

How two Gustavson grads made travel a lifestyle by Rich Taylor

Destination: Everywhere

For Nicole Wears, BCom '05, Kean Graham, BCom '07 and countless other Gustavson students, a backpack and a map of Europe were all it took to spark a lifelong passion for travel.

Yet while both Wears' and Graham's globetrotting began in similar circumstances, they have gone on to craft unique lifestyles that satisfy their commitments, career goals and wanderlust in very different ways.

For Graham, the realization that he could combine a thirst for travel with his dream to start a business came on a spontaneous trip to Peru. "I was on a mountain behind Machu Picchu," Graham reflects, "checking out the view and thinking about my trip. And I just thought, 'this has been the time of my life. I want to do this at my own leisure. I want to be able to work and travel, whenever I want, wherever I want.'"

Coupled with his previous experience in the digital marketing industry, this revelation led Graham to found online ad optimization company MonetizeMore. Now a



Kean Graham

Photos: iStock; courtesy of Nicole Wears/Kean Graham

successful business with more than 70 employees, MonetizeMore has also proven the perfect vehicle to facilitate Graham's wanderings: since 2010, Graham has operated MonetizeMore independent of location, growing his business from cities all over the world, armed with just a laptop and WiFi connection. Speaking to *Business Class* from Cape Town, South Africa, Graham highlights the business benefits of this arrangement—an arrangement that on the surface might seem detrimental to the successful growth of a start-up.

"Travelling and living in different cities is definitely better for networking," says Graham, "and I actually hire in the places that I go to: I've already hired two people here in Cape Town. I also attend

plenty of networking events and often have the chance to meet new clients. A lot of interesting opportunities and cool offerings can come your way when you're networking in a new city—that's actually how we ended up partnering with Google.

"And when travelling, you meet like-minded people that also want to broaden their horizons," he explains. "It's a very unique and fulfilling way to see the world—especially while building a business."

Of course, not everybody's personal and professional goals easily synchronize with a life of perpetual travel, but that doesn't stop them from relentlessly pursuing the destinations on their must-see list. Wears and her husband Cam were among those facing the conundrum of seemingly opposed career, family and travel goals. Living, working and raising a family in Vancouver, the pair wanted to plant roots for their two young sons, but continue accommodating a mutual love of travel that in just one year took them to over 35 countries. Through a combination of strategic budgeting, careful planning and a keen eye for flight deals, the Wears have transformed this long-term passion into a family lifestyle. Moreover, they have become inspirations to the committed professional/aspiring traveller demographic through their blog, *Traveling Canucks*, in the process.

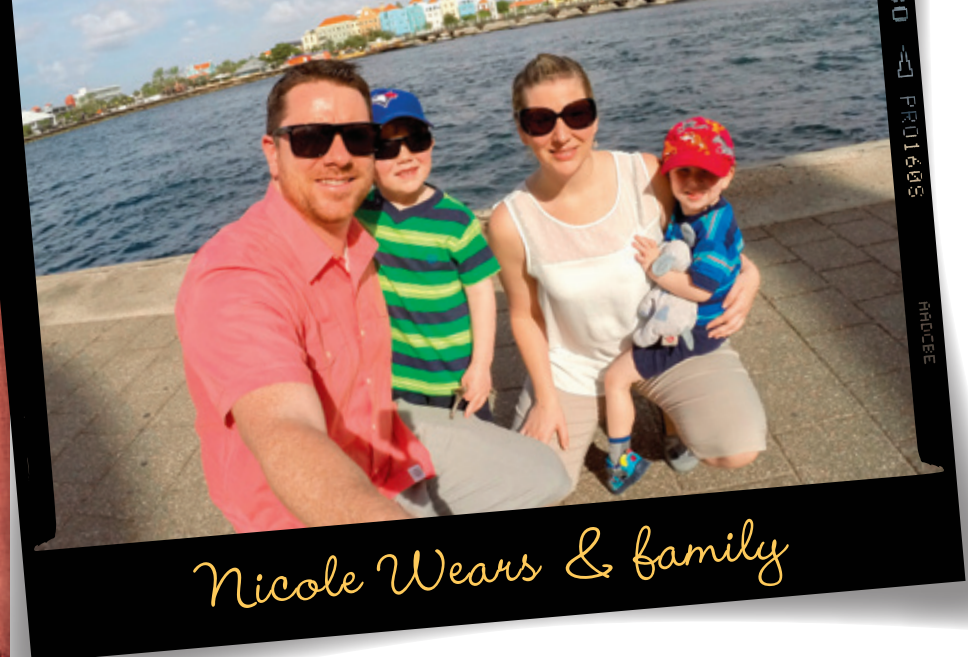
"I would say that a good portion of travel bloggers are digital nomads," comments Wears. "They don't have a home base, they do it full-time.

Whereas we have full-time jobs, so we travel when we can and prioritize to make it happen. That's one of the main things we talk about in our blog: just because you've got a full-time job doesn't mean you can't travel."

Wears highlights some creative steps to achieve this life/travel balance, from making the most of an air-miles reward system ("We just went to Ireland on miles!") to leveraging long weekends to grab a 10-day getaway with just four days off work. But of course travel is meant to be about freedom and relaxation, so to mitigate the potential stress of meticulously planning a trip, the Wears have developed one key strategy that keeps everybody happy.

"We recently just got back from Aruba and Curaçao. That was a decision between Panama, or Aruba and Curaçao, and we let our oldest pick—we said do you want to see beautiful beaches, or do you want to go to the jungle? He picked beaches, so that's the direction we went with that one, but Panama will probably be next year. We pick destinations with our kids in mind—but it doesn't stop us from travelling to destinations that we're going to enjoy as well!"

The takeaways? Do your homework on rewards programs and be willing to compromise to keep things simple. Don't assume that wanderlust precludes your goals as an entrepreneur. And if seeing the world is your dream, don't ever think you have no choice but to give it up. ■



Nicole Wears & family