

## Transcript of Podcast 043: Letting Agents and Moving To Glasgow

{Intro.

**SFBO: WELCOME BACK TO THE POD**

{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 :)

As the lovely ladies on the 'Sounds Fake But Okay' podcast say – 'welcome back to the pod'. And also, arbitrarily, welcome to Season Five. Long gap, new setup, makes sense. I'll shortly come onto why this episode is so much later than anticipated, and why the subject matter changed at the last minute, but firstly I just want to say I hope you found the two most recent episodes that I pre-recorded before my holiday back at the start of June very interesting. Influencer Responsibility is a topic that we as bloggers and influencers probably should think and talk about much more than we do, outside of subtweets and passive-aggressive discussions on Social Media sites.

I recorded and published them both quite a way in advance, to take into account my holiday in Scotland; they were done on the Monday morning, the day before I left. I was going to do them that evening, but realised I had a bit of time to spare so just about squeezed it in before I needed to go out for a dentist appointment. And with hindsight this was a really great idea. I went there to get a tooth removed. It was an annoying tooth that had kind of half-broken-off, so every time I ate peanut butter sandwiches, I ended up with bits of peanut stuck in it. I always eat crunchy peanut butter – I do use the smooth stuff but only for curries and chocolate milk shakes. Anyway, what I hadn't realised is what happens \*when\* you get a tooth removed (it being, you know, 25 years or something since I'd last visited a dentist and had a procedure). It bleeds. For several hours. And you need to keep a wad of cotton or fluff in the gap, and bite down hard, while it's bleeding. And it means you can barely open your mouth, never mind talk. I would simply not have been able to record a podcast had I left it until after I'd come back!

Having a tooth removed the day before a two week holiday probably wasn't one of my better ideas, but aside from keeping tissue on hand (well, in pocket) for the whole time just to make sure it didn't start unilaterally rebleeding, it didn't cause me as much hassle as I'd feared it would. Indeed I was in the pub as early as the following day, because I had four hours to waste in Aberdeen and there's only so much you can do on a warm Tuesday during Covid restrictions with a heavy-ass backpack. It's a shame as I'd not been to Aberdeen since I was like nine years old, and there's a couple of local museums etc there that it would have been nice to see, but they were closed so I couldn't. I spent an hour and a half in a Brewdog pub. Re my previous episodes, I am aware that, ethically, there are certain issues with Brewdog but a) it's not a Wetherspoons, b) it serves good beer, and b) it was open, and when you're not entirely sure what the rules and regulations are because everywhere in your own country has very different ones, you take what's available.

Anyway.

Yes it's been a while since those episodes. It's something I am consciously aware of, and is partly due to, honestly, focus and dedication issues. For much of mid-late June, I felt like things were a bit of a monotonous blur where every day merged into each other, and I never seemed able to sit down and do things. What doesn't help is that I have a full-time job that has only a small cross-over with my Barefoot Backpacker identity (that cross-over being, oddly, Google Analytics and related products), so I don't have the same amount of time or resource to focus on that as I used to this time last year. On the opposite side though, I'm doing a job that I like and which kinda suits my personality, and it helps to fund my side-hustles like this, so it's an overall win.

However, this is hopefully going to change. Well, not the job thing. As I say, I like earning money, it's useful. But re blog stuff, since coming back from Scotland, I've picked up speed with my VA and we're going to be working together to do, well, 'more'. Broadly, I'm hoping that the more we plan and manifest, the more will get done, even if we don't end up doing it all. And having someone there who's willing to both encourage me to do things, and promote what I do, means I'm hopefully going to be more inclined to do it. Hopefully. Which is a word I'm using a lot.

She's actually suggested several other things I can do to promote both me in general, and this podcast in particular, including the dreaded 'v' word. No, not Victoria. Video. She thinks it'd be a good idea to have 'trailer'-like videos for my podcast episodes, and maybe some longer-form film to support them for a different audience. I'm unlikely to film me doing an entire podcast, because I ain't got the wherewithal for that even I was blogging full-time.

That doesn't mean I'm going to end up on TikTok though. Although a Gen-X demiboy who can't dance might well take it by storm, albeit for the wrong reasons. Is it possible to be too self-aware?!

I did take quite a lot of video in Orkney, as it happens, partly in thoughts that I could create a film of my adventures, in a similar manner to how I did with the Outer Hebrides two years previously, and around Ashfield and the adventure on my first Wild Camp. The one thing my VA has said is she sees my podcast as being my primary media, higher even than my blog, so that should give me the incentive to do it more often and regularly.

