

Transcript of Podcast Episode 025 – Privilege in Travel

{Intro}

MATTHEW: Even just having the chance to make a choice between countries that you would like to travel to puts you in a privileged position compared to many across the world. So I think for me just having the chance to travel anywhere at all should be considered a privilege.

{intro music – jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello, and thank you for downloading. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a weekly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

Okay, I didn't drop an episode last week. This was partly because I didn't have all the submissions ready until the weekend, and by the time I did, I just didn't feel it was appropriate to knock an episode off quickly. I tried to think what else I could talk about instead, but in the end decided I should just leave a proper episode off till this week.

I did do a spot of recording though, which I dropped onto my Patreon (subscriptions start at £1.99/month), about VE Day. Which may seem like a weird thing to drop onto a travel pod's Patreon account, but bear with me on this.

See, I've been wondering for a bit about this whole theme of late. Some of you may know I have a hand in a left-leaning political podcast called 'Ungagged'; by 'a hand in' I mean I occasionally contribute, but more importantly the website is hosted in my webspace for, uhm, complicated reasons. Anyway, I was musing about whether I should go down that route of politics a bit more now, especially as I have things to say, people's voices to amplify, and no-one's going to do any travelling so a third of my current podcast theme (the 'different ways you travel' bit) is kinda redundant. Obviously I can still do destination pods as that serves as both local interest and as the same principles as travel documentaries serve to people who'd never go to those places anyway - I talked a bit about that in my Travel Hopes pod a couple of weeks ago, but it also relates in part to this one.

In addition, because I didn't have anything else to hand for a pod, and because I felt I'd neglected the Patreon a bit this week, it seemed the most obvious and easiest thing to do. I was going to talk a bit about Asexual Visibility Day, which at the time would have felt like quite a strong mood whiplash, although on Asexual Twitter in the days afterwards, there was a bit of an argument about it. But then I've already spoken about Asexuality in a previous pod, which will surely be mentioned again later for different reasons.

As an aside, regarding asexuality, I'd previously mentioned to Asexual Twitter that most of the leading activists in the Asexual community were British (a fact that became relevant with regards Asexual Visibility Day as it's the same day as VE Day), and a friend online asked me yesterday 'so who are the most visible asexuals in the USA?'. At the time of my research, Wikipedia lists precisely 8 Asexual Men and 8 Asexual Women who are notable enough to be listed on their site; this is worldwide, note, and the latter includes Caitlyn Jenner whose connections to asexuality seem to be quite 'dubious', even by her own admission. There are 11 Fictional Asexuals, and yesterday I learned that, canonically, Spongebob Squarepants is asexual. I don't quite know what to do with this information, nor how much that's going to change my life knowing that one of the leading asexual rolemodels is a yellow sponge, but hey.

I've also been reminded of my political bent with my recent blog posts; I'm now only four years late with them as I'm now talking a bit about my adventures in Southern Africa in January 2016. And while the posts started off quite fresh and benign, with tales of seeing elephants and not bungee jumping, I ended up getting a bit deeper than I'd intended into more profound topics; firstly colonialism and then Apartheid, and I was thinking as I was writing them – I kinda enjoy this slightly more than I do writing general overview posts of countries.

One possible branching I could do of course is to create my own, separate, political-themed podcast where I talk about things like VE Day directly. There's a few travel-related political-tinged pods or blog posts I've got on my 'things I should be doing list', including one on Business Class Air Travel (which may be a bit outdated now, but we'll see), palm oil, and possibly Plastic Pollution, although I can't help but feel I've already podded about that – possibly for Ungagged. But obviously that requires far more work on my part, and you know how I feel about that.

I am currently looking for a job – I've applied for quite a few positions across the country and I've had one 'you're through to the next stage' mail already, as well as maybe 3 rejections, but that's fine. I'm seeking roles back in my old stomping ground of data analysis, because, well, I can, I guess. In my search I did discover a couple of job titles that sound more intriguing than they are, including the 'Senior Leakage Analyst' which involves water supply, rather than ... anything else you might imagine.

