

Transcript of Podcast 052: Packing Mistakes

{Intro - Lexx

Oh man, considering how much I think about packing, I really should be better than I am by this point in time.

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{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 :)

A lot of my timeline is full of people talking about how January is such a long month. For some reason, I didn't feel that vibe; for me it went just as quickly as any other. Maybe it's because I don't do anything different at the start of the month compared with anyone else. Maybe it's because of the nature of my job, Maybe it's just that I live alone and every day feels the same. Who knows.

I tried to set up a more enclosed space for my podcast recording, last weekend. One of the less useful things in this flat is the ceilings are, well, if I stand on a chair I can't even reach the lightbulbs, which is an issue as one of them has gone in the hallway. So while I can record with a blanket, well, a sofa throw, over my head and the computer screen; that in itself causes issues, given gravity and the laws of physics. So I tried to see if I could make a kind of box out of cardboard. I had a lot of cardboard, given I recently bought a frame for a decidedly not-safe-for-work piece of artwork I commissioned off a friend in 2005, whose previous frame had broke some years back, and while the artwork is pretty big and a non-standard size (24 by 18 inches), the box the new frame came in was at least twice that, so I thought - I know, I'll cut this cardboard a bit and try to build a framework around my desk.

Listener: I'm sure you know me by now. it went exactly as well as you imagine. Which is why I'm recording this underneath a sofa throw. At some point I will create a more soundproofed and stable structure. Probably under close supervision.

Anyway. I've used a new Social Media concept. I mean, I've still not done even an Instagram Live, partly for logistical reasons, and partly because I always worry that if I did something like that, no-one would show up. But I have now done something that feels a little more on-brand, and one which I initially never saw the use of.

Twitter Spaces feel a bit like one of those 'panel discussion' things, where you have a host, some guest speakers, and an audience listening in who, if the host allows, can ask questions and contribute to the discussion. In a way it's the ideal sort of functionality for me: an audio person who lives on Twitter: but I'd never really explored them before. In part this is because most of the time I'm using Twitter on my desktop-esque laptop via Tweetdeck, so I never see them. And in fact, annoyingly, the only thing you can do even on the Twitter website is listen in; to host/speak on them you have to be using the Twitter App. Hopefully that will change as, obviously, my microphone is better on my computer.

Anyway. One of my friends - someone I've known since Primary School but I've not known her for the whole of the time since then - is a schoolteacher and one of the classes she teaches is studying Travel Writing. I have no idea why. We didn't study that when I was 11 years old. But anyway, she thought of me, and she got her class to ask me questions about my travel blogging brand. I wondered about the best way I could answer them, and my VA, who'd been pondering about Twitter spaces for a while, suggested it as a way to not only have an

easy recording for them, but also so I could answer the questions for the benefit of a wider audience. She'd suggested already I do a Q&A for a podcast episode in the future, and this fits in with that theme.

The experience itself went really well. It helps that my friend had supplied a list of questions, as it meant we had a framework to mould our conversation around. It also allowed the conversation to flow pretty naturally, and it never felt awkward at all. We managed to stay on topic without waffling, and even not to swear, which was, feckin' amazing to be honest. We chatted for just over 50 minutes, making it a decent length for a podcast episode. I'll probably (with a bit of editing) make it into one of my next podcast episodes in fact. We've had a subsequent discussion and we think we have enough material straight off the bat for at least another six or seven Spaces, so the plan is we do them fortnightly too, probably at first mostly at 12:30 GMT on Thursdays, because that's just a time that suits us. As things stand, the next one will be on 10 February, and be on "Travel Planning, with the proviso that BB is not a travel planner". I know that time doesn't so much suit much of my audience, but because they can be recorded and people can then listen to the output afterwards, it's not so much of an issue in the short term. That said, it would be lovely to have some audience participation.

