

Transcript of Podcast 072: All-Inclusive Resorts

{Intro:

KYLIE: So it was nice to have that option to eat in my hotel rather than wondering if I'm going to have to get the bus every night. It was nice to know that I had that guaranteed meal after dark and such. So I do like that factor of all-inclusive holidays.

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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 podcast 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 Enby 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 :)

Yeh, it's been a wee while since my last episode. There's been no particular or specific reason for this, so thank you for bearing with me in these precedented times. Things I'd like to blame include the inherent lethargy brought upon by the current heatwave here in Scotland. It's quite weird, in that it's been over a month since I came back from Italy and Cyprus, and in that time I think it's rained twice. It's currently dry, sunny, and temperatures are hitting around 27-28 Celsius, or around 81 Fahrenheit. For some of you, this may not sound like a lot. However firstly, we've never had a temperature above about 92F in Scotland, and secondly, we don't have the infrastructure for this sort of thing. Brits like to point out our houses aren't built to let the heat out in summer, but rather to keep the heat in in Winter. Laura points out that they don't do this very well either.

I have been taking advantage of the drier weather, though possibly despite the hotter weather, to continue my aim to walk past as many railway stations in this part of Scotland as I can. I'm now in the realm of 'places outwith the Glasgow urban area' so they all require a bit of an adventure to get to and around; plus it's making the actual routings I walk much more limited. This is partly because many of the country roads often don't have pavements so walking down them is very much taking my life into my own hands, and if there is an alternative route it's a long-winded one along farm tracks and single-track lanes meandering their way through farmland. It's not nearly as pretty as you imagine.

That said there are unexpected 'everywhere is interesting' points. One walk I was on last weekend took me through the village of Dunlop, which was actually pretty cute with old-style cottages and buildings that made the place feel it hadn't changed in 200 years. Another walk a week or two ago had me pass the Carfin Grotto, a larger-than-you-might-expect Catholic shrine in the mould of Lourdes, located in an otherwise identikit suburb of the ex-industrial town of Motherwell. I've also been past country reservoirs and natural lochs, down country cyclepaths that had once been railways, through country parks, golf courses, and wild woodland, and along rivers big and small. It's amazing what you find within a short train ride of Glasgow. It'd probably make a half-decent podcast episode. Hmmm.

There's something related I need to say about this point, but now is not the time. Nothing has been confirmed.

Regardless. Despite my really long walks, which have been up to twelve miles in distance and which I've been doing at pace (before my injury I was walking a shade faster than 4 miles per hour, and I seem to be back to around that ability), I'm still not running. Partly this is because when I've dabbled (eg running across the road, or fast-jogging through the streets of northern Motherwell to catch a train from Holytown station that runs once an hour because otherwise there's naff-all to do in Holytown for an hour, and yes that really is the name of the town, and no Carfin Grotto isn't in it though it's only a mile away), I've not felt entirely comfortable, and partly because I've honestly not pushed the point much. I've volunteered at Parkrun a couple of times but lately by the time I've got round to thinking about it, they've had a full rota. Which is brilliant, not just for Parkrun but also means I get more flexibility with my Saturday mornings, but also means I'm slowly getting out the loop and out the practice. It's something I need to be aware of, is all.

What else is going on in my life that you need to know about? Oh, my paid job involves working with Google Analytics, and those of you who are website owners and especially travel bloggers may well be fully aware about the imminent sunsetting (Google's phrasing, not mine) of the old version of Google Analytics and the sole implementation of GA4. This is causing me, shall we say, issues, because a lot of what I do in old GA doesn't seem to be available in GA4, and in any case sense-checking it is quite tricky several of the metrics have changed definition, and my figures don't seem to match between the two Googles anyway. Newport, we have a problem. But I'm sure it'll all work out in the end. Maybe.

I like change, so long as there's a reason for it and the change brings overall material benefits. Change is inevitable, change is usually A Good Thing, and without change we'd be no more benefiting wider society than people living in villages like Woburn Sands and voting Tory. That may or may not have been a slight subtweet, though I don't know personally of anyone who fits in both categories. Now, if I'd said Little Neston ... I wonder if she's listening. I'll find out I guess.

I had a weekend in Manchester in the middle of May, which was badly timed as it was the same weekend as the Great Manchester Run, a half-marathon that I might be tempted with one day. I did wonder why it was hard booking a hotel. Anyway I don't have much to say about my weekend there save on the Saturday night I ended up in a rock nightclub, unexpectedly, because Laura's friend led me astray. Suffice to say it was more my scene than Laura's scene, tho she did stop a bouncer trying to throw me out because they'd mistaken my dyspraxia for incoherent intoxicated dancing. Just to be clear, I was absolutely the most drunk I'd ever been in my life, but that's not the point. I was so tipsy in fact that I bought a doner kebab for like £8 and only managed to eat half of it, I don't know which of those two facts is more damning, to be honest.

Anyway. Speaking of alcohol, I've been meaning to do this pod for a couple of weeks, but ... haven't. It's about all-inclusive resorts, where lots of alcohol was drunk but oddly, not as much as you might imagine. It certainly didn't feel like it, and I'm not sure I can explain why. Maybe I'll come to a realisation as I write this episode.

{section separation jingle}

I am The Barefoot Backpacker. My tendency is to go backpacking around lesser-visited spots around the world, independently, and usually solo, staying in hostels, airBnBs, and Premier Inns. I tend to move around from place to place a lot rather than spending too long in the same destination, and I generally book my onward journeys on-the-fly rather than having things booked in advance. The idea of being in a place for several days and not 'need' to worry about things like food or travel is not one I'm used to. I seek out craft beer bars and street food, and generally steer clear of other Brits travelling abroad for sun, sea, sand, sangria, and sex. And of course my only reference point for all-inclusive holidays has tended to be what I've seen on TV and in the media.

In short, I'm the least likely person to end up in an all-inclusive resort on the beaches of Cyprus for four nights.

However, life is often about getting out of your comfort zone, And, in a sense, given that this sort of trip isn't really what you'd expect from someone like me, doing it was exactly the point.

Full disclosure - it was a blogger press trip gifted by Jet2Holidays. Which, given the above, and given how well y'all know me, probably in truth raises more questions than it gives answers.

So, going back to the trip I had to Czechia last year. That was organised by Traverse, who obviously have their hand in many pies. And while I was there, I had word that Jet2, a company noted for package holidays more than backpacking trips, were on the lookout for travel bloggers, people like me, but generally much more established, to go away on trips of theirs in return for blogging about them. They pay for cheap advertising, the blogger gets a free trip in return for a bit of work. It's a win-win situation, really.

Anyway. Turns out, I seem to be established enough for them to be interested in me.

