

Transcript of Podcast 040: First Time Travels

{Intro}

AMANDA KENDLE: yeh it's a very interesting question to think about where the first travel ideas came from and where the travel bug started

{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 :)

How are you? I hope you are all doing jolly well. It's definitely more springlike here at the moment – as I write this today it's been the first time I've seen rain for, maybe not all month but certainly for a couple of weeks. It's quite weird, in a way, amazing what you get used to, but at least it'll please my landlady's plants. She did tell me what she was growing, but I, obviously, don't remember. A lot of veg, I believe, tho I've not seen any of it grow to fruition yet.

I must apologise for this being a week late. I'd love to put the blame entirely on having my first Covid vaccination on the Monday, but if truth be told that didn't affect me in any way, apart from a slight existential angst and an increased hyper-awareness of other aches in my body. My dear friend Laura, who had already said 'oh, you're eligible for the vaccine, that means you must be getting old', is at least being sympathetic.

Getting the jab was simple, arranging it was slightly less so. Once it had been announced that my age cohort (45s and up) were eligible, I waited a couple of days and then went on the NHS website. It said there were sessions available all of the following week, at Sheffield Arena, which is conveniently walkable from where I live. Signing up that way though, rather than waiting for a letter etc from my doctor or whatever, required you to book your second jab there and then (you couldn't book just the first one), and even in pandemic times I have no idea what or where I'll be in July. In any case there was no option to choose Sheffield Arena as an option for the second jab – it wasn't that there was no availability, it was that the website calendar itself didn't seem to work. The other options it gave were all in weird and far off places like Huddersfield and Hathersage, doable but not necessarily useful; until I noticed, of all places, Pinxton – the next village along from where my real house is, in Nottinghamshire. They had availability for a Saturday, making it an easy and convenient journey.

Sheffield Arena is a pretty big venue. It's home to the Sheffield Steelers ice hockey team, and the jabs took place on a wooden floor placed over the rink. I first of all checked in outside, where a chap made sure I (was wearing footwear!) had a booking, and that I wasn't carrying anything illicit in my backpack (it was empty; I was going to Aldi afterwards), then inside I got to a lady behind a desk who signed me in, and directed me into the main area, where there were maybe 20 curtained-off booths and we all waited in line for one to become free. The waiting took longer than the jab, which was just a case of asking if I was allergic to anything, then being stabbed in the upper arm. I got a sticker but no lollipop; I was disappointed. AstraZenica, in case you're wondering.

Pretty much everyone I know, either online or at work, who has had the jab, has suffered quite a bit in the day afterwards, as if they'd gone down with a sudden cold-like bug for 24 hours. All I had was a very mild headache both the next morning and the morning after, but even that I'm pretty sure was caused by dehydration rather than the jab. See, it was a really hot day, and I'd gone for a jog earlier on, about lunchtime, and I did some hard hillwork, I had this idea of 'oooh I've not been up that road before, it might add a couple of hundred metres onto my route and show I'm developing slowly'. It felt like I was adding a couple of

hundred metres **up** rather than across, tbf; I was knackered after that run and, TMI alert, the next time I went to the toilet it was very clear, by, um, not being at all clear, that I probably needed to drink a lot more water.

I have done a lot of additional walking this week though despite that, partly because Laura is putting me to shame with her two-to-three-hour walks around London. Architecturally, Sheffield isn't as interesting, and as previously discussed, a lot less flat, but nevertheless still worth a jaunt. I did 10 miles on Wednesday, in a loop encompassing Hillsborough, Grenoside, and Ecclesfield, on the very edge of the urban sprawl almost into the countryside of South Yorkshire, that included a country lane and a couple of woodlands, but Saturday was the biggest one I've done for a while – a total of about 15 miles around the east of the city.

A month or so ago, I found out there was a named footpath that loops the edge of the city, the Sheffield Country Walk. It's about 53 miles in length, and I've unknowingly been on part of it before – it runs along Stanage Edge in the Peak District, for instance. On Saturday though, I took it from near Meadowhall Shopping centre all the way round to the previously-attested Halfway Tram Stop. This had me going near an industrial suburb called Greenland, past what used to be Sheffield City Airport, onto the far side of what was Orgreave colliery, then alongside railway lines and the River Rother through the Rother Valley country park and eventually to Eckington in North-East Derbyshire. Apart from the Rother Valley Country Park, which given that it consists of a couple of large lakes, a miniature railway, lots of greenery, and a cafe, was obviously rammed (and nary a face-mask in sight!), it was otherwise quite a pleasant and quiet walk, only passing the occasional dog-walker.

