

# MY LIFE IN TRAVEL

Andrew McCarthy is best known for his work as an actor and director, but he's also an award-winning travel writer. Here, he shares some of his thoughts on travel.



// The streets of Saigon

**FIRST TRIP ABROAD /** My first trip abroad was a family trip to Bermuda when I was nine. I have few memories of it except of my father's ill-advised decision to take his three preteen boys scuba diving. A far more meaningful trip, and the trip that changed my life (I have a friend, the great travel writer Don George, who says there is one trip that changes every traveler's life), was when I walked 500 miles across the Camino de Santiago in Spain, when I was 30. Each step was a step away from a fear that had previously ruled my life.

## FROM ACTOR TO TRAVEL JOURNALIST /

I had been traveling, almost always alone, for a decade or so. I tried keeping a journal of my travels but found I was an indulgent, lazy keeper of my experiences. One day I simply wrote down an experience I had in Saigon with a young man who gave me a ride on his scooter. I wrote it as a story, beginning, middle

and end – dialogue, a sense of place, I told the story of our experience. As an actor I came from seeing the world through story, so it was natural, and it captured my travels the way my journal never could. I wrote stories of my travels for years, only for myself so as not to be lonely on the road. I had no ambition for it other than for my own solace – until the day I did. I met an editor, the late and wonderful Keith Bellows of *National Geographic Traveler*, at a party and he took a chance on me. Everyone needs someone to take a chance on them.

**WHY TRAVEL? /** I was a terrible student. Simply, travel has been the University of my life.

## LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH TRAVEL /

No one can say it better than Mark Twain: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness."



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## MOST MISERABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE /

Going down the Amazon for a week, sleeping on deck in a hammock, with 500 locals and one bathroom. Sounds more romantic than it was. I also went on a one-day bus tour in Vietnam 20 years ago. I will never go on another bus tour.

## FAMILY TRAVEL /

Traveling with kids – which I do with mine often – is obviously one of the best gifts we can give them. It's also a pain in the ass at times and I usually come back in need of a vacation. But everything with them is an adventure; going through airport security, one of life's most miserable and enervating experiences, can be a hilarious adventure.

## I WANT TO VISIT /

I'd very much like to cross the Sahara. I spent a few nights under its spell several years ago and it lit a foolish desire. I want to go to Burma [Myanmar] before McDonald's gets there. I want to swim with the whales in Tonga. I've never seen the northern lights. Endless list.

## 2016 TRAVEL PLANS /

I'm supposed to go to Iran, which I've been looking forward to for a long time. I want to go back to Patagonia this year. And to Death Valley. And Rome.

ANDREW MCCARTHY is an editor-at-large at *National Geographic Traveler* magazine and a former global travel editor at Lonely Planet. He has written for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and other publications. His travel memoir, *The Longest Way Home*, became a *New York Times* best-seller. Algonquin will publish his fiction debut, *Just Fly Away*, in the spring of 2017.

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