



Backpacked: A Reluctant Trip Across Central America

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The laugh-out-loud new travel memoir from the bestselling author of *Mousetrapped: A Year and A Bit in Orlando, Florida*

Catherine Ryan Howard prefers bath robes to bed bugs, lattes to lizards and mini-bars to malaria. So why is she going *backpacking*?

She doesn't know either...

Catherine isn't the backpacking type. Working for one of the world's biggest hotel chains, she and her employee discount have become accustomed to complimentary bath robes, 24-hour room service and Egyptian cotton sheets. As for holidays, Catherine likes places that encourage lying - lying on the beach, by the pool, in bed...

She's been on what feels like one long holiday in Florida when her fearless best friend, Sheelagh, announces plans to backpack across Central America. With Catherine's US visa about to expire, her having no desire to return home to Ireland just yet and her common sense, evidently, on a day off, she agrees to go along.

After all, how bad can this backpacking thing be?

Um... *very* bad, actually. Catherine soon finds herself showering with the threat of electrocution, living with mutant cockroaches, sleeping on wooden planks, suffering from all but one of the side-effects listed on her bottle of anti-malarial tablets (liver failure, in case you were wondering) and riding a horse up the side of a smoking, lava-filled volcano.

And that's just the first week.

Backpacked is the wry tale of what happened when one *very* reluctant backpacker hit the backpacker trail and discovered that beyond the mosquitoes, bad coffee and flea-infested hostels lie even *bigger* mosquitoes, even *worse* coffee and flea-infested hostels whose bathrooms have no doors...

Backpacked: A Reluctant Trip Across Central America Details

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Ryan Howard**

From Reader Review Backpacked: A Reluctant Trip Across Central America for online ebook

Amanda says

I'm not much into travel writing, but until recently there was one exception: *I love* Bill Bryson. I like the humor, and I like the self-awareness while traveling aspect. And I like that it looks into cultures and attitudes and history instead of just places and things.

Then my friend Nicole went to England and started a blog, and my list of travel doubled.

Now I'm up to three. Backpacked is funny, and fun, and easy to read. The writing makes me feel the things she's feeling (or maybe it's just that we have similar attitudes to so many things -- notably, people. "I already knew that Sheelagh's social philosophy (strangers are only friends you haven't met yet) was in sharp contrast to mine (strangers are annoying morons you've thus far successfully avoided)")

Anyway, a quick, fun read, well worth the time.

Talli Roland says

I read and loved 'Mousetrapped', so when I heard Catherine had a new book out, I couldn't wait to dive in. I wasn't disappointed -- Catherine takes the same dry wit and self-deprecating humour along for the ride in 'Backpacked', the story of her travels through South America. From nearly falling off a horse on a vertical volcano ride to a bevvy of eccentric -- and sometimes downright threatening -- characters along the way, reading this travelogue made me feel like I'd gone on the journey myself. Highly recommended for anyone who loves reading about the extremes of exploration without actually having to endure the discomfort.

Olwen White says

This book follows Catherine Ryan Howard's trip across South America. I must admit, although it is a quick and easy read, I was left feeling a little disappointed. The focus is on her experiences of local transport, chicken buses in particular, local hotels and time spent sitting on buses. I know this is a blog style book about backpacking in South America, but, I would have liked a bit more info on the areas, the sights, the people, the Mayan ruins. She went to South America but she could have been anywhere. Having said that, her easy going writing style draws you in and keeps you reading to find out what happens next.

Anna says

If Bridget Jones went backpacking.

Kenya Starflight says

I never realized that travel books could be entertaining before I started reading a few on a whim. I'm not talking about travel guides, such as the Fodor or Lonely Planet guides -- I mean real-life experiences of travelers who have been there and done that, and who chronicle the good and the bad about the places they visit. Bill Bryson continues to be the reigning champion of the entertaining yet informative travel book, though Tony James Slater (author of *That Bear Ate My Pants!* and *Kamikaze Kangaroos!: A trip around Oz in a van called Rusty*, among others) ranks a close second in my book. Catherine Howard's "Backpacked," a tale of her backpacking trip through Central America, ranks a close third in my book -- not quite as good as Bryson or Slater, but entertaining and very enjoyable, and with a knack for capturing humor in the worst of circumstances.