Your mileage may vary.

This podcast episode was going to be on the Orkney Islands, as a natural follow-up to my trip. However, for the whole of July and August, my run-time has been taken up by precisely one thing - housing. As some of you who follow me on other channels, well Twitter, may know, I've recently moved house. This is normally a very stressful time, and oddly, so it proved, but not for the usual reasons.

So, some backstory; as I'm sure you all know, for the last year and a half I have been renting a room off a friend of mine in Sheffield, Yorkshire, in a very casual arrangement. However, for a while now she's been making suggestions of wanting to sell up and move back to nearer her family, so I knew it wouldn't be a long-term thing. In fact I've given her a target of having her house on the market by Easter next year, in part because she needs accountability almost as much as I do. Ah, accountability - something I'm much better at giving to other people than I am to myself.

Now, Easter next year is a long time away; why couldn't I stay for longer? Well, in part it's because I was getting angsty - even though I had free run of the place it never really felt like mine; I was always conscious of other people and I never really felt that comfortable being anywhere else other than my bedroom. I was always aware it was someone else's place and the other lodger there had been there four years and I felt I was kind of intruding. I know, really odd mentality I have.

The main reason though was because of one of those 'Say Yes More' moments that life throws at you; the sort of thing that had me hiking across Great Britain back in the summer of 2019. In this case, it was a suggestion from a close friend of mine, occasional podcast contributor Laura. See, she's been a student in London for the last year, but for a long time she's wanted to live in Scotland; specifically Glasgow, though she was open to Edinburgh. The trouble for her was, she couldn't afford to do it on her own, so she needed to find someone to share with. This person needed to be someone who was financially able to, logically able to, and someone she'd be willing to flat-share with. Her shortlist was very small ...

It took her a while for her to be brave enough to ask me, but of course I was more than happy to. In truth I'd already been looking at Scotland as a possible next place to move to - well it was either there or South Wales, because that's where the head office of the organisation I work for is. I work from home and they aren't looking like they're going to impose full-time office work any time soon, and with the greatest respect to Newport, it's not Glasgow.

One might well ask - but my dear Barefoot, how are you going to cope with living in such close quarters with a

friend? How will you know if you get along? And in truth, I guess I don't. But we've travelled together a couple of times, including a two-week backpacking trip in Philippines back in February 2019, where we shared hostel rooms and cramped minibuses, amongst other things, and we didn't argue, despite being quite different types of people.

As an aside, she hates feet. Like, really hates them. I may end up wearing socks occasionally indoors.

Anyway.

So, we agreed to share a flat, and because I'd be the one paying the rent, plus the fact I'd probably be living there for longer than she would be, it was left up to me to find one. The remit she gave me was very simple; ideally a ground floor flat, on a quiet street, with a double bed. As it turns out, two out of three ain't bad. But it was a long effort coming.

As for location, well at the start of June we had a few days in both Glasgow and Edinburgh to see which one she preferred. This was an interesting trip for other reasons actually – it was just as the Covid restrictions were being lifted across Scotland, with the exception of Glasgow City. I'd come directly from Orkney (Level 1) and she'd arrived from London which at the time had really started to open up again. Glasgow was stuck in Level 3 because of a spike on the south side of the city, and the regulation was that only essential journeys in/out of the city were 'permitted'. This led to thoughts of mine that police would be patrolling the train from Perth I'd be getting, making sure everyone had a valid reason for going.

In the event, Level 3 restrictions in Glasgow made the city feel a bit like Magaluf. The only rule that seemed to actually make a difference was 'you're not allowed to drink alcohol indoors at a pub or restaurant', so who knew just how al fresco Glasgow's dining and nightlife scene was.

But we weren't up there to drink, we were there to check out locations. I mean, we did drink, maybe more than we anticipated, but that's by the by. Despite deciding she didn't like the Clyde waterfront, Laura definitely felt more of a vibe for Glasgow than Edinburgh ('a proper city' rather than 'a glorified touristy high street' is how she described it), and she loved the buildings and setting of Glasgow University, so that's where she wanted to live – the West End.

This is a very popular area, as it's the heart of studentville, but equally it has an awful lot of flats for rent. When I did some initial casual searches, I noticed two or three going online every day. I was thus pretty hopeful that when the time came, I'd have little issue in finding somewhere. She needed to move by the first week in September, so I figured if I started looking in early-to-mid-July, with a view to moving myself in in mid-August, that would work out perfectly. All I needed to do was make sure she was in principle happy with what I found.

It ... didn't go to plan. For many reasons.