I'd already done a couple of miles in the north several Sundays ago, and my plan is to do the whole thing in stages over the next month or so, finishing back in Ecclesfield. I might even blog about it. There again.

The only other thing I've done recently is I finally made it down to London to get my voice recorded officially. It was a lovely and simple process; it just involved me sitting in a sound-proofed room in front of a microphone, and read previously-prepared scripts. The producer was really happy with my voice, once I'd felt comfortable being loud (he says everyone does this – when faced with a microphone people seem to reduce the volume of their voice for some reason), and while I'm more a documentary-type person he seems to think I'm suited for a lot of things, especially given my voice itself. People seem to like the kudos of having a 'northern' voice talk about their things but often balk when actually faced with one, because this is still a very class-conscious and class-driven society and culture. So being a 'posh northerner' might help.

The scripts I did were all 'samples' of things that had previously been done for real, and included a few advertising voiceovers, a couple of documentary introductions, and two 'continuity announcement' type things. Obviously there's more work in advertising, but I do really like the idea of short documentary type work, especially in subjects I'm interested in; the producer says you can definitely tell if someone has a passion for something they're talking about, and that it comes across better on recording.

The next steps with this are that he'll take a couple of weeks to create and edit the full reel, which he'll then send to me (so I'm expecting to see it sometime this week), and he'll also give me pointers about what I can do with it. Largely this involves finding a voice agent who wants to take me on, but also I know from other sources that people like YouTube videographers (not vloggers, obv) don't really like doing voiceovers for their own work, so I'm sure there's a market there. Obviously there's also going back to sites like Fiverr too – with a proper voice reel I'll sound a bit more professional.

It feels weird to have a saleable asset. Now I'm just going to be paranoid about every cough, splutter, and irk. I have also noticed other things about my voice – it's better as the day goes on. I was doing some audiobook work for my friend V and I had to rerecord a couple of stories because my voice sounded so much worse mid-morning. I've noticed the same on this podcast even – recordings I do early doors sound a bit cracklier than those I do in the evenings. Although I've also noticed that alcohol reduces audio quality (not, obviously, content quality lol). Apparently so do dairy products, so no recording after chocolate milkshakes or cheese sandwiches. Who knew?

My only other housekeeping is it's proving hard to plan things for away trips. As I said last time I'm meeting a friend in York in mid-May for a natter and a few drinks, but finding pubs to chat and drink in is proving problematic – some of them are closed until indoor seating opens, some of them require booking and are

booked up weeks in advance, and others don't take bookings at all and decide to open based on weather conditions, so that adds both the risk of closure and the risk of them being full.

I'm also possibly going to visit Glasgow and Edinburgh at the start of June with Laura for a couple of days for, uhm, 'research purposes'. No doubt I'll talk about the wider implications of this much more later in the year, and yes I'm being deliberately vague for reasons of, it'll take a lot of explaining and even more explaining if it doesn't happen.

Connected to this though is a feeling it's a good opportunity for me to explore a bit of Scotland and, you know, finally take some holiday time from work. I mentioned hiking a footpath – this is more likely to happen next year as I apparently have a willing hiking companion for it then – so I'll probably use the time this year to either explore a couple of the islands, or a bit of mainland wilderness exploration. I'm in discussions about both with people who know far more about this than I, so uhm, watch this space I guess.

Well, I've nattered on about myself a bit more than usual, so on with the pod. When I was doing my 'Bucket Lists Revisited' pod, I got a contribution from a friend that, while bucket list related, talked a lot more about how it felt to go on that first adventure, and it got me thinking a bit about whether it would make a decent idea for a pod on its own. Others agreed, and here we are.

I know I've talked a bit about my travel inspirations a couple of times, in disparate pods and blogs, but I don't think I've put the whole thing down on paper at the same time before, which, when you think about it, is rather odd.

But before I talk about my inspirations, let me bring in Amanda, from the Thoughtful Travel Podcast, who told me about her parents being an influence on her future travel passions.

