

# Digital Nomads: A Lifestyle

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## ABSTRACT

This research briefly describes the technology, techniques, and savvy of present day digital nomads. Advantages, disadvantages, and rewards of being a traveling techie are outlined with respect with today's bleeding edge technology and software.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- (i) What is a Digital Nomad?
  - Brief explanation
  - Types of Nomads
- (ii) Technology Requirements
  - Basic requirements
  - Software updates/Security/Back-ups
  - Open-source/Cloud computing
- (iii) Opportunities
  - Finding work
  - Challenges:
    - (a) Distance work
    - (b) Distractions
    - (c) Money
    - (d) Travel
- (iv) Travel
  - Emphasizing flexibility
  - Cheap places to live
  - Tricks of the Trade
- (v) Conclusion

We are all digital nomads to an extent with the technology present students and professionals use on a regular basis: smart phones, laptops, wifi capability, wireless service through a cell phone providers, etc.

*Being a digital nomad means keeping up with the latest gadgets and trends.*

[1]

As in any lifestyle, being a digital nomad requires certain attributes and choices. Of course, there is a certain tech-savvy awareness required along with some associated equipment. Not only is it important to stay up to date with developing tech to keep communication fluid and current, but also software improvements to enhance and protect any information stored and transmitted. This lifestyle implies the necessity for regular travel, which in turn requires a digital nomad to be flexible, open-minded, and ready to leave at the drop of a hat.

It can be considered that digital nomads are separated into three classes:

- Road Warriors:

*People whose regular job required constant travel--salesmen, executives, managers and technical folks with far-flung teams--were nomads before they were digital nomads. [4]*

- Telecommuters:

*People whose regular job can be done on a computer were digital before they were nomads. Bosses never liked telecommuting--if they couldn't walk over and see you working, they were pretty sure that you probably weren't.*

[4]

- Freelancers:

*The technology is cheap and easy. If you don't have a regular job, you don't need to get anyone's permission to telecommute. As a freelancer, you can work wherever, whenever, and however you want. The limiting factor is earning enough money to support yourself.* [4]

These classes can be further described as either being attached to a common workplace or simply self-employed.

There are some basic requirements for being productive on the road. A mobile device, power, and connectivity are the most essential requirements for any digital nomad. Other important factors in distance working are security, storage, and back-up methods. Not only is it important that information reaches its destination, but also that it is secure and stored in case of loss or corruption. Implementing open-source software is an excellent method for cutting cost (saving on otherwise expensive software) and allowing the digital nomad to heavily modify/personalize work suites to their own needs. Cloud computing is another great method for accessing software and storing information.

There are many career types that lend themselves to accommodating this kind of lifestyle. Consulting, web/graphic design, information products, freelancing, and programming are just a few choices a digital nomad may take up while on the road. Many digital nomads do several of these and many others in

tandem, creating an ever changing work experience. One is only limited by their own drive and imagination – there may even be untapped job markets that a digital nomad can introduce or expand.

Living this lifestyle seems quite glamorous at first glance but as in anything else there are some disadvantages that shouldn't be overlooked. Probably the most prominent disadvantage is that working as a digital nomad is inconsistent. Working for a business or corporation has set hours, wage, and work load. Online business carries none of those features.

*The major drawback to being a digital nomad is that you spend a lot of time looking for new clients. You also have to work really hard to build new income streams so you never have to worry about your money running dry. Both of these tasks require tons of learning and research in order to stay up to date with what is happening on the web. [2]*

*Depending on your industry, if it takes 3 months to find a new job, give yourself at least twice as much to find remote work. It's out there. [4]*

There are several disadvantages revolving around cooperative group projects among digital nomads/distance workers. These include the following:

- *Interpersonal relationships can become mechanical because there is no personal connection between employees*
- *Team building is enhanced by live interaction between employees. Trivial (but critical) side conversations build a foundation of understanding*

*between people who otherwise would interpret interactions from a purely objective and reserved perspective*

- *Brainstorming can be stifled by a lack of live interactivity*
- *Otherwise good employees are sometimes overlooked because they don't have the necessary technical skill set to make mobile work feasible*
- *Distractions in digital nomad environments (e.g. coffee shops, shared workspaces, basements, home offices) can dilute focus*
- *Infrastructure is sometimes reliant on consumer-oriented services. For example, consumer Internet access, electricity. Gaps in service are outside the organization's control. [3]*

Distractions are another simple, yet possibly devastating disadvantage of being a digital nomad. Being in a beautiful, calming environment or a vibrant, active area can be immensely counterproductive. Besides these complications in the group work aspect, digital nomads are at the mercy of their devices' battery life, connectivity, and durability. Also its important to keep up with regular backups and encryption to protect personal information and work since a digital nomad will more than likely be handling finances and travel by means of their wireless devices.

*Don't forget that living overseas is often much cheaper than living in the States. While it might take \$60,000 to live comfortably in Connecticut, a mere \$20,000 somewhere else could be sufficient. [4]*

It is very possible to live comfortably on a lesser salary than expected if living overseas or in a different area. Traveling/Living abroad to work as a digital nomad takes planning and risk – willing to leave a stationary base of operations takes

courage. Some of the cheapest places to live include the Philippines, Cambodia, areas of South America, to name a few. It's important to remember, living in exotic, cost-efficient surroundings can lend itself to hardships of connectivity and security breaches. Keep in mind that, as often stated, you get what you pay for.

It's true there are several obstacles to an otherwise picturesque lifestyle, but the benefits far exceed the negatives. Like most programmers/CS students, I work primarily at night. Being a digital nomad opens the possibility to program at 3:00 in the morning on a netbook, sipping coffee overlooking the Gulf of Mexico from Pensacola Beach. Being free to work from anywhere, at any time is what being a digital nomad is all about. Keeping up with trendy gadgets and bleeding edge software is not a disadvantage in my opinion either. The digital nomad lifestyle, as in most things, is a constant learning experience and one that everyone should at least consider with developing tech and information today.

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