

# DIGITAL nomads

HOW TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY AROUND THE WORLD



Esther Jacobs & André Gussekloo

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ESTHER JACOBS & ANDRÉ GUSSEKLOO  
[www.digitalnomadbook.com](http://www.digitalnomadbook.com)

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The authors are not responsible for misfortunes resulting from reading this book: jet lags, culture shock, broken relationships, lost jobs, spent pensions, etc. We do like to take credit for new friends, broadened worldviews, increased happiness, and the like. Also, we will gladly accept shares in successful digital nomad startups resulting from this book¼

**Sources**

The information in this book is mainly based on our own experiences and tips from other digital nomads. Contributions and quotes are properly credited. Some of the more in-depth research was done via internet. Where possible we mention the source. Getting to the original source was sometimes difficult, because the same information appears on various sites and blogs. So if you feel we might have used original information from your website or blog and failed to correctly mention its source, please let us know (as detailed as possible), and we'll update and give proper credit.

The secret of happiness is freedom.

And the secret of freedom is courage

*Thucydides*

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION BY CHRIS GUILLEBEAU**

**WELCOME TO THE FUTURE!**

**WHAT IS A DIGITAL NOMAD?**

**ABOUT THIS BOOK**

**LIVE**

**EIGHT REASONS TO BECOME A DIGITAL NOMAD**

**1) BREAK FROM THE TEMPLATE LIFESTYLE**

**2) LIVE CHEAPER**

**3) FOLLOW THE WEATHER**

**4) WORK FROM INSPIRING LOCATIONS**

**5) TRAVEL THE WORLD**

**6) MEET LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE**

**7) GROW!**

**8) BECAUSE YOU CAN**

**TEST: ARE YOU A DIGITAL NOMAD?**

**SCORE YOUR TEST**

**TEST RESULTS**

**DESIGN DESIGN YOUR OWN INTERNATIONAL MASTER PLAN & 'SIX FLAG THEORY'**

**1) OPTIMIZE YOUR CITIZENSHIP AND PASSPORT FOR MAXIMUM FREEDOM**

**PASSPORT ALTERNATIVES**

**2) STRATEGICALLY CHOOSE YOUR RESIDENCY**

**IMMIGRATION BY INVESTMENT**

**WHERE TO REGISTER?**

**DILEMMA: TO BE REGISTERED OR NOT?**

**TAXES**

**3) FIND A BUSINESS HAVEN THAT FITS YOUR NEEDS**

**WHAT ABOUT E-ESTONIA?**

**4) SAFELY LET YOUR ASSETS WORK FOR YOU**

**5) PICK YOUR PLAYGROUNDS**

**6) EXPLORE CYBERSPACE**

**COUNTRY SPECIFIC LEGAL AND TAX INFORMATION**

## **MINIMIZE TO THE MAX!**

### **REDUCE YOUR EXPENSES**

- [1\) REDUCE YOUR FIXED COSTS](#)
  - [2\) CHOOSE HOW YOU SPEND YOUR MONEY](#)
  - [3\) EARN YOUR INCOME IN A STRONG CURRENCY](#)
  - [4\) FIND A LOCATION WITH LOW COSTS OF LIVING](#)
  - [5\) BARTERING AND SHARING](#)
  - [6\) TRAVEL SMARTER AND CHEAPER](#)
- [17 TIPS FOR CHEAPER FLIGHTS](#)

### **DECLUTTER YOUR LIFE**

- [MINIMIZE YOUR STUFF](#)
- [DIGITIZE AND ARCHIVE](#)
- [YOUR HOUSE: HOLDING YOU BACK, OR YOUR TICKET TO FREEDOM?](#)

### **ON THE ROAD**

- [PACKING LIST](#)
- [WHERE TO STAY WHILE YOU ARE TRAVELING](#)
- [INSURANCE](#)
- [TELECOMMUNICATIONS](#)
- [FINANCIAL TIPS](#)
- [DEALING WITH BUREAUCRATS](#)
- [TRAVELING WITH KIDS \(OR PETS\)](#)
- [RELATIONSHIPS](#)
- [SAFETY](#)
- [TRAVEL BLUES](#)