Catherine Ryan Howard describes herself in "Backpacked" as someone completely unsuited to backpacking -- an unadventurous introvert who loves Starbucks, shopping, and five-star hotels as opposed to slogging through jungle, sleeping in hostels, and living on instant coffee and junk food. But when her best friend encourages her to join her on an expedition through Central America, Catherine, eager to boost her Facebook photo album with exotic photos, agrees. Soon the two are off on a trek through five countries, a trek that will have them climbing up (and into!) an active volcano, enduring cockroaches and the threat of electrocution during showers, rubbing elbows with obnoxious fellow travelers, experiencing the perils of public transit aboard a "chicken bus," suffering through unpredictable weather, and taking (and dropping out of) Spanish lessons. And though the journey is wildly unpredictable and sometimes unpleasant, it's always very funny.

I admit to almost dropping this book when I first picked it up -- Catherine begins the book with a rather whiny tone, and I think it was a mistake to open the book with one of its most unpleasant scenes. Thankfully I pushed through, and the "whiny" tone soon fades into self-depreciation and dry wit, seguing from complaining about the trip to finding humor in challenging or weird circumstances. Much like the aforementioned Tony Slater, Catherine is able to relate what should be miserable circumstances in such a way that the reader finds themselves laughing instead of wrinkling their nose in disgust. And the colorful cast of characters she meets along the way will make you groan and chuckle at the same time -- and let's face it, we've all met at least one of these characters on our own journeys, whether it's vacation or just in the grocery store.

Catherine also describes their destinations -- Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama -- in just enough detail to paint a vivid picture, without dissolving into overly flowery prose. She doesn't shy away from some of the rough edges of these countries, but she does make them sound like appealing vacation destinations. She also hints at ominous signs of these quaint, semi-hidden tourist destinations succumbing to commercialism, with McDonalds and internet cafes popping up all over the place. With this book being written in 2011, it's entirely possible that many of the places described in this book have vastly changed. Sad, but inevitable.

Catherine Ryan Howard is one of the funniest and most entertaining travel writers I've had the pleasure of reading, second only to Bill Bryson and Tony Slater. I see she's moved on to writing fiction now, and I enjoyed her writing enough that I just may have to move on to her novels now... or at least pick up *Mousetrapped*, her other memoir/nonfiction book...

Emily Crow says

Entertaining travelogue of the author's backpacking adventure through Central America. She is definitely a traveler after my own heart: doesn't like roughing it, daredevil activities or chit-chatting with strangers. If

only she liked birds I would have thought I'd discovered my new travel buddy! She has some truly funny observations along the way, but nothing to elevate this to must-read travel writing.

Leah says

Earlier this year I won a copy of Catherine Ryan Howard's non-fiction book *Mousetrapped* on Catherine's blog. It was just before I got my Kindle and if I hadn't won a copy (thank you, Catherine) I was going to purchase it for my Kindle when I'd decided to get one. I'm not a big travelogue fan, for no other reason than I prefer fiction. I mean, there's rarely a happy-ever-after, let's-skip-off-into-the-sunset ending on a non-fiction book is there? But I really enjoyed *Mousetrapped* and was inordinately pleased when Catherine sent me an e-copy of its sort-of-sequel *Backpacked* and I finished up my current book quick as you like and dived eagerly into *Backpacked*.

I'm not really known as being a traveller. I've been on holiday to Florida – twice – to Alicante in Spain and to Tenerife, where I now live. However I would love to be a traveller. I dream of doing a road-trip across America; of visiting Australia; South America intrigues me as a place to travel, but I certainly would never go alone, that would be miles too terrifying. *Backpacked* allowed me to travel to South America all in the comfort of my own home! I went to Costa Rica, to Guatemala, to Honduras, to Nicaragua and to Panama. It allowed me to visit all of those countries in South America and it seriously whetted my appetite for wanting to go to those countries.

