

The First 30 Days

A companion for the hardest, most honest month — the first one.

Free companion to You're Allowed to Go.

Here's something nobody tells you. The hardest part of this whole thing isn't the decision. It isn't the visa, or the money, or even saying goodbye. The hardest part is the first month on the ground — because that's when the fear is loudest, the excitement has worn off, and you're standing in a strange place asking yourself, at least once, *what have I done?*

Every man I talked to went through some version of it. The ones who knew it was coming sailed through. The ones who didn't sometimes panicked, packed a bag, and nearly threw away the best thing that ever happened to them over a feeling that was always going to pass.

So this is your map of the first thirty days. Not so you'll skip the hard parts — you won't, and you shouldn't try. So you'll recognize them when they come, and know they're normal, and not mistake a rough patch for a verdict.

Day 0: The night before you leave

You will be more frightened than you expect. Even if you're sure. *Especially* if you're sure.

Sitting in a half-empty house, or a hotel by the airport, with everything you own in two suitcases and a life behind you — your body will do something dramatic. The doubt will arrive like a flood. *Maybe this is insane. Maybe I should call it off.*

Hear me clearly: that fear is not information. It's not your wisdom finally speaking up to save you. It's just what a nervous system does the night before a big leap, and it would do exactly the same thing the night before anything that mattered. The men who'd done it told me, almost

word for word: *the night before, I was sure I'd made a terrible mistake. I was wrong.*

Don't make any decisions that night. Just get on the plane. The fear doesn't get a vote until you've actually arrived.

The first week: everything is strange, and that's fine

The first week is disorientation. Call it jet lag of the soul. The heat, the sounds, the way things work, the small constant friction of not knowing where anything is or how anything is done. You'll be tired in a way sleep doesn't fix. Little things will feel like big things.

This is the worst possible week to judge the whole decision, and it's exactly the week your fear will demand that you judge it. Don't. Of course it feels strange — it *is* strange, it's brand new, and you've spent decades in the deep grooves of an old life. Strange is not the same as wrong. Strange is just what new feels like at our age.

Your only job in week one is to arrive softly. Sleep when you can. Eat. Walk a little. Don't try to "settle in" or make big calls or solve everything. Let the strangeness be strange. It gets quieter on its own, faster than you'd think.

Weeks two and three: the dip

Here's the one I most want you to brace for, because it's the one that ambushes men.

Somewhere around the second or third week, the novelty fades and the loneliness arrives. The first-week adrenaline is gone. You're not a tourist anymore but you're not home yet either — you're in the lonely gap between. You might feel a wave of homesickness, of doubt, of

what was I thinking. You might miss people fiercely. You might have a bad afternoon that feels like proof you've made a mistake.

You haven't. This dip is so predictable that I'd be worried if you didn't hit it. Every man does. It is not a sign that this isn't for you. It's a sign that you're a human being who just uprooted his whole life, and the part of you that bonds to places and people is doing its slow, awkward work of letting go of the old and reaching for the new.

What gets you through it isn't white-knuckling alone in a room. It's the opposite. Call home — not to be talked out of it, just to hear a familiar voice. Get out of your four walls even when you don't feel like it. Say good morning to one neighbor. The dip lifts, and on the other side of it is the part where a place starts, quietly, to become yours.

The anchor: build one small routine

The single thing that turned a strange place into home, for the men who did this well, wasn't dramatic. It was a routine. One small daily thing that belonged to them.

A morning walk on the same path. A café where, after a week, they know your order. A market you go to. A spot you watch the sun go down from. A greeting you exchange with the same guard, the same vendor, the same old man on the same bench.

It sounds almost too simple to matter. It matters more than anything. A routine is how a place stops being a place you're visiting and starts being a place you live. Pick one in your first week. Protect it. Within a month it'll be the thing that makes you feel, for the first time, that you're not lost — you're home, and home has a shape.

The reckoning: "am I too old for this?"

At some point in the first month — usually during the dip — a particular voice shows up. *You're too old for this. Men your age don't start over. What were you thinking.*

We took this one apart in the book, so I'll just remind you what's true. That voice is almost never about your age. It's fear, borrowing your age because age is a respectable thing to blame. You weren't too old to get on the plane. You're not too old to walk to a café. The men who proved this were in their sixties and seventies and they will tell you the only thing age cost them was the years they wasted listening to that exact voice.

When it shows up, don't argue with it. Just notice it, name it — *that's the fear talking, in its old costume* — and go do the next small ordinary thing anyway. Fear can't survive being seen for what it is.

Day 30: reading your own answer

At the end of the first month, you'll know something you couldn't have known before you came. Not everything. But something true.

Be honest with yourself, and be gentle. There are three honest answers, and all of them are allowed:

This is becoming home. The strangeness has softened, the dip has lifted, you've got a routine and a face or two you recognize, and underneath the ordinary you feel something you haven't felt in years — ease. If that's you, you have your answer. Keep going.

This needs adjusting. Maybe the town isn't right, or the place you rented, or some piece of the setup. That's not failure — that's information, and it's fixable. Lots of men's first month told them not "go

home" but "try the next town over."

This isn't for me. And if, honestly, after giving it a real and gentle month, you know in your bones it isn't — that's allowed too, and there's no shame in it. You found out. You'll never have to lie awake wondering. Going home isn't defeat; it's an answer, and a man who went and looked is a different man from the one who only ever wondered.

What you must not do is let *week two* make this decision for you. The dip is not the verdict. Give it the thirty days. Then listen to what's true.

You don't have to have it all figured out on day one. You couldn't, and no one does. You just have to arrive softly, expect the dip, build one small anchor, see the fear for what it is, and give it an honest month.

Be patient with yourself. You've done a brave thing. Brave things feel like fear before they feel like home.