Jet2 fly to quite a number of destinations in and around Europe, so in principle I had quite a lot of flexibility. In practice, however, I was limited by time and availability. In addition, these trips tend to be offered to two people: the travel blogger themselves, and a 'plus one'. And given in my personal life I don't have a 'plus one', clearly, and given I tend to travel alone anyway because it's just very hard to find someone who we're both willing to put up with each other for any length of time for, my list of willing plus-ones is quite small.

{Laura: hello}

And Laura has a job and limited holiday time, because she books things several geological eras in advance.

Another aspect is we both wanted to use the opportunity to visit a country we neither of us had ever been to. And the one country that fitted all the available options was Cyprus. Jet2 gave me a list of possible hotels, and Laura chose the one she felt best suited her requirements. I say 'her' requirements because, quite frankly, I didn't have any and everything started to blend into one the more I looked at all the options.

The resort Laura plumped for was called the St George Hotel and Spa. Partly because of it having "and Spa" in the title, partly because it was listed as an 'Adults Only' resort, and partly for its location relatively near the historical sites of ancient Paphos. Note that in the world of resorts, 'Adults Only' means 'no children'. It does not mean it's a haven for swingers, sadly for Full Swap Radio listeners. I mean, not officially. I have no idea what goes on behind closed doors. We didn't hear of anything though. Not that we asked. Obviously.

All it meant was that we were surrounded mostly by Gen-X and Boomer adult couples, and the occasional 30-something pre-wedding party. We slightly stood out, but I'll talk about that at the end.

I can't comment on the vibe of family-friendly all-inclusive resorts, but I know they exist, I guess one of the beauties of such a holiday is the wide variation of styles available. In Paphos we had a slightly older crowd; no doubt had we chosen to stay in a resort nearer Ayia Napa, we'd have been surrounded by more party-focussed holidaymakers. What it did mean is that it never felt 'loud'. We weren't disturbed by parties at 2am or anything like that.

I asked around for contributions from others about all-inclusive resorts, and one of the things I wondered was when the first time people went to them was, and how they felt about it.

Amanda Kendle, from the 'Thoughtful Travel Podcast', went to her first, and only, all-inclusive seemingly by accident:

/AMANDA:

So, I have only ever stayed in an all-inclusive kind of resort one time in my life, and it wasn't really intentional. I'd just moved to Germany and we were told that after just a couple of weeks that we'd have two weeks with no work because it was the summer season, and the school we'd come to work in was closing down for two weeks. So it seemed a shame to stay in Germany, and we had a look to see where we could get to, and obviously we'd left it until the last minute, unintentionally, but basically our options, the only affordable option we could find was to fly to Egypt, to Hurghada on the Red Sea, and stay in a resort, so it was like a package, with the flights and a resort stay.

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Ruth Millington, who hosts the Extreme Holidays Podcast – on which I was a recent guest talking about my Hike Across Great Britain – gave me a contribution all about a recent resort trip she had to Turkey, and told me reasons why, despite this type of holiday not being anywhere near her preferred style of trip, she chose to book one this year. In fact she was away pretty much exactly the same time we were, and just over the water too!

{RUTH:

I'm usually very last minute and spontaneous, (I rarely even book the first night's accommodation when I arrive in a place) so it felt very strange booking an entire two weeks in advance.

And then there was also the fear that because it's more expensive than just a bed and breakfast, I could be wasting a huge amount of money which didn't live up to the blurb and the photos on the holiday company booking site.

*I was really tired and stressed and wanted to speak to no one.
I wanted things to be easy*

*I wanted everything in one place. I could unpack and not have to move on every few days.
I wanted everything to be included so I didn't have to worry about my budget
Turkey is suffering from hyperinflation so I didn't know if I would end up spending more by not going all inclusive.
It was a 5 star all inclusive. The photos showed it had a great pool, lovely beach area and was quiet.
It was in May, between the English bank holidays and few guests would be there.*

All the flights and transfers were included in the trip, so it was easy to get there and very convenient so took away any stress of getting to the hotel.

I didn't have a great deal of expectations. I expected the food to be buffet style (which always disappoints me regardless of how good or bad the food is - you can probably tell I'm not a big fan of buffets).

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We'll come back to Ruth's buffet experiences later. But for now, finally we have Kylie, from the 'Between England and Everywhere' blog who said while her first all-inclusive was ... not really her choice, she does have reasons for continuing to go on them.

[KYLIE:

So my first all-inclusive holiday was when I was 11 years old, so I don't really remember it too well. I just remember that we could eat ice-cream whenever we wanted to, because it was already paid for so in theory it was 'free'. And even now though I do still like to go on the odd all-inclusive, especially in that time when travel started opening back up in like 2020. I would go on a package holiday which included the flight and the hotel, and then food and drink, just because there was a lot of uncertainty as to some businesses were shut, some had capacity limits, and I just found it was kind of easier to travel that way for a little bit.

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There's a strong vibe coming out here that people like all-inclusive resorts because it makes vacationing 'easier', so I guess we'll see over this pod if that's true or not.

{section separation jingle}

Getting to Cyprus was an adventure, though none of it was Jet2s fault. Indeed that side of it went without a hitch - I'd argue that having a dedicated all-in-one service made things simple and quite personable. And that's not something I'm used to having. Check-in at Stansted felt quick and efficient, with friendly and knowledgeable staff - Laura's boarding passes always require additional admin due to her passport status but they seemed pretty clued-up on what she needed.

And the flights themselves were really smooth (which, granted, is not something Jet2 have any control over), but we did feel quite looked-after on them, with attentive crew and a decent selection of snacks. On the way out I had a middle seat - Laura always needs the window, for anxiety reasons - and at 1m90, I wasn't looking forward to four hours crammed in to a small space. But in the event I had a surprisingly large amount of legroom and didn't feel at all restricted. On the way back I sat in the aisle and the middle seat between us was free so that was the best of all worlds.

The only thing lacking on the flight was the pocket in the seat in front, but this seems to be the way of things these days, alas. We were also bemused by the size of the drinks holder, which seemed to fit no known size of bottle, cup, or mug. Except the ones sold on the Jet2 flight itself. Hmmm, have they been taking tips from Apple?!

The transfers in Cyprus were easy too, and required no admin or angst from us. On arrival at Paphos airport there was a Jet2 stall with staff around who took our names and quickly directed us to our assigned coach that would whisk us to our resort. Similarly, on our return we had both a txtmsg and an e-mail telling us when our transfer back would likely pick us up from the resort, and where to wait for it. Paphos has a number of resorts and our transfer coach stopped at several of them dropping other passengers off before reaching ours, so the actual journey time was longer than you might have expected, given we were near the 'end of the line', as it were, but on the plus side it didn't require any effort or expenditure from us, and everything was taken care of.