Note that none of this supersedes the Q&A episode, which is likely to be in the summer, so if you have any questions about me, my travels, my brand, or anything else you feel you want to know about me, then don't hesitate to drop me a note. I can even give you my first pet's name, the road I grew up on, and my grandmother's name if you like. I've probably mentioned at least two of them on previous episodes of my podcast. Because any website that uses that kind of thing as the security questions really does need a slap up the backside, and anyway, what makes you think I tell the truth when answering them on those sites? In fact, one reputable, and by reputable I mean 'one of the most well known and respected on the entire internet' asked those very questions. To which my given answers were along the lines of 'up yours'. And, as a side note, it's well known that one of the most common birthdays for people on the internet is January 1st 1970.

My birthday is not January 1st 1970. Given I have a blog post called 'I Was Born In Year Zero', all about the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, you know the year at least, and I share my birthdate (not the year, obviously) with a US President and a fantasy creator. Tho, again, what makes you think I tell the truth on websites. Many of you don't even know my name.

To be fair, my name is a moveable feast, and even people who know my real name call me Barefoot, because apparently, 'oh, you just look like a Barefoot' (hello Seanna!), because that's obviously a common enough name to have a mental image of. I will say my non-binary identity is crying out for a non-binary name, so ... I mean, call me Nel? Nel is a good name. Short for Nelipot. In case you were wondering.

Anyway, Podcast. Episode. Thing. This one. My last three podcasts were all about London, and it was really enjoyable and fascinating to do the research for them, even if it was very revealing that most of the Londoners I know live in South London; something I really wasn't expecting, and those who do live in North London were ... somewhat reluctant to talk about it. Listeners, you know where The Vibe is, and it's more likely to be found in Lewisham than Camden. That may have been a subtweet. But she's probably fallen asleep by now, because I have such a soporific voice.

This episode, though, is back to talking about aspects of travel. Some while ago, in fact I recall exactly when it was; I edited one of them in the pub in London, in ... Pimlico in fact, above which is a backpacker hostel, almost exactly two years ago, it was my last adventure before Covid hit, and me and Joe (This Way Up on YouTube and Twitter) did some videoing in Camden and Islington in prep for a series about London that never happened, but Joe, now I've done podcasts about it I'm definitely up for continuing that vibe and now I have more concept of it, tho I am also aware that Jay Foreman has already done much of it so now I'd feel like a copycat. Close bracket. I did two podcasts on luggage, on packing, on what you take with you. Some while ago I realised there was probably mileage in taking another look at this topic, but focusing on 'packing mistakes'. On whether you'd packed things you realised were pointless, or not packed things you realised were vital, and had to scramble about trying to find them. Maybe you'd accidentally packed something that became serendipitously useful. Or the opposite; you'd forgotten you'd packed something that caused you hassle later on in your journey.

Things like this, from Darlene, who runs the Thirsty Journeys blog:

{Darlene 1 -

Many years ago we actually ended up getting, it's called an immersion heater, from some friends, and if you don't know what that is, it's basically this plastic handle with a big metal coil on the end, and it plugs in and you use it to heat or boil water. So we brought it on our first trip, I think we actually ended up using it because one of the hotels we were staying in in Italy didn't have a kettle, and we made soup that day. But most places have a kettle or some way to get hot water, so for whatever reason we decided that we were going to bring this immersion heater with us on the next three trips, and never used it again other than the one time. And it was so bulky, and because we backpack it just took up way more space and weight than it was worth, so yeh, after a couple of years we did finally get rid of it, but it took a while because it had been gifted to us, so we sort of felt bad about getting rid of it but it was just completely pointless and way too bulky for the way that we like to travel.

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The most useless thing I've taken on my travels has been an electric beard trimmer. I generally use a bread trimmer in my normal life because I don't have the mindset to shave; it just strikes me as far too much effort on an everyday basis, and besides, a beard trimmer can be carried in hand luggage without security at airports raising a fuss. As an aside, I tend to beard trim every two weeks, because that tends to be when it starts to itch.

