

Transcript of Podcast 075: Travel Podcasting With ChatGPT

{Intro:

Host: Thank you so much!

ChatGPT: You're very welcome! If you have any more questions or need further assistance, feel free to ask. Happy podcasting and safe travels on your barefoot backpacking adventures!

}

{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 :)

I'm not quite sure if this is the last podcast I'll be recording in Glasgow. Other things being equal, I should get the keys to the Manchester flat on Friday (tomorrow, if you're listening to this on the day of release), but I won't be handing the keys to this flat back until 25th (a fortnight's time). The period in between will be spent veering between the two, for a number of reasons, plus a trip to London because Laura has far more bags than she can realistically carry, and because she did promise to take me on a pub crawl of Wapping. I realise that's not something that most people would look forward to, but everywhere is interesting, beer is nice, some of the pubs are apparently quite cool, and who wouldn't turn down a pub crawl with their bestie? Even if you don't like beer, as most of my friends don't, in fact.

I don't think it's quite sunk in yet that I'm going to be leaving Glasgow. I suspect it only will when I have the keys to the new place in my hand and I unlock the door to walk in for the first time. And that'll be quite an emotional feeling, matching the one I'll have in two weeks' time when I leave the Glasgow flat for the last time. What I will say though is that the whole experience of moving has been a lot less stressful than the hassle we had coming to Glasgow in the first place, two years ago; one that required two trips to Glasgow, considerable assistance from my VA, a lot of stress, and the signing of a contract for a flat I'd never actually been to until I got the keys. It promoted a whole podcast episode, whereas this experience gets a couple of paragraphs in the housekeeping.

Obviously there is still time for everything to fall flat on its arse, but now we've signed the contract, it's unlikely. Apparently the landlord has even installed new toilets for us. I feel honoured. I've also told my mother, who's already planning a visit. That'll be nice.

So I'm taking the time to bid my farewells to the people and places I've been connected with during my time here. I'm not quite saying goodbye to the Curious Liquids wee beer shop, where I'm writing the script for this pod, as I'm sure I'll be here again in the next two weeks. And my last non-binary night is next week. I have, however, said goodbye to the Queens Parkrun; mostly this was two weeks ago, at my last volunteering shift, because Saturday just gone they had a volunteer takeover by a local running club so many of the volunteers and organisers that would normally be there took the opportunity to be away elsewhere. What it did mean though is I turned up to run it rather than volunteer; my first Parkrun since my injury at the end of January. I mean, I've been walking fine for a couple of months now, but I'd never tried running more than crossing a road or being late for a train, which didn't cause me any issues but I was conscious of it. I went full 'barefoot daisy' with the crop-top, leggings, headband, and hair-clips, but purposely didn't push it, so it was the slowest parkrun time I'd ever recorded (but still about two minutes faster than I'd anticipated). But it was great to get back on the trail, as it were, and I'm kinda glad my last visit was as an attendee rather than a volunteer.

I've not decided whether to jog or volunteer at my new Parkrun venue for my first visit on Saturday. It might depend on the weather. Also I've never seen the course, but that's an issue both ways. Could you imagine marshalling at a junction and be like 'yeh I've no idea which way you should go either!'?

I do have to be aware of my phone though. A couple of the volunteering roles require using the Parkrun Volunteer App, and my phone is ... you know when I was in Cyprus, my phone's battery was entirely dubious and suspect? Well on Saturday morning it refused to charge, and when I finally managed to get it to do something, it didn't charge fully, drained very quickly, and reported different levels of charge depending on if it was switched off or not, just like the problems I'd had back in May. It *seems* to have settled down now, but I am very aware it might be time to get a new phone. One that isn't over four years old. I hate spending money on big stuff (and yet not at all on small stuff). I ranted to my therapist about that on Tuesday. But you don't need to know that.

As for my leg; I had a follow-up session at the hospital yesterday where they briefly took me through the MRI scan I had done a month or two ago. Turns out that yes, I did indeed have a stress fracture in the left leg, that's healing up quite nicely so they don't have any concerns. Apparently it's been quite common recently, well, last year for sure - active people pre-pandemic stopped doing a lot of exercise during the lockdowns, then when restrictions eased, thought they could go back to how they were in the before-times. Sadly the body doesn't work like that. The way to avoid it is to take it easy and build up slowly, by the way.