{Amanda Kendle – Thoughtful Travel Podcast / Not A Ballerina}

For a long time I thought that my travel bug really came from the 1st trip I took, which I'll get to in a second – I was 9 years old, but I've been thinking a lot more about it in the last couple of years and I've realised actually my travel bug really came from the stories my parents told me when I was much littler. My dad, although he had a really standard career working for a bank in Australia for 44 years (with the same employer) but he actually had a couple of years of those, he spent working in Papua New Guinea, where this Australian bank he worked for had a few branches. So that was a few years before I was born, but by the time I was a kid he was still often talking about it, and we would often hear just little snippets, and he'd introduced us to a few phrases of pidgin English that he'd learned while he was working in Papua New Guinea, so that was one thing. Also my mum grew up in a really small country town - her big goal was always to "Not marry a farmer" so she could leave the country town and move to the city, to Perth. And she also took I guess what we'd now call kind of a 'working holiday', and from here in WA, she and her friend in her early 20s, late teens, went to the East Coast of Australia and worked for a few months in a couple of places, and that was quite unusual at the time and she would often tell us stories of those things as well, so I think this viewpoint that there is this big world out there, and even from my parents who grew up in the 40s and 50s, they saw that this was possible, even tho it was totally not to the same extent that it was for me and my sister later, that that really shaped my idea that we can get out there, even from this isolated place here in Western Australia where I live and grew up, that we can go out and see the world. So I think that was really the beginning of my travel bug, because basically I was always taught that there was this amazing, all these other things out there and you should try and find them.

We'll hear more from her later, but I wanted to bring that in early on because as you heard, travel has been part of her family background. I guess in a way I've had a similar upbringing; that me and Amanda are of a similar age too is quite interesting. I suspect though we're almost the privileged ones in that respect.

I grew up in a small but convoluted family; I lived with my grandmother and uncle, for, uhm, 'reasons' – my mother and step-dad (they married when I was still a toddler) only lived a couple of miles further into the countryside and I used to visit them most weekends when I was at Primary (elementary) school. And just like Amanda, people in my close family unit took trips away, often abroad, sometimes for business and sometimes for pleasure. My uncle was particularly notable for this, taking business trips to places like Toulouse, Copenhagen, Colorado Springs, and even to somewhere in Japan. Not bad for a computer

programmer. My mother and grandmother took the occasional trip for pleasure, to visit family in the USA and, I think at least once, to Australia. We were quite an insular family, so I guess I never saw this as unusual, until years later. That's the problem with privilege – sometimes you don't realise you have it until you spend time with people who haven't.

Now, let me talk about my step-dad, because I never really have. We're quite different people, in many ways, and I have no doubt had I grown up with him, a) it would have been quite a hard childhood, and b) I'd be a very different person now with different hobbies and probably even career path. He's very much more based around science (especially physics & astrophysics).

But. When he married my mother he was a refrigeration engineer in the Merchant Navy. I'm in discussions with him right now about doing an entire podcast episode on this, because it's a world I know very little about, and I'm sure most of you know even less than I do. Well, one of you probably knows a lot #subtweet. But in a nutshell it meant he was always travelling and I rarely saw him. Regardless of the fact he rarely went anywhere 'interesting' – while the list of countries he visited would be quite eye-opening, especially given the time period of the late 70s/early 80s (including places like Honduras and Japan), he generally only saw the ports and an awful lot of bleak ocean – the fact was he was out there seeing the world, and seeing it at a very 'basic' level too, so no expensive airlines, resorts, or hotels for him, it kind of made it sound more 'real' when he talked about it.

It also meant when I looked on a map, he was able to tell me more about those places on it, even if that was simply 'I sailed past there'. Having someone I knew who had been to these places, who could put more visualisations in my head than simply looking at the topographical and political layout of the world made the whole thing feel more ... accessible, somehow. As I say, more 'real'. I wasn't just looking at words and pictures on a page, I had something concrete I could associate them with.

I've already spoken before; I think in my pods about borders; about my youthful fascination with maps, how I would spend hours at home in bed, or on the toilet (hey, we're all friends here; for most people these days, that's where they scroll Instagram, be honest with yourselves!), poring over map books, atlases, both locally and worldwide. And associated encyclopaedias – I was always fascinated with facts about the world and even at the early age of 8 I could probably have pinpointed most countries and world capitals on a map. There were, obviously, fewer of them then, but that's by the by. It's a shame for me in a way that secondary school geography lessons became obsessed with things like cloud formation and rocks – I dropped it for GCSE at the age of 14 in favour of History (with hindsight I should have taken both and dropped German, but that's by the by. At the time I seemed to have this love for foreign languages, even tho I was completely useless at them).