It does take my mind back to when I was casually looking around for jobs 20 years ago when it looked like the firm I was working for was going to close (it didn't, in the end, but still); one of them was as a telephony analyst for ... shall we say, a company with a lot of phone lines and people working from home, mainly women. I guess listening to call recordings may have been more interesting than most firms. Another role I saw, that I was prevented from applying for because of my height, was for MI6 as a spy. I think they may have worded it as a 'surveillance officer', but I do remember two of the aspects of the job were 'You must be average height, build, style, with no redeeming or memorable features, so you can blend in to the crowd without people noticing you', alongside possibly the most honest thing I've ever seen in a job advert: 'this job will require staying in one location for several hours at a time watching and waiting while nothing is going on. It therefore doesn't suit people who need excitement and variety in their working day'. Remember folks, nothing is like how it is in the movies or on TV – if you made a true-life show about the working lives of police officers and reflected it as accurately as possible, it would be very, very, boring to watch.

My abilities to blend in with the crowd would be taking even more of a battering than usual, though; I don't know how many of you will have noticed this either independently or as a result of a couple of posts on Twitter, Facebook, etc that either me or my online friends have made, but I was in the newspaper on Sunday. Admittedly only the online edition – I assume it was only the online edition anyway as The Metro I don't think produces weekend paper editions – but there was a long article published about me, and specifically how I tend to travel the world barefoot.

A journalist contacted me via Instagram and asked me a few questions – I knocked up a few answers based around both my very first podcast episode, which was an introduction to me, and all about my Travelling Barefoot, and the follow-up blog post I did a year or so later – and then they edited and published it as part of a week-long series of features about feet. Feetures, one might say, which is a pun that only works in print. Their rationale was that initially as it was coming up to summer, people were going to be showing off their feet more and they wanted to showcase some interesting articles about them, but when the virus came they decided to roll with it anyway because it gave them something light-hearted to talk about rather than concentrating on death, lockdown, and boredom.

So there we go, fifteen hours of fame. That said, it's not quite over – BBC Radio Northampton

picked up on the article and want me to chat to them on Thursday evening about it for 5 minutes or so. Makes a change from BBC Radio Sheffield I guess.

Of course that I'm able to travel barefoot around the world is because I'm able to make the choice to, on so many different levels of privilege. And that's where I wanted to go on this week's pod – the subject of privilege in travel. It's one of those topics I feel some people are reluctant to delve into to think about, as if there's one thing people don't like, it's to have their comfortable lives challenged with the observations that they had an innate advantage in getting there.

With regards to my barefoot travel, let's see, there's the privilege that I can travel, for a kick-off; the privilege that no-one really mythers me for my general lack of footwear – assuming that it's a choice rather than a necessity -; and there's the privilege that they're right, on both counts – I have the privilege of being able to choose how, when, and where I travel, to a large extent, and that my origins and general demeanour mean I can get away with these choices.

As I've pointed out in, possibly even my first pod, I'm personally not exactly short of privilege, being tall, white, British, male, middle-class, and middle-aged. I went to school with people who had the choice to learn Latin, Greek, and Ancient History at 'A'-level and go on to do Classics at Oxbridge – the sort of people who think it's great even now to sit in a dinner party and regale the guests with prose directly out of Ovid or Cicero. I don't know these people any more, and I don't get invited to dinner parties, I mean could you imagine me in a formal setting where you have to be polite?! Note that Latin GCSE may be my highest language qualification but it was 1991 and all the Latin I remember comes from Asterix books.

