

Transcript of Podcast 038: Bucket Lists Revisited

{Intro}

PRACHI: On that note I guess, we kinda wanna ask you what you guys think about bucket lists, like, I think that's what you're gonna hear about in this podcast later on, what's your opinion on them, do you have one, or do you not believe in them either, like us?

MORGAN: Do you wanna try every toilet in every country in the world [giggles], do you wanna eat crickets in Asia, what do you wanna do, let us know!

PRACHI: Yeh.

{intro music – jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly 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 :)

Happy New Year. Not just if you're Iranian, as we've recently just passed Nowruz, the Persian New Year that happens on the Vernal Equinox on or around 21 March, but also traditionally in England and Wales, 25 March ("Lady Day" – in Catholic terminology, the feast of the Annunciation, when Gabriel visited Mary to tell her that being a virgin was no barrier to having a kid, the only time this excuse has ever worked) was the start of the new year. Not the New Calendar Year, rather it was more of a financial thing; it was the traditional starting date for annual tenancies and work contracts (especially & particularly in agriculture) and thus also the date by which the previous year's financial affairs need to be finalised. Interestingly, it still is. Sort of. When we adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1752 and 'lost' 11 days in the September, this 'contract start date' moved to April 6th, to ensure that no-one lost out by having a contract year that year that only lasted 355 days. And it still is. This is why the UK's Tax Year starts on such an otherwise really weird date.

Anyway.

I have a rare factual update to bring you. In my last episode, on snow, I mentioned the world record for the fastest half-marathon run barefoot on ice or snow had been broken, well, smashed, by Jonas Sevaldrud, in a time of 1:44:58. Well, since that episode was broadcast, the record has potentially been broken again. Karim El Hayani, in Quebec, ran 1:36:45. Unlike Sevaldrud, El Hayani is much more accustomed to barefoot running; growing up in Spain he ran barefoot by default and kept it up even when he moved to Canada; and he feels he could have gone even quicker had conditions been more favourable – he mentioned in a post-race interview with Runners World magazine it was slightly too cold and icy for him to feel truly comfortable, and in slightly warmer and snowier conditions he hopes to break 1hr 25 later in the year.

Not one for my bucket list. But that's a discussion for later.

Hmm, anyway. I don't know about you, but I've had a particularly mixed fortnight. Personally, it's been great – a list of TinyJoys I created for a friend of mine included a great deal of positive things - the most important of which is that I have finally managed to book in a date to go down to London and record my voice in a proper recording studio. Covid-willing, obviously.

I'll be doing this on April 9th. Those of you who are following England's Covid Lockdown Plan (a document that feels about as coherent as the one I'm reading this podcast off) will note that this is before the expected large relaxation of rules on the 12th. This is vaguely annoying, as it means my trip will be a simple pop-down,

do the thing, meet a friend in a park rather than a pub, and get the train back all in one day rather than doing things like going to a pub or staying overnight. But the latter isn't feasible until mid-May, and while the pubs are due to re-open on 12th, they'll be outdoor seating only, and because so few pubs have outdoor seating, because, you know, Britain, they're likely to be rammed with people and/or require booking. Also, perhaps relatedly, the train prices were significantly cheaper on 9th than even the 19th, the other day I was looking at. So there we go. And I wanted to go down sooner rather than later, because obviously the earlier I get this done, the sooner I can make use of it. I didn't want to go down too soon though, and break lockdown regulations. Not that that seems to be a ... problem for people of my demographic, it appears.

Ugh, people like me are ruining this country. I could go on a complete rant about double-standards, about the way the government and the police have particular variance on who gets the right to protest, on how the law applies more strongly to some than others, but this seems to be a problem the world over, and was ever thus. As a reminder though, last year two episodes of my podcast covered "A Guide To Your First Protest", and an overview on times when protests have changed England's politics. It might be an idea to keep them in mind going forward. You may know by the way, our current government are trying to implement laws heavily restricting the right to protest – it won't end well. And you can interpret that observation how you wish.

But anyway, we're talking TinyJoys.

