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The Telegraph

Meet the millennial who has visited every country on Earth

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Move aside Michael Palin (96 countries) and Queen Elizabeth II (120). Sal Lavallo has just joined a very exclusive club of individuals to have visited every single country in the world.

And at just 27 years old, he's one of the youngest people to have achieved the feat, touching down in his 193rd and final UN-recognised country, Malta, in November 2017.



Sal Lavallo during his trip to Tuvalu, the 190th country he visited CREDIT: SAL LAVALLLO

Born in Indiana, Lavallo told Telegraph Travel he never planned on visiting every country on Earth. Having attended the United World College, a boarding school with students from over 100 countries, he had already spent a lot of time travelling the world to meet up with his old schoolmates.

It was only when he left his job as an Investment Analyst in Abu Dhabi in 2016 that he decided to embark on this mission, blogging from his website and posting on Instagram (@sallavallo) along the way.

We caught up with him to find out about his travels in “danger zones” like Syria and Afghanistan, and hear why he has developed a penchant for boiled goat head.

World tour Where it started and ended

2004

China and Japan

At just 14 years old, Sal Lavallo didn't know that this trip would kick-start a 13-year tour of the planet.

November 2017

Malta

27-year-old Lavallo touches down in Malta, his 193rd and final UN-recognised country.

My first international trip was to Japan and China in 2004

... I travelled a bit after that, but it picked up between 2009 and 2015 when I was visiting around 15 to 20 countries each year while I was studying or working full time. When I left work in 2016 I had already been to 115 countries, and in the last two years I've hit the remaining.

Visiting all of these countries was not about travel and tourism

... but rather about learning and building connections with people. I was always eager to see the nuanced diversity in societies around the world, so instead of researching only one place, I would visit its neighbours as well to understand how each is unique.

I tried to enter Ivory Coast by two different land borders

... but each was closed; third time was the charm. My Libyan visa was delayed three weeks, but it finally came and the visit was lovely. I was supposed to be in South Sudan on the day they became the world's newest country in 2011, but the border closed – that is my biggest travel regret – luckily I was able to visit last August.

In August and September I visited the “danger zones”

... of Libya, Syria, and Afghanistan. I was lucky that in each one I was hosted by family of friends I have known for years. These are all places that are perceived so negatively and known almost exclusively for their conflicts. However, within each of these countries life continues as, of course, it must! People still smile, love, and are human. From smoking hookah and watching football matches in Libya, to attending weddings in Syria, and paddling in swan boats in Afghanistan, I experienced such wonderful things in each of these countries.



Iraq was the 144th country Lavallo visited CREDIT: SAL LAVALLO

The craziest thing I've ever eaten was a whole bat

... in Palau (fur, teeth, wings, and all). One delicacy I've always enjoyed is boiled goat head – it gives you so many kinds of meat with the cheeks, brain, and tongue. I've had it in Namibia, Tanzania, and Albania. I also really love the Ethiopian dishes made of raw meat – gored gored and kitfo. I often find myself craving South African drywoers and biltong, and eat them whenever I can.



Beautiful Palau CREDIT: OPTIONM - FOTOLIA

The only thing I never want again is milk

... especially direct from the animal – I’ve had camel, horse, and elk milk this way and disliked them all. I remember in Mongolia being offered a selection of half a dozen types of dried milk curd... that was the hardest thing to keep down.

I first visited Tanzania in 2011

... while doing a project with Trail of Seeds, a small NGO I founded that did work on Culturally Inclusive Development. We worked in a subsistence farming town for six weeks, and I just could not get enough. The language, the people, the food, everything excited me and I wanted to understand it all. They have an ideology called “Tukopamoja” which means “we are together” that epitomizes their inclusive and community-based society.



Sal with friends in Tanzania CREDIT: SAL LAVALLO

I’ve learned that there is beauty and positivity everywhere in the world

... and that usually that beauty is within people. I am yet to meet a person that I am unable to connect with and feel similar to. From my guide in North Korea, the indigenous chief in southern Venezuela, my motorbike driver in Guinea, the refugees in Iraq and Nauru, sheikhs in Abu Dhabi, whirling dervishes in Sudan, activists in Timor Leste, Mexican Pentecostals speaking in tongues, Brazilian crossdressers, and playful kids in Tuvalu. When I look at a map I see faces.

Note that the Foreign Office advises against visiting many of the countries named in this article. Check its website before considering a trip.