I'd like to say that there's nothing inherently wrong with privilege, in and of itself. But then I would say that, wouldn't I. Thing is, in pretty much any society there will be some people deemed to have more of an advantage than others. Everybody is equal, as the saying goes, but some are more equal than others. The main problem, as I see it, with privilege is more that, more often than not, the people with privilege barely recognise it as such, they treat the way they live as being 'normal', and barely even imagine that things could be different for different people, that not everyone has the ability to work from home, for instance, or avoid using public transport, so will often say or do things that, while everyone in their social circle can relate to, many other people feel left out by it.

In terms of travel, the biggest one is probably the ability to travel in the first place. So many people, when they talk about travel, assume that it's something everyone can do – that it's easy to just pop on a train or a plane and head out somewhere new, even if you're on a budget.

There's two levels of pushback to this: at the first level is the belief that everyone should have a passport, but I'll come onto this in a moment. At a deeper level is the fact that not everyone can travel. At all. Period. "What do you mean you've never been to London; it's only a train-ride away" is all very well but what if you're living day-to-day, and simply can't afford to take a train? What if the only way you can survive is to work long hours because you have dependents you need to care for, who would also need to come with you? What if you have a long-term disability that means you can't get out the house at all? I touched upon this in episode 21, about Travel Hopes, where I said that it's important that we keep talking about travel, in a general sense, because for some people, the inability to travel isn't just a virus-related situation, but rather their permanent situation. It's quite privileged to think everyone can travel, and I think we as travel writers need to be mindful of that.

Passport privilege is the other level. This takes on two forms; the ability many of us have to get a passport in the first place, and then the privilege of having the 'right' passport. On the first point, it's a held belief amongst many of my generational & class-based peers that everyone has a passport and those who don't are in some way ignorant or backward-thinking.

Here let me introduce my friend Victoria who has something to say about that.

{VICTORIA:

When I was first asked to record a pod on passport privilege, my immediate response was 'but what can I say about passports; I haven't got one!'. Barefoot was very patient when he pointed out that – that was the point!

As a white cis straight-passing women with no disabilities, I'm used to talking about privilege from the other side. It's challenging for me to discuss a privilege I don't have without sounding whiny and lecturing, but the more I pondered, the more I realised that perhaps I do have something to say on the subject after all.

When I was a little girl, I wanted to be an explorer. I was gutted when I realised that the world had been pretty much thoroughly explored already, and there wasn't much left to discover. No matter though, there was maybe nothing new left to see in the world, but there was a whole world that hadn't been seen by me. I was going to see the Northern Lights from the Arctic Circle, swim in waterfall pools in Vietnam, cross living root bridges in India. I was going to climb mountains, immerse myself in languages, and paddle in every sea. A passport was going to be the first thing I bought as an adult. There'd be no stopping me.

I moved out of the Foster Care system when I was 17, into a tiny flat with my two-year-old. I couldn't afford a passport; I could barely afford food. Never mind, I told myself, I can buy one when I finish my 'A'-Levels. One for my son as well, we can travel together. That'll be great for him.

Except that ... when I finished my 'A'-Levels, every penny I had was going towards paying off a build-up of rent arrears that had happened when my Housing Benefit had been erroneously cut. Never mind, I'd get one the next year.

I scrimped and saved all year long. I just about had enough for a passport each, and then the cooker broke down. Toddlers require constant feeding; a cooker is non-negotiable.

Fast forward to now. I'm 35. I haven't left the country in my entire adult life. I have 4 children, so just buying passports for us all is way beyond my reach. It probably always will be. It hurts when I think about it. I get a little spike of grief for things that I'll never get to see, for the life that I thought I was going to have, the life that I could have had if I weren't on a constant treadmill of 'just about surviving'.

In the scheme of things, it isn't really important. There's blogs and videos of places, you can buy food from all sorts of cultures right here in the UK. You can explore the world through books and TV shows. They say you can't miss what you've never had – well that's not true at all, but you can try not to think about it.