Last week, one tinyjoy I had related to this very podcast. A small milestone was reached – across all the episodes, the podcast has been downloaded over 10,000 times. And while I've been on podcasts that get those kind of downloads in a month, I did read elsewhere this week that achieving as few as 150 downloads per episode puts you in the top 50% of podcasts, so that's definitely something for me to cheer about. Thank you to you all for downloading and sticking with me for all this time.

The only other thing to say is that Sunday just gone was Census Day, and, after having filled in hundreds of the bloody things in test over the past few months, actually filling it in for real was a bit of an anti-climax. And it took far less time than it did in test, too.

But let me go back to Covid. Almost exactly a year ago, in early April 2020, I did an episode of my podcast (Episode 21) on 'Travel Hopes'. This was an episode where I asked my friends what they hoped to happen over the year, and whether the concept of lockdown had changed how they thought about future travel. Needless to say, it's clear with hindsight that we were being too optimistic, even then. Future historians will look back on that episode as a great indicator on how we were feeling at the start of the pandemic. My personal travel hopes haven't changed, oddly, and were it not for the financial crisis I had over summer, I may even have got round to doing one or two of the Scottish ones. But not the trip to Ireland, obviously. As it is, though, I'll be happy to have any kind of experience this year. Even I'm starting to get stir crazy. But we'll see.

Now, this brings me on to the topic of this episode, which I also alluded to earlier – bucket lists. Long time listeners will know this was the topic of my third ever episode, so it's always been something on my mind. What you may not know is that I consider that episode to be one of my worst. I created it in New Zealand at the start of a long backpacking trip of a couple of months (it also encompassed my trips to Vanuatu, Australia, and Sri Lanka), and I had so many problems with the episode, from recording and editing it on a low-powered tablet-style laptop, to the uploaded file having a huge error in it that I never spotted, to not including all the contribs because I'd managed to lose one, that I didn't do another pod on the whole of that trip. I also didn't think it flowed particularly well; I had an idea in my mind of doing the episode based almost entirely on one of my previous blog posts, and as a result I don't think it was terribly interesting – it was advertised as Bucket Lists but it was just more a list of countries that weren't on it. One of which (Philippines) I'd ended up visiting within a year of issue, and a second (Japan) I would have visited had I not come down with the severe chest infection I mentioned in my previous episode.

This, therefore, will be the episode that one should have been, in hindsight. That's not to say the previous episode isn't valid, just that this one will be more ... it'll be better, anyway, I promise. Pinky Promise.

But first, what is a 'bucket list?' The origin of the exact term is unclear, but it's believed to be one of those wonderful and cheerful metaphors we British are inordinately fond of. "To kick the bucket" is a slang term for "to die", and has been used since at least the 1700s, referring possibly to dead pigs hanging from a beam,

or 'bucket', in Norfolk slang, possibly the kicking away the bucket you stand on when you're trying to hang yourself, or possibly even relating to the custom of sprinkling holy water from a bucket laid at a corpse's feet. Regardless, the 'bucket list' became 'the list of things you want to do before you kick the bucket'.

Another term for dying is 'feed the tree', but 'bucket list' sounds better than 'tree list'. Maybe.

People have always had bucket lists, and they're often used as a way to motivate, as well as to provide optimism about the future – a plan to make you more confident about life as the years go by, and give you something to look forward to, give life a good kicking before you reach the bucket. The more I use this metaphor the weirder it gets.

What sort of things appear on bucket lists? Here's Roo, from Roo Loves Travel, with a couple of thoughts.

[Roo – Travels With Roo]

When I think about the phrase 'bucket list', I think of certain activities such as swimming with dolphins, or more adrenaline-based activities like bungee-jumping, or sky-diving. When I was in New Zealand, I actually had a voucher for a free bungee jump, but once I got there I decided 'I really don't feel the need to jump off a bridge – I'm too young to die'.

Something that was never on my bucket list was white-water rafting. My mother had told me my whole life 'it was far too dangerous', and that was fine with me because for some reason it just didn't appeal. Until I was in Rotorua, New Zealand, where the water is warm, beautifully coloured, really appealing. And I was feeling adventurous. The rapids themselves weren't too violent, but the seven metre waterfall drop was what made the rafting Grade 5. I booked it on an impulse, and I must say I'm really glad that I did. Whenever I look at the photos I feel really proud of myself overcoming that fear. However I am never doing it again.