It is important to bear in mind that I was looking during what purported to be a relatively restrictive Covid lockdown situation, even if by the time I started, even Glasgow had dropped at least one level. In addition, I was mostly looking from my room in Sheffield. Remember, Sheffield is a long way from Glasgow – though possible in a day trip it's not really advisable too regularly without being permanently knackered, so I wasn't really in a position to go flat-viewing at a moment's notice. Therefore, you'd have thought virtual and online viewings would be, well, not just offered but preferred, indeed possibly obligatory.

No-one appears to have told the letting agents. Most of them had a policy of 'you can't apply for the flat unless you've physically visited it' and 'no we're not offering online viewings'. One letting agent told us later this was actually contrary to the Covid regulations that were in place at the time in Glasgow, and was not happy his competitors were doing that, but by then we'd probably have taken a shed.

In addition, much of the time, the viewings were all arranged by the letting agent only on one day. Which may make sense if the flat was currently tenanted, but most of the ones I was looking at were vacant. The first flat I wanted, I had to get a friend to visit on my behalf, purely to satisfy the requirement that we'd done a physical viewing. The day that the viewings took place also seem to have had no relation to when the flat first came on the market; some places had lettings that day, some for one day later in the week, and some ... it took about two weeks to get a viewing, suggesting that they were just waiting around for enough people to express interest in it to make it worthwhile getting someone out to give viewings.

And this was another odd thing – there was no real consistency to how these viewings were conducted. In some places the letting agent rep met me at the property and showed me round. In others the rep stayed in one room and I was free to explore. In one flat the rep stayed outside the property 'for Covid reasons'. Yet the simple idea of just going around the flat on, say, a video call, seemed alien to them, despite it being much more efficient and certainly much safer, covid-wise.

Anyway, what that first viewing that a friend of mine made us realise was how quick and competitive the market was. My application for that property was rejected by the landlord the morning after I submitted it; while two or three new flats would come onto the market each day, they'd mostly be gone the day after the scheduled viewings. And there'd be five, six, seven people looking at it, wanting it, each putting in an application. The viewings would be almost done in a chain; you'd meet the people either side of your viewing and, I guess often, some of them would see the same people at each of the flats they were viewing.

In conversation with the agents, and my friend/VA Victoria, I realised what I ought to do is spend some time in Glasgow and see a lot of flats in a short space of time. So, in late July I booked myself into a central Glasgow hotel for two days, to make it easier to see in-person viewings at short notice – if a property came onto the market while I was there, I could try to see it immediately. I ended up staying for four because of rejections and new flats coming onto the market. A couple of them seemed really nice, but I never got any of them. Sometimes there was insight as to why: for one flat the letting agent said the landlord turned me down because he felt a couple who were dating would make a safer and more secure set of tenants than two friends flatsharing. [pause] Which is, frankly, ridiculous, because relationships are more likely to break up than friendships are.

This, sorry I'm going to rant a bit, so I have a couple of other problems with this. Leaving aside the obvious discrimination against single people, asexuals, and people for whom friendship is the primary form of family, I realised something that made absolutely no sense. One of the issues with my flat-sharing is that Laura is an ex-student and can't prove any income. Now, under normal circumstances I can understand landlords being reluctant to take on someone like that without financial safeguards, but, get this, she's not paying the landlord the rent. I am. And I can afford it on my own. If I were looking for myself, if I were the only person living there, this whole process would have been really simple and easy. But because she'll be living there too, it seems she needed to be listed as a co-tenant, and therefore go through the same checks that I do. This led me to assume that even if I were a multi-millionaire earning 250 grand a year, we'd still have needed to either find a guarantor or pay a couple of months rent in advance. It got to the stage my VA was almost tempted to claim that me and Laura were a married couple, just to make things easier. I'm not convinced they'd have ever asked for proof, though it might interfere with her Bumble-ing.

The other problem we faced was with the letting agencies themselves. Some of them were remarkably overworked and understaffed, but that's not an excuse for basic customer service failures. My VA was doing a lot of phoning around agencies on my behalf. One of them appeared to be completely scatterbrained, having lost paperwork and e-mails, not really knowing what anyone else working there was doing, and generally were a pain to work with. Another, who shall rename nameless, mainly because I can't recall their name, only that they were based in Bearsden, literally put the phone down on her when she was enquiring about a flat ('it's gone' was the brusque response), which would have been bad form anyway, but doubly so given that was not the flat she was enquiring about. ('oh that's gone too' she was told, snappily, when she called back). Mind you, at least she made contact - a couple of agencies pretty much ghosted her after a while, not responding to e-mails and not answering the phone (all her calls were redirected to an answerphone). Additionally, a couple of promised callbacks she was expecting just never materialised. [pause] Imagine being ghosted by a letting agent. I suppose that prevents the need to ask 'your place or mine'. [pause]

