



**Rogue gang
informant
costs Tampa
\$260,000**

Tampa Bay, PAGE 9



**Cockroach
cam comes
to Animal
Planet**

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TUESDAY APRIL 30, 2013

LOOK OUT, WORLD

**After graduating from UF, Tiffani Amo sold all
her possessions and set off to see the planet.
Why don't more young people dare to do this?**

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A long way from
her hometown,
St. Petersburg:
Tiffani Amo in
Australia's Glass
House Mountains.
tiffiniamo.com

YOUNG AND FREE

Plunging into the unknown

I'm seeing the world. You could be, too.

I am 25 years young. I have my youth, my health, my freedom. Nineteen months ago I made a choice to use them.

In September 2011, I packed my University of Florida diploma and the accompanying student loan into a cardboard box and stored it in my family's garage. I sold my car and gave everything that didn't fit into my suitcase to my little sister. I booked a one-way ticket to Indonesia and the rest is globe-trotting history. At the moment, I'm living in New Zealand.

People back home in America seem to think I'm some sort of lucky star, as if the universe pointed at me one day and said, "Tiffani Amo, you win. You get to travel the world." Well, that never happened. At the beginning of



TIFFANI AMO
guest columnist

my trip, it felt that way, though. When people would say, "I wish I could do what you're doing," I would think, "Yeah, I am pretty lucky, aren't I?" Today all I can think is, "If you want to do it, too, then why don't you?"

I'm going to skip over the parts of my life on the road that include living in postcard paradises. I won't talk about how satisfying it feels to book a one-way ticket on a whim, to learn a new language, to come face to face with creatures and places you thought existed only in *National Geographic*. I'll leave out the beautiful, ex-

otic people, the fast friendships with worldly travelers, the selfless acts of kindness by strangers. They are the kinds of experiences that people equate to "lucky," "maybe someday," and "if only." But life on the road isn't an untouchable holy grail. It's a very doable thing.

People tell me they don't have time to travel. What they mean is that they don't have time right now because they haven't yet set it aside. "Being busy" is not an activity in and of itself. Try this to-do list on for size: Get a life. I'm talking about visa applications, finding a place to live in a foreign country, getting a job, opening a bank account. All alone — no friends, no family, no one to lean on.

Amid the chaos, I still manage to buy groceries, do laundry and exercise, drink beer with new friends, go to music festivals. I take time to update my status online, to write emails, to send postcards. I find time to do nothing at all. I also find time to climb to Indonesian volcano tops to watch the sun come up. I go on 13,000-kilometer road trips down the western coast of Australia. I explore chasms in the depths of New Zealand. I skydive over the Coral Sea.

People say they "don't have the money" to travel. What they really mean is that they haven't actively made an effort to save any. Take a



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Tiffani in a chasm in the Wairarapa area of New Zealand's North Island.

THIS IS KENTUCKY DERBY WEEKEND!

FINAL LIVE RACING WEEKEND OF THE SEASON

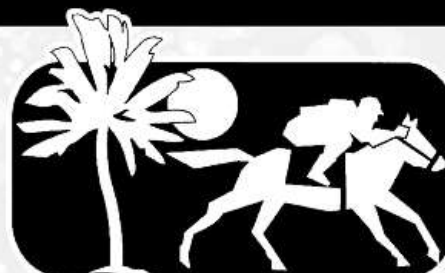
Scheduled to Run for the Roses is Tampa Bay Derby winner Verrazano, runner-up Java's War and Sam F. Davis Stakes winner Fallen Sky.

Saturday gates open early at 10:00am first race post approx 12:15pm

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minute to think about your expenses. Divide them into luxuries and necessities. Boom, money in the bank! It won't be easy leaving the land of milk and honey for bare-bones livin', but the Rolling Stones have some good advice when it comes to getting what you want and getting what you need.

As for student loans and the like, you have your whole life to pay them off. I'm in debt up to my ears with student loans, but while I'm young and free, I'm putting what I earn to good use. I've been through an abyss of mind-numbing work as a waitress. I packed mangoes in a shed to earn a buck. Sometimes I eat rice crackers and carrots for dinner to save a little.

Another thing people tell me is that they are afraid to travel into the unknown. First of all, the good stuff is always better than you could ever imagine. That's a fact. The best thing to do is to dream up the worst-case scenario and then accept it.

"What if I quit my job and sell my car and defer my degree, and then I go abroad and realize I'm not happy?" Then you go home.

"And what if my job won't take me back, and I don't have enough money to buy a new car and I've lost my scholarship?" Then you will have to apply for a new job and another scholarship and start saving. But at least you'll never have to wonder "what if?"

But the one concern no one ever raises is the most substantial: "Do I have what it takes to survive living the dream?" How will you cope with languages you don't understand, diseases you've never heard of, laws you didn't know existed, food that makes you sick? These are the types of obstacles for which there is no guarantee that you can overcome them, but if you never try then you will never know.

If you want something, you make a choice, you take a chance. Life's lows will always find you, but when you actively follow your bliss, the highs will be higher and they will last longer. Sounds like something you'd read on an inspirational e-card, but it's the juicy, sweet truth of real life.

Mark Twain said it best: "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Tiffani Amo grew up in St. Petersburg and is a graduate of St. Petersburg High School's International Baccalaureate program. You can read (and see) more about her travels at her blog, tiffaniamo.com.