You might wonder as to why it would be useless. Well, the obvious answer is 'barbers exist', and even I, with my social anxiety, have managed to go to them and have them shave me. Weirdly, I never feel anyone can shave me as 'well' as I can shave myself, though obviously it's still a closer and smoother finish than a beard trimmer. Point of note, a barber I went to in Luganville, in Vanuatu, used a raw razor blade to shave me with. Like one of those things you'd slot into a knife. Definitely not a safety blade. Obviously I'm going to trust them because they do it several times a day all year, but still, it's not something I'm going to sit there and be truly relaxed about.

I have also had shaves in places as diverse as Alabama, Singapore, Philippines, and China. Weirdly I did not visit a barber in West Africa, so by the end of my trip there I looked a bit scruffy. This wasn't helped maybe by my mostly having to be barefoot due to sandal existential failure, For reasons known only to biology though, I feel my facial hair grew slower in those days.

But, going back to the subject. On my trip around Central Asia in August & September 2014, I took my beard trimmer as I knew I'd be away for a while and it would have saved me the irk of going into a backstreet barber knowing none of any of the potential languages on offer. However, it didn't quite work out that way. For one thing, the voltage and electricity supply was such that the trimmer didn't actually work when plugged into the mains supply. This meant I was running on battery power only. Which didn't last long. And then I managed to lose the power lead anyway. Because I do that sort of thing.

I think I ended up dumping the thing in a hostel in Kyrgyzstan somewhere. To be fair it was getting old at that point. Interestingly its replacement is the one I'm still using now.

Remarkably, that was the second time I'd made that error. Some years previously I'd taken a beard trimmer, possibly the same one, on an adventure to the USA where ... I had the same problem with the voltage and it simply did not fire into gear. You'd've thought I'd've known about this and got myself a transformer. You'd be wrong. When you live in a country with a strong electrical supply (240V), you kind of assume everything you have will work everywhere, and to be fair the vast majority of my electronics do. I've never had a problem with phones, or laptops, etc, just ... beard trimmers.

Speaking of travelling abroad with electrical items, one of the things I have had to buy en-route is travel adaptors. This happened to me in Australia, and it wasn't because I'd forgotten to bring one, or had lost it en route, it's because mine had broken and I didn't have a spare. I ended up buying a universal one, but since it was powered entirely by USB, it turns out it wasn't really that powerful. I did also end up leaving the Australian adaptor bit in Australia, but then no-one else really uses Aussie plugs so that's no loss. Darlene, who you heard from earlier, also had issues with a universal adaptor, but very different issues.

{Darlene 2 -

One of the more useless items that we travelled with for a few years was a travel converter and electrical adapter, but the thing with that was it was universal so it came with every conceivable electrical adaptor that you would ever need to travel anywhere around the world, so it was the size of a small brick. And it weighed a ton. It was awkward, you know, it was solid. And when we travel we tend to only go to at most maybe three countries with maybe one electrical conversion amongst them. So it took a while, but you know we had to do our research, but we finally found adaptors for individual countries you know they're nice and small and compact, and you only bring one or two, the ones that are the most necessary, rather than this thing that covers the entire globe and every conceivable electrical plug that you might happen to come across and probably won't in your travels.

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I'll concede my purchase was more 'having to buy things because you've realised you needed them' rather than genuine 'mistakes', since we can't foresee every opportunity, I've definitely had several situations where I've had to buy things on my travels because I've either not got round to getting them before I leave, or I plain forgot. While in both Australia and New Zealand, I've had to buy anti-malarial tablets because ... I don;t know, I just don't like phoning and making doctor's appointments (and over here, the phone is almost exclusively the only way to get in touch with your GP; I could have contacted my old surgery in Nottinghamshire by fax if I'd so wished, but ... I tend to prefer to live in the 21st Century). It was easier in Australia, but that's because I was staying with my friend so I simply used hers. New Zealand involved me finding a doctor's practice that accepted foreign walk-ins (on the nth floor of an ugly modern office building in Wellington, in this case) and then a local chemist that did prescriptions. They also took £50 off me because they noted one of my recurrent jabs was out of date (I don't recall which: Tetanus, Typhoid, Hep B, something, one of those anyway; I could easily check to be honest as somewhere I have my vaccination 'passport' to hand; I needed it in West Africa to prove I'd been jabbed for Yellow Fever. I just, you know, can't be mythered to find it!).