Anyway. I didn't get accepted to any of the flats I looked at in the West End. Or at least I assume I didn't; a month later and there's still a couple I've yet to hear back from. [pause]. It got to Wednesday 4th August and I hit upon a different tack; let's look in another part of Glasgow. A quick search online suggested parts of Southside (the area around Shawlands and the wonderfully-named suburb of Crossmyloof) met our needs - close enough to the city centre to be convenient, yet also with a quirky vibe of its own (like the West End). Neither of us had ever been there so it was very much a blind look.

Two days later I'd been accepted for a flat. The letting agency offered a virtual view, they were pleasant and

easy to deal with in general, and, chaotic admin aside caused because, as I say, we are two flat-sharers not bed-sharers (we did once share a bed, but it was a very large bed in a room in Philippines and it was cheap and convenient and we were both really tired), I got the keys a week later. This is what I imagined it should have been like, but for whatever reason, it seemed almost impossible in Glasgow's West End.

The downside of course is moving into a flat I'd never actually properly seen before, and it was very much a 'oh my god we need to find somewhere quickly; oh this'll do' vibe, is that it wasn't going to be ideal or perfect, but apart from being on the first floor rather than the ground floor, and having a kitchen approximately the size of a telephone booth, it's actually really nice. Well, I think so. Laura's seen video I've taken but as I say she won't arrive until 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

As a small aside, I'm a little worried about her arrival. I've already told her this, so this isn't going to shock her when she listens to this. She's been in London for a year, and she'd lived in London a couple of years earlier too. One day I'll do a podcast episode on London, but TL;DR you know how huge it is, even what defines as the 'centre' is several miles wide. Nowhere else in the UK is that large; Birmingham and Manchester are both sizeable conurbations but nothing compared with London, and Glasgow is smaller still than either of those two. It's about 35 miles from West Drayton to Upminster (or at least the railway stations, so the admin area is slightly further), at either end of London's admin area. This is about the same distance as between Glasgow Central Railway Station and ... Edinburgh Airport. I'm just worried that Glasgow will be too small for her, that she's set her heart and mind on being here but she'll find living here just isn't ... 'enough' for her, you know? Like, she'll go for long walks of 30,000 steps or more just around the streets of London without ever leaving the central districts, never mind hitting the suburbs. I don't think it's \*possible\* to do that in Glasgow without reaching the actual countryside. Also, I'm worried that as the flat is in the south rather than the west, she'll come into it already slightly irked and disappointed about the whole thing. But, I guess, we are where we are, and she knows and accepts that. I'm sure it'll be fine....

But back to the flat. It's pretty big, with two very sizeable bedrooms and an expansive living room (off which the kitchen feels like an afterthought). It's very quiet; you can't hear a lot at all from outside (which makes a change from the room in Sheffield and its regular ice-cream van and an awful lot more cars than you might expect from being at the corner of two cul-de-sacs), and it's a furnished flat too which means on the upside everything's ready to be used on moving in. On the downside of course it means we have to be more careful about what we do, plus it means we're stuck with the décor which is ... more homely than I'm used to, I'll be honest. Like, it actually has some, even if some of it is not what I would have expected a tenement flat in Glasgow to contain). The only other main drawback is the door and doorframe have a lot of glass in and around it, and outside the flat is a stairwell with a bright light that doesn't seem to be able to be turned off. Nothing a few sheets of card or piece of large fabric won't stop, but with the high ceilings it requires a bit of technical ability that I sadly lack.

One unusual feature is that one of the bedrooms has an ensuite bathroom, but one without a toilet (it has a shower and a sink). This led to a conversation with a few friends (mostly female, too) saying that, yes, they often peed in the shower. And, in my Sheffield landlady's case, the bath. She was quick to say she washed it out afterwards. But still. Ew.

So, in the end, after all the hassle I had, it was relatively okay to find a flat. But there are certain things that have irked me about the whole process. Firstly, the whole 'you have to visit in person' thing, which was clearly not true in the first place. But it opens the question of: what about if you physically can't visit a flat - either for reasons of geography, or, more pertinently, given the demographics of people who rent, for reasons of employment, finance, or disability? We seem to be making life incredibly hard for the very people most likely to be renting. Plus the need to constantly chase, to poke the letting agents with a big stick, many people simply don't have the time or the spoons for that. I couldn't have done it without my VA, and most people simply aren't in a position to call on a friend to engage in that level of commitment.