Got a comment on this column?

Email tbteditors@tampabay.com.

Please include your name and city.

PRESIDENTIAL HUMOR

Who does Rubio think he is?

The annual White House Correspondents' Dinner is an occasion for the president to poke fun at a captive room of reporters, politicians, and celebrities. Here are some of Barack Obama's zingers on Saturday:

- These days, I look in the mirror and I have to admit, I'm not the strapping young Muslim socialist that I used to be. Time passes. You get a little gray. And yet, even after all this time, I still make rookie mistakes. Like, I'm out in California, we're at a fundraiser, we're having a nice time. I happen to mention that Kamala Harris is the best-looking attorney general in the country. As you might imagine, I got trouble when I got back home. Who knew Eric Holder was so sensitive?



- I want to give a shout-out to our headliner, Conan O'Brien. ... I understand that when the correspondents' association was considering Conan for this gig, they were faced with that age-old dilemma: Do you offer it to him now, or wait for five years and

then give it to Jimmy Fallon?

- Did you know that Sheldon Adelson spent \$100 million of his own money last year on negative ads? You've got to really dislike me to spend that kind of money. I mean, that's Oprah money. ... Sheldon would have been better off offering me \$100 million to drop out of the race. I probably wouldn't have taken it, but I'd have thought about it. Michelle would have taken it. You think I'm joking?

- I know Republicans are still sorting out what happened in 2012, but one thing they all agree on is they need to do a better job reaching out to minorities. And look, call me self-centered, but I can think of one minority they could start with. Hello?

- One senator who has reached across the aisle recently is Marco Rubio, but I don't know about 2016. I mean, the guy has not even finished a single term in the Senate and he thinks he's ready to be president. Kids these days.

- I'm also hard at work on plans for the Obama Library. And some have suggested that we put it in my birthplace, but I'd rather keep it in the United States. Did anybody not see that joke coming?

Obama at the correspondents' dinner on Saturday night.

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NEWS TALK

CARTOON: Walt Handelsman

NOW WE CAN BLAME EVERYTHING ON THE SEQUESTER...



TODAY IN HISTORY

1707: The Kingdom of Great Britain was created as a treaty merging England and Scotland took effect.

1941: The Orson Welles movie *Citizen Kane* premiered in New York.

1960: The Soviet Union shot down an American U-2 reconnaissance

plane over Sverdlovsk and captured its pilot, Francis Gary Powers.

1961: The first U.S. airline hijacking took place as Antulio Ramirez Ortiz, a Miami electrician, commandeered a National Airlines plane that was en route to Key West and forced the pilot to fly to Cuba.

1971: The intercity passenger rail ser-

vice Amtrak went into operation.

1992: On the third day of the Los Angeles riots, a visibly shaken Rodney King appeared in public to appeal for calm, pleading, "Can we all get along?"

2008: A U.S. missile strike in central Somalia killed the reputed leader of al-Qaida in Somalia.

EMAILS TO THE EDITOR

That plunge overseas requires some sacrifices

Re: *Look out, world (tbt* cover story, April 30)*

I read Tiffani Amo's article as soon as I got to my desk this morning. It brought back fond memories of my former nomadic existence: visiting temples in Asia, diving the Great Barrier Reef, exploring the jungles of Borneo, riding camels through the Moroccan Sahara at sunset. I had condensed my life down to two suitcases and lived the life I never thought was possible.

In the past five years I've traveled to 40 countries on six continents. It was amazing, life changing, inspiring and beautiful. It was also hard. You do not just sell your possessions and ride off into the sunset. You say your final goodbye to the grandfather you know you will never see again and then you miss his funeral. You hug your childhood cat goodbye as well, because you know he is old and will be put down before your eventual return. You say goodbye to your family and friends and watch them slowly move on without you, getting married, having babies, celebrating birthdays and graduations. You spend many a lonely night longing for a familiar face.

As hard as it was at times, I wouldn't have done anything differently. I came home with a newfound confidence and an appreciation for life and for the world that can only come from being present in the moment and truly living life to the fullest. As the saying goes, "Go big or go home." I was lucky enough to do both.

I hope there is someone else reading Tiffani's article who will make the

decision to live big as well.

Katrina Baumann, Clearwater

So, after college, Tiffani Amo packed up her belongings and headed off to see the world. She then chastises the rest of us for not throwing caution to the wind and "leaving the land of milk and honey" to "get a life" by taking what essentially is one long vacation. Well, surprise, Tiffani — some people actually do just that but manage to make the trip a little more meaningful.

After high school, my daughter set off to see the world. She visited Turkey, Greece and Bahrain, living for an extended time in Sicily and Cuba, taking some side trips to a few countries in the Middle East (some trips via big scary helicopters) and in the process learned boatloads about other cultures as well as herself. She even managed to pick up a bachelor's degree along the way. She also took an amazing nine-month cruise to the North Arabian sea: aboard the USS *John F. Kennedy*, a Navy aircraft carrier, in a time of war.

Rather than taking a few months to do a little "globe trotting," she did the same globe trotting but managed to make the trip more than just about herself. Tiffani Amo is to be congratulated on her adventurous spirit, but her condescending attitude toward those who do not follow in her footsteps says volumes.

Deborah Williams, Wesley Chapel

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