The other time I can remember having to buy something specific that I hadn't brought, but needed (not counting things like new memory cards or replacement USB leads) was, uhm, definitely off-brand. On my inter-rail trip in Autumn 2019 I passed through Switzerland. It only occurred to me quite late that I could visit CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research. I didn't know they had a visitor centre, but they do, and you can take tours of part of their setup, Except that one of the rules/regulations is that you must wear closed shoes to do so. Closed shoes are not something I often carry with me; heck apart from the sandals I'm (possibly) wearing I rarely carry a second pair of footwear at all. So once I found this out I had to go round a supermarket in Toulon, the French town I was in at the time I was doing the research, and buy a pair of cheap converse knock-offs for about €20. Which I have worn about four times in total since then, all of which were later on that same trip because that trip finished in December, and December in Hungary and Slovakia tends to be cold and snowy. As an aside, at least two women on the tour group at CERN were wearing solid, but open-toed, sandals. Growl.

Another aspect to this is 'packing things that aren't useless, but which it turns out you never use'. Alexei, from [Travelexx](#), and who you heard from in my earlier pods about packing, isn't fond of doing this.

{Lexx 1- Useless

I think, in terms of packing something useless, it's not so much that I pack useless things, it's I pack things I don't end up using. So while there's definitely a reason why I packed it, I don't necessarily get around to it, so over the years I've tried to bring down my packing list as much as possible so that I don't bring any 'just in case' items. But it's still quite difficult to do sometimes because you think 'what if, I might need this particular jacket' or 'this many t-shirts' and so on.

So I'd say for me it's bringing jumpers, warm clothes, which I don't necessarily need, because one hoodie, one jumper is more than enough so I do end up bringing too many layers sometimes. So I'd say that's where I really need to get even better in terms of packing.

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Someone else who has done this sort of thing, quite recently, is Martha, from the blog *May Cause Wanderlust*.

{ Martha - May Cause Wanderlust

So let me start by saying I don't subscribe to this idea that the less you pack the better a traveller you are - you know, all you need is a pair of pants and a toothbrush. I don't really subscribe to that idea but obviously there's a pragmatic, practical benefit in having a case or a bag that's light enough to carry off and on all the transportation that you need. So having less weight is definitely good when you're travelling. And for me, I've done a couple of trips in the last couple of months, since the world sort of re-opened, and these are actually the first trips I've taken since I started travel blogging, so having a DSLR camera with me, and lenses, and having my laptop with me is new, and having the extra stuff in it, extra weight, does put more pressure on me being selective about what else I take with me when travelling, especially if I want to carry it all easily myself.

And on a very recent trip that I took to Europe, I was frustrated that I took unnecessary stuff, cos I was going on and off a lot of trains and planes, and I ended up feeling like I had a bit too much weight. One of the items I wish I had not packed that I did was a Kindle. I have used Kindles before when travelling solo and they can be a great way to read when you're perhaps in a restaurant or something on your own, or a cafe, or when you have a bit of downtime, but if I'd really thought about it, it wasn't going to be that kind of trip, I had quite a lot packed in, so I knew I wasn't going to be left with hours to spend with nothing to do, so really if I'd thought about it, I would have known that was a bad idea.

The other thing that I wish I had not taken that I took was a hardback notebook. And this is a strange one because I'd packed it with the thought of 'maybe this would come in handy', but I just never use a hardback notebook for blogging. I use notes on my phone if I have ideas I want to jot down, so the idea of having a notebook was sort of out of leftfield, and again probably if I'd thought about it, the idea of starting a new habit when travelling was probably not very likely.