There's no denying that travel changes people. It instils empathy, introduces new perspectives on all sorts of things. In our society, to be worldly and well-travelled is to be wise and cultured. That means that to some people, perhaps those people for whom passports are an essential item and not a struggle to obtain, the opposite seems to be true too. To not own a passport means that you don't care to see the world; you're insular and isolationist and believe travel is pointless because your home country is the best. That may well be true for some people, but I'd guess the majority of people who don't hold a passport do wish they did. We're already ashamed and sad that we're likely never leave the land we were born on, so please don't further shame us with 'I bet you've never even left your home town'.

So what's the solution to travel inequality? Well personally, I'd like everyone to realise that borders aren't actually real; that they're imaginary lines in the dirt and it's absurd bordering on obscene to charge people to cross them, but that's unlikely to happen, at least in my lifetime. Maybe, if we insist on passports to allow access to certain parts of the planet we all have an equal stake in, we should make them free to everyone.

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I of course talked about my own take on borders in Podcast 12. I'm not necessarily saying abolish borders completely, but certainly having much larger regions of freedom of

movement would be only beneficial for all the states and countries involved.

This leads on to the privilege of having the right passport, and there's quite a few of my contributors who have made this point. First up we have Kristina, from Living Wonder Filled.

{KRISTINA:

To answer the question of whether of whether I have passport privilege – yes. I definitely have passport privilege. I have a US passport, which is a strong passport, meaning I don't have to apply for visas very often. I've been to Central and South America and Europe, and have never had to think about passport or visa issues, whereas I have have friends and family from South America and other countries who have been denied visas for what seem like arbitrary reasons. So the fact that I've never even had to think about applying for a visa or any of that, whereas some people have to plan out things and apply and, you know, risk actual rejection – I definitely have passport privilege.

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Another person who mentions it is Matthew from Two Tickets To, who talks a bit about having a British Passport.

{MATTHEW:

Passport privilege and the world you are born into plays a huge role. As a British citizen, I am incredibly privileged and fortunate that I hold what might be considered to be a powerful passport, recognised, acknowledge, and yes, even after Brexit, probably respected across much of the world. And it's very easy to take for granted things like visa-free travel or even just the freedom to travel almost everywhere you want.

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A glance through my Twitter followers does reveal something definitely revealing. The majority of people I chat with are American, European, or Australian; people who hold pretty useful passports, who don't have too much hassle getting in to most countries, and where the biggest gripes around border controls tend to revolve around visa fees – 'oh this country is hideously expensive to get into – the visa costs £50'.

I mean, seriously. Firstly, we have economic privilege, that means that while £50 feels like a lot of money, if we're the sort of people who can afford to fly halfway round the world to take holiday snaps for Instagram, we're also the sort of people who can afford visa fees. That doesn't mean, by the way, I endorse the concept – I've been to enough countries to get a feel where that visa fee goes, and it's not always to the development of the country, otherwise somewhere like Democratic Republic Of Congo would be one of the lushest and richest countries in the world – just that we're showing our privilege by complaining about it then paying it anyway, or by choosing to visit somewhere else instead. Because having choice is a privilege.

Secondly, of course, as others stated, there's a huge number of countries that Western travellers can visit without admin. It's not just the visa fee either; it's often the rest of the admin. I've baulked in the past at the criteria for getting a visa for Nigeria as a British citizen, which at the time included having to pay not only \$144 US Dollars for a single entry visa, but also providing evidence of a return ticket, proof of accommodation, including a letter from the accommodation confirming my stay (not just a booking receipt), a letter from my employer confirming I had a job and was planning to come back to it, and evidence of bank details proving I had the funds to stay in the country.

But this is quite normal for non-Western citizens. My Twitter friend Pinkzenjoy, who holds an Indian passport, tweeted:

"Whenever I fill up Visa forms and submit bank statements, tax returns, salary slips, air and hotel

bookings with day to day itinerary, reminds me of the unfairness but makes me more determined. Those who write blogs about spontaneous travel have no clue what many go through."

