

Volume 15 • Issue 4
April 2022

Live and Invest
OVERSEAS[™]

OVERSEAS

Living Letter

Lisbon

Western Europe's
Sunniest And Most
Accessible Capital

Earning Anywhere:

19 Ways To
Make Money
In Belize

Overseas Living 101:

**Freedom From
Freedom:**
How To Shift To A
Car-Free Mentality
Overseas

Spotlight On: Successfully Moving Overseas... Despite A Global Crisis



Overseas Living 101: Your Monthly Tip For Tackling The Expat Life

Have an issue you'd like us to tackle? We want to hear from you! Get in touch with us at editorial@liveandinvestoverseas.com to send in your suggestions, and we'll add them to our roster.



Freedom From Freedom: How To Shift To A Car-Free Mentality Overseas

By Bart Walters

In 1977, my father handed me the keys to a black 1969 Ford Fairlane. She was my first car and I named her "Old Black Betty."

The things I did and the places I went with that car will forever be burned into my memory...

Sure, the driver side window didn't roll down, the shocks were too stiff, and only one windshield wiper worked, but she represented freedom. Freedom from teachers and classes and homework. Freedom from household chores and parental tyranny...

Freedom to go anywhere, do anything, and listen to my music at whatever volume I desired. The experience combined the thrill of a prison break with the awe of Alice in Wonderland.

For most Americans, the love affair with automobiles continues throughout our lives. Dream cars are dangling in front of our noses like carrots on a stick.

I remember people of my father's generation asking friends or relatives they hadn't seen in a long time, "So, what are you driving now?" It's a not-so-subtle

way of asking about your employment and financial status. Where I come from, if you can afford a BMW, you get one.

After moving to Thailand, my priorities changed.

When you live in a mega-city like Bangkok, owning a car is a hassle. The traffic is pure chaos, parking can be a nightmare, and if you ever get caught in rush hour gridlock, you'll never want to drive again.

During my first two years in Thailand, I earned a master's degree in public transportation. Skytrain, Subway, Airport Link, buses, shuttles... you name it and I've ridden it. Who needs a car with all those affordable options?

When I moved to the remote end of Phuket, I purchased the most practical vehicle for my needs, a 4WD Isuzu D-Max pick-up truck.

The southern tip of the island can be treacherous during rainy season, and since I was involved in construction project, the D-Max was the perfect transportation and workhorse.

When I moved to Ban Amphur outside of Pattaya, again I focused on practicality and bought a

Mazda-3. They are smooth driving, easy to park, and good on gas. Perfect for getting me up and down the coast and occasionally up to Bangkok.

I was quite pleased to see my progression from status cars (my last car in the States was a Jaguar) to practical vehicles. I felt like an evolved human to be consciously selecting the best machine for the task regardless of what status vibe I was generating.

Then, five years ago, I took a quantum leap and quit driving altogether.

It all started when I went back to the States to see my family. During previous visits, I would always rent a car to get me around, but this time I decided to eliminate that expense.

I rode my bicycle and used the ride-sharing service, Uber. I got some exercise every day and met some very cool Uber drivers.

I didn't take any spontaneous or frivolous trips out of boredom. I went wherever I needed to go whenever I wanted to go there, and I missed out on nothing.

The best part is, I saved a ton of money by not renting a car that would just sit idle in the driveway most of the time.



When I got back to Bangkok, I fell right back into the public transportation routine. Eventually I moved two hours down the road to Jomtien Beach, and I knew transportation would be an issue I'd need to solve again.

Sitting in my living room and staring at a pile of new car brochures, I made the decision to try living without a car for a few months...

Fast-forward to now and I haven't driven for five years.

I walk a lot. I take motorbike taxis for short trips. I can ride the *songtaew* (baht bus) from Jomtien all the way to North Pattaya for 20 baht. We have two ride-sharing companies competing where I live, Grab and Bolt, and I use both of them.

Even the taxis in Pattaya that should be metered are getting into the action by driving for the ride-sharing services. Once again, I go wherever I want whenever I want for extremely reasonable fares.

During the past 12 months, I've carefully logged my transportation expenses, including every motorbike taxi, ride shares, and long rides to Bangkok. My average monthly expenditure is about 3,200 baht (about US\$95)..

I don't have a car payment. I don't have an insurance payment. I don't have to buy fuel. I don't have to maintain a vehicle by servicing or cleaning it. If I want to have a few glasses of wine at dinner, I can get home safely with no hassle.

Recently, one of my neighbors bought a sparkling new SUV and took me for a ride. It was intoxicating. The new car smell. All the cool modern gadgets. I was immediately jerked back into the old mindset.

I could close my eyes and see myself cruising out on the open highway, blasting my music, and going wherever I wanted on my own terms. I started researching all the newest cars on the internet, narrowing it down to just a few that I might want to buy...

But when I went to the dealership, an odd feeling came over me. As the attractive salesperson approached with an eager smile and a fistful of brochures, I backed away from her in horror.

I imagined she was wearing a prison guard uniform and holding a set of leg-irons to shackle me to a car. I thought to myself, "I'll have to drag that thing around with me for the next 10 years!"

"Oh no, no, no," I said as I waived her off. "I choose freedom." She stood there with a puzzled expression as I bolted out the door. Then I called a Grab taxi and went home. 🚗

About The Author

Bart Walters is an American expat who has lived in Thailand for over 20 years. He's been active in real estate development and has written dozens of articles and essays about living and doing business in Thailand. Bart has also been a teacher at a major university in Bangkok and recently published his first book titled "Sunset Vertigo," a collection of short stories about expat life in Southeast Asia.