So the kindle and the hardback notebook were unfortunately extra weight that I was dragging on and off trains across Europe that I really didn't need to have had. However one thing I wish I had packed that I did not pack was some proper trainers. You see I took daps with me instead. My husband laughs that I call them daps. You know, kind of canvas tennis shoes, rubber sole, comfortable, very sort of fine for walking around, and I like to do a lot of waking when I go to a new city, to explore it. But I was doing so much walking on this trip, because I was in so many different cities; I was in Paris, and Barcelona, and then Madrid, Lisbon, and Porto in Portugal. And halfway round this trip I started getting really really exhausted feet and blisters, and I really wish I'd had something more comfortable, something softer, slightly kinder in terms the stretchability of the fabric, something with a bit more shock absorption. And I know the lesson in this one because I thought about taking trainers before I went, but the argument I came up with at the time was the daps I had, which are kind of gold, would be more adaptable, and if I was just walking the streets they'd be fine for that, and if I was going into somewhere semi-smart, you know if I was going to a restaurant or something, they'd also perhaps be smart enough in a way that trainers might not be, so I'd argued that I was making a smart move taking the daps, but really they weren't quite comfortable enough and didn't have enough performance in them I guess to keep my poor feet protected, so I got a lot blisters.

So yeh that's what I would have done. I would have swapped the notebook and the kindle for some better shoes. Or even better, maybe somebody could design some shoes that have a high-performance angle for walking a lot but smart enough to get into a restaurant. That would be amazing if someone could do that.

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As you know, I usually travel with only hand luggage. This means space is at a premium, and I generally try to pack only things that I'll find a use for, even if it turns out later I'm mistaken. I'm not saying that makes me a 'better' traveller, but for the travels that I do, I find it makes things easier and more efficient. I want to be lugging around a backpack I can actually carry, you know? And there's no sense in carrying something around that I'm not going to use, because by not carrying it, my pack can be lighter.

That said, there are regularly things I pack but don't use. None of them are clothes, although after taking only two pairs of trousers on one two week trip and having one of them rip hugely in an inconvenient area after three days means I do tend to make sure I pack spare clothing just in case. So while there are sometimes

clothes I don't end up wearing (often a pair of thick socks just in case it gets a bit cold at nights), I'm glad I've taken them. Rather, oddly, it's things like Martha mentions. I'll often take an e-reader, on the grounds I think I'll get bored on transport, or in the evenings, or in cafes, but weirdly I never do. Or rather, I always seem to find something else to do. It must be said sometimes I have the thought of 'well I wouldn't often do it at home so why would I do it while travelling' (which, as an aside, is one of the minor reasons I never saw the point of paying extra for hotels with gyms), but equally I know I'm not taking my home computer on most of my travels so what else would I be doing at night? The answer appears to be, 'not reading Young Adult dystopian fiction', at any rate.

And yet I always take it, because I hate being bored, and I just know the one time I don't have it is the one time something will happen to the bus I'm on and I'll be stuck in the back of beyond for a couple of hours while they fix it. Mind you these days I have podcasts to listen to, And I do, usually, carry headphones. They may often not work very well and require me to constantly hold the wire between my fingers in a specific way, but what do you expect from something that cost £2 from B&M? I'm far, far, too dyspraxic and ADHD to be let loose with expensive headphones.

One other thing I packed and never used also leads in to my next subject to mention. When I did my two week trip around Israel & Jordan several years ago, one of my last-minute packs was a book on 'teach yourself Arabic'. My thought was, well while I'm in Jordan and Palestine, it might help me have better conversations with the locals. This went down about as well as you can imagine; it was one of the reasons I was refused entry to a museum in ... Acre? Tho given it was a museum about how the Israelis kicked the British out in the 1940s, I suspect the main reason was because of the passport I was holding, It also didn't endear myself to the border guards at Tel Aviv airport on my way out, but my experiences there were ridiculous and if anyone ever wants to take a trip to Israel, I'd strongly recommend they fly out of Jordan. Flying *in* is fine, it's just the only country I've ever been to where leaving it is harder than entering it.

And how many times did I end up using that book? Nonce. Because everyone spoke decent enough English for me to have really good conversations with. Grrr.