In my 20s I was happy to do abseiling, paragliding, other such things. But as I've got older, my bucket list has become more destination based, with the exception of gentle activities like swimming with manatees. That would be nice. But I doubt I'll be throwing myself out of a plane any time soon.

As an aside, Roo pointed out to me she likes the fact whenever she appears on my pod, she's always near the end. Well, sorry Roo, not this time.

When people think of Bucket Lists, they often do in two vague ... whatever the division of a bucket is. Chamber? Pot? But not a chamber pot; that's something very different, and I guess what happens when your bucket list experiences go to ... well, pot. Or shit. Either way. But yes. They tend to concentrate either on places, or on experiences. It's very often "I've always wanted to go to China" or "I've always wanted to do a parachute jump". That said, there's very often an overlap; people who have made it a life goal to ride in a hot air balloon rarely choose to do it over Barnsley, instead making it coincide with a trip to Bagan or Cappadocia. For one thing, the weather's better. My ex bought a Red Letter Day bucket list experience to ride in a hot air balloon somewhere over Nottinghamshire; two years and many cancellations later, she swapped it for a two night hotel stay at Loch Fyne.

Now, obviously, in a time of pandemic and lockdown, it's a great opportunity to think about places and experiences we want to have when we're all allowed to travel again across the world as we'd like and as we used to be able to. It provides us with a sense of what and where we feel is important to us, and also, if we only get one chance to do something before the next pandemic hits, what would we choose to do. The one thing that's certainly true about this situation is ... it's a bit like how we tend to view death, generically. Like, we all know we're going to die, but equally we all know we're unlikely to die tomorrow. Or indeed at any point in the short term. So we have a tendency to believe that everything will always continue as it always has done, so when a pandemic or other such huge restriction comes, it really knocks our assumptions and our belief that we'll always have these options.

What may then happen as a result is people start to prioritise. So when we come out of the pandemic, I'm pretty sure many people will have a specific list, and will be actively aiming to do them, just in case they never get another chance to.

Other people though are thinking more domestically, they're taking the likely inability to travel abroad in the short term even once lockdown restrictions have eased, and turning it into a desire to visit places more local to where they live, which they may have not considered, because often people don't think about holidaying close to home. Someone who is thinking that way is Sarah, The Urban Wanderer.

[Sarah – The Urban Wanderer]

Bucket lists are a bit of a funny thing this year I suppose.

While there are things I'd love to do, like cycle around the Netherlands, or revisit Berlin, I think realistically it's more about experiences I can have in the UK. So while it might sound a bit weird, I think my Bucket List is pretty simple. It's just to walk every street I've never been on.

One of the things I'm most looking forward to at the moment is taking a train to Birmingham, which from Manchester is not a massive distance, but I received a Pevsner Guide for Architecture for there, so I'm looking forward to just pounding the streets and walking somewhere different.

I've been doing that through lockdown, and I've discovered so many different places, it's stupidly exciting for me, and I think it's nice to share these different things with people, but it does make my bucket list quite affordable and easy to access, so just heading to a different city, following my nose and finding what's going on there is a super way for me to spend my time.

I think experiences really are important, and while it might seem a bit odd just visiting other cities in the UK and nearby, with everybody dashing off to try to take trips abroad, I feel like the tourist areas are going to be really busy, and I'm not really a fan of those sort of places anyway, so if I can duck down a back street or down near some water or somewhere less trodden, I think it's a lot more interesting than to just take the same photos as someone else.

I must interject myself at this point to say bucket lists shouldn't be confused with tick-lists; the two are related but I'd potentially argue the desire to visit every country in the world, for example, becomes more a tick-box exercise than an actual motivational tool. If it's Tuesday it must be Belgium, as the film title goes.

I say that because one item on my own 'bucket list' is to visit every county in the UK. And it's one I've had since I was in my early 20s. Unlike most people with this or a similar aim though, I define the county as 'top tier administrative area'. So, not the traditional or the ceremonial counties, no; I'm going for counties, Metropolitan boroughs, unitary authorities, London Boroughs ... There's an awful lot of them and they keep creating them which means I find it hard to keep up. On the flip side, many of them are very small, so while 'everywhere is interesting', it's definitely conceivable to visit the most interesting and notable spots of several in the space of one weekend. As I'll probably demonstrate in a future pod about South Yorkshire.