## **WORK**

### **DO WHAT YOU LOVE**

#### **TYPICAL ONLINE JOBS**

#### **'MY JOB IS NOT SUITABLE FOR A DIGITAL NOMAD LIFESTYLE'**

- [WORK LOCALLY/OFFLINE](#)
- [TEACH WHAT YOU KNOW](#)
- [MAKE A CAREER CHANGE](#)
- [FIND YOUR SWEET SPOT](#)

### **FOUR WAYS TO MAKE MONEY ONLINE**

- [1\) GET A REMOTE JOB](#)
- [2\) BECOME A FREELANCER](#)
- [3\) CREATE A PASSIVE INCOME WITH AN ONLINE BUSINESS](#)
  - [NATALIE SISSONS' 3 STEPS TO FINDING YOUR SWEET SPOT](#)
- [4\) LET YOUR MONEY WORK FOR YOU](#)

## **MAKE CLIENTS COME TO YOU**

### **SHOW YOUR ADDED VALUE**

**WEB SITE**

**PORTFOLIO**

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

**EMAIL LIST**

**IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!**

**WALK THE TALK**

### **HOW TO PRESENT YOURSELF AND/OR YOUR COMPANY**

**MIND YOUR ATTITUDE**

**YOUR LOCATION CAN BE A SELLING POINT**

**NO EXPERIENCE, NO PROBLEM**

**DON'T COMPETE ON PRICE**

**DELIVER QUALITY**

**FOCUS ON RESULTS INSTEAD OF THE PROCESS**

**OBTAIN KILLER REFERENCES**

**TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS**

### **SHOULD CLIENTS KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?**

## **INCORPORATING YOUR COMPANY**

### **WHERE TO BASE YOUR COMPANY**

**DIGITAL NOMAD PROBLEMS**

### **HOW TO GET PAID**

**SET UP YOUR FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

**INVOICING**

**VAT**

## **WORK SMART, NOT HARD**

### **MINIMIZE THE AMOUNT OF WORK**

**1) ELIMINATE**

**2) SIMPLIFY**

**3) AUTOMATE**

**4) OUTSOURCE**

### **FOCUS AND PRODUCTIVITY**

**EMAIL EFFICIENCY**

**TOOLS WE LOVE**

### **COWORKING OFFICES**

## **PLAY**

-  
**STEP OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE**

**YOUR BUCKET LIST**

**HOBBY OR ACTIVITY**

**THEME**

**A CHALLENGE**

**GIVING BACK/VOLUTEERING**

**STAYING FIT AND HEALTHY**

**MEDITATION**

**BE KIND TO YOUR BACK AND NECK**

**BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES**

**FLEXIBLE GYM PASSES**

**SIGHT JOGGING**

**DIETS**

**FIGHT JET LAG**

**MORNING RITUAL**

**DIGITAL NOMAD HOTSPOTS – WHERE TO LIVE, WORK & PLAY?**

**HOW TO MEET OTHER NOMADS**

**MEETUPS & GROUPS**

**ONLINE COURSES & FORUMS**

**CONFERENCES**

**WORKATIONS & RETREATS**

**COLIVING PROJECTS**

**CRUISES**

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**



## DIGITAL NOMAD STORIES

Motivational speaker **Esther Jacobs** (1970) got ‘fired’ from her country for traveling too much. The Netherlands de-registered her, because her way of life ‘did not fit the system’, even though she owned a house, paid taxes, and ran her own business. Esther managed to turn this into an opportunity, and is now an advocate for the digital nomad lifestyle. The Dutch government now even seeks her advice on the topic!

**Rob Greenfield** (1986) is an American adventurer, environmental activist, and an entrepreneur on a mission to entertain, educate, inspire, and give back to the world. He traveled through the USA without a penny. He explains why it’s OK not to pay taxes.

Co-author **André Gussekloo** (1980) and his girl -friend Marta took their laptops and their cat on a trip to Thailand. The experiment proved successful, so they also traveled through Central America. They now live on Lanzarote with their baby boy, but still like to escape for a few months a year.

Freelance translator **Martina Russo** (1989) from Italy worked from the Galapagos Islands, and other unusual places. She loves to immerse herself in nature and likes to do extreme sports wherever she travels.

**Daniela Ramos** (1994) is a blogger and copywriter from Mexico. She has lived in the US and the UK and writes mainly in English. By camping, staying with friends, and hitchhiking, she manages to cut costs and visit many countries per year.

**Jacob Laukaitis** (1994) is an online entrepreneur, avid traveler, SEO specialist, and an occasional tech writer. Originally from Lithuania, he learns something new in every country he visits, and he is always looking for business opportunities.