Anyway, so, I have packed other things in my luggage that have caused unexpected issues. I had an overnight stopover in Singapore on my way back from South-East Asia, and the woman at customs was insistent that the x-ray device was showing a knife in my luggage. I was very confused, but every time I'd queried 'I don't have a knife; what knife?', she was insistent that I had a knife and that I showed it to her.

It took an emptying of half my backpack to reveal the culprit. I'd bought a large metallic hairclip in Cambodia for a friend back home, which was showing up on their scanners as suspicious. Once the item had been discovered, they were grudgingly happy with me and let me go on my way.

Another issue I had with airport security was again on my trip to Israel and Jordan. Despite the destination, this was an issue leaving the UK. I was travelling only with hand luggage and thus taking as few liquids and gels as possible. I was experimenting with powdered toothpaste. However, when my bag went through the scanners, it showed up as bright yellow/green on the security screens, causing Rather A Lot Of Raised Eyebrows. Evidently powdered toothpaste has the same x-ray signature as high explosive. Not what you need when going to an already volatile part of the world. Well, Israel, anyway; Jordan's about as volatile as the Marischal College building in Aberdeen. Locals call it the Hashemite Kingdom of Boredom for a reason. It is to the Middle East what Botswana is to Southern Africa. But this is not a podcast about the world's least volatile countries.

As an aside, powdered toothpaste tastes particularly foul, and really, a little tip for you, not worth the effort, not worth the workaround. Just take a small tube of toothpaste instead; it's less hassle.

Weirdly I've had less issue in Australia & New Zealand than you might expect. On my first trip over, the customs in Australia confiscated the apple that I'd been given on the flight over for one of the snacks, but that was only to be expected, I guess. And it wasn't until I was cooking in a hostel in Vanuatu that I realised I'd been carrying stock cubes from England all through New Zealand; the customs dog at Auckland airport had obviously not noticed them at the bottom of my backpack either.

Someone who has had trouble in Australia for having an unexpected item in the bagging area is Amanda, host of the Thoughtful Travel Podcast, and who, being Australian, proves that even citizens have their moments at

that border.

{Amanda - Not A Ballerina

Well, my packing story is about an item that I ... it's not that I forgot I packed it, it's just that I didn't know enough about it, and I packed it and then it caused trouble.

So this is going back about eleven years. It was my first trip as a mother, so my first trip with my son, who at the time was about 4 months old. And it was no short trip, it was a trip from Western Australia ll the way to Germany and back, so quite the effort. And if you've ever travelled with a baby you know that they have a lot of stuff, and they need all these extra things to go with them. So it was probably my least, not probably, definitely, my least favourite packing experience ever, and I'm glad I never have to repeat it because he's nearly twelve and he can pack and carry his own baggage.

So, anyway. We were actually returning from Germany and we'd been visiting his grandparents and aunts and uncles, and in our baggage on the way back we had lots of gifts they'd given us very kindly while we were there. So we rocked up back in Perth, and I know when you enter Australia, the customs and quarantine people are really very strict, you know, we watch those border security shows on TV and people are always getting picked up for having brought, you know, a mango, or various kind of food or other things that are restricted and you can't bring into Australia.

So, we get there and we're pulled over to be searched as we leave the airport. We've arrived, we've been on a very very long flight with a very small baby, and it's the middle of the night, and I'm really not with it. And then the customs officer puts the suitcase through the scanner, and says 'err, so there's a problem. Something in here that's a problem'. And I'm like 'oh my goodness what's going to happen. I don't want to be fined, I don't want to be taken away in a room', all the things that happen on those shows. And my thought immediately went to a knife. So my then mother-in-law had gifted me a very good, in fact I still use it to this day, a ceramic kitchen knife. And I thought 'Oh, the knife, maybe I'm not allowed to bring the knife into Australia, it's like a weapon, oh no I'm so sorry' I say to the man, 'I'm so sorry, is it the knife, the knife?' And he's like 'Oh! I didn't see a knife!', and I'm like 'Oh no what's going on, this is even worse'. And he's like 'oh okay, no the knife is fine, it's something else.' And I'm like 'Oh I don't know, I'm sorry'. And I felt like I was going to be in trouble if I didn't manage to confess what I was apparently smuggling in.