Also note of course my second ever podcast episode was on Hometown Travel, so maybe I was just well ahead of the curve there, plus even without the Pandemic, I'd planned to do things like hiking in Scotland and visiting some more islands – notably the inner Hebrides, the Orkneys, and the Isle of Man. I guess the ongoing world situation is providing me with the perfect opportunity to do some of these things.

With regard to world geography though, as you know in Autumn 2019 I did an Inter-Rail trip across much of Europe, whose routing seemed to involve ever-increasing circles rather than just one loop, because this is me we're talking about, and at one point I even did a Twitter poll to ask if I should head North or South. The poll returned a 50-50 split, so I'm not doing that again. But anyway. One of the reasons for doing the trip was many years ago I'd set myself the task to visit every country in Europe (the actual list was every European capital city, but let's not split hairs in hindsight), and for a number of reasons, only some of them related to international politics, this seemed to be a good time to tick a number of them off. Obviously I spent longer than just a swift passing through (I tried to have a beer in every one of them at least!), but while on the trip I ended up thinking about why I travelled, and whether going forward I'd travel differently. I realised I was creeping into the territory of visiting places because I could, to tick them off, rather than because I wanted to. Everywhere is interesting, but some places hold more of an appeal than others, and I began to think about a

list of places around the world I actively wanted to visit, rather than just places that sounded good.

As a result, the number of actual places on what might be deemed my 'bucket list' dropped substantially. I'm definitely more about the experiences than the places, though, so rather than visiting countries because they seem interesting, I have more active reasons to choose to visit places. And I think in my head I have two kinds of desires.

Firstly: places which are unique. Bolivia is the number one place on my hit-list, has been for nearly 10 years, and one day I might actually make it. There's enough there that I can't easily see elsewhere in one trip (high mountains, salt plains, rainforests, wetlands), plus specific history (Che Guevara's death, amongst other things), plus a different culture. Specific history is also what attracts me to El Salvador, because everyone enjoys visiting the legacy of fights between a US-backed military dictatorship and a communist-funded guerilla movement, don't they?

On a completely different note, climbing the Nyamuragira volcano is honestly, **honestly**, why Democratic Republic of Congo is on my hit-list, and similarly I want to return to Indonesia to visit Mount Tambora, another volcano with historical notoriety (it was indirectly responsible for Mary Shelly to write *Frankenstein* – a couple of leading literary figures of the time, and Lord Byron, went on a jolly to Switzerland, but the weather was so bad because of the effects of the Tambora eruption that they sat around and wrote ghost stories. For his part, Byron wrote a few paragraphs about Vampires; it was left to John Polidori to take these scraps and invent the entire Literary Vampire genre from it).

Then there's St Helena, one of the last vestiges of the British Empire (which itself is a draw, to think about what was, and what is, in terms of history, in terms of what it means to be British), and its own history, it's for example where Napoleon Bonaparte and many other people who fought against the British ended up, and it means it's started to intrigue me somewhat more than it did.

Sudan has its pyramids. I am aware Egypt has pyramids, but the ones in Sudan seem more ... well, more of them, for a start, also less touristed, so I feel they loom more how they were intended to.

Finally, there's things like being on a boat on the Gambia River, and the Sangha River – the latter involves crossing a lesser-travelled international border, which I'm always up for, and, while going on Safari isn't on my bucket list because as discussed many times, I'm not an animal person, that route does take me past the Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve which seems to be definitely worth the visit for the cultural aspects as well as the biodiversity.

The other desire is that of comparing and contrasting. So, having been to Polynesia and Melanesia, I want to visit somewhere in Micronesia (probably Kiribati) to get a feel for the different culture and style between the three. I'd like to visit Pakistan to, again, see the similarities and difference with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. I also obviously still have a strong passion for places that don't exist, so comparing, say, Abkhazia and Georgia, or Somaliland and Somalia, Bielefeld and the rest of Germany ... (there's only about 10 people listening to this who will get that reference, but hey, everyone relevant loves a good in-joke).