Catherine Ryan Howard is our intrepid traveller, someone who prefers chilling in a 5-star hotel to backpacking through South America. But with no job, no home and nowhere else to be, Catherine figures going backpacking is going to be an adventure. And she's going with her best friend Sheelagh, who can save Catherine from all kinds of terrible things since she's a seasoned traveller herself! What follows is a 9-week adventure that is highly readable. At times when I was reading *Mousetrapped* (the predecessor to *Backpacked*) I found myself a bit bored with some of the longer ramblings from Catherine (I mean that nicely; the ramblings just weren't my kinda ramblings!) but in *Backpacked* it's as if Catherine has streamlined herself and it all flows brilliantly. I was thoroughly ensconced in the book and couldn't wait to see where Catherine and Sheelagh were going to next.

Catherine is an excellent writer. She's scaled back on the more information-heavy paragraphs, only giving us the bare basics from books about the countries they're visiting and it's a much more personable read than *Mousetrapped* was. Catherine injected such humour into the book that I found myself laughing out loud on many occasions, particularly when Catherine travels up a mountain on a HORSE! There are many brilliant moments during *Backpacked* and every page was brilliant. I felt as if I was part of Catherine's journey and she writes about the places she and Sheelagh visited so thoroughly and with so much passion that I'm tempted to hop on the next flight to Guatemala. *Backpacked* is just brilliant, I thoroughly enjoyed it and despite Catherine was indeed a reluctant backpacker, you can tell she did on some level enjoy it and I enjoyed reading all about it. I'd hugely recommend it to anyone, but mainly to backpackers thinking of going to South America 'cos Catherine really knows her stuff!

Ari says

I've never wanted to backpack but Catherine's style of backpacking almost made me consider it. Almost not really.

Sabine says

4.5 stars.

An easily flowing, fun and interesting written travel story. I couldn't 100% identify with Catherine since I am a bit more adventurous but that did in no way effect how much I enjoyed reading about the trip. I had to laugh out loud when reading about "Doc" since I am usually the one attracting the crazies.

Adina says

3.5*

This winter I made it my mission to read some of the books that have been sitting for a while on my to read list/kindle library or books left forgotten in my bookshelves for years.

My first pick is Backpacked which I bought on Kindle more than two years ago (I think). I do not remember how I found out about the book. I only remember that I thought the sample was funny and decided to give it a try. However, I never got to reading the whole thing.

This is travelogue but a very funny and this is how I like them. If I want to read facts I go to my DK books. The author decides ,against her better judgement , to leave with her best friend in a backpacking trip to Central America . The humour comes from the fact that she prefers well planed 5 stars, by the pool vacations to backpacking. As you can imagine she is stepping way out of her comfort zone in this trip and this creates a lot of funny/scary situations. I prefer my holidays to have more action than reading by the pool all day (which I also enjoy for 2-3 days) but I also prefer comfort so I understood most of her concerns. I never stayed in a hostel (except in Roskilde once for 90 EURO!!!!!! so it does not count) and after reading the book I'll probably never will. *

The book made me want to visit Central America as I found some beautiful places I would love to check out. However, I will not be going backpacking there for sure.

It was a funny read, some the characters she met there were quite outstanding.I might read more from the author, depending on the subject.

* I should mention that I go backpacking in the mountains and sleep in huts but I consider that a different kind of travel.

Paula Brandes says

Truly delightful! Loved this!

Alissa says

My quest for 2018 is to get through a large chunk of my all ready owned books. Many of which have been sitting there getting dusty for years so I figured I would do it the fair way and read them alphabetically (yay I'm on the B's). Some have been duds (for a time I downloaded anything that was free) but a fair have been surprisingly good, so I'm glad I've taken this quest. At this rate it should take me 2 years to go through my books and that's if I don't buy any in between.

Anyway, this book was a quick, fun read. I would definitely recommend it

Helen Dunn says

This is a completely light and fluffy memoir about a young Irish woman on a reluctant backpacking trip through Central America with her outgoing best friend.

There's nothing truly remarkable here but the author is funny and I enjoyed reading about her trip.

I saw that she wrote a novel and I want to at least read the preview of her novel.

Frankie Valente says

Absolutely brilliant - loved the book - but I am so never going backpacking. There are some really funny characters in this book, the kind that make you feel glad you are safe at home merely reading about travelling. The descriptions of Central America make me want to visit, but only when I am wealthy enough to do it in five star luxury. Great holiday reading and I am so jealous of the Facebook photo gallery that the author must have collected. Almost reason enough to dig out my walking boots and rucksack.

Rachel Fisher says

Coming soon...4.5 stars