Additionally, we were able to 'check in' to our flight home at the resort itself on the morning of our departure - our flight wasn't until around 6pm but we were able to check in around 10am. This meant both we had almost a full day at the resort without having heavy bags and we didn't have to worry about getting to the airport several hours in advance so we had more time to enjoy it. I took the opportunity to have a back wax, but that's a whole 'nother story we'll come on to later. Anyway, our transfer picked us up about 3.30pm, and went around the same group of other resorts before getting to the airport, but it was still an easy ride.

Laura found it really unusual that all-inclusive like this exists - the idea of a package holiday that incorporates flights and accommodation is weird to American culture. She didn't realise that a flight to a Jet2 resort with Jet2Holidays would be operated by a Jet2 Airline with Jet2 staff both on-board and at either end.

So, I opened this section with a suggestion of hassle. It wasn't a huge amount of hassle, but it was slightly frustrating. I'd booked a hotel the night before in Redbridge, specifically a two-minute stagger from Redbridge tube station. This was great on the Friday as I was able to go there, dump my bag, then go back into the centre of London to meet up with Laura and one of her work colleagues for a couple of drinks, which, honestly, turned into a couple more drinks, and a couple more ... not the ideal preparation for an early start. But, I figured, not too early since Redbridge is 21 minutes from Liverpool Street station where the Stansted Express goes from, so it's an easy route.

But no. Turns out they were doing planned engineering works on the line and there were no tubes scheduled on the Saturday or Sunday. And information about rail replacement services were confusing and contradictory, as well as incomplete. Information about alternative route was also somewhat oblique. And at that time in the morning even regular London buses aren't that frequent. Anyway, I had to get up much earlier than anticipated, which is really great after a night in the pub, and my 21-minute journey took just over an hour, involving a bus into Ilford and my first experience of the Elizabeth line, and then a realisation that if you're the wrong end of the train, getting off at Liverpool Street puts you out nearer to Moorgate. And I thought Bank/Monument tube station was a large messy hassle. Anyway, I got to the station in good time, albeit noticeably grumpy which Laura picked up on, I apologise for my not being a morning person leading to bad attitudes.

Bloody TfL.

{section separation jingle}

Now, I must say something important. We were on a blogger press-trip, as I've already mentioned, and as part of that we were also on the highest level of tariff - the 'All-Inclusive Plus'.

So, for a bit of clarification, Jet2Holidays offer a couple of different tariff levels, but in simple terms on all-inclusive, the price you pay includes flights, transfers at the destination, hotel costs, and most food and soft drinks. You get free use of the pools and associated facilities, and at that level, all you would need to pay for would be alcoholic drinks, and any of the spa treatments offered by third parties on-site, which we'll come on to later because we absolutely did.

The All-Inclusive Plus includes unlimited alcoholic drinks, as well as, in this resort at least, one meal a week from the specialist on-site restaurants. That is to say, there were several specialist restaurants and we had the option to have one meal from each of them in a week, not one meal from only one of them. Sometimes the vagueness of the English language needs clarification. Also, some very fancy bespoke cocktails aren't included even on the Plus package, but the inclusive selection is wide enough for that to not be an issue unless you're really wanting to push the boat out. The wristband you get given on arrival is colour-coded so it's easy for the staff to see what package you're on and what you're entitled to.

This meant we spent a lot of time drinking standard cocktails. Because why not. There's not much in the way of local craft beer, but that's to be expected and I'm noting more a me-issue for being a beer snob than anything bad about the package or resort. Whereas Laura's go-to drink when she visits Scotland is Tennents Lager. Make of that what you will. Disclaimer: I quite like Buckfast - a caffeinated fortified wine very popular with a certain section of Glaswegian culture and society and which makes Tennents Lager feel like champagne.

Anyway.

With regard to food, the resort we were at had several restaurants, open at various times of the day. A couple of them were open all day and required no reservations. They generally operated as a buffet style restaurant, with the options changing over the day - breakfast, lunch, and evening meals all being catered for differently. As the resort was in Cyprus, much of the available food was eastern Mediterranean, with ample amount of halloumi, lamb, dolmades (stuffed vine leaves) and the like, however many major cuisines were represented. In general, the food at the buffet was very good, much better than we'd expect from buffet-style restaurants in hotels back in the UK.

I mentioned earlier about the specialist restaurants. At the resort we were at, these included Greek, Oriental, and an American style one. These mainly operated in the evenings, and by reservation only. We went to two of them, and I think they'd definitely be worth paying for, The Oriental restaurant vibed like a standard restaurant with an a-la-carte menu, while the Greek restaurant - outdoors, lovely in the fading spring sunshine - was a set menu where they kept coming over to the table and dropping more food off. It was so good but so much even we couldn't eat it all.

The reservation system for these restaurants was online, and we had some trouble booking on our phones, but that might have been because we were trying to do it from a McDonalds about 5km away in Paphos town. But when we returned to the resort we asked the reception desk and they took us through it on one of the large touchscreen information boards in the resort and everything was fine. Another plus for helpful staff.

For snacks and quick food, the resort had a couple of places you could get sandwiches, cakes, ice creams, etc. One was outside near the beach and pool, another served as a cocktail bar but where you could get divine chocolate cake and pastries.

While I'm not the best person to ask about allergies or religious/dietary requirements, because, let's be honest, I'll put anything into my mouth (famously so, but you don't need to know about that, although again, for Full Swap Radio listeners, absolutely yes, and absolutely no, in that order), what I will say is that as many of the restaurants work on a buffet system, and everything is labelled with what it is, for the most part it's easy to 'play safe' and, say, stick to the vegetarian food for example - we were in Cyprus; this wasn't a problem. I didn't notice anything specifically labelled as halal/kosher, gluten-free, or containing allergens, but what I will say is the staff were consistently very friendly and attentive, so I would be confident enough to say if you asked them they'd be very happy to guide you.

Certainly that would be the case in the specialist restaurants with specific menus, where things like that would be listed specifically.

On another tack, In case you're wondering, it's pretty easy to get something to eat and drink most times of the day. So, the restaurants open at various times of the day depending on the food they offer, but for example the buffet breakfast runs from 7am until 10am. The specialist restaurants you need to pre-book open at 7pm. All the restaurants close at 10pm. The patisserie, for cakes and snacks, closes at midnight.

While our resort was pretty awesome for buffet food, I must mention that this is not always the case. Ruth mentioned a situation in her resort which left her feeling a little worse than she should.