But these maps, these facts, kind of 'spoke' to me. And obviously given my age, some of these maps were themselves quite old, depicting the world not as it was at the time, but as it had been say 15, 20 years ago. This posed questions in my head like, why was "Northern Africa, not to scale" on the same page as France? Why is it called the Territory of the Afars and Isars; that's a strange and complex name for a country, I'm not surprised it changed? And of course the rather naïve, innocent childhood question of "coo, there's a lot of places with (UK) after their name, why is that?". Maybe that's where I got a passion for history from as well, because I wanted to know more about these places.

I also liked exploring what was 'over the page' or 'bits that lay beyond the map'. A joke my stepdad once told me about a world atlas I had – it had pages with drawn colourful political maps, but also satellite images, for each region and area of the world. I had it open to the satellite image of the Oceania page, and there was a black triangle on the top right where the picture from the satellite obviously wasn't complete, and he said it was the edge of the world, and that nothing lay beyond it. From memory, and cross-referencing with Google Maps, I'd say that triangle was over what are now called the Marshall Islands and the north-western islands of Kiribati.

Of course, a love for travel can also be formed from early trips, say, family holidays with parents. Roo, from Roo Loves Travel, mentions this may have been true for her.

{Roo – Roo Loves Travel}

My first trip abroad was when I was fairly young, and we went on a family trip to Paris. And I think my parents didn't think we'd particularly like Paris as children, so they sort of bribed us with a day out at Disneyland to try and appease us, so that we'd behave in Paris itself, but I think I quite surprised my parents by begging them to take me to the Paris Catacombs which I'd seen a photo of, and even to this day I have all these little morbid curiosities, so I can see it suited me very well as a child to go there.

Sometimes it's those little things that make a big impression later, and sometimes you don't really think about it until afterwards. Like with me and borders and map edges, I guess. A little thing I focused on at the time, that led to much bigger thought processes later in life.

My early family holidays were less ... international than my parents' trips may suggest. My first international adventure was when I was 11. Unusually for my peer group and British culture at the time, it wasn't on a two-week sun, sea, and sand adventure to a Mediterranean island, rather it was with my uncle to Denmark. As it was one of the places he'd been a few times previously on business, it was a place he felt he knew relatively well, and one he thought that I'd find interesting. We didn't go to Legoland, for the record, tho we did go to Roskilde's Viking centre, as well as a day trip to Sweden, which involved taking a train from Helsingborg to Malmo. It rained pretty much the whole day, so for 30 years my only knowledge and experience of Sweden was of looking out of a soggy train window for 3 hours.

Not only was it my first international trip, but it was also my first flight. I don't remember too much about it in all honesty; it was only a short hop from Manchester to Copenhagen, I do recall the flight crew giving me a freebie of a colouring book and some pencils on the way there, and I know I didn't get sick or anything, so ... disappointingly for reminiscing purposes, I evidently didn't see it as a particularly memorable or exciting experience. Maybe even then I knew I'd be on lots of flights in the future, although interestingly I've been racking my brain trying to think when my *second* flight would have been, and I can't honestly place it, given my later passion for trains and cheap coaches. It might have been on one of the trips to visit my then-girlfriend in France, when I'd've been about 20, but we'll talk more about penpals and things later.

My usual family holidays were in self-catering cottages in the UK, almost exclusively in Scotland. By the time I was 11, I'd been to most points on the mainland except the far north (my uncle tells me we even went to Ardnamurchan lighthouse on a day trip when we stayed near Ben Nevis once, tho when I hiked there in summer 2019 I absolutely did not have any memory of it, despite remembering an obscure car ferry from the Isle of Mull to the mainland, so who knows). I'm not saying that these holidays instilled a passion for Scotland, nor a liking for mountains and countryside, and I certainly saw enough ruined abbeys to last me a generation, but I wonder if what it did promote was proof that the UK as a whole was worth visiting – when everyone I knew was talking about weeks sunbathing in Spain or Greece and I was going round small towns in overcast conditions, and maybe I just got used to it, that it was 'different enough' for me? I don't know.