She also highlights there one of the privileges of having a preferential passport, and something I take full advantage of in my travels; the ability to travel without a plan, very short-term decisions, waking up in the mornings not knowing which country I'll be in that night. If you hold a less powerful passport, that becomes impossible, partly because of the need to obtain visas but also because some visas will only be issued if you provide full details of your entire itinerary – where you'll be going, where you'll be staying, etc. This concept is completely alien to me, but is the reality for the majority of the world's population.

Now, I mentioned Nigeria a couple of moments ago, as being a country with an unusually difficult visa process for Westerners, as well as the DRC (which has similar requirements, and whose visa fee seems to be around \$175 though it's hard to confirm this as they seem to make it difficult to even apply for a visa from the UK – you'd have thought countries would be most welcoming to allegedly rich foreigners and I mean who wouldn't want to visit DRC with its lush jungles, large rivers, beautiful mountains, wildlife – both magnificent and mythological – and interesting culture. It's certainly on my list of places to visit in the next few years). For someone like me, holding a British passport, I've certainly found Africa in general to be the continent I've most had visa/admin issues with – I've needed a visa for almost every country I've visited, and not all of them could be obtained on arrival (or where they could be, the time allowed in the country was limited), and they've pretty much all been quite expensive. But I guess that's what you get when you shaft their entire economy, culture, and resource for 150 years ...

But there is another aspect to passport privilege that gets round some of these issues, that of dual nationality. Here's Tayo, The 5 to 9 Traveller, who talks about her privilege holding dual British-Nigerian identity.

{TAYO:

My travel privilege is so multi-layered, so ...I have a British passport. Automatically that sets me apart from being able to walk into, waltz into, countries without a second thought. I have no responsibilities so that's another level of privilege, you know, I'm not tied down by children, by a husband or partner, kids, bills, mortgages – I have my day-to-day bills but that is not stopping me from travelling the world

Another level of privilege – I have a job. I think a lot of people don't realise that even being economically able to travel is a level of privilege. Some people are struggling to put food on the table. I'm totally aware of the whole rhetoric of 'quit your job, travel the world'; that is just not feasible and actually just irks me no end.

Another level of privilege I suppose is, even just thinking about the fact I have two passports, so, I have a British passport and a Nigerian passport. Now I know my British passport is stronger but my Nigerian passport allows me to enter into African countries without an issue, so in that sense I may not get hassled as much in an African country, but in comparison to going to Eastern Europe is where I can get hassled, so I'm very aware of the nuances of different levels of travel privilege I have.

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It's noticeable that some people here in Britain have picked up on this in the years since Brexit, and it's interesting how many of them have discovered they have an Irish grandparent.

There's of course a whole other class of people barely mentioned in these discussions; V mentioned earlier about not having a passport, but obviously as a British citizen she still has certain privileges, and at least has the legal possibility of getting one, even if economically it's beyond her means. What if even the right to a passport is beyond you.

{MATTHEW:

Even before Coronavirus, the freedom and opportunity was certainly not universal for everybody. From refugees who might find themselves stateless so without a passport, to countries that might be subject to travel plans etc etc, it's really just a quick of fate that we've been born into countries where freedom to travel is an expectation, and I suspect we won't be taking it for granted for a while.

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One day I'll do a pod on immigration. Actually, that's a lie. One day I'll introduce a pod on immigration and get my friend Laura to then talk about it for half an hour. If I can restrict her to half an hour. It might be nearer half a day.

Anyway. Back in Podcast 7 I talked about Sexuality in travel, and how some people have much more of a privilege than others in terms of 'passing' in local culture – contributions from a bisexual woman, an asexual lesbian, and a trans man talking about the issues they've encountered when visiting other countries, and indeed when actually travelling itself. I appear to be able to 'pass' for both gay and straight, which ... is quite useful – but as a little tip I always try to keep the first picture in my camera (or on my phone) as a pic of a female friend, so I can easily bring up the impression that I'm happily coupled. The friend in question is quite amused at this.