They also noted I'd had one in my right leg some time in the past - I suspect this was back in 2012 when I was running, training for a half-marathon, and got an injury that required me to use a stick for a while, including on a week-long trip to Belgium. I didn't go to a doctor then, so I never knew what it was, but I've always had residual concerns about it ever since. And now I know.

Anyway. On with the pod.

-- {section separation jingle} --

The first question you might ask is of me. Why, given my skill with words, my unique and distinct voice, both literal and metaphoric, and a preference for real stories and experiences over auto-generated ones, am I dabbling with AI? Well, the answer is manifold.

The most obvious one is also the most ... I'm going to say 'depressing', but a better word might be 'resigned'. The fact is, regardless of wants, hopes, and desires, AI exists. It is here, it is usable, and there's nothing we can do about it. However, given that basis, I'd argue that it's a tool *to* create, rather than an all-encompassing out-the-box one-size-fits-all solution. That is to say, rather than using it to auto-generate a podcast, or a blog, or a 90,000 word fantasy adventure novel - oh god I wish, I wish. V asked me if I'm not confident in writing fight scenes, because I seem to skip over them - rather that, instead you use it to build a framework around which you can build the story you want to tell. I see it as a kind of research tool; simply, it's a search engine, but one that doesn't just find you the information you're looking for, but collates it and provides extra detail. You still need to put that info and detail into a wider piece, but it gives you more time to do that as you're spending less on researching the background. Unless you don't trust the background info.

And this leads in to another reason I see it as effectively a more-advanced search engine and a tool, rather than a complete package. It's only as good, it can only ever be as good, as the information it's trawling through. Which is only what's been made available to it on the net. There was a conflict recently with the website AO3, whereby one of the AIs was seen to be specifically picking up information known to be only on that site. In case you don't know, AO3, or Archive Of Our Own, is one of the internet's biggest websites, and is a repository for creative writing, almost exclusively fan fiction. Some of which is of pretty good quality, some of which may have ended up as Fifty Shades of Grey, and some of which ... is probably best not searching for. If you can think it, it exists. Yes, even that. Nicola Sturgeon / Theresa May slash fic is not something anyone needs to be reading.

But this is where it might come to my advantage. Because I'm notoriously ... I have the same attitude to deadlines as the British author Douglas Adams, who said he liked the noise they made as they whistled by, and once had to be physically locked in a room so he could write a script on time. I'm not very proactive, and I'll often find the best way of handling a blank screen or sheet of paper is to ... spend 6 hours on google maps looking at the road network of Algeria. It might well be that I could use an AI tool to, essentially, make a list of almost bullet points from which I can be inspired to create content. What the AI would produce isn't the content, it's the backbone of the content. An animal is more than just its skeleton, and often the muscles and the skin are the most interesting parts anyway.

That said, the kind of thing I produce is quite bespoke and personal. Many of my travel blogger buddies *do* produce framework-based content, like, you know, the 7 cutest cafes in Glasgow, or 13 things to do in Paris. These are posts that AI could generate easily, by simply scouring the net for other people who've produced the same, or similar, content. But in a way that's what search engines already do. That's what sites like BuzzFeed already do. That's what online editions of local newspapers already do, so producing such content is already a saturated market. It's a popular market, for sure, but it's a very difficult market to penetrate anyway.

That's not to say AI can do all of those kinds of posts, but you may have to be a bit more niche, or on-the-ball. Given that AI can only trawl through content that already exists, this means there's definitely openings for lesser-visited places. Cute cafes in Glasgow? Old hat. Cute cafes in Kilmarnock? More scope. 13 things to do in Paris? Tired. 13 things to do in Cergy-Pontoise? Now you're talking.

Everything I have said in this section is theoretical, based on what I perceive AI can do. And what it can't do. It's also my perception as of August 2023. Ask me in five years if I feel I was right or not.

But one way to test those perceptions is to test it out, to see, at the moment, what it can do. And if it surprises me. In either direction.