[RUTH:

The worse though about my stay was getting food poisoning a few days after arriving. I suspect it was from an omelette that they cooked in front of me for breakfast. When I ate it, something didn't quite taste right and then low and behold about 6 hours later I started feeling very stressed then my stomach started playing up and I had to go lie down in my room. I couldn't eat for the 5 days and for most of that time I was curled up in bed in my hotel room with stomach cramps or rushing to the toilet. It was annoying that I had wasted so much money on an all inclusive and couldn't even eat the food, BUT - if I am honest - the most disturbing part of it all was having left the do not disturb sign on my bedroom door, I realised that if I died there - no one would find me for days. It didn't occur to anyone that I was missing in action for 5 days and to come and check on me. When I normally travel, I go to small hotels. They always know where you are and will check on you. This doesn't happen in these very large all inclusive resorts.

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Clearly she didn't travel with Jet2Holidays. I'd love to insert an ad here, but that would indicate I really have

sold out.

Anyway, back to our resort, where we didn't even get ill from the alcohol. The bars open at various times in the morning, between about 9am and 10:30am. The pool bars tend to close early evening, but the inside bars stay open until late; the cocktail bar closes at 1am. It means you're unlikely to be kept awake by party animals.

Obviously all the restaurants served drinks, which for both soft and alcoholic (wine and beer) were available on a tap dispenser system like you'd find in a fast food restaurant. Yes this means you could have self-serve wine with your breakfast. There were a number of dedicated bars too, not just the one mentioned above, whose seating drifted out onto the patio, but also a proper bar with a piano and occasional live performances, with good high views of the sunset. There were also two pool bars, one of which you could actually swim up to and sit on stools at; the decadence of which had been on Laura's bucket list for quite some time.

Note for non-swimmers; it was possible both to walk into the water and sit pool-side, or just sit land-side. Though the latter means you lose something of the experience.

Now, this opens the question of: do I need to be able to swim to enjoy an all-inclusive resort? As a non-swimmer, famously so, my answer is a solid no. Although the resort we were in had two outdoor pools, an indoor pool at the spa (more about that later), *and* was next to the sea, there was plenty to do outwith the water; indeed on our visit the pools were relatively quiet; the majority of people staying were spending their time either in the bars or lounging on the large areas reserved for deckchairs.

Both the outdoor pools are freshwater ones, and not artificially heated. This makes them cooler than you might expect on a hot early May day. But you soon get used to it. The indoor spa pool is heated but only over the Winter period.

The bar pool you could swim up to had not only water access via steps, and was in the shallow end, it also had a bar landside anyway. For the record though, it was not the best bar in the resort. While it might have ticked off an item in Laura's nebulous bucket list, we only went to it once. But we did take lots of pictures. Even if I do look like an Old Trans Woman in them.

What?

{section separation jingle}

I ought to briefly mention the room we were in, Now, we had a room on the lowest floor of accommodation (there were at least three). We had a twin room, obviously, and it was a good size - plenty of space for us to not feel cramped and ample room for the luggage. There was a large bathroom complete with shower; out only downside was at first the shower flooded the bathroom but the hotel facilities sorted that out without too much of a fuss. Apparently it's a known design fault, but that's beyond the scope of this pod, suffice to say my house in Kirkby-in-Ashfield was built in 1898 and my tenement block in Glasgow dates from around 1907. The Victorians and Edwardians knew how to build buildings. Modern architects care less about this sort of thing. Indeed, my step-cousin works in mortgages in Dubai, and laughs silently to herself every time she sells a 30-year mortgage for a new-build, of which Dubai has a lot,

But back to the resort, The room also had a sizeable balcony with table and chairs, and provided a good spot to sit with a bottle of wine and watch the sun go down over the sea. Or would have done if we weren't in one of the bars doing that exact same thing.

The beds were very comfortable, and the rooms are equipped with aircon which would be very useful in the height of summer, else you have to sleep with the patio doors open and then risk getting bitten to death by the mosquitoes that lurk in this part of the world. Listener: we are not very good at using hotel aircon systems. Look, there were no instructions, all right?!

{section separation jingle}

Two of the questions I was asked by my friend V were 'can you leave the resort' and 'did you feel pressured by up-selling of excursions?'. The first question is easy to answer - yes. The door is right there. This isn't a remake of The Prisoner. There isn't a huge ball bouncing down the beach stopping you. And in any case the door is on the opposite side of the geography. Sometimes I hate metaphor.

It must be said though St George's Resort itself is a little way out of town – about 6km from the Paphos seafront. The road down has a wide demarcated area you can walk along, but regular buses do exist. At the time of typing they only accepted cash, but hopefully this will change soon. Halfway down the road is one of the important historical sites, the Tombs of the Kings, so you're going to want to head that way anyway.

At the junction with the main road just outside the resort is a mini-mart that sells pretty much anything except The Sun newspaper. Across the road from it is a small shopping centre including a pharmacy, an opticians, and a cafe.

As to the other question; I wonder if my friend V has been watching too many sitcoms from twenty years ago. There were no trips to 'local markets run by friends of the resort' nor anything similar. There were a couple of Jet2 reps on-site but they were there purely to ensure that we had no admin or logistical issues, and the staff were there to run the resort, not get involved in ephemera.

That's not to say there weren't excursions available. On arrival we were given a whole booklet's worth of information, including a list of available trips, which was quite extensive. They covered a whole world of Cypriot adventures, from simple things like daily trips to Paphos Zoo and the Waterpark, to cultural and heritage trips around the island, to jeep safaris and sunset cruises. Most of these excursions were full-day experiences, and would be a nice way to get out of the sun-lounger and explore the region. We chose not to, because we're both independent travellers at heart, and anyway it's likely we'll be back in Cyprus soon to explore at our own pace. On this trip we just wanted to make the most of the resort, as that in itself was a new experience for us.

One of the questions often raised about all-inclusive resorts though is around the economic effect it has on the local area. Kylie makes this point here.

/KYLIE:

I think there's also kind of an image within travellers where they look at all-inclusives as if you're the bad person, because a lot of travellers go to an all-inclusive and they never leave the resort, so then they're not really spending money in like the community. But I find I do make a conscious effort to actually go out and still spend in the community and you know just spend the time to go out and about.

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Ruth agrees.

/RUTH:

I've never been into big hotels and certainly never all inclusive resorts. They feel false and cut off from the rest of the country you are visiting, You are basically in a bubble and there is no need to venture beyond the premises of the hotel.

I miss eating at local restaurants and talking to the locals about their lives and particularly during this time, the Turkish elections were on, it would have been fascinating to get a greater insight about the election going on. It's also a way to help the local economy.

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I obviously can't vouch for all resort complexes across the world, and, for example, one thing that springs to mind is parts of the Caribbean, like Dominican Republic and Haiti, where there always feels like there'd be more pressure to stay within the resort complex, quote, for your own safety, unquote. Obviously this kind of practice has detrimental effects on not just the local economy but also on people's perceptions of those countries and places.