Here's Matthew again talking about local customs and how easy it is to 'fit in'; this is easier for some people than it is for others.

{*MATTHEW:*

Privilege plays a huge role when you arrive into a country. Whether it's gender, race, sexuality, or more, this could all affect your experience of a country and how you're perceived within it. The general rule of thumb is that you should always try to respect and abide by local customs and traditions, and this is normally pretty easy for me as a straight white male, but it probably isn't quite as easy if aspects of your identity would be considered illegal or subject due to reduced rights or respects in the country you're travelling you.

Having said that, even just having the chance to make a choice between countries that you'd like to travel to puts you in a privileged position compared to many across the world, so I think for me, just having the chance to travel anywhere at all should be considered a privilege and hopefully we'll start to realise that a bit more now and in the coming months and years.

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And of course that's the big one; most of my twitter followers, most of the Instagram travel influencers, most of the travel bloggers, are white. One of the biggest privileges in travel of all. Partly because of how people see us – we're often seen as the ones with money, the rich foreigners, the powerful ones, the ones with influence – and partly just because we white people kind of ^expect^ it to be the case – we don't imagine ever being hassled walking down a street because of our skin colour, we don't imagine being challenged on entry into businesses, we don't imagine ever being worried about being attacked whilst jogging through a white neighbourhood. That combination of colour and nationality is the biggest privilege of all – and why most travel bloggers are white Europeans, Americans, or Australians. Because it's much, much easier for them; so easy that they rarely have to think about it, and the assumption is that everyone following them is the same.

Which to be honest might well be the truth in a way – people tend to gravitate around people who are similar to them, be it socially, in the work environment, or in terms of social media following. If you're listening to this, and you're a white westerner, ask yourself how many People of Colour do you follow, interact with? How many Africans? How many Indians? Do you know if what you write is accessible to them, interesting to them, as much as it is to people like you?

The continent of Africa is very diverse, and it may surprise many westerners to know that African Travel Twitter is A Thing, just as much as European Travel Twitter. Katchie, from The Solo Wanderer, is a leading light in African travel having travelled to 35 of them, mostly solo, and definitely someone worth checking out (though at the time of this podcast she's updating her website). She admits to having a level of privilege being from South Africa, tweeting thus:

"My current struggle right now is trying to put words that explain the convenience and privilege that comes w just being a South African that other Africans will never understand. I'll find those words. The privilege of being a South African. Something majority of the continent will never understand. They will always hold us in such high regard and call us out without taking into consideration that privilege which most of us as Africans cannot begin to fathom."

But she is using that privilege to inform, educate, and entertain other Africans about travel in Africa.

"Affordable travel will be the end of me. Will stress me to no end but I'll work to my last day for this. This is my purpose. Travel heals. Educates. Travel will free you. To my last day I will work that all my people can experience this privilege most of us take for granted"

She's also quite critical of white bloggers writing about Africa, and with fair reason:

"I've realised mediocrity in blogging rest with white people. They always claim to be the top bloggers in spaces it makes zero sense. I'm yet to see a black blogger claiming to be the best in Africa or the UK. I figure mediocrity and white privilege could be mutually exclusive."

It is true about white privilege in general; we don't have to be exceptionally good at something to be noted for it, whereas certainly in the western world, People Of Colour need to be seen as exceptional to be in any way noteworthy, and even then they don't get the opportunities, the rewards, that white people do, or people seem them as having got their breaks illicitly, or are held up to an immensely greater standard than white people, and any little crack is hounded down. Sometimes it feels to get noted in the media, people of colour, Africans especially, have to have 20 years of experience and a Masters degree before anyone gives them a note, whilst white women stand in front of a famous monument, flutter their eyelids, take a selfie, and become instant superstars.

Kristina is more optimistic about traveller privilege though.