One thing that was comparable tho was that these holidays were regular: they were annual and tended to last two weeks. Amanda, who you heard from earlier, had a very different family holiday when she was a kid.

{Amanda Kendle – Thoughtful Travel Podcast / Not A Ballerina}

And then, as I mentioned right at the start, my first trip was a very impressive trip really, looking back, it was very budget, but we actually spent 6 months in Europe with a camper van or motorhome. My dad, from this very secure bank job, we have a long service leave scheme in Australia so after many many years he was entitled to 6 months' paid leave, which meant that we could spend that time in Europe, with a motorhome travelling round, very budget kind of travel but the fact that we were outside of Australia; we were doing distance education, my sister and I (I was 9, she was 7), and obviously just that experience of visiting all these different countries, seeing different languages, different cultures, it was so different to our experience here in Australia that it excited me no end and made me really really ready to see the rest of the world. So that very first trip was never going to be the last at all.

And funnily enough, in more recent years, I asked my mum what was the impetus for doing that trip, and she had great foresight and said to me 'well actually I sort of thought in the future you and your sister might end up living abroad, perhaps in Europe, and I wanted to see what it was like'. And I did indeed spend a few

years living in Slovakia and Germany, so she was very accurate with her prediction and her thinking, or is it a self-fulfilling prophecy because by showing me Europe I wanted to live there and travel more and do all of that.

I know of a couple of people who, as parents, have taken their kids on long experiential journeys abroad – one of them took her two kids who I think were 7 and 9 at the time on a two month trip couchsurfing across the USA, and I met a woman in an South African backpacker hostel who was travelling around the region with her 6-year-old, but for people of my generation, this sort of thing just didn't happen; it would never have occurred to us that we could *be* the kids, and the idea of long-term travel was something that existed only in history books, or seemed accessible only for people who'd purposely dropped out of society; ideas like The Grand Tour in aristocratic Europe, or the Hippie Trail of the 60s and 70s, both very different ends of the same spectrum. People who either had the money, or the time, to travel, who either didn't need to be stuck in the life-long 'working 9-to-5' career that we were all expected to follow, or who so vehemently didn't want to be that they literally 'escaped', for better or worse. I'm not saying it's 'easy' to do this now, by any means, but by comparison it feels more accessible and it is more common, suggesting either that travel has become more affordable to a larger swathe of the population, or more people are actively seeking out and trying alternative lifestyles. Although that it's now possible to work on the road certainly helps. I thought having Denmark as my first foreign country visited was unusual; I am sure there will be people in the UK alive right now whose first foreign country visited would be, I don't know, Algeria, or Ecuador. Probably not Kiribati though.

Someone whose passion for travel came in a less usual way is Kylie, who blogs at *Between England And Iowa*, whose very name suggests this passion stayed quite unusual in scope.

{Kylie – Between England and Iowa}

I remember the first time I was bit by the travel bug, and how it all started. I was on a caravan holiday in the UK, in Cornwall. I was at that age where I was a bit annoyed that I didn't have a phone signal, I was grumpy about things like the rain, and I'd gone down to the clubhouse that was on the campsite every night, and I was just watching the kids entertainment, for something to do, and the more I watched it, I kind of discovered this and was like – I want to do that. It's like, I was writing a journal at the time and you can kind of see the change halfway through the week where I was just like 'I think I want to be this now', and I even went up to one of the club reps – considering I was only about like 15 – and I was like 'how do I get to do your job', and they told me to – they took 'travel and tourism' at college, so, I was just at that time where I was just getting ready to choose college and stuff like that, so I signed up for college, and the rest was history – I did 'travel and tourism', I did a foreign exchange trip in Poland, I went to Rome, I went to Kenya for two weeks, and that kind of just sparked it, but I was kind of annoyed that I was with group student travel, like, stuck with a teacher; I wanted to get out and explore by myself, and obviously I couldn't do that on a school trip, so that's how it then kind of gave me the bug, I just wanted to go out and see as much as I could on my own terms, and the rest is history. 40 countries later and 15 years later and I'm still going and I love it.

