of life, something we choose—consciously—to be. It's about filtering out the black noise of negativity and shifting our focus to the things

in our life that bring us joy, as best we can. If the offshoots of a travel-saturated life bring you joy, then choose to focus the energy of your mind on those good things.

Happiness is, and always will be, a way of being. And for me, at least, it is *the way*.

“Despite ongoing challenges, I realized that every day was this wild, wonderful mix of novelty, overwhelm, and excitement.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"Be The Greatest You" is Amelie's motto and commitment to support people and corporations in unleashing their inner diamonds to unlock their full potential. Amelie provides coaching, training and public speaking. You can find more inspiring tips and tools for increased happiness and higher success in Wanderlust's upcoming issues and also on Be and Become's Public Chat at viber.com/beandbecome or on Facebook at fb.com/beandbecome