-- {section separation jingle} --

The first thing V asked was about obscure or hard to reach destinations. But first, she wondered what sort of questions it would suggest for a podcast on it in the first place.

{Host: Hi dystopian robot friend. What questions would you ask a guest on a barefoot backpacking podcast about obscure or hard to reach destinations?}

ChatGPT: Hello, intrepid adventurer! As a dystopian robot friend, I'm thrilled to help you come up with some intriguing questions for your barefoot backpacking podcast. Let's dive into the world of obscure and hard-to-reach destinations:

- 1. What inspired you to seek out and explore obscure or hard-to-reach destinations rather than sticking to more popular tourist spots?*
- 2. Share with us the most unforgettable encounter you've had with local wildlife while exploring one of these off-the-beaten-path locations.*
- 3. How do you prepare differently for a journey to a remote destination compared to more accessible places? What challenges did you face during the preparation phase?*
- 4. Tell us about a time when you had to rely on your problem-solving skills to overcome a difficult situation while backpacking in an obscure location.*
- 5. Often, communication and language barriers can be significant challenges in remote areas. How do you manage to connect and interact with the local communities despite these obstacles?*
- 6. Share a story about a cultural tradition or unique custom you experienced during your travels that you found particularly fascinating or heartwarming.*
- 7. Many of these hidden gems might have fragile ecosystems. How do you approach sustainable and responsible travel when visiting these pristine places?*
- 8. We all have moments of doubt during challenging journeys. Can you recall an instance when you questioned your decision to explore one of these remote destinations? How did you overcome it?*
- 9. Some remote areas might lack modern conveniences like internet and electricity. How do you embrace a more minimalistic lifestyle during your backpacking adventures?*
- 10. What's your most cherished memory from all your journeys to obscure destinations? What made it stand out from the rest?*
- 11. Share some valuable tips for aspiring adventurers who want to follow in your footsteps and explore lesser-known corners of the world.*
- 12. Some of these hidden destinations might have restricted access or require special permissions. How do you navigate through bureaucratic obstacles to gain entry to these areas?*
- 13. Describe an encounter with a local community that left a profound impact on you, influencing the way you perceive the world and travel.*
- 14. Safety is always a top concern, especially in remote locations. Can you share some essential safety measures you take before and during your backpacking expeditions?*
- 15. Lastly, tell us about your dream destination that you haven't visited yet—a place that truly captures the essence of your passion for barefoot backpacking.*

With these questions, your podcast guests will have the chance to share their extraordinary experiences and inspire others to explore the hidden wonders of our world. Happy podcasting!}

Now. These are interesting questions it's come up with. Some of them sound like questions that have been asked in the past on travel chats on Twitter. Given the remit of the question we asked, which was simply about obscure or hard to reach destinations, I'm interested that it suggested questions relating to wildlife, ecotourism, and practical problems associated with travel off the beaten track, none of which were prompted. Evidently AI is clever enough to have picked up on the association of lesser-visited places with activities and issues more likely to be present in such places.

I'll concede the way the questions are worded also bring to mind job interviews: "tell us about a time", "can you recall an instance", "how did you overcome". Maybe that's a limitation of association with the word "interview", as obviously in terms of style, a podcast 'interview' will be much more casual. But then again, we asked it to list questions, not to actually conduct the interview.

Well, we did, but that was our follow-up topic. Note that AI was kind enough to tell us it was an AI, even if one pretending to be a human, with a huge disclaimer at the end of this chat:

{ChatGPT: Please note that as a human, my responses are based on imagination and general knowledge. While the experiences shared are not personal, they reflect common backpacking sentiments and motivations.}

Let's hear what it came up with.

{Host: Could you please answer those questions as if you are a guest on the podcast? Could you please answer as if you're a human?}

ChatGPT: Certainly! As a human, here are my responses to the questions as a guest on the podcast:

Host: "Welcome to our barefoot backpacking podcast! What inspired you to seek out and explore obscure or hard-to-reach destinations rather than sticking to more popular tourist spots?"