When I was the age Kylie was when she had that revelation, I was starting to collect, if that's not a slightly creepy term, penpals. Most of them were elsewhere in the UK but I did have a few abroad. It never occurred to me that I'd ever meet them, more for me it was the thrill of having friends (that I had very few local friends is one reason I now have a therapist, but hey), mixed with the dual concept of learning more about other places and, occasionally, keeping up practising with French and German. Because learning is fun when you choose to do it and you do it because you want to. However, over time I did end up travelling to meet a couple of them. Sometimes it worked out fine, and we got along just as well in real life as we did in letters. This is how I ended up with my first fiancée, who started out life as a penpal in France. Other times ... it didn't. Meh. One such early adventure to meet a penpal I'll talk about in a little bit, but first, let's talk about a wider concept.

Now, I mentioned earlier about The Grand Tour. This phrase harks back to a time before revolutions swept across Europe in the late 18th to mid 19th Centuries, and refers to when children of aristocratic heritage, once they 'came of age', would travel around the courts of the European monarchs, and doing what we might term now 'social networking'. In general it tends to refer to people visiting the capitals and important centres of European culture – the Viennas, Pragues, Milans, Krakows ... obviously these days the culture tends to be

more about photographing the buildings rather than dancing inside them, but the concept still exists. These days it's seen more in terms of 'Inter-Rail', commonly undertaken by people either at University, or on a 'Gap Year' either before or after Uni. One of my slight regrets is that I didn't do this at the time – I went to University more because it was expected of me than any real desire to go, and even when I was choosing subjects and locations, I wasn't really convinced I was doing the right course (I ended up doing a subject known as 'Social and Economic History', at Birmingham University, and I dropped out after a little over a year because it just ... it wasn't 'right' for me. Which, given the nature of my pod and blog, is largely ironic. But again, learning is fun when it's something you've chosen to do and have an interest in.)

("Economic Industrialisation of the USA in the 1860s" is not fun. When I've spoken to my American friends about this, they agreed it's not fun, 'why are you learning this?', but you know, that was my course – this was why I dropped out!!)

Anyway, rant over. Someone who did take a, and she even calls it such, cliched Gap Year as her first major travel experience is Nat, from NatPackerTravel. She also talks about how she felt while she was doing it.

{Nat – NatPacker Travel}

I don't really know when I started wanting to travel, I just feel like I always wanted to. I don't know why and when that desire came up on me, so I did the very cliched thing of – after uni, take a gap year. So, I went to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and the US, and since then I just always wanted to travel, I just absolutely loved it, and just wanted to it more and more, and see more and more, and I don't really know why, seeing that everything went wrong in the first few weeks of that, I mean, honestly my parents expected me back within the first two weeks, they really didn't understand the type of travelling I was doing, but ... my connection flight to London got delayed, as we were meant to be flying to Bangkok, so that all fell apart really, then in Australia we got a van, and it broke down time and time again, we ended up scrapping it ... anything that could have gone wrong did go wrong, and I didn't really plan anything, so each place we got to it was like 'what do we do here?' 'I dunno'. So, although lots and lots went wrong, I still wanted to travel, wanted to do it again. And that taught me to plan a bit better, and actually do a lot more research than I originally did. I thought I was prepared, but I really wasn't. Each time I travel now, I still see it as a challenge to overcome, which I think is why I really like travel so much. But it was definitely that first gap year that threw me in at the deep end and made me just love it even when stuff doesn't turn out right.

As an aside, I've done an Inter-Rail trip twice, once in 2000 for a two-week blast around Spain, Portugal, and Morocco with my then-fiancée (who started out life as a penpal), the details of which, remarkably, are still accessible online, which may make it one of the first ever online travel blogs. It's not a very interesting blog – it's very much in diary form – but it exists. Ah, if only I'd known the future. The second time, as I've mentioned before, was Autumn 2019, for almost three months in all, and was something much closer to the original spirit of the concept. But neither happened as anywhere close to my first trip, or my first experiences, with the exception that the three nights I had in Morocco were the first nights I spent outside Europe. I'd expect most British people's first foreign geographic continent visited would be North America or Oceania; I obviously had to be different.

However, a visit to Ireland at the age of 17 to meet a penpal aside, my first real solo trip was while I was at University, and had similar vibes to an Inter-Rail trip, even if I did most of it by Eurolines coach. September 1994, I had almost no money, but decided on a whim to go visit my penpal Jelena in Yugoslavia. We seemed to get along, and were writing really long letters, so why not. Let's not mention that we'd only written each other three letters by that time; regardless of length this was still very early in the friendship.