So I was really feeling quite stressed. And he said 'What about the seeds?'. And I was .. seeds, what, what are you talking about? I'm not bringing any seeds in.' So he rummaged around and found a toy elephant that my then father-in-law had given as a gift to my son. And it was a very cute toy elephant. And what I didn't realise is that it was also one of those toys that you could put in a microwave and it was like a heat pack as well. And I didn't know that, it just looked like a stuffed elephant. So it turned out you could unzip him and in his guts were all these cherry seeds and the cherry seeds were the things that could be heated up and had some effect, could retain the heat or something, I don't know. And so he pulled these out and I was immediately like 'oh I'm so sorry, I had no idea, I'm so sorry, you can keep them, you can keep them, you can throw it away, I don't mind.' And you know, I didn't want to get in trouble. And he's like 'okay, well we'll keep them but you can have the elephant.' I was like 'Okay, thank you thank you thank you I;m sorry, I won't do it again', not that I really really thought I'd done anything wrong, but anyway.

And so to this day we have a deflated-looking elephant toy that doesn't have any stuffing in the middle, and I still have a little bit of panic every time I go through those customs areas where they're checking what I've packed, because I live in fear that I've packed something that will cause trouble. I've never done it again since, but I definitely I hope I never do it again.

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An ex-girlfriend's nine-year-old son had a problem with a stuffed animal, but theirs was when leaving the UK. At the time he had a stuffed hedgehog, he called it 'hedgehedge', quite a big thing, that I think would have had a normal use as a doorstop, but he quite liked using it as a companion. Anyway, the thing was full of, I don't know, some kind of packing material and he tried to take it as hand-luggage. Caused quite a kerfuffle at the security scanners, as they really didn't know what to make of it. They did eventually let him on board with it though. As far as I know he still has it.

From things forgotten in luggage, to things, well, just, forgotten.

I don't think I've ever 'forgotten' to pack things. My problem, rather, stems from dyspraxia and ADHD, and the issue that things I pack get ... lost. The most common of these is reusable water bottles. There have been at least two occasions where I've left water bottles in hostel rooms in London while overnighing there on the way somewhere more foreign, which has forced me to go seeking them out in the supermarkets of middle-city suburbs. The Tesco Express on Tooley Street, by London Bridge Station, did not sell them. A fact that really irked me at the time.

In my travel experiences I have managed to lose many items. Water bottles are the most common; I have them by the side of the bed when I sleep, and because they're generally the last things I pack, for easy access, I put my backpack on and then forget they exist, because I've already packed my bag at that point so there's nothing else left that needs to go in. My second most common thing to lose are hats. Because I sit down in pubs, or on buses or trains, and take them off, and because I'm not used to wearing hats, it doesn't occur to me that I ever was wearing a hat. So when I get up to get off, I was never wearing a hat, I am not wearing a hat, therefore there is no hat. A slight alternative to that was in Aachen cathedral where I was holding my hat, and then took a picture of the ceiling. About 10 minutes later, elsewhere in the cathedral, I realised I was no longer holding my hat, I never did find it. Annoyingly, when I took my hat off in the first place, I had a thought of 'I should put my hat in my daypack; nah it'll be fine what could go wrong?'. You can infer from that that I either over-trust myself or I really don't know just how inept I am. I suspect the former, which isn't actually better tbh. I have also lost hats in Benin (because I took it off in a minibus and forgot to put it back on), and along the Pennine Way (I took it off in a pub and it completely disappeared and I didn't notice for a few hours). The only hat I no longer have that I didn't lose was the palm hat I had in Southern Africa. I left it in a hostel in Durban. Because it was huge. And falling apart.