In short, I have to have a reason for being somewhere, that matches my interests, be they geographic, cultural, or, most likely, historical. They also have to be, well, accessible, for want of a better word, be that in terms of cost, logistics, or simply weighing up experiences and locations against each other. Like, several of my friends (hello Kate-Frankie!) have been to Antarctica; it's been a place to visit on their bucket lists for years and finally had a chance to go. It's not on mine, simply because I feel I can get a similar vibe in easier and cheaper (if not necessarily much cheaper) ways – like Svalbard, Franz Joseph Land, or Greenland. I mean, all right, there are no penguins, but there are polar bears, so all I'd be doing is swapping one animal for another, plus the sea crossing would be less ... onerous.

When it comes to specific experiences though, that's where I tend not to really have a particular list. Like, I mentioned just now I have some concepts, like climbing more volcanoes, or crossing obscure borders, or boating down rivers, but I don't have many of the true 'bucket list experiences' that many people have. I'm talking the likes of adrenaline activities, like bungee jumping, parachute jumping, white-water-rafting, of the kind Roo talked about earlier. Indeed one might say they would belong on my anti-bucket-list – things I would never do, regardless of circumstance. My Episode Three podcast was all about the anti-bucket list, but specifically with regard to places, and while small hot islands are still on that list, that's mainly for experiential reasons. Like, I can't swim, despite Laura's best efforts when we travelled to Philippines (as I mentioned, itself one of the places on my anti-bucket list), so concepts like swimming with manatees or

diving the Great Barrier Reef would also feature on my 'would never do' list, even though they would be on many other people's.

Many people also have visiting specific sites on their bucket lists, like Borobudur, or Machu Picchu, or the Coliseum in Rome. I kind of used to think this way, and certainly when I've plotted ideas for trips in the past, I've made sure I've drawn up a routing that includes certain places specifically, but most of the time for me, it's not so much that I choose to go to places because of what's there, it's more I think of a place to go and see what's there that I might find interesting. The ruins at Great Zimbabwe, for instance, were never on my Bucket List in the sense it wasn't a place I'd specifically marked down as one I needed to go, but I knew that if I ever did do a trip to that part of the world, it would be a place I'd certainly make the effort to see, and so it proved. In terms of places I'd noted down as being absolute 'bucket list' spots, the only ones I can think of offhand were Chernobyl, the Aral Sea, and Timor-Leste, all because they were places I'd known about for many years, growing up with news stories and documentaries from when they were still inaccessible.

But experiences can be more mundane as well. Some people may have 'learn a foreign language' on their bucket list, for instance – it's kind of on mine but with the proviso that ADHD brain mixed with Gifted Child Upbringing and Social Anxiety leads to huge Imposter Syndrome on that score; I'd love to be able to speak foreign languages but I ... it would take far more work for me to manage it than I think it would take for most people, because my own brain would put up huge blocks to it, either consciously or accidentally. I keep meaning to try, but ... things get in the way. Spanish, for the record, followed by Russian, then either Gaelic, Hindustani, or Swahili. You know, languages I'm actually going to use when I'm travelling.

Then of course there's running. At the start of 2020 I wrote on my 'activity list' that I wanted to work my way up to do a marathon, and possibly then to start trying ultra-running. Due to circumstances I never managed even a half-marathon, and even in my training runs the longest I managed was a 9 mile loop around the northern Sheffield suburbs. I do still aim to do it one day though. But not barefoot over ice and snow, just for the record. Barefoot, though, yes, obviously, which does mean choosing my event verrrry carefully!

In the back of my mind though it is true that breaking a world record would be a fun thing to have on a bucket list. I'm not sure what though. In my teenage years I read the world record for pushing someone in a shopping trolley for an hour was about 11.6km, which at the time was probably within my ability range, but almost certainly not now and in any case I couldn't find a record of it on the official world record site. I did find world records for running distances with a 20 lb backpack (about 9kg), but after the ripped toenail incident on The Hike, I'm wary of running while wearing any kind of backpack – not that I ever really felt comfortable running with a backpack anyway.

One might argue 'getting a book published' would be on my bucket list, but I think I'd say it was more of a 'life goal', in the same way that 'living abroad' might be. It's not something to tick off a list, more it's something you 'become'; it's not something you do, more something you are. Like, 'being well-respected enough to be the contact point for journalists and a resourceful knowledge base', on a given topic. It's not really a bucket-list item, more an achievement to work towards. And that resource doesn't have to even be particularly important, like the friend of mine in Coventry who was BBC Radio WM's 'go to' point of contact for all things related to Guinea-Pigs.

