

JULY 21, 2017, 11:32 AM ET

I Paid \$650 to Be Sent Away on a Mystery Vacation and It Was Effing Awesome

This “Surprise Travel Agency” sends you wherever the hell they want.

BY KRISTYN POMRANZ

WARNING:

→ *No Peeking* →

until the day of your departure!

When my best friend Ashlie announced she was pregnant, I immediately looked up flights to go visit her in Denver. But for whatever reason, tickets had skyrocketed from the typical \$300 to upwards of \$500 for the summer. “I love you,” I told her, “But I am not spending \$500 to go to f***ing Denver *again*. Can we meet somewhere else?”

Ashlie lobbied back with the idea of [Pack Up + Go](#). I had never heard of the company, which bills itself as a “Surprise Travel Agency” — you pay a flat fee (the lowest rate is \$650), fill out a survey about your vacation wants and needs, and then Pack Up + Go builds a three-day trip for you to a mystery destination in the continental U.S. (from major cities to small towns). They coordinate flights, book hotels, and even provide itineraries since you won’t have time to research the destination yourself. (If they have extra room in your budget, they may throw in some bonus surprises, woohoo!)

The concept is perfect for people like Ashlie and myself. We are both working mothers who don’t have a ton of time to get away (so three days is ideal), and we also don’t have the energy to coordinate flights at the best times and lowest rates. Even selecting a hotel and activities can turn into a major time suck. By handing over all of the power to Pack Up + Go, we didn’t have to worry about any of those things.

Of course, there’s always the question of *What if we get sent to Ambler, Pennsylvania?* But that’s part of the fun! (Right???)

Since Ashlie is pregnant, we had a few specifications: Nowhere that could have Zika (adios southeast), nowhere that was extremely hot (adios south...everywhere), and no “adventure” travel. We also asked for no San Francisco (Ashlie frequents for work), and no Savannah (I was taking a trip there the week prior). These requests don’t *guarantee* anything, but the Pack Up + Go team tries to accommodate all of your wishes.




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After we paid, it felt a little odd. In my calendar I simply wrote “July 6 – July 8: MYSTERY???”

Then one week before the trip, we received an email from Pack Up + Go with the forecast and clues about our destination:

Weather

THU JUL 6		AM Showers	84°/71°	30%
FRI JUL 7		Partly Cloudy	86°/70°	20%
SAT JUL 8		Mostly Sunny	83°/67°	20%

I'll send over an updated forecast on Wednesday - hopefully Thursday clears up for you!

What to Pack

- Walking shoes (hint: you'll be covering a lot of ground)
- An empty stomach (hint: this city has some seriously good food!)
- A camera (hint: this city is known for its amazing sights and history)

So basically...anywhere. (It took serious self-control to not reverse-search the weather.)

A couple days later, I received a USPS package with the following envelope inside:



Followed by:



Because I am a pillar of self-control, I obeyed and didn't open the envelope.

Then, one day before the trip, we got an email with an updated weather forecast:

THU JUL 6		Mostly Sunny	88°/70°	☔ 20%
FRI JUL 7		Mostly Sunny	77°/61°	☔ 20%
SAT JUL 8		Sunny	75°/63°	☔ 10%

Wherever the hell we were going, it was going to be beautiful. I filled my bag with five random outfits that could cover me on everything from hiking to a fancy dinner and called it a night.