**The Kortman family** traded their house for life on the road. Since March 2014, the family of six has been traveling around the world, moving every three months or so. Dad sustains their family (and three full-time employees) with a digital marketing business.

**Tal Gur** (1975) created financial freedom in one year after being in \$34,000 of debt. He now helps others to achieve the same freedom. Originally from Israel, he’s lived, worked, and traveled in over 50 countries across six continents. His main focus is personal development.

**Vera Ruttkowski** (1980) is a virtual assistant from Germany. She lived on Tenerife for two years, and is now exploring Asia for a taste of the digital nomad life.

**Laura Viviana** (1983) traveled a lot in her early twenties, and then found a dream job as a

copywriter on Wall Street. So how did she end up across the table from Esther in Southeast Asia? In this interview, Laura openly shares her journey, ups and downs and learnings. And indeed, she has a way with words...

**Hilda and Bas** from the Netherlands sailed with their small kids to –and through– the Caribbean. At first the project seemed too big and bold and was doomed to remain a dream. But when they made a hypothetical plan, it suddenly seemed realistic and they decided to just do it.

Half Spanish, half Dutch **Sylvia Lorente van Bergen Henegouwen** (1976) is as European as they get. She studied in France, lives in Germany, and has helped develop over 400 mobile apps. She took a sabbatical from her job as a startup mentor to travel to 12 world cities in 12 months.

**Marcus Meurer** (1977) and Feli Hargarten (1981) run a German travel blog and organize digital nomad conferences and digital nomad work-actions around the world.

# INTRODUCTION BY CHRIS GUILLEBEAU

Something strange happened a dozen years ago: the world split open. In a short period of time, a large group of people began making a living (and crafting a life) very differently than anyone had ever done before. They forged new lives without a fixed address. They set out to become intentionally homeless. Without much in the way of planning, they ventured to new lands and set up shop, only to leave again and move somewhere else.

Sure, there have always been traders and nomads—just look at the merchants of Libya or China from centuries ago. But those merchants didn't have MacBooks. They traveled and traded only with people they met along the way. If they wanted to journey long distances, it required a great deal of time and money.

These days, being a digital nomad presents countless opportunities that the merchants of old didn't have. From the pulse of your phone or laptop, you can connect with people all over the world. You can earn an income in one country and spend it in another. And as a bonus, you no longer have to travel by camel.

There's just one small challenge. Becoming "location independent" is highly possible (and many, many people have done it), but it's not always easy. You'll want to follow the age-old advice from Seneca: before beginning, prepare carefully.

That's how this book will help you. It's designed to be accessible and practical. You can read it in a day, but it can be your guide for a complete lifestyle change.

What does this mean for you? It means it's your turn to join the club. If you've been looking in from the outside, eager to choose your own adventure, you now have two important tasks to complete. The first task is to turn the page. The second task is to begin packing your bags.

Chris Guillebeau  
Portland, Oregon  
USA

Chris Guillebeau is the New York Times bestselling author of *The Happiness of Pursuit*, *The \$100 Startup*, and other books. During a lifetime of self-employment, he visited every country in the world (193 in total) before his 35th birthday. Every summer in Portland, Oregon he hosts the World Domination Summit, a gathering of creative, remarkable people. Connect with Chris on Twitter, on his blog, or at your choice of worldwide airline lounge.

[Chrisguillebeau.com](http://Chrisguillebeau.com)

“Once in a while it really hits people that they don't have to experience the world in the way

they have been told to.”  
– Alan Keightley –

# WELCOME TO THE FUTURE!

Not too long ago, companies needed their employees in one location to enable full-scale industrial production. But today, they've begun to understand that as long as employees deliver results, their physical location and work hours don't matter.

As a result, a new class of employees has emerged; people whose work is completely location and time-independent. They spend their time traveling while working — taking freelance assignments from the tropical island of Aruba, running their own businesses from Berlin or working for an employer in California from Buenos Aires.

