

193. An Aarhus globetrotter reaches his goal.

Message:

The message of the article is to talk about achieving your goals, even if it is a difficult goal. And even if not many people understand it or believe that it can be done.

// This text is automatically translated from the original danish. //

To travel is to live, believed H.C. Andersen. On a journey you can experience new places, gain new insights and meet new people. For H.C. Andersen there was value in all journeys, big and small. In "A Foot Journey to Amager", from 1829, H.C. Andersen takes the reader on an adventurous hike from Holmens Canal to the east end of Amager. The point is clear, adventure awaits even on short journeys, especially if you think, dream and use your imagination along the way.

Travel can offer trials and challenges, but it also provides education, and can perhaps lead to maturity and insight. At least if you use your eyes. Which in today's world, perhaps, is not quite as easy as it sounds.

H.C. Andersen could probably make a completely ordinary everyday life in a cafe in Aarhus sound like something very special. An elderly couple fumbled with their phone. A younger couple immediately offered assistance and asked if they would help them take a selfie. The man refused on the grounds that he knew exactly what he looked like. A good point, you should look at the world, not at a camera with the world as a background. At that moment a message came in on my phone: "193".

The message was from Erik Futtrup. From Aarhus, a member of the Travel Club, and with a goal of visiting every country in the world. The number 193 refers to the fact that there are 193 countries in the world, and that he had now visited them all. According to the strict rules of the Travel Club, it only counts if you have been in a country for more than 24 hours. An amazing amount of adventures, H.C. Andersen would probably have said. According to Erik, there are only 3-400 people on the planet who have done the same thing, so it's big.

It was not entirely surprising that the goal was approaching. A few years ago I received news from Timbuktu in Mali, where Erik, wearing the blue headdress of the Tuareg people, seemed to have settled in well. A local TV station had apparently filmed him and a few other travelers, and reported that tourists had started coming to Timbuktu again. At the same time, on the website of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one could read that Denmark does not have an embassy in Mali, and that the ministry urged everyone to leave the country immediately due to the risk of kidnapping and terror.

Air travel has certainly made it easier to travel than when Jules Verne had his protagonist Phileas Fogg travel around the world in 80 days back in 1872. But the Earth is still big, and there are still regions and countries that are not so easy to get to. Back in 2009, many of us, in Aarhus and the surrounding area, received daily updates from the Moon Mountains, also known as the Rwenzori Mountains, on the border between Uganda and Congo in Central Africa. Where Erik and his Spanish friend Sepp enjoyed snow-capped peaks close to the equator, alternating with swamps and lush rainforest with unique wildlife. They both seemed to be having a wonderful time, while others might have thought that it was a travel experience that could be done without.

Near the border with Djibouti in Ethiopia lies the Danakil Desert, which Erik visited in 2011. For centuries, salt has been extracted in the area by cutting blocks from the dried-up lake bed, which are then transported by camels through the desert before the blocks reach markets in small Ethiopian towns after a few

days. As a tourist in these parts, however, you should be aware that in some places in the desert there have been locals equipped with Kalashnikov rifles who have not only thought about the comfort needs of tourists. For Erik, one of the travel destinations in the area was the Erta Ale volcano, the smoking mountain. From which astonished readers back home in Aarhus received detailed descriptions of the problems of consuming enough fluids when the water you bring with you becomes so overheated in the desert that it is not easy to consume.

Erik grew up in Thy with his brothers and a sister. You can tell from the whole thing that it was a happy childhood, without a single trip abroad, as that kind of thing was not something you thought about in your everyday life. I first met Erik when he had moved to Aarhus, and we were both working on an IT inventory management system. Erik was already extremely hardworking and meticulous in planning, and it was around that time that he went on his first trip abroad. One trip was clearly not enough, and it quickly became clear that the goal was to visit every country in the world. A quite dizzying project that you cannot complete if you are too easy-going. But with an indomitable will to get through, literally, all sorts of obstacles, it can be achieved. It also takes a little time, so from the first trip to the message that all countries had been visited, 31 years passed. Great achievements take time.

At one point I asked Erik what he had learned from having visited so many different countries. Silence. Obviously a silly question I could understand. Like asking cyclist Jonas Vingegaard, also raised in Thy, and now living in Glyngøre, what he had actually learned from winning the Tour de France. As it says in the Chinese book of wisdom Tao De Ching: "He who knows, does not speak. He who speaks, does not know".

And fortunately there are many who do know. On a trip with Erik we stood together under an acacia tree in the Masai Mara nature reserve in southern Kenya and talked to our local Masai guide Kios. Kios had become a tourist guide because, in his own words, he was the one his parents could do without in their daily work, and they had therefore agreed to let him go to school, learn to speak English, etc. "The stupidest child", according to Kios. Normally it was mostly lions and giraffes seeking shade under the acacia tree, but here it was us who spent a few hours together looking out at the Masai Mara. Pretty soon silence seemed like the best comment.

Football players are happy when spring comes, and you can feel the grass under your boots again on the way to the pitch. With the arrival of spring, Jonas Vingegaard can look forward to being on his bike again. And according to Erik, it is always a great joy, after you have sorted everything out at home, to go on a new adventure. Jonas Vingegaard has his Trine and daughter Frida by his side. And for Erik it is always important to mention that the greatest joy is of course coming home to Birgitte and the children. Adventures are best if you have someone to share them with.

Erik only managed to visit the last country, Sudan, in November 2025 after almost 2 years of planning. The British Foreign Office says that the airport in the capital Khartoum has been closed since 2023, but that Ethiopian Airlines sometimes flies to Port Sudan. So in Aarhus, many of us were not particularly surprised that the message "193" came from Port Sudan. But many wanted to know what Erik would do now that the goal had been reached? Not surprisingly, that question was followed by a slight shake of the head, and then silence. New adventures await.

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See the original danish article: Globetrotter.pdf (on my homepage).