Part of this though might be self-selecting. Amanda has an observation from her trip to Egypt, suggesting that one of the reasons resorts have a reputation for being insular is because ... people who visit them prefer it that way, and actively don't leave it even if they could.

[AMANDA:

Now the funny part about that resort was there was a shuttle bus to the nearest town, like, the nearest proper real town, I think it was 15-20 minutes away, not too far. And during our five day stay, one day of which we went to Luxor so that was already one day gone, so we went twice on this shuttle bus to the nearest town. There wasn't tons to do there, like it wasn't a touristy town, but I mean that was the point i think; we could wander around, you know, have a meal, and you know, I got chatting to some local people, met this really lovely guy working in a souvenir shop and we kept in touch by e-mail for quite a few years actually, I often wonder what happened to him, we lost contact and I guess he changed his e-mail address, but on this shuttle bus there was nearly nobody else. So I don't know how many people were staying at the resort, hundreds obviously, at least hundreds, and I think every time on the shuttle bus whichever direction there were maybe one or two other people, and sometimes just us. So obviously that was not a popular outing to go to the nearest town, I guess most of the people in the all-inclusive resort wanted to stay in the all-inclusive resort, and that was the whole point of their holiday. And I guess I kind of try and understand that people just want to have a purely relaxing time, but I don't know, there's all this, like Egypt was Out There, go and have a look, that's kind of how I feel, but also the all-inclusive nature just removed a lot of choice and a lot of different options, especially meals and stuff, cos you kind of feel like we've paid for it already so we might as well make use of it.

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We had a day wandering the historical sights of old Paphos, then along the waterfront, and finally through the suburbs back to the resort (in part because we were looking for a pedicurist and a hair salon, for reasons I'll come to in a minute. We failed, because who knew everything closed on a Bank Holiday in Cyprus!). We only spent one day outside simply because the resort was 6km from the town centre and it was pretty hot, and there otherwise wasn't much left we didn't see so didn't feel the need to. I hope that doesn't make us stereotypes.

{section separation jingle}

Now, of course, resort holidays are more than just alcohol, food, and sunbathing, and while it might be very tempting on an all-inclusive holiday to do just that - after all, all-inclusive, clue's in the name - that would be a very easy way out that doesn't push any other buttons. There were several other entertainments available. In the daytimes there were fitness and sporting activities, including daily yoga. A list of them is posted for the week outside spa reception. In the evenings a couple of the bars had events including live music and allegedly karaoke, though I didn't notice that happening. We were too busy sipping sundowners on the patio.

But. The resort we stayed at was called "the St George Hotel and Spa". Note the last two words. It felt remiss to be spending four days in the resort and not visit the spa. It was, after all, in the name. And I wouldn't be a travel podcaster worth my ... Brutal salt & lime beer (Raven Brewery, Plsen, Czechia), if I didn't take advantage of that fact.

Now, as you hopefully know, I've only ever been to a spa once before, and that was a specialist beer spa in rural Czechia, as part of a brewery trip, which you would have heard about on a previous episode. And if you haven't heard it, go do it at the end of this episode. It was an interesting experience. Similar to this, but also different. For a start, this time had less beer. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

Anyway, the spa itself had a few different parts. It took up much of the basement level of the resort, under a couple of the restaurants, bars, and the patio, with a door to the outside pools and the beach. The multi-gym was just outside the spa's reception. We did not visit the multi-gym; well I didn't, and Laura didn't tell me she did. I like knowing that multi-gyms exist, but I'm far too self-conscious to use one in public and not knowledgeable enough about what I'm doing to make effective use of one in private,

The reception area was quite large. Along one wall was a myriad of beauty, skin-care, and similar products that you could buy. The majority of these were the same products used in the beauty and therapy treatments you could book. I'll come onto these later, as they're an important part of the spa's remit, although just be aware that despite being on an 'all-inclusive' tariff, although the general spa offerings were, the treatments and self-care packages themselves weren't.

The spa reception was also where you could hire towels. In principle the process is: at resort check-in you get given a card with your room number on it that you can hand over to spa reception in exchange for a towel. Or two towels, in fact. You then keep those for use in the spa, or for the deckchairs outside, or for drying off after

using any of the myriad of pools, and when they're dirty, damp, or used, you take them back to spa reception and exchange them for new, clean, towels. At the end of your stay you hand over your last towel and get your card back.

I have no idea why it's done this way and we broke the system at least twice, but nothing bad happened, so make of that what you will.

Anyway. With regard to the spa facilities themselves: beyond the reception was a large spa pool, a calming way to swim away from the bars and sun-seekers in the pools outside. In winter this pool is heated. Alternatively you could just relax on the recliners around the edge, and sit in the cool quiet. Although right next to the busy pools of the outdoor space, it feels a world away.

Beyond the spa pool were the treatment rooms, which also included a small room with what can best be described as 'rocking beds'. You half-sat, half-lay, on them, and they rocked up and down. A couple of them were heated. It was where you went when waiting for a treatment, or directly used as part of one of the treatment packages.

Behind the reception desk were the changing rooms, the jacuzzi/hot tub, the sauna, and the steam room. The latter required you to tell the reception desk you wanted to use it, and they'd turn it on. This is presumably because it puts out a lot of heat and energy. The men's changing room had quite a lot of lockable lockers, so it would be rare for there to be no room for you; I can't comment on the women's changing room. There were also two shower cubicles here, complete with all-purpose liquid soap. This is very useful when you find the shower cubicle in your bathroom has a tendency to flood,

As for the facilities themselves, well, let's start with the hot tub. I had a couple of teething troubles, including sitting on the step rather than the bench below, and not being able to find the 'let's make this rumble' button, but once I'd got that figured out, it was a nice place to sit and muse. Pushing the button activates the jets of water for several minutes, longer than I'd expected, in truth. The pool itself was big enough for at least four people - when me and Laura were in it the first time, two other ladies joined us for a few minutes while they waited for their coach back to the airport. And they were not size zero, shall we say, but it didn't feel cramped at all.

The only downside of the hot tub was its location. It was just off the passageway that led from the reception desk; even the men's changing rooms lay beyond it. I'd imagine in busy periods there'd be a constant stream of people walking past you as you chilled in the tub, which some people might have a problem with.

The sauna felt quite traditional, in the sense of how I always imagined saunas to be. There was a fire heater thing on the wall, and two levels of wooden seating. I'm guessing the technique is to spend some of the time at the lower level and some at the higher level, but I don't know. This is absolutely not my scene. On the wall near the fire was an hourglass, measured in blocks of 5 minutes. I assumed the idea was to flip it over when you got in, and leave when the sand ran out. It doesn't sound like a long time, but the sauna did get pretty hot so I don't know how much time you could realistically spend in there. I did it anyways.

