

## Beer, women, fun—the backpacking ritual comes to (unscripted) TV life

**W**hen mates James Grech, Lee Mahoney and Mick Middleton—they all grew up in Colac, Victoria, pop. 10,164—headed to Europe in 2004, they were toting camcorders, not just Leatherman tools. They filmed more than 450 hours of their rite-of-passage adventures, roaring through 20 countries in an old Ford Transit van they nicknamed Van Damme. “Our aim was to try everything, eat everything, do everything,” says Mick. Was there lots of cheap booze every day? “Yes.”

The result is *Backpackers*, a 26-episode reality-TV road trip, complete with disasters (a brush with death in Italy’s Blue Grotto, emergency dentist trips, having to use the elastic top on underpants as a fan belt) and triumphs. A cult hit in Canada, Hungary, Malaysia and New Zealand, the show—now airing on Channel [V]—was pulled together in makeshift editing and recording suites in the trio’s Melbourne flat. They share travel tips with WHO:

Lee, 26, mechanic and ice-cream maker: “Just go out there and do it. If you’ve ever wanted to travel, it’s not a big world. As soon as you land, keep a tight hold on the money. Convince yourself to be a tight arse.”

Mick, 27, TV editor: “Walk in sunny parts of the street because the gypsies try to avoid the sun so there’s less chance of being pick-pocketed.”

James, 26, pizza chef: “Don’t have a solid itinerary. If you plan everything before you leave, you eliminate your chances of brilliant random things happening.” ■



Mick Middleton

James Grech

Lee Mahoney



# Backpacking up

PHOTOGRAPH BY JULIAN KINGMA