In the transition from college to the workforce, it is not uncommon for graduates to spend time traveling abroad. The experience can be liberating, broaden world views and provide time to figure out one’s next steps. Indy Nelson, California ’15, felt all that and more as his post-graduate travels were a bit more involved than a typical backpacking trip. Indy is now a newly-minted Guinness World Record holder for being the youngest and fastest person to visit every country in the world. He visited 196 countries (the 193 recognized in the United Nations plus Vatican City, Kosovo and Taiwan). He took more than 539 days, Indy looked at the current Guinness records so he could make plans accordingly. As part of the deal to become the fastest person to visit every country in the world, Indy would need to revisit all of the countries already stamped in his passport, including North Korea.

“I got permission from Guinness that if you cross the 38th Parallel, technically, that’s North Korea,” Indy said. “I crossed the border at the DMZ, and that was, well, interesting.”

During Indy’s trip, he had many interesting—and sometimes dangerous—experiences. In addition to beautiful tourist destinations, he also visited those ravaged by conflict and war. On numerous occasions, Indy was detained at the airport. He was accused of being spies, and was broke. I was planning to start looking for jobs, but I kept wondering if it was possible to actually try something like this. I wanted to make myself a better person by seeing the world.”

Before setting off on his voyage, Indy planned all of his travel—from booking flights to securing visas—himself. Often, he would spend hours online researching the best ways to enter a country or obtain a visa. He planned the entire trip as he went.

On average, Indy spent three days in each country he visited. However, in several countries, he spent only a few hours, whether it be to avoid danger or because the country was very small. For example, when visiting West Africa, he visited 35 countries in 35 days but would spend mere hours in some, and a few days in others.

To verify with Guinness that he had indeed visited a country, Indy took a photo of himself there and provided copies of his visas, passport stamps, and evidence packet to Guinness, he also helds five world records. Indy has completed his journey Nov. 11, 2017, after visiting Yemen.

Since his travels have ended, Indy has focused on re-acclimating himself to a “normal” life. He has returned to California and begun looking for jobs. Ideally, he will end up in Silicon Valley working in software development. Regardless of where he lands, Indy now has quite the fun fact—not to mention resumes boost—to share during interviews.

“All of this has made me into a stronger man of character that I otherwise would not have been,” Indy said. “I hope to continue to grow into my character throughout my life, but in the last year and a half, I’ve probably gained 10 years of experience.”

Looking back on his travels, Indy noted the most important takeaway. “Sometimes the unknown is what can change one’s life. Sometimes it’s just about being open to it. Whether that’s pledging a fraternity or jumping on a flight to go for it.” Whether that’s exploring the world or something else, that’s what exploring the world is all about.”

“Sometimes the unknown is what can change one’s life. Sometimes it’s just about going for it. Whether that’s pledging a fraternity or jumping on a flight to go build something new, that’s what that’s what exploring the world is all about.”

— Indy Nelson, California ’15