Let's go through this again. No money. First solo trip. Useless at languages. Introvert. Someone I didn't know that well. Yugoslavia. 1994.

I mean, it's "on brand", certainly ...

When I look back at that trip, I sometimes wonder how on earth I managed to do it. I took a bus to Bratislava (which I nearly didn't make in the first place because of finance issues – a bank machine in London swallowed my card because of debt, and had to get a loan from my uncle, in cash, to sort me out in the short term), a train to Budapest, and an onward to train to Belgrade. In those days there was basically no Internet

so everything had to be booked in person, the currencies used were difficult to obtain outside the country (for a foreigner, they were tricky enough to obtain *in* the countries), almost no-one spoke English and they certainly weren't used to young English tourists passing through – indeed two of these countries had only recently even been opened up to independent foreign travel having been under restrictive Communist regimes until as recently as five years earlier. I had no maps of the cities, no clue where I was going, and I really had to try to make myself understood. When I tried all of this eight years later in Italy, I came home rather than having to constantly force myself out of my comfort zone, yet for some reason, maybe because I was young and a bit greener-round-the-ears, the idea that I couldn't do it just hadn't occurred to me. Did anything go wrong? Well, yes, obviously; I needed help from passing American businesspeople to buy a train ticket from Bratislava to Budapest as no-one at the desk spoke English (the Americans were rather surprised to see a young English tourist trying to do this in the first place, they were quite weirded out as to why I was there); similarly, buying the ticket from Budapest to Bratislava on the way back was tough because it was 5am on a Sunday morning and the ticket office wanted to me to prove I'd got a receipt for changing money into Forints legally, which obviously I seem to have lost somewhere along the way. Fortunately this too got sorted. I don't sleep at all on coaches and the train from Budapest to Belgrade was an overnight one and I was too worried that people were going to come into my compartment and rob me, or worse, try to talk to me, so I ended up staying awake all night out of anxiety, so when I arrived into Belgrade about 10am I was so shattered that when we went back to my friend's apartment I pretty much slept the whole day. It was also quite, shall we say interesting, to see from the train through Yugoslavia whole yards full of UN vans, and being reminded that only a couple of hundred or so miles away there was a full-blown civil war going on. And, to finish off, the brake cable snapped on coach on the way back to London from Bratislava so we were several hours late after having to detour to get it fixed; the journey to the workshops in Austria or southern Germany (it was dark, we don't actually know) being made carefully as one of the coach crew was literally having to hold the brake cable together, or something.

You may be pleased to know I'm still friends with Jelena after all of this, and have met her a couple more times since, though not in quite as chaotic circumstances. She's even appeared on this podcast from time to time. And that whole adventure didn't put me off travelling; indeed you can tell that it was quite ... similar to other solo journeys I've had since. Start as we mean to go on, I guess.

What these early adventures do, though, is teach you things. They may be learnings about foreign places, or they may be learnings about yourself as a person. I'd strongly argue that many of your early experiences affect who and what you grow up into later, not just passions as Roo mentioned earlier, but also fundamentally the sort of person you become. Indeed Roo herself goes on to talk about that very point.

{Roo – Roo Loves Travel}

And then years later I took my first adult trip, when I was about 18, without family, to Athens, because I love history and ruins, and I think I was quite nervous to be away for the first time without parents and whatnot, so I stuck quite close to the city centre and the ruins etc, excepts I'd booked this boat trip on the final day. This was then cancelled due to bad weather, and I was given the option instead for a replacement trip to a place I'd never heard of at the time, called Delphi. Now, Delphi is the most amazing archaeological site, where Ancient Greeks would travel in order to talk with the Oracle, and it's in these beautiful mountains, that are just green, full of olive groves, and the sun was shining, and the sky was blue, and it was just absolutely incredible, and it became the most memorable aspect of the whole trip for me.

I suppose what my travel firsts taught me is to always have an open mind, and always seek out or be open to visiting places that you otherwise wouldn't have thought you'd were interested in, and I can think over the years this has made me go out of my way to drive out to remote castles on the top of mountains in the Pyrenees in France, all the way down to catching a bus out to see these quirky little mosaic arty loos in the middle of nowhere in New Zealand. And even nearer home, in London, looking out for places I wouldn't have thought of visiting, and aren't on the tourist trail, and making the time to find those hidden gems.