Another one of my weird, I suppose you'd call it a bucket-list item was – I wanted to watch an international football match between two countries that had nothing to play for and would never win anything. And on my Inter-Rail trip in 2019 I actually managed it – I watched Liechtenstein draw 1-all with Armenia.

Referring back to the introduction, I've been to the toilet in every country in the world I've been to (I mean, it would be kind of hard not to really!), though obviously not to every toilet, not even in Monaco, oh wait, did I even go to the toilet in Monaco? Maybe I've even failed that one! And I couldn't, for instance, make a blog post on 'the best toilets around the world'. (There is a 'loo with a view' on the Sunshine Coast in Australia, but when you're actually in the loo, sitting down, you can't see a thing). Maybe there's a market for that, who knows? And I've eaten crickets in SE Asia. Nicely deep-fried. Tasted like the dregs of a KFC bargain bucket. 6/10 would snack on again. Think of them, a bit like a protein-laden twiglet.

Anyway. Bucket lists also don't have to be to do with hobbies and interests anyway. The concept is equally as

valid in your professional life. Here's Jodie Paterson, talking about a career bucket list.

[Jodie]

So, I don't have a 'fun' bucket list. I don't have a travel one. I don't have an 'x amount of things to do before I'm a certain age'. I have a career bucket list. It's very practical. I use it to motivate myself. The only reason I put it together is because I sometimes lack motivation when I wasn't getting forward with my life. But now I use it to create smaller goals to get to the bigger ones on my bucket list.

The kind of stuff you can expect on there is 'I want to work in this industry doing this', So, I want to work at a radio station, doing research. And then, how I'm going to work my way up. All the things I want to do. I've got many interests, so it helps me kind of whittle them down and see what I want to do when.

I've managed to tick two things off that bucket list. One of them was to work for a newspaper, and the other was to work for a travel company. Quite small goals but I got there and I did it, and now I'm working towards other goals.

There's definitely a few career goals I will not be putting on that list, and that is working at a butchers as I'm a vegetarian. I actually almost got a job doing telesales for a butchers, but I turned it down.

Some people, though, have a much vaguer idea of their bucket lists. For example, here's Kate-Frankie, from This Could Lead To Anywhere, talking about the fact her 'bucket list' is more of an 'introspective' concept.

I banned her from mentioning Antarctica.

[Kate-Frankie – This Could Lead To Anywhere]

So, for bucket list experiences I think I've actually been incredibly lucky that I've been able to do so many amazing things and see so many great things, but really I think it's going to have a lot to do with nature, coming up, so I've got this kind of an idea of an Amazon kind of trip that I want to do as my next really really big kind of thing, but I also want to go to Canada and just see some of the amazing bits like the Rockies and I keep seeing this picture of Lake Louise and I want to kind of go there.

But I think it's more actually the experience, that I want, to kind of grow as a person, and I'm almost kind of trying to find my balance and well-being, and really the big experiences are part of me kind of either challenging myself or kind of centring myself, that you're trying to get 'back home' yourself, in a strange kind of internal way that kind of really feeling comfortable with myself. That's what I get through travel, and I think that's why travel is such an important thing for me. So anything where I can explore more about myself and become more the person I want to be is kind of the bucket list experience. That's a very like intangible thing to talk about.

She also makes an important point; many people listening to this pod may not realise it, but y'all are privileged. It's not a bad thing, don't worry. I did a whole episode on it – Episode 25, and in comparison to Episode 3 being the one I like the least, the one on Privilege is probably my most favourite. Many of us are incredibly lucky to be in a position where we can make bucket lists in the first place, let alone have them be dedicated to travel experiences.

Someone who references that point, as well as going on to talk about much more conceptual bucket list items, is my author friend Victoria Pearson.