Similarly, the sheer finance involved in renting. I realised that even I, with my background, know very few people able to act as guarantors - homeowners who earn a certain salary. That's the sort of thing people come to me for (as you know I own a house. I don't live in it because my lodger kicked me out, in effect, but that's not the point!). Ironically, I could have been a perfect guarantor for my friend, only I wasn't allowed to be because I'd also be living in the property she was. We managed to secure the flat only by putting up three months' rent in advance, \*and\* a double-deposit. There are very few people in the rental market who would have that amount of money just resting in a bank account, which again means the entire industry appears to be

built specifically to fight against those people who need it most. I'd imagine students (who several of the letting agents were actively marketing against) would actually be pretty 'good' prospective tenants in a sense because they could call upon the Bank Of Mum And Dad to act as guarantors or deposit-providers. My parents are retired or semi-retired.

There's a lot of hate online against landlords. And, is true, there are a fair number of dodgy landlords, out purely to make a quick buck and don't care about their tenants. But I think much vitriol needs to be levied at the letting agents who act on the landlords' behalf. I can see why you'd use a letting agent as a landlord; it's the same reason I hired a VA - because I don't have the time or spoons to handle the admin so I'd rather pay someone else to look after it on my behalf. But when the agents act as unilateral gatekeepers, a law unto themselves with no rime nor reason for the way they act, when their behaviour is unmoderated and unregulated, contravening government guidelines and breaking all rules of customer service, it really doesn't put the industry nor the whole process in a good light.

I hope it's a long time before I need to move again.

Anyway, I suppose I ought to talk a bit about the area I've moved to. As I say, it's called Shawlands. It has a similar feel to the West End, without as many students, although certainly the area is popular with younger people and other flatshareers. There's a lot of cafes in the area, and sitting in one with a laptop while drinking a hot chocolate and eating a slice of cake does make me feel a bit like the sort of influencer I was talking about in my previous podcast episodes. The main street has a good array of shops and restaurants and other fun things (including both a Greggs and a craft beer shop & bar); one of the things I've realised since I moved here was that this may be the closest I've ever lived in my life to 'stuff', in that pretty much everywhere else I've lived has been deep in the residential suburbs, with anything more than a corner shop or small mini-mart more than a 15 minute walk away. Here, there's pretty much everything I need \*within\* a 15-minute walk, including the nearest budget supermarket. And Glasgow city centre is only a 2½ mile walk, albeit parts of it are quite ugly - the road passes through an area of derelict blocks over which passes a fine example of 1970s architecture, a concrete motorway viaduct tastefully coloured in a murky pastel blue. Or would be a fine example of 1970s architecture had it not actually been built around 2010, proving I guess that all urban motorways look the same.

The area around the flat though is much nicer. Many of the residential buildings are traditional tenement blocks; three or four storeys high, brick built to a similar clean design, all with high ceilings. Just to the north is Queen's Park, a decent sized public park designed by Sir Joseph Paxton, who also designed Birkenhead Park (the first publicly-funded civic park in the world, according to Wikipedia, and the template for Central Park in New York) and the original Crystal Palace in London. He is thus responsible for naming two football teams. Conveniently for me, Queen's Park has a Parkrun, although having walked the course the tarmac is possibly too broken up in places to be comfortable running it barefoot. We'll see. Another parkrun takes place at the much larger Pollok Country Park, a mile and a half to the west, so I'm certainly not at a loss for greenery.

Of course I'll miss Sheffield. It's a lovely city and one I was really happy to have had the chance to live in. But nothing is forever, and though I'll lose the quirkiness, the nearby countryside, the convenient location to the rest of the UK, there's a lot to be gained from Glasgow. It's a city I've been to before on many occasions (amongst other things I used to date someone who lived in one of the satellite towns), and it's the only place I've ever been paid to visit as a blogger, when Cheapflights got me to spend a weekend there a few years back to find all the 'free stuff' I could.

Overall though, I think I'm happy my life has taken this turn, and I hope the upcoming year will be interesting. Maybe if Covid regulations relax a bit more, I might even start doing social things here, all the ideas I wanted to do in Sheffield but couldn't because less than a month after I moved there, everything closed.

*{standard section separation jingle}*

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me in what I hope to be two weeks' time for a trip 'beyond the brochure'. That will be the much delayed episode on my brief adventures on the Orkney Islands. Until then, it's time to skedaddle off, 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 Glasgow 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.*

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