{KRISTINA:

Do you feel many people in the travel world go through life not knowing they have privilege?

Maybe at the beginning of your travels you might not really fully understand the depths of your privilege; also it depends where you're from obviously, and how much privilege you have, but I think you'd have to be completely dense and unaware of your surroundings while you travel and as you travel, to ignore the fact you have privilege. Once you meet other travellers and hear their stories and experiences, you've got to realise the levels of experience you have as a traveller.

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That all being said, travelling around Africa as an African is different from travelling around Africa as a white European. Here's Tayo again, talking about a couple of things she's experienced in West Africa.

{TAYO:

Another thing that's interesting about my travel privileges is my skin colour. Now often being a Black woman, you know, Black, Woman, can count against me, but actually I can go to some communities

where I don't stand out as much, so, I'm not saying being Black and a Woman can be a privilege at all times, cos we all know that's not the case, but at certain times I can blend in more. I certainly felt that in South America, even tho there's not many Black people, I didn't stand out compared to my Danish brother who was like tall, lanky, blonde, blue-eyed, and he'd often get attention, but that's the same for me if I were to go to an Asian country, so it very much varies where you're going in the world what kind of privileges you can have; I also have that privilege of being able to blend in in certain areas, and likewise with people who are Caucasian, they will have that privilege to being able to blend in as well.

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Another aspect, related to dual nationality, is the privilege of knowing more than one language, specifically a locally-used one. This could be as broad as knowing both English and Spanish in Latin America, or as specific as knowing French and Mandinka if travelling in The Gambia and parts of Senegal. Obviously it makes travelling itself much easier; you're not as reliant on other people to help you around, but also it gives you a much greater insight into the people and the culture. It also helps to endear yourself to the local people, especially if you are obviously a foreigner – the respect you gain is more than worth the hassle of learning, and it means it's easier to 'pass'; you don't stand out as much, and you gain that little bit more of local privilege.

Here's Kristina again, talking a bit about travelling and knowing local languages.

{KRISTINA:

It's funny; I used to think of being bilingual as this annoying burden. My parents forced us to speak Spanish, and even made us take advanced grammar classes during the summer growing up. But because of that, I ended up wanting to learn another language, and then I ended up studying French in High School and College; I'm not fluent by any means but I pick it up fairly quickly, and I can read and write it fairly decently, and again these are things that I felt – these are things I enjoy and something to have in my back pocket for job application purposes. I never realised how much this would be a privilege or how useful it would be until I took my first backpacking trip after college. I went with a friend who spoke German and understood a little bit of Dutch, and then I could do the French and the Spanish for us, and so it made travelling so much easier for the two of us, because we could get around quickly, we could get help fairly easily, and all the little mundane things that you might have to google or you might have to be prepared with general phrases, we never had to worry about which ... it's really simple, but it's amazing, it kinda streamlines your experiences a little bit.

And then of course it was also really nice when we would be in a restaurant or something for example, and we would speak to each other in English (obviously – we both had very clear American accents), it was always really funny, and kind of annoying, but funny that we could hear what people were saying about us in their native language and one of us understood it and could relate it to the other, so there were a couple of occasions where, in German for example she'd turn around and kind of told one of the people off, and then it also happened in Spain when I had to turn around and say 'you know I understand what you're saying and it's really disrespectful', things like that. We're not dumb American tourists and we were able to kind of defend ourselves in those ways, so I think obviously the more languages you know the better, and I definitely think I'm privileged that, not only am I native in two languages, but I do have a fairly strong hold on a third, and several other languages come easier to me because of that.

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I'm really bad at languages; I can't get my brain to remember stuff like that, nor can I think quickly enough to access those memories in real-time when I need them, My theory is that it's something I'd get used to when put in that environment, but that's why I always aimed to go abroad to learn intensively. You'd have thought given how many friends I know who can speak Spanish that it would be a relatively simplistic thing for me to pick up remotely, logistically, but apparently not.