[Victoria Pearson]

The other day, Barefoot said to me that they were planning on doing a piece specifically on people's Bucket Lists, and asked me if I'd like to contribute, to which I obviously said 'but I haven't got a passport'. I don't know why that was my initial reaction because I do actually have a bucket list. Passport privilege is something I have spoken about on this podcast before so I won't bore you by going over it again, but for me, personally, foreign travel is something that is likely to be out of my reach for quite a long time, if not for

ever. So while I do have some places I'd like to see on my bucket list, places like like Vietnam, Morocco, Svalbard, but some UK places as well, it isn't really something I've focused my bucket list on, because then it just becomes this thing that squats in the corner of my journal going 'hah, you'll never be able to do any of this, isn't your life depressing?' and who needs that really, I don't. So yeh, there are some UK-based places on my list, like Skye, and there are some sacred sites I would like to visit and things like that, and those are things I probably will be able to do, so those are on my list.

But most of my bucket list is focused around goal setting instead – things I might actually be able to do. Things that either really matter to me, or things I just want to do just for the fun of it. So, for example, I had on my list, 'learn an instrument', something I always wanted to do ever since I was tiny, but just didn't think I'd be able to do – I'm just not a musical person. Just before COVID became a thing, it was my birthday, and I was bought a little blue ukulele. I've been practising for nearly 2 years now. I'm awful. Really really terrible. I mean, even the dog cries when I play. But I sort of know how to do it now, I can do most of the main notes, I can play pretty much any pop song I can find the tab for, and so do I cross it off my list now? I'm not sure. I didn't really give myself a specific 'this is done date' for that one, but it was something I wouldn't have done had it not been on my bucket list, probably.

I'd also like to learn a language, well enough to be able to have a conversation with a native speaker. I don't really care what language it is to be honest. I'd just like to be able to learn a language. I've dabbled on Duolingo with Russian and Italian, and I've learned a bit of ASL on YouTube (American Sign Language), which was really really fun, but because I don't get use these things very much, they do tend to just drop out of my head quite quickly, so I would like to be able to get to a point where I'd feel fluent in a language even if I hadn't had a chance to speak it for a little while, that would be great.

So those are sort of personal improvement things that are on my bucket list, but I also have some experiences on there that are just on there because I think they would be really fun. Axe Throwing, being an example of one of those. I found a class near me last year and was going to go and have a go at it, just because it sounds awesome, and also zombies and stuff, very helpful to be able to throw an axe I would gather. But then lockdown happened, so I haven't had a chance to do that so it's gone on my bucket list, that is something I'm really quite keen to do. Along with things like archery, and paragliding, and wild swimming – not things that are particularly useful, or particularly valued as experiences, but things that I can do that would be fun. Just because.

And then the rest of my bucket list is made up of things that I would like to achieve, which are a bit more concrete, and involve sort-of a 'step up' of goals to get to the big one. For example, those of you who already know me will know that I self-publish short stories and poetry. I would really like the novels I've been working on to be traditionally published. And so, 'get traditionally published' is on my bucket list, but I also have a separate list of steps to get to that goal, which is things like 'build up the confidence to actually query', maybe 'finish editing the thing', that might help, stuff like that.

Another thing I'd like to do, and I don't think I've said this this out loud actually, I'd really like to do Tough Mudder. Now, at the moment I'm on week one of Couch to 5k, and so there's no danger of this happening any time soon, but it is on my goal list, it is on my bucket list of things I would like to eventually do one day.

So not every bucket list item has to be travel based, although even for somebody like me who is unlikely to ever be able to travel, there are one or two travel based things in there. But for me, and maybe for others who don't want to travel or can't see themselves ever being able to travel, a bucket list full of things we'd like to achieve instead works just as well.

V there makes an interesting point about some of her bucket list items – they're ongoing concepts rather than one-off things; again this harks back to the idea that sometimes bucket-lists can be seen often as a 'tick-box exercise'. But if you have aims on your bucket list that are long-term and ongoing, can you really be said to have 'ticked them off'? What even counts as 'having learned a language', or a musical instrument? There's whole essays and arguments about that question online, and is quite beyond the scope of this podcast.

You'll also notice V has similar view on bucket-list items as me. I don't know about the axe-throwing, although on my way to my nearest Aldi in Sheffield I actually do walk past a place that does offer axe-

throwing lessons. I've never been in it because I'm only ever passed it in lockdown. It might be fun. But it's not on my bucket list.