*“My grandparents, who were born and raised in the Soviet Union, had a very simple idea of success. They wanted to find one job, and do it for the rest of their lives. For them, this was ideal because it allowed them to stay firmly inside their comfort zones. They wanted life to be uncomplicated and predictable: Go to the office at 9 am, make sure you look like you're busy all day, stay under the radar, and leave at 5 pm. Two generations and a few decades later, much has changed. I hate simple and predictable; I dislike offices; I don't want to stay under the radar; and I love being outside my comfort zone.”*

– Jacob Laukaitis –

People are much happier when they spend their time doing things they're passionate about while living where they want. As a digital nomad, you can do just that. If you like to play golf, you can travel from one famous golf course to another. If you're into sailing, you can charter a yacht in Turkey and sail to Croatia with your friends.

Dutch nomad Pieter Levels figured out how important factors like travel time, expenses, cost of living, Wi-Fi, safety, climate and entertainment are when deciding on your next destination. He created [NomadList.com](https://nomadlist.com), which is an overview of the best cities to live and work remotely, as well as the chat community #nomads ([hashtagnomads.com](https://hashtagnomads.com)) and [Nomad-Forum.io](https://nomadforum.io). Pieter is pioneering the new lifestyle. He only communicates through Twitter (professing that email is dead), and he has very specific ideas on how remote work and digital nomads will evolve in the next 20 years.

### **Pieter Level's predictions for 2035:**

- 60% of the working population will be freelancing; there will be far less people in corporate jobs.
- 1 out of 3 freelancers will be digital nomads. It will be more common to find jobs that you can do from wherever you want. As a result, people will not only be able to work from home or while traveling, but also from small villages if they prefer that lifestyle.
- Depending on your definition, there will be about 1 billion digital nomads. A real remote generation.
- Internet speed will increase up to 6G. This will make speed basically irrelevant.
- Big cities are going to claim more power. (They might even introduce city tax...) Cities are going to compete to attract digital nomads, for example by offering green cities, fast internet, and other perks.
- The price of flights will drop dramatically and new planes will be much faster. It will be super cheap and will only take a couple of hours to fly anywhere.
- Due to these lifestyle changes, marriage rates will continue to drop, and there will be fewer house ownerships and mortgages.
- More connected people worldwide and more traveling would also mean more international friendships, more online dating, and mixed race relationships.
- Children won't need to go to school (because they can learn online), resulting in an increase in homeschooling.
- Universities will offer more online courses, combined with on-site working sessions.

Basically, we are still at the start of a work revolution, but the digital nomad era is already taking shape. The pioneers of this lifestyle are no longer seen as 'outcasts', but are admired and copied. More and more people consider these pioneers role models, paving the road for the next generation.

With the publication of Timothy Ferriss's *The 4-Hour Workweek*, in 2009, it became cool to "Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich." His bestseller is sometimes nicknamed the digital nomad bible'.

Chris Guillebeau visited all 193 countries in the world before his 35<sup>th</sup> birthday. He turned this lifestyle into a business by writing a number of bestsellers, such as *The \$100 Startup*. He created *The Art of Non-Conformity*, a travel blog, initiated the Travel Hacking Cartel, and organizes the annual World Domination Summit; a worldwide gathering of remarkable people.

Natalie Sisson left New Zealand in 2006, travelled the world, and lived out of her suitcase. She wrote her bestseller, *The Suitcase Entrepreneur*, and now runs an online business that allows her to be location independent while generating a six-figure income. She is an inspiring example to her army of 'freedom fighters'. The digital nomad lifestyle has even become a status symbol. Tim, Chris and Natalie have many followers who are trying to design their own dream life. Some nomads gather their own following by sharing their experiences, choices, and inspirations.

So, if you've ever dreamed of exploring the world, this is the time to do it. It won't require sacrificing your career, on the contrary; it might even boost it!

# WHAT IS A DIGITAL NOMAD?

The first digital nomad was probably writer Steve Roberts, who started his journey through the United States in 1983. During his eight-year road trip, Roberts equipped his recumbent bicycle with more and more gadgets: a radio connection, a mobile telephone, a battery, a computer, and a keyboard that consisted of four keys on each side of his handlebar.

At the time, digital nomads weren't called as such. Instead, the term technomad was used by Roberts and those he inspired. Even today, there are still self-proclaimed technomads, most of whom are US citizens and drive around the Americas in RVs or campervans.