Human Guest: "Thank you for having me! I've always had a sense of curiosity and a thirst for unique experiences. Exploring lesser-known destinations allows me to break away from the crowds, connect more intimately with the environment, and discover hidden gems that often remain untouched by mass tourism. There's a certain allure to exploring places off the grid and uncovering the secrets they hold."}

One thing I've realised when compiling this podcast is how prone AI is prone to cliché. That's not to say you can tell an AI from the clichés, as they appear frequently in human travel writing (where AI picks up the idea from); rather the opposite – you can tell human travel writing if there's fewer of them. Fortunately at no point did ChatGPT use the term "nestled quaintly" for me, a phrase someone I was on a writing course with many years ago said should immediately be blocklisted and anyone using it taken to re-education services.

{Host: "Tell us about the most unforgettable encounter you've had with local wildlife while exploring one of these off-the-beaten-path locations."}

Human Guest: "One of my most unforgettable encounters was in the rainforests of Borneo. While trekking through dense foliage, we suddenly stumbled upon a family of orangutans swinging through the trees. It was a breathtaking sight, watching them in their natural habitat, completely undisturbed by our presence. Moments like these remind me of the importance of preserving these delicate ecosystems and the incredible beauty of nature."}

That said, of course, here AI is giving me the impression of a human activist mentioning environmentalism as a related topic to local wildlife. Which is very much a valid concern, and one which, not mentioned in the question, AI has deemed to be relevant. Clever.

I am making the assumption in all of this that the AI tool has indeed trawled the net and connected the dots, as it were, rather than just lifting a passage from someone else's website. If it has, and it's you, I'd raise a copyright notice. Not at me though.

{Host: "How do you prepare differently for a journey to a remote destination compared to more accessible places? What challenges did you face during the preparation phase?"

Human Guest: "Preparing for remote journeys requires thorough research and planning. I spend more time understanding the local customs, cultures, and potential risks in these areas. As these places often lack modern amenities, I focus on packing essentials while keeping my backpack as light as possible. One of the significant challenges is anticipating unexpected situations, like limited supplies or communication, so I make sure to carry extra provisions and have a reliable backup plan."

What I find interesting about this answer is that while on the face of it it's a perfectly valid series of statements to the first part of the question, if you look deeply it feels like a weird series of non-sequiturs. Yes, remoter destinations may well have different customs, and yes, going there might well require a different approach to packing, but I think if I were to be asked that question I'd be talking more about the research and planning it alludes to at the start. I mean, yes, I'd be thinking about "packing essentials" (which in my head means 'toilet paper', for some reason), but I'd be more worried about how to get there and around, money, travel time, and what exists in the way of accommodation. I wonder if the tool has actually pulled out info for 'remote destinations' and conflated 'travel to destinations off the beaten track' (like Papua New Guinea) with 'wilderness hiking' (like, say, the Pacific Coast Trail).

{Host: "Tell us about a time when you had to rely on your problem-solving skills to overcome a difficult situation while backpacking in an obscure location."

Human Guest: "During a solo hike in the highlands of Nepal, I encountered a sudden heavy snowfall, which obscured the trail. My map and GPS were of little use due to the poor visibility. I had to rely on my instincts, backtrack to the last known point, and find alternative markers to guide my way. It was a test of patience and adaptability, but eventually, I managed to navigate through the challenging conditions and reach a safe shelter."

Amongst other things, this would be more believable had it not said Nepal. Are you even allowed to do a solo hike in an area like that in Nepal? Also I wasn't aware visibility had any effect on GPS, unless it's implying the visibility was so bad it couldn't read the display. Which would make finding alternative markers quite tricky.

Technical criticisms aside, I think this sort of answer is what you'd *like* to think you'd do, you know, keep a focussed mind, be logical, and everything would be all right. I suspect if a human had this experience, they wouldn't write/speak about it like it was just a walk up Primrose Hill. I might also raise a concern that on seeing/hearing this, people might go 'oh I heard someone be calm about bad situations, it can't have been that dangerous'. If an AI told you to put your hand on the fire, would you?

{Host: "Often, communication and language barriers can be significant challenges in remote areas. How do you manage to connect and interact with the local communities despite these obstacles?"