The steam room however gave much more detailed instructions. On the wall outside were a series of notes about it, mostly warnings about who should use it, for how long, and what to do afterwards. In a nutshell, you're supposed to spend around 6 minutes inside, and certainly no more than 10. You're supposed to then go and cool down, either in the pool or in the shower, and rest a bit to get your temperature back to normal. Only then should you go back in the steam room for a second go. It also said that for most people, two cycles is enough. And you shouldn't go in if you're dehydrated, pregnant, or under the influence of alcohol. I read this and thought: 'I've just been in the sauna, it can't be that much different, surely'.

My dear listeners, I lasted about three minutes on my first try.

Rather than being wood-laden, the steam room was tiled, a bit like a swimming pool. Around the sides was a bench-like structure that you could sit on. This was fine for the first couple of minutes, as the heat built up, and you think 'oh, this isn't too bad'. Then two things happen. Firstly, the room fills with steam, which sounds pretty obvious but it's much more than you imagine. It becomes difficult to see anything, and finding either the bench or the door out becomes quite a task. Secondly, the steam seems to come from inlets below the seating, so your legs start to burn. Standing up just means you feel slightly faint from the heat. There's also no timepiece in the room to know how long you've been in there, so it's quite disorienting. I resorted to counting, just to make

sure I didn't over-steam myself.

Remember too, by its very nature, the steam room makes you and everything you're carrying very damp and hot. The instructions specifically say to remove jewellery and not take electronics inside. You will get damp. You will need a replacement towel from reception to dry off afterwards. Thus how you actually time 6 minutes is anyone's guess - short of taking in a small analogue wall clock, but even then, batteries. You wouldn't be able to see it anyway. You probably couldn't have seen the Big Ben Tower clock face.

Don't let yourself think this was a bad experience though. I disregarded the health & safety information and had three sessions in the room, although only once did I manage to last the minimum-suggested 6 minutes. I used both the spa pool and the hot tub to cool down - when a hot tub feels chilly, you can gauge how hot the steam room was.

I don't honestly know if any of this did me any good, but I was definitely reminded of how the Ancient Romans did bath-houses (and how Turkish Baths work, though I've never been to one of those either). I'm certainly not averse to trying them again, but I would be more keen to know if I was doing it 'right', you know?

Also remember I didn't really know what I was doing nor what benefits it was going to bring, so I'd probably want to go in next time with more of a plan than 'oh I'll just go in the steam room again cos it's there'. I'd also say it helps if you can swim; the spa pool is nice to relax in but if all you're doing is walking around the shallow end, it feels quite embarrassing. When we were planning this trip, Laura did casually suggest it might be a good place to do a second attempt to teach me. It will come as no surprise to any of you that nothing more was ever said about this.

The spa also offered beauty treatments. Now before I get into those, I just want to make you aware that although we were on the all-inclusive package which included the spa itself, that didn't extend to these treatments; they were offered by external third parties and had to be paid for separately.

Now, the list of available treatments was quite long; indeed there was a whole brochure listing them. They included ten different types of facial treatments, a couple of body polishes and body wraps, ten various forms of massage, manicures & pedicures, hair waxing & removal up to and including pretty much a full body session, eyebrow makeovers, and a couple of hydrotherapy treatments. These could be chosen separately, or made up into a 'package'. One of the packages was a 'romantic treatment for two' which included hydrotherapy, a steam and mud cleansing ritual ("rasul"), and a full body massage. We did not do that. Obviously. Though I was in reception when a young (I'd say early twenties) did indeed choose that option. Bless their romantic hearts.

One thing to note is that not all the treatments were necessarily available all the time. Like, we'd wanted a pedicure but the person who was trained to give them was off work the week of our visit. Also, you also needed to book at least a day in advance for the treatments, and in fact in busier times it might be advisable booking more than that - possibly before your arrival.

Out of all the treatments offered, the only one I went for in the end was a back wax. It's something I'd been contemplating for a while anyway, but never had the wherewithal to do. But here I was, in a resort, with time and opportunity right there. So I went for it.

I wasn't sure what to expect, given I've absolutely never had it done before. I'd been pre-warned by Laura that it would probably hurt, and as you can imagine I have a lot of hair back there. Thick hair. It's a hard place to shave or even trim on your own, and yes I have tried.

In total, the treatment took just over an hour, though I had a bit of waiting around on the rocking recliners at the start. It was kind of a weird feeling; I wasn't ever in pain but it was more annoying than being tickled with a pinwheel. I was lying face-down on a bench with a hole for my face to rest in, so I couldn't see what was going on, only feel it. The lady who worked on me, Lily, did it in stages, rather than doing the whole of my back at once. So each section went through the same process. Firstly she prepared parts of the skin with a kind of poultice; this is the bit that took the longest. Once it had settled in and gripped on, then she applied some kind of strip. Which she then ripped off, taking most of the hair with it. It didn't all come off in one go, so she'd have to either quickly re-stick and re-rip (which didn't hurt anywhere near as much), or she'd go through the process again later on.

It was weird to note the upper left side of my back stung less to wax than the lower right side. I genuinely don't

know why.

Anyway, I left with a smooth back. Not that I show it off much, but that's not the point of the exercise. She did give me a couple of warnings - don't have a shower for a couple of hours, and when I do, make it a cool or tepid one, and don't get sunburn. I'd imagine going in to a waxing session with sunburn would be equally as ill-advised.

Having done it once, I suspect having it done again will be easier, but I don't know if that's something I'm going to do on a regular basis. That said, I'm glad I did it, and while I can't see it, I know it felt smooth to the touch from what I could reach, so I'm more than happy with it.

{section separation jingle}

[Chat with Laura]

{section separation jingle}

Now, one thing I ought to talk about, given who I am, is how it felt to visit an all-inclusive resort as someone who is ... clearly not cis-het-allo. Non-binary, Asexual, Aromantic people aren't exactly common, especially not at a resort like St George's, which caters for an older demographic. And as we all know, that demographic isn't exactly the most accepting of people who vibe differently to the standard. Even my generation, Gen-X, we might be much more accepting of homosexuality than our parents, we, as a rule, are less likely to get concepts like non-binary, like asexuality, than those that came after us. We also have a very confusing cultural knowledge of transgender than Millennials And Below, but that's a separate subject. Because I'm not Trans. Sort of.

Anyway.

As you know, in terms of gender I'm very strongly non-binary. Enby for short. This means despite my body type, I don't consider myself strictly either male nor female. In fact I tend to not really 'understand' the idea of gender stereotypes - I get that they exist, I get what they are, but it confuses me as to why, so one could argue I'm Agender. This is a debate for a different podcast; this is just backstory. Anyway. I'm having these internal dialogues in my head, and it made sense to use this trip as a way to see how I felt comfortable expressing my enbyness in a public and social environment. By which I mean, I do this already, but I was wondering where my boundaries lay, because being in an all-inclusive resort surrounded by a large number of very diverse people I don't know is very different to going to my local shop or pub,

On the one hand, it was quite scary to put myself into an enclosed space surrounded by so many people who I feared might be disapproving. On the other though, it's a well-regulated and 'protected' place where I didn't feel anything 'bad' would actually happen, precisely because it's an enclosed space.