Travel thus taught Roo to be open to new ideas and concepts, and I think that idea of being 'open' is important when travelling. Many people, especially Brits, see a holiday as doing exactly the same as you'd do at home, but with different currency and probably better weather. I can see the attraction of Benidorm for that very reason – it's 'easy' as foreign holidays go; you don't have to learn a foreign language, you can trust

the food, the TV is familiar, and you can do it all while lazing under an almost guaranteed sun, which you can't get at Rhyl or Skegness. But travelling I think is 'more' than that sometimes, it's about breaking out of your standard practices and seeing what else a town, a country, an island, offers. Whether that island is off the coast of your own country, or diametrically opposite you on the globe. But while you can try to learn to open your mind at any time, it certainly helps if you've experienced it from an early age,

Someone else who agrees with some of these sentiments is Kate-Frankie, from This Could Lead To Anywhere, who talks about her first 'big trip', and whose comments kind of sum up the whole of this episode really, talking about gap years, things that go wrong, and the feeling that Amanda alluded to earlier that this was never going to be a one-off, this was the start of something big and personal, and which, quite literally, could lead to anywhere.

{Kate Frankie – This Could Lead To Anywhere}

My big trip, when I was 21, I felt like I'd been waiting forever for it. I'd kind of planned some of it from being about 15, but my parents wanted me to do University because I think they knew definitely who I was and knew that I'd probably never stop travelling after I kind of went. So I did Uni and then straight after it started saving for my trip.

So it was like a big gap year. I did ... the China part of it weirdly, which was at the very beginning, I flew to Beijing – that was the bit that changed me and changed my life, and I think the travel bug kind of started then – it was definitely that whole big trip, but it was completely different to what I thought, and I didn't know what to expect, and I was very ... quite naïve, quite gullible. I think I got ripped off in the taxi on the way from Beijing airport to the starting hotel of the trip. And I learned a lot really quickly. I kind of just hadn't ... grown up in a way. University gave me some kind of life experience and some independence, and you start doing things for yourself, but there's a whole world out there and it's big, and it can be scary, and I just was probably not really that prepared really.

And so going across China through Tibet, particularly the Tibet part of the trip, getting to Everest Base Camp, you know doing some real proper hiking and climbing up what they considered hills but it definitely felt part of a mountain because you're in the Himalayas, and you're up at real altitude so it takes much more out of you every step, that just was an experience that's really hard to get people to understand; people that I met there, we just felt like we were on a real adventure, like, the real meaning of the word adventure; we were going to stand at the foot of the highest mountain in the world and this incredible mountain range of the Himalayas, but we were also exploring a culture that most of us had never been to I think, we were trying different food, we were hearing a completely different language – I'd done like bits of Europe before, I'd done some of North Africa, I'd been to America before, but China was something very very different and huge growth for me; I really grew as a person there.

So what have we learned in this episode? Apart from that some people had quite privileged upbringings?! Everyone has to start somewhere, and quite often the travel bug is almost genetic, in that it's parents or wider family who provide the initial inspiration. First travels are often inspirational, and plant seeds that grow later, even if sometimes it's hard to work out how that seed was planted. And often those first travels are indicative of the sort of places and styles you end up liking to travel later in life.

How my life might have been different if I'd have spent a week every year in Rhyl.

{standard section separation jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me in another two weeks for another venture beyond the brochure. I'm planning quite an interesting episode that may, may, cause controversy and ructions within the travelsphere! Until then, get a jab when it's offered, 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.

Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure was written, presented, edited, and produced in the Sheffield studio by The Barefoot Backpacker. Music in this episode was "Walking Barefoot On Grass (Bonus)" by Kai Engel, which is available via the Free Music Archive, and used under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Previous episodes will be available on your podcast service of choice, or alternatively on my website: barefoot-backpacker.com. If you want to contact me, I live on Twitter @rtwbarefoot, or you can e-mail me at info@barefoot-backpacker.com.

*The podcast has a Facebook Group : [travel.tales.beyond.brochure](https://www.facebook.com/travel.tales.beyond.brochure)
And I have a Patreon, for access to rare extra content: [patreon.com/traveltalesbeyondbrochurepod](https://www.patreon.com/traveltalesbeyondbrochurepod)*

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