It's not just hats though. I left a *new* fleece-coat thing on a train from Romania to Moldova, because it was an overnight train and I'd taken it off to sleep, put it on the luggage rack, and because it was warm on my arrival, it never occurred to me to dress warmly so forgot the fleece existed. Never got it back and had to rush around a street market in Chisinau to find a coat in my size because May in Moldova/Ukraine is Not A Dry Time. This was also the trip when my new sandals snapped and the closed shoes I needed for Chernobyl were falling apart and virtually unusable - I'd taken them purely for my visit there, because it was required. Not for anything to do with radiation, I may add, but more because the place was littered with broken glass and rusty metal like nails and screws. This meant I flew back from Lithuania to the UK barefoot because I *literally* had no viable shoes. No-one cared, either in Vilnius or at Luton Airport. Make of that what you will.

I did the same on a bus in North Macedonia. I rushed off the coach from Kosovo because I realised it was about to stop in a part of Skopje much nearer to my hostel than the central bus station. I managed to grab my bag and my sandals, specifically noting it would be both on-brand and awkward to have left them behind, but I did leave my sweatshirt. Because it was on the luggage rack. Which, given it was October, meant my last day in the country was slightly chilly given all I had was short-sleeved shirts.

I also nearly managed to lose a laptop this way; I left it in a bag on the luggage rack of a National Express Coach to Gatwick Airport North Terminal; this was on the way to the USA back in, oh, either 2006 or 2009 I'd guess. Fortunately its final destination was South Terminal so I managed to retrieve it on the coach's way back north; had it been going to its usual destination of Brighton, that would have been an expensive mistake.

Usually this is harmless, but there was one occasion when it did get a tad scary, I'd taken a bus in Chile from La Serena into the Elqui Valley, the small town of Pisco Elqui, deep in the mountains. The hotel I was staying in was close to one of the last bus stops, so I grabbed my backpack and wandered off. It was a really warm day, so I never thought about my coat, that was still on the bus, in the luggage rack. The only problem being that in one of the pockets of the coat was my wallet with my money and debit card in. And in another pocket was my passport.

Fortunately the bus was terminating in the town, so all I ended up having to do was find the bus station, get to the right bus, and get my coat back. Not an easy thing to do surreptitiously, and certainly not something easy to explain in a foreign language. You may be relieved to know I did manage to get my coat back before the bus made its lengthy way back to La Serena. And you'd have thought that such a shock like that would have made me more aware of my surroundings and belongings. You'd have thought wrongly, because of course ADHD

doesn't work that way,

You can conclude from this that I've needed Adderall for ... quite a long time. It will also never cease to amuse and scare me in equal detail that the mitigation for people being distracted and forgetting things on a regular basis is to ... take a pill ... on a regular basis ...

Despite his fetish for luggage and packing, Alexei is also guilty of forgetting to pack things.

{ Lexx 2 - Forgetting

So in terms of forgetting to pack something important: My first solo trip since the pandemic, I went to Spain in October. I was very confident in my packing, I packed my bag as normal, got on the plane, everything was fine. Got to the hostel, and the amount of stuff I forgot that I needed because I'm out of practice was pretty funny. Didn't bring a padlock, which I would normally just have in my bag, it would literally just be there all the time. Didn't bring that. And I didn't bring a daypack, which is literally one of the most important things I normally bring with me, so I had to spend the first morning of my trip looking around for a Decathlon so I could buy a daypack.

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The final thought I had for this podcast was - have I ever packed something without thinking, only to realise that in fact I did need it and I was lucky to have packed it? A serendipitous moment, one that saved me time, money, and admin stress, and served to define as the highlight of my trip?

{long pause}

No.

{standard end jingle}

Well that's about all for this episode. It's a bit shorter than recent ones. I've never known quite how long to make them - I used to aim for 30 minutes but these days I'm feeling 40-45 is an optimal length. My geographic posts are the longest though, probably because there's just a lot more to say about them.

Join me next time when I take another trip Beyond The Brochure. Until then, don't forget your toothbrush, 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.}