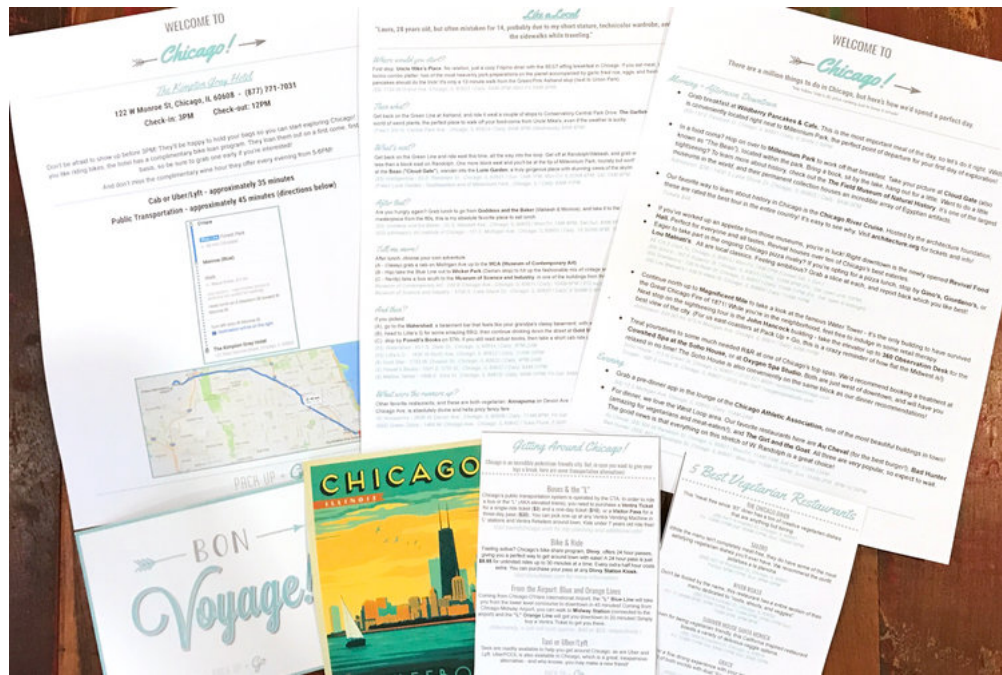
The morning of departure, I woke up like a kid on Christmas and FaceTimed Ashlie. "I'M OPENING THE ENVELOPE!" I screamed in her bleary face. I ripped it and revealed:



My instant reaction was, honestly, one of disappointment. No disrespect to Chi-town, but it just felt like the easiest possible destination for two people meeting from NYC and Denver; it is literally the halfway point. We've both been there before, and it wasn't exactly a "vacation" from bustling city life.

But the anticlimax quickly fell away as I remembered that, first of all, this is what I signed up for — a surprise! Secondly, I was going to get to see my best friend. And third, I had a plane to catch... stat.

Once I was settled on my American Airlines flight, I opened my packet and looked through all of the materials Pack Up + Go had sent: a map, public transit information, tourist suggestions, a list of the best vegetarian restaurants (per our survey), a ticket on a Chicago architecture tour boat for the next day at 11 a.m., a \$50 Uber credit, and hotel information (for [The Grey](#), a Kimpton boutique hotel — my fave brand).



I was suddenly really effing psyched on going to Chicago.

It is a huge testament to the Pack Up + Go team that they were able to get me amped on a destination I wasn't originally excited about. The experience start-to-finish was just so well thought out: The flights were ideal times (Thursday morning out, Saturday night back). The hotel was gorgeous and perfectly located. We loved that they booked us a boat tour so we didn't even have to think about it. And the Uber gift card wound up being enough to cover our entire trip, taking us from downtown out to Wicker Park, Lincoln Park, Roscoe Village, and more. Beyond the initial fee, our only expenses were meals and shopping.

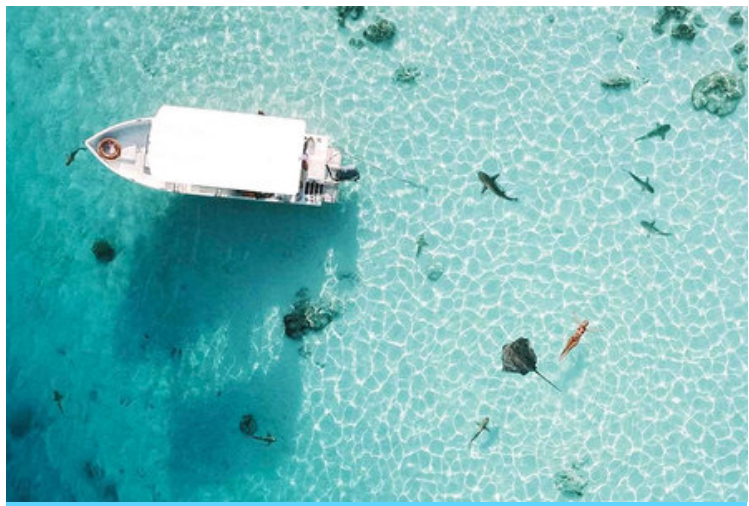
If I were to do it again (and yes, I plan to, and no, this is not a paid advertisement), I would give zero specifications and preferences in order to jack up the mystery level. 'Cause no matter your ultimate locale, the best part is the element of surprise — not knowing where you're going, where you're staying, or what you're doing.

It's the perfect trip for someone who simply wants to get away, doesn't care where, doesn't want to worry about the details, and is comfortable exploring a random nook or cranny that America has to offer. (But remember: You can always say "No Ambler, Pennsylvania, pls" on your survey, no disrespect intended.)

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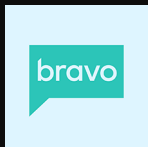


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