Kristina also brought up another aspect of privilege, which Roo from Roo Loves Travel brings

up. It's the idea of feeling privileged that you can share your travels with someone, that you have someone you can travel with, which of course not everyone has.

{ROO:

Other than being financially able to have travelled, I also feel very lucky to have had people to share experiences with. Although I've travelled solo a few times, sharing a passion for travel with loved ones, sharing precious memories, is a privilege in itself. Growing up, my dad put his own love on travel mostly on pause in order to save money to share with us once he retired, and since his retirement we've travelled together, him and I, at least once a year, to almost every continent. I've also travelled with friends, and with my boyfriend of nearly a decade.

So, although being financially privileged to travel is something I am so grateful for, the real treasure for me is the memories I've been fortunate enough to make along the way with those I care about.

}

I tend to travel most places on my own (I even did a whole podcast about it – Podcast 9), but certainly having someone to travel with makes some adventures much easier and cheaper; it's much harder as a solo traveller to get to more off-brochure places without, for instance, hiring your own taxi.

One last aspect of privilege in travel, and again not one often mentioned, is health. Most people who talk about travel do so from the point of view of being able-bodied and able-minded, people who are capable of hiking up a hill, meandering around town, or even to a degree just getting on a bus. Here's Tayo again, mentioning this very point.

{TAYO:

In addition, another level of privilege is just the fact that I am healthy, and I don't mean that in a disparaging way, it's just more there are certain activities I go on on my holidays, so I very much focus on adventure travelling, so hiking, kayaking, anything that's physical, but actually that's quite a difficulty for some who have disabilities or are not physically able to for whatever reason, so that's another level of privilege, so I can access areas in the world that requires me to utilise my body to its fullest. So I think back to my hike to Machu Picchu, I was just like 'this is an insane hike' and if I was on crutches this is just not possible, so I just have to be ... that is another level of privilege that I am able to do these kinds of travels as well, so that's something to think about when I go about my business.

}

If you look at many people who talk about travel, and this is especially true on Instagram, there's rarely a disability or health condition to be seen – I guess mainly because the audience for travel tends to be people who are themselves 'privileged' in this way, so don't associate the idea of travel with people who need a little extra help to get around; they assume everyone can just 'get off their sofa and go'.

On related subjects to that, I have in mind a couple of future podcast episodes – one on disability and travel, and one on plus-sized travel which, like sexuality in travel, brings up a whole host of small issues that most people don't even think of, never mind understand. I'll be putting a bit of a recording on Patreon about the latter later.

That's nearly everything I want to talk about, so I'm going to offer final thoughts with a contribution from Alexei at TraveLexx, who provided me with a nice little summary of pretty much everything I've talked about, which given it takes just over a minute, suggests once again that what I really need most of all, is someone to edit my written words.

{LEXX:

So I think that being from a Western country has definitely given me loads of privileges when it comes to travel, and I don't just mean from a financial standpoint. Having a powerful passport which allows me to travel to almost everywhere in the world without needing to go through the bureaucratic processes of obtaining visas and so on is a privilege in itself.

Now, I think we have a responsibility to be very mindful of those privileges that we have when we travel, and that in a way we are also ambassadors not just for ourselves but for the countries that we're coming from, so we're essentially representing our parts of the world when we travel, and we need to be mindful how our actions come across and how they could be perceived by locals that may not be as familiar with travellers of the places that we come from.

}

So, thanks for listening, and I hope this episode has made you open your eyes and think a bit. Next time, I mean let's be honest, I've no idea, but it's due to be a geographic-based episode, so ... I've been posting a lot on my blog about South Africa, so maybe it'll be that, or maybe I'll finally get around to doing the London-centric pods. We'll see. Until then, check your privilege, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice. I'm pretty bad at that sort of thing myself, so I'll understand perfectly if you don't.

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Until next week, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}