For the record, I definitely feel comfortable in my presentation around Laura. Her only observation is she wished I'd be more aware of colour and pattern matching. I'd love to know I don't know what she means, but, I mean, you've seen or heard my pictures. I am with clothing as I am with food; I wear and consume what I like. This is why my uncle used to leave the room when I ate sandwiches as a teenager; apparently salt-and-vinegar crisps squashed into chocolate spread sandwiches was one of his Hard Limits.

With both food and fashion, I consider there are no rules. Others disagree.

Anyway.

I very much give the impression I'm not the middle-aged male-bodied person I would normally appear to be. People of my demographic do not generally go out in public in dungarees, a crop-top, or a long skirt. I very much 'stand out', especially in an environment surrounded by my peers, who are more rigid in their presentations.

Note that even though it's a beach resort, beachwear also tends to be gendered. Cisgender middle-aged men generally do not wear crop-tops. I mean, clearly, I did in the sauna and steam room etc, the same combo as I wear for Parkrun, but I'd argue that spas are an athletic type of activity. Even so, cisgender middle-aged men don't tend to wear crop-tops and leggings for Parkrun. This is why I'm not a cisgender middle-aged man. In my head I'm a 36-year-old woman. I am clearly not a 36-year-old woman. But meh.

But you may well wonder, how do people react when they see me? You may be unsurprised to know that for the most part, I don't know because I wasn't paying attention or noticing them. That said, we did have a couple of people come up to us and talk to us though, specifically because they were curious about my presentation. One of them did a drive-by: we were standing at one of the bars waiting to be served when someone came over, said 'I think you're very brave', and then wandered off. I don't know what to make of that.

Someone else sat with us for a few moments at another of the bars while we were waiting for our booking at one of the restaurants. She may not have been entirely sober, but she was very chatty. Amongst other things she said was 'I'm not one to talk about people behind their backs so I thought I'd come over and speak to you directly'. This implies people were indeed talking about me but didn't want to say anything, but since they never said anything, it didn't directly affect me. Sometimes knowledge is not power.

I do know a couple of people weren't sure how to refer to me, based on my presentation. Because it came up in conversation with a couple of the bar staff, I should have worn my pronoun badge. Yes I have a pronoun badge. It usually lives on my backpack, it's silvery/shiny, and it says 'they/them'. I bought it from the Queer bookshop near where I live in Southside Glasgow, and I took Laura there once and she bought a 'she/her' badge in the same style and I have never felt so seen, so understood, so allied with, than I did at the moment she bought it. It's only a small thing, but it damn near made me cry with happiness and comfort. She didn't know that until she heard me say it just then. Thank you, Laura, I love you.

Anyway.

The impression I got from the conversations I had with the people I met in the resort was that, in general, everyone seemed to be assuming I was Trans, rather than non-binary. This is understandable given the majority of society still thinks in terms of a gender binary. If I'm clearly not masculine, even in a male body, I must therefore be a Trans Woman. I did not correct them. It just felt easier not to. Your mileage may vary as to whether this is just conflict-avoidance on my part or whether it's an accurate representation of Future Nel. That's not a discussion for this pod.

{shortened? section separation jingle}

What also affected the way people saw me was the fact I wasn't travelling alone.

Now, while as you know I tend to travel to places solo, a large number of reasons for this are due to my random nature and last-minute decision-making. In an environment where everything's just 'there' in front of me and I don't have to move and I don't have to make decisions, I mean, on the one hand it sounds ideal but on another, I fear I'd get bored. It's not challenging, especially alone. I'd just be sat there and going 'ho hum, what shall I do for the next six hours'. I'm very glad I had Laura there because it was just nice to chill and be with a friend so I had someone to chat with and it was, well, it was like being in a pub with a friend, you know, no pressure, just chill. I've never been on a cruise but I'd imagine it's be quite similar in vibe – just potter around until the next destination, surrounded by people you don't know and probably wouldn't normally speak to unless you absolutely had to, either from boredom or from alcohol. Still, better than a coach tour cos at least you can rest properly and move around at will. And at least you can leave the resort when you like; you can't do that on a cruise because there's nowhere to leave *to* when you're out at sea. It would feel like a very swanky open prison.

But where was I going with this? Oh yeh. Solo travel to resorts. Some people thrive on it, because it gives them a chance to meet people. Here's Kylie again.

[KYLIE:

But even though I'm alone I'm usually the odd-one-out, kind of, and there's often a lot of like couples and families, but it doesn't really bother me so much, I've kind of got used to it now that I'm alone, and you do still get to meet people.

I find that, especially if you travel in the shoulder or off-season, you can get some really good all-inclusive deals, and when a package is so cheap, I then don't mind spending money on loads of day trips, or even going and like eating lunch out places, and they are a good place to meet other travellers, especially if you get a hotel pick-up where other people are going on the same tour. You then get to spend the day with them, talk to them,

and then when you get back to the hotel, you might often then spend time with them around the pool, or at the bar, or even sometimes I've had dinner with people I've met on tours before.

Because another thing with I find with a lot of all-inclusive hotels is they are kind of on the outskirts of like bigger cities or out in the middle of like remote areas. I quite like that and I like it because it's more peaceful and it's not quite as hectic as what a city hotel would be. But then I find that, especially as a solo traveller, I often don't like going out alone at night by myself. So even though I'd go out on like a day tour, or I'd take a bus to a nearby town, I don't then really want to be going around at night by myself in the dark for, say, dinner, so it's quite nice with the all-inclusive packages that you know that you've got a dinner there provided for you at the hotel. But then if you do meet someone and you decide to like go out as a group to a nearby restaurant, you know, the option's there, you can do that, there's nothing stopping you from going out and eating like in another restaurant or somewhere else, there's nothing stopping you doing that, but it's just nice to know that you have that food option like nearby.

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Ruth has been less keen on it, in her experiences.

[RUTH:

One of the things I have always struggled with being a solo traveller is eating out on my own. It's one of the most intimidating thing to do. On the first night, most of the waiters were quite bemused that I was travelling on my own and asked why, was I lonely and why I wasn't there with my husband. I haven't gotten used to being asked this in certain countries over the years, but didn't expect to be asked it in a 5 star hotel. When you don't expect it, it suddenly can be quite intimidating and make you feel awkward.

I also didn't enjoy being asked to join the group activities each day such as archery and darts. I must have come across quite grumpy. I did though partake in some pool aerobics which was funny.