*“Digital nomads are individuals who use telecommunications technologies to earn a living and, more generally, conduct their life in a nomadic manner. Such workers typically work remotely—from home, coffee shops, public libraries, and even recreational vehicles—to accomplish tasks and goals that traditionally took place in a single, stationary workplace.”*

– Wikipedia ([bit.ly/wiki-dn](http://bit.ly/wiki-dn)) –

Defining the term ‘digital nomad’ is a challenge. Take a look at the situations below. Would you consider someone a digital nomad who:

- works online and travels twelve months per year?
- works online and travels three months per year?
- travels twelve months per year but makes only a small part of their money online?
- is based in one spot, but makes a lot of trips, always taking their work with them?
- changes countries every six months, living in long-term rentals?

As you can see, it's hard to draw the line between a settled and a nomadic life. And it's equally hard to decide when someone is ‘digital enough’ to be deemed a digital nomad. That's why we won't spend too much energy on defining what a digital nomad is. Instead, we propose that anyone may call himself or herself a digital nomad. That's right – you too. Now let's get to work, shall we?



# ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is an example of what digital nomads can do. We, André and Esther, had never met when we decided to write this book. It was completed in different parts of the world, in different time zones, and with only two ‘real life’ meetings.

In 2014, Esther published her ‘Handbook for World Citizens’ about her struggles with the Dutch bureaucracy, ‘forcing’ her to adopt the digital nomad lifestyle (more on page 34). She got so many questions and reactions, also from aspiring nomads outside of the Netherlands, that she decided to address an international audience. Merely translating the book was no option, however, because much of Esther’s experiences were based on Dutch laws. Also, the developments in the digital nomad world were accelerating at such a pace that translating the 2014 book would only result in outdated information. So, she endeavored on a completely new book, Digital Nomads, and announced her new project on Facebook.

André already ran the successful Dutch website [www.werkenvanuithetbuitenland.nl](http://www.werkenvanuithetbuitenland.nl) (the URL translates as ‘working from abroad’) and was considering an international version of the platform. When we exchanged ideas on Facebook, the idea of writing the book together popped up. In a few emails, we found our shared passion for the digital nomad lifestyle and decided to go ahead. Without any formal meetings, financial or legal agreements, any paperwork or other hassle, the project was created. The first thing we wrote was the back cover text. This forced us to decide how we would structure and present the book. Then we had the cover designed through a contest on [99designs.com](http://99designs.com) ; a first for both of us. More than 50 designs were submitted, and together we coached the winning one to its current form. We collected useful websites, quotes and articles in Evernote and Dropbox. Then we used Scrivener to outline and write parts of the book. We edited in Google Docs until everything came together.

We got to know each other a bit through occasional Skype sessions. André was mainly in the Canary Islands, because his son Diego was born there, about halfway through the book. Esther ‘commuted’ between a rural farm in Mallorca and different friends’ houses in Amsterdam at first and then cruised to South America on the first nomadcruise (more info on page 273).

We first met ‘for real’ in Barcelona (a bit weird, because we’d already been working together for a few months). During the first DNX Global Conference in Berlin, we had some time to really work together, interview other nomads, and finally sync our Scrivener and Dropbox files (which got hopelessly messed up again afterwards, because Esther was rarely in a place with fast internet). So, we can assure you that during the writing of this book, we experienced all digital nomad ‘problems’ (see page 161) first hand.

We divided this book in three parts: trying to fit all information and tips about the digital nomad lifestyle in: LIVE, WORK, and PLAY.

## LIVE

*How to make it possible.* Commitment. Habits required to become a digital nomad. How do you prepare for life on the road? Strategically design your international life. Minimize to the max.

## WORK

*How to finance your life. Purpose.* What's it like to work remotely? What kind of jobs can you do? How can you increase your productivity to gain more freedom?

## PLAY

*How to enjoy.* What to do with your new-found freedom. Where to go. How to meet other digital nomads. Mini retirements, workations and repositioning cruises. Giving back, sharing. What is it that you really live and work for? How to link LIVE, WORK and PLAY and put it all together.

Throughout the book various digital nomads share their experiences, eye-openers, tips and successes.

Most topics are specific to (aspiring) digital nomads, but many tips are also interesting for more sedentary readers or 'couch nomads'. For example, by minimizing your expenses, possessions, and work, you can create more time, energy, and freedom, which you can then spend any way and any place you like, even at home.

You can read everything in the order presented, but you can also pick and choose the parts that are relevant to you right now, and come back to the rest later.

We wish you a lot of fun reading, preparing, travelling, and sharing with others.

January 2016

PS: The world is our playground; let's take good care of her!

**LIVE**

***To travel is to live***

Hans Christian Andersen