

# What We Carried Home: Two Years of Travel, Discovery, and Friendship

A family leaves behind their home in Seattle in order to travel around the world for 24 months, with hopes of experiencing a great adventure and gaining an appreciation for what domestic life looks like in other cultures.



MARTIN PENNER AND TARYN ELLEDGE-PENNER,  
MATILDA (9), FRANCIS (7), AND VIGGO (4)

It was nearing midnight in Tokyo. Martin Penner and Taryn Elledge-Penner, surrounded by their three jet-lagged children and a pile of luggage, stared up at a map inside Shinjuku station—the busiest train station in the world—wondering how to get “home,” and what it would look like when they got there. Later that night, the family of five found their way to a friend’s place in Tokyo’s Nerima district, and home turned out to be a late-night bowl of ramen, soft beds rolled out on the floor, and dreams of the next day’s adventures.

A year earlier, Martin and Taryn had sold nearly everything they had, packed what they could and left their home in Seattle for an around-the-world adventure. Together with their kids Matilda, Francis, and Viggo, they started traveling full-time with hopes of experiencing what family life looks like in other cultures. By the time they arrived in Japan in May 2019, they had already journeyed through Europe, Africa, and Asia and had long since left the edge of the map they’d imagined when they boarded a one-way flight to Paris 11 months earlier.

Martin and Taryn grew up in small communities on opposite sides of the Canada-U.S. border. They met in 2006, and it wasn’t long before they were traveling together to places they’d always

dreamed about: Paris, Rome, Marrakech, Jerusalem, and far-flung Ouagadougou. Their first baby, Matilda, arrived while the pair was working in Paris—she was born just off the Place de la République while Parisians outside chanted for a better tomorrow. By the time the family returned to Seattle, they knew someday they’d be back out on the road.

Life in Seattle was filled with good friends, interesting work, and the clean water and deep forests of the Pacific Northwest. “We knew we were leaving something special,” says Martin. “But we wanted our kids to know the grandness of the world, to see and feel things that inspired them and, just as importantly, made them uncomfortable in some way. We wanted to turn them upside down, shake a bit, and see how different the world looked when we set them back on their feet.”

Paris, full of friends and memories, was an easy first stop. From there, the family’s path was guided by research needs for Quartier Collective, a boutique travel agency for curious families the couple had created on the eve of their departure. Italy, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Morocco, Sri Lanka, Japan, and Australasia—in 20 months, the family put 15 stamps in their passports, with stays as short as a week and as long as three months. In Greece and Morocco, Martin and Taryn produced special events called Family Gatherings, which brought small groups of families