One last point to make about bucket lists is that they're not always worth it. Sometimes you have an idea in your head that you want to tick off an item on your bucket list, but when it comes to actually doing it, the experience isn't as good as you imagined it. Here are Morgan and Prachi, also known as AlienEating, who give their take on bucket lists and one experience they had which didn't go to plan but ended up turning into something better instead.

[AlienEating]

MORGAN: First off, I think they're nice, but I also think they can be a little bit of a hindrance, as far as keeping you on schedule, and making sure you get that thing crossed off your bucket list, so ... for example, we went to Thailand and my number one thing on my bucket list was the ATV through Phuket, I love ATVing, I've grown up doing it, I think it would be beautiful, I was so excited. But, we got to Phuket, it was packed to the brim with billions of humans, everyone in the world was in Phuket on that day. It was hot, it was not a great time, and it just wasn't fitting into our schedule. So we decided, I was like OK, you know what, I'm just going to give up ATVing, I really want to do it, but we're gonna take an overnight bus to Bangkok, this is not our cup of tea, we are not having it. And it turned out to be one of the best trips we'd ever taken, Bangkok was about a thousand times better and I wouldn't go back and trade it for the world. So I think in that sense bucket lists can be a little bit frustrating because you want to do something but you can't get your mind out of it.

PRACHI: Yes, cos you always, you have like this tunnel vision, like you can't focus on anything but getting that one thing crossed off your list, like you don't take in anything else around you that's happening, you don't enjoy the food as much, you don't enjoy meeting the people around you, because that's just what you want to do and there's nothing else on your mind.

MORGAN: It hinders your flexibility, and when you're travelling it's all about being flexible, you meet people who invite you to places, you see festivals, and ... if you have an appointment to see the Coliseum at 10am you're just gonna wanna do that because it's on your bucket list and you need to cross it off. [laughter] You need to just kinda go with the flow, and I'd actually recommend not even scheduling things a little bit less than I would recommend scheduling things but er ... they also can be good though for people who aren't so travel-savvy and don't care about travelling as much, and you just in life like, "I wanna see, I wanna go to the Taj Mahal", well then you can save up money and you can work towards a goal and that's a little bit better, and I think bucket lists are good in that sense, they give you something to work towards.

PRACHI: Yes, like you said, especially for people who don't travel as much.

One of my travel styles is to be relatively unplanned, to book very little in advance and to largely go with the flow, and as I said earlier, a bucket list is slightly different from the concept of a 'tick box' exercise that you feel you **have** to do; rather I feel bucket lists should be aspirational. There's a whole aspect I touched on in a previous pod, Episode 17, about Mental Health, where I talk about the 'Fear of Failure', and I do think there's a danger that if you commit to ticking everything off a list, if something happens and you find you can't, rather than enjoying what you have achieved you might feel disappointed in yourself and/or the world around you that it didn't happen.

For my Patreons, I've uploaded a further take on this, from Kate-Frankie again, who talks about a major bucket list experience she had regarding moving to Australia, and how it didn't go as well as she'd hoped, so if you're interested, go sign up and have a listen.

As I said earlier, Bolivia has been on my mind for so long it's almost like a running joke. Will I be sad if I never get to visit the country? Yes, of course. But if instead of visiting it, I end up having had a whole host of other experiences elsewhere in the world, will I still feel like it's all been a failure because I didn't do that? No, of course not. We can't do everything before we die, so in some ways the 'bucket list' will never be completed, because there'll always be things to put on it. I guess the secret is to do what you can, and make your list as accessible to you as possible.

So what have we learned from this episode? Bucket lists are things you should want to do before you die, but you don't have to complete them if you don't want to, nor should you be scared of not ticking everything off, or changing it. Sometimes you can't even tick them off as they're ongoing concepts rather than one-off events, where the tick might well be simply that you started. They can be as precise or as vague as you like, be as wide or as narrow as you wish, refer to hobbies or careers, and no-one should judge you for yours.

Unless it is to visit every toilet in every country in the world. Which is a bit of a shit idea, to be fair.

{standard section separation jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me in another two weeks for another venture beyond the brochure, though of course one could argue brochures are where bucket lists are often created. Mind you it depends what sort of brochure, I guess. I wonder if Luton has a tourist brochure. Anyway. Until then, Happy New Year, 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.

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