

From France to Armenia by hitchhiking



I decided to travel to Armenia by hitchhiking for various reasons:

- To get out of my comfort zone
- To see the progressive change of culture
- The displacement of oneself
- Airplanes pollute

I left in early May because I wanted to have the weather on my side. I had also confirmed through which countries I could pass without a visa and I wrote in my notebook helpful information for each one of these countries:

- How many days it is possible to travel without a visa
- The number and address of the French embassy
- Areas to avoid (close to countries at war, independent regions, etc)
- Rules of security and hygiene
- Traditions to respect as to not offend the locals
- 7 basic words in each language (Hello, Thank you, Yes, No, Eat, Sleep and Drink)
- The exchange rate (to have an idea because it changes every day) and also where I should change it

I also had a vague idea of the route I was going to take but I didn't want to have anything set in stone, it was just to have a basic idea of where I was heading and to evaluate the minimum distance and time.



Concerning supplies, my thought process was the following: the less I had, the better it would be. For 2 reasons:

- The lighter my backpack is, the more mobile I am and the more I can enjoy my trip
- The fewer items I have, the more I depend on others. The more I depend on others, the more I meet them! And that is why I am here!

I wanted to have less than 15 kilos. Some of the things I brought: a few clothes, a brush for my clothes, tissue packets, a marker, a harmonica, Marseille soap (it works for everything!), a notebook and a pen, a knife and a lighter, a sleeping bag and a camping foam mat, semolina and 1.5 liters of water, pictures of my family, a secret pouch, copies of my papers (I left one set with my parents), a simple cell phone, etc. So I didn't bring a tent, a tarp, a camera, a wood stove with me.

Secret pouch, what an important tool it is! I sewed a pouch that I can wear on my hips, under my underwear, so you can't see it. I kept all my money, my documents and my credit card there. In my wallet, I had only a small amount of money for a few days and a paper with my identity information and my parents number for if something bad happened to me.

The trip was spread out over one month, but I returned to my parent's house for one week after a bout of food poisoning. So 3 weeks of traveling from Colmar to Yerevan, close to 4500 km.

A quick summary:

I started with 8 days in the Black Forest in Germany. I met a local and we worked on renovating his house for 5 days. For the remaining 3 days, I hiked. Then I started to hitchhike: Germany, Austria, Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria in Europe; Turkey, Georgia and Armenia in Asia. I tried to manage the time between rides and breaks by visiting the places where I found myself. I asked locals where it would be possible to sleep, the goals being to spend the night at a local's home. However, I ended up spending many nights outside, and some nights in hostels. My meals were quite varied: I frequently ate cold food, or fast-food, sometimes I was offered some fruits and bread. I also shared a few meals with truck drivers, or locals who opened their doors to me. I would say that, on average, four or five people gave me rides each day, for a total of about 50 rides throughout the trip. The first part of the trip lasted 10 days and 9 nights, the second lasted 13 days and 12 nights, making it a total of 21 full days, more or less. But during these 21 days, I hitchhiked for just 9 or 10 days. I wrote some more detailed French articles about my trip on Birthright Armenia: <http://www.birthrightarmenia.org/fr/news-fr> This kind of trip, I think, requires a good motivation – it's necessary to know why you're doing it. You don't need to be athletic, but you need to be able to walk a little. You shouldn't be afraid of risky situations (diverse and varied). It's good to have a basic knowledge of multiple languages.



Be resourceful, have a good sense of direction and don't be stupid, it can't hurt! But the most important thing is to dare, if we don't dare, it won't work!

For the "administrative" part: concerning insurance with credit cards, there is often built-in insurance. You have to call the bank to know in what conditions you can use it, for how much time, the zones and damages for which you are covered.

Or on the internet you can subscribe to insurance companies, like Mondassur, etc. A note for the French people: if you travel in European countries, ask "la Sécurité Sociale" for the "Carte Européenne d'Assurance Maladie".

I left with 400 euro in cash, I used 215 euro, more or less. That includes all the travel expenses: food, lodging, transportation, local sim card, internet cafés, post cards, etc. $215 \text{ euro} / 21 \text{ full days} = 10.50 \text{ euro/day}$.

So I spent, on average, 10.50 euro a day, which is a little more than I thought. In reality, a budget like that doesn't allow for lots of big expenses, but it was still enough to be able to sample local food, sleep under a roof when necessary, and a few small "extras" once a while. I think that it is possible to spend less if you are attentive, but if you are not careful, you can quickly go over budget. One day in a big city costs more than one day in the countryside. Western countries are more expensive than eastern.

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