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Ruth also had bad vibes the first time she ever went to an all-inclusive resort.

[RUTH:

Back in 2008 I ended up in a Sandals all inclusive resort in Jamaica. It was 3 days of hell. The little hotel I had booked turned out to be overbooked when I arrived so I had to find another place to stay. I had to get into a taxi and trawl down a long strip of hotels to find a room available. All these hotels along the strip were all-inclusive (some housed up to 3000 guests at a time!) and after 1 and half hours of being in the taxi and stopping multiple times along the way, I finally found a room at Sandals - the 17th hotel along the strip.

Sandals was perhaps the worse place I could have stayed in. It was an all inclusive for honeymooners and there's me a single female women who showed up. The room was lovely and the restaurants food good, but I posed a threat to many of the women there who were with their new husbands. No one would talk to me. It was horrible and probably one of the loneliest moments in my life.

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Ruth's experiences are my fear, especially with my latent social anxiety and fear of being so obviously out-of-place that everyone sees me as the Thing To Laugh At, even if only behind my back, and is why places like Mauritius are on my anti-bucket list.

But that doesn't mean you have to be in a couple, or naturally exuberant and extroverted, to find the right balance at an all-inclusive resort. One of the things me and Laura discussed both at the time and afterwards was how all-inclusive resorts would actually be great places for people to go to with friends. Like, you don't need to do everything together; there's enough to keep you entertained if you want to do your own thing. But equally, it's a small enough environment for you to never be too far from each other if you wanted to meet up for a snack or drink, or whatever, swap notes about your people-watching or the vibe, and have some downtime together before doing your own thing again.

In addition, the resorts have plenty of twin-bedded rooms, not just double-bedded ones, so they definitely acknowledge that even in an adults-only resort environment, where you would expect a large proportion of older married couples, there's space for people like us.

However, while we never had any issues around this from either the resort or the Jet2 staff, the clientele appeared to be slightly confused, Especially given my presentation; it was clear me and Laura weren't the 'standard couple' that almost everyone else seemed to be. While it was clear we weren't 'dating', people didn't seem able to classify us in any other box either. Like, It's clear we're not siblings; we don't look alike for one thing, and then it's clear from our speech that we certainly weren't brought up together. Cousins, maybe, but not many cousins are close enough to go travelling together so it wouldn't be people's first thought. One person suggested Laura might be my daughter, but bless him he was only a wee nipper himself, relatively speaking. Though it reflects well on Laura, given I'm not yet looking pensionable. Whether I was her mother or her father was not specified. No-one we spoke to openly put forward the thought that we were friends; evidently in their minds, the only people who go on holiday together are those related by blood or, uhm, other bodily fluids. As an Aromantic Asexual Enby, I find this problematic. As The Barefoot Backpacker, I find it amusing.

Quite whether all of this would vibe the same in a family resort or one more populated by the twenty-something 'Georgie Shore' type crowd, I don't know, but then I'd be unlikely to be in those sorts of places anyway. I mean, going to Ayia Napa might be an interesting cultural experience but if I ever did, it'd be likely one I'd do as a day trip and just ... observe.

And probably not while wearing a crop-top laden with daisies.

{section separation jingle}

So, to close off this pod, I just want to give an overall vibe of how it felt to have been to an all-inclusive resort and how it felt to be there. It's certainly not something I'd ever had on my bucket-list (although it was equally never on my anti-bucket-list, suggesting either I'd never ruled it out, or that it was so beyond the spectrum that I'd never thought to think about it.

Now, one of the things that always irked me about all-inclusive resorts was the cost. They always seemed to be quite expensive. But when me and Laura sat down to work out prices, we realised that it's actually much cheaper overall, relatively, than you think. That everything is included means the initial price looks like a big number, but if you break it down in terms of flights, hotel costs, food and drink, etc, it's clear how the costs of travelling independently adds up. Those who budget might be more aware of this than I am. Return flights, especially with hold luggage, then a decent hotel, and it doesn't take much extra spending on food and drink to make all-inclusive resorts genuinely affordable in comparison. Bear in mind St George's resort is rated four stars.

Ruth said pretty much the same:

/RUTH:

I know many people do chose to go, especially if they have families with kids as there is a large variety of food and activities. And especially when all alcoholic drinks and everything else is included it's easier to budget upfront especially again if you have a family.

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My main fear had been that I'd be bored, just sitting around doing nothing. But of course you get out what you put in, and there was enough to do (and enough to drink) for that to not be a problem. It helped that I was travelling with a good friend – I don't know if I'd've had the same experience as a solo traveller. But even so, I didn't feel rushed, I didn't feel pressured to 'do' everything, and that's another big change to my normal my travel style. And it was just nice to sit and relax and ... do nothing.

Ruth said there were some things she did enjoy about her stay, including, despite what she said earlier, the food. Well, some of it, anyway.

/RUTH:

I enjoyed the fact that everything was catered for: there was food 24/7. There were two huge pools, a nice beach area in a quiet cove away from Turunc (which itself is a small village, former fishing village). There was also a spa, and Turkish bath area.

The staff were friendly and the weather good. There was structure to the day. I knew when the meals were. There was a huge range of dishes per meal. The salads were great in particular.

I arrived late afternoon and I was put on the top floor with great views of the two pools and the beach and beautiful cove. The room was clean with a well stocked fridge and balcony. Importantly for me, the hotel was nice and quiet.

I didn't enjoy the fact that it made me feel incredibly lazy,. Normally, on arrival, I drop my bags off and go explore the area but this time I couldn't be bothered.

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I'd definitely be tempted to do this again, that's for sure. Which is not a sentence I thought I'd say. Amanda, however, has a different vibe.

[AMANDA:

There were some good parts about it; we managed to get out and about a little bit, but the resort part, it was fine, like, there was nothing wrong with it, it was pretty homogenous and, you know, fairly bland. The food I remember being pretty boring and very samey, you know, just like a buffet every meal and, I don't know, you know, it was fine, and I remember trying to do the proper 'good resort' thing and taking my book to the swimming pool for the day, and I love to read and I love to swim, but I did it for I think like a day and a half of this trip and I'd had it, that was more than enough. I was like: how do people just do this the whole day long, I just couldn't, I don't know. I don't understand. Not my kind of travel. I mean never say never, and I guess there are probably some kinds of all-inclusive resorts in certain destinations that might suit my needs better, but this one was fine, but not something I'm ready to do again any time soon.

{end pod jingle}

Well, that's about all for this pod. Join me next time for another adventure beyond the brochure. This one was quite clearly *in* the brochure, but generally not brochures I tend to read any more. So I'm counting it. Am I really that out of touch, or do I, too, default to 1986? Anyway, don't forget your toothbrush, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{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.}