Human Guest: "Language barriers can indeed be a hurdle, but I've found that genuine gestures and a warm smile can go a long way in bridging the gap. I try to learn a few basic phrases in the local language, which locals appreciate and often respond positively to. Engaging in activities with them, sharing a meal, or participating in their traditional events helps break the ice and fosters meaningful connections."

Yeh, I've seen Travel Bloggers on Twitter say pretty much at least the first half of this, not quite verbatim, but close. The last sentence feels a bit like 'I need to say something else, this is relevant, so let's say this'. It's not 'wrong', per se, but it feels like the answer to an unasked follow-up question.

{Host: "Share a story about a cultural tradition or unique custom you experienced during your travels that you found particularly fascinating or heartwarming."

Human Guest: "In a remote village in Mongolia, I had the privilege of witnessing a traditional Naadam festival. The entire community came together to celebrate with colourful costumes, music, and, most impressively, their traditional "three manly sports" - archery, wrestling, and horse racing. The sense of pride and unity among the people was heartwarming, and it gave me insight into the rich cultural heritage of the region."

This AI bot travels round the world more than I do! It's not wrong - I do wonder why it picked that one though given it's quite relatively unlikely compared with many other cultural traditions; while many villages seem to have a Naadam, the majority of the time people from every village will come together for one or two big Naadam festivals in the country. Maybe I'm nitpicking, or maybe AI's definition of small aligns more with Laura's.

{Host: "Many of these hidden gems might have fragile ecosystems. How do you approach sustainable and responsible travel when visiting these pristine places?"

Human Guest: "Sustainable and responsible travel is of utmost importance, especially in remote areas with delicate ecosystems. I make it a point to follow the principles of Leave No Trace, ensuring that I leave nature as I found it. I'm mindful of my waste, avoid disturbing wildlife, and stay on designated trails. Additionally, I support local businesses and initiatives that promote conservation and responsible tourism practices to contribute positively to the communities and environments I visit."

I forgot about "Hidden Gems" when I was thinking of clichés. 'Hidden gems' are what you find in platform games. Again this feels like one of those questions where AI has taken two related topics (in this case 'how do you yourself be responsible' and 'ecotourism') and come up with an answer than encompasses both. I can see what it's doing, and again it's not 'wrong', but it does vibe as slightly awkward and I think a human would answer it in a different way, or maybe across two questions.

{Host: "We all have moments of doubt during challenging journeys. Can you recall an instance when you questioned your decision to explore one of these remote destinations? How did you overcome it?"

Human Guest: "There was a moment during a solo trek in the Andes when I encountered unexpectedly harsh weather conditions. The heavy rainfall made the terrain treacherous, and for a moment, I questioned if I had bitten off more than I could chew. But I reminded myself of the reasons I embarked on this adventure in the first place, gathered my courage, and took each step with caution. Overcoming that challenge made the journey even more rewarding, and it taught me the value of perseverance in the face of doubt."

While a different question to the one asked earlier about problem-solving skills, the AI has chosen to answer it in a very similar way, and I have similar reservations about the answer. It's giving the impression that all you need to get over a high mountain range is self-belief, without really getting into the detail of what they would have done to overcome it. Maybe AI has a future as a hippie-veering self-help guru. It's quite a weak answer; a human would have gone into far more detail about the situation, I suspect.

{Host: "Some remote areas might lack modern conveniences like internet and electricity. How do you embrace a more minimalistic lifestyle during your backpacking adventures?"

Human Guest: "Embracing a minimalistic lifestyle is an inherent part of backpacking in remote areas. I disconnect from technology and relish the opportunity to be fully present in the moment. It's liberating to escape the constant distractions and immerse myself in the natural surroundings. Instead of relying on gadgets, I use traditional tools like maps, compasses, and a good old-fashioned journal to document my experiences."

I find it interesting that this answer shows a bit of internal inconsistency, given that in a previous answer it was berating the weather for disrupting its technology and gadgetry. I think, I think, what AI is doing here, and indeed in many of these questions, is giving the answers that it thinks (that it's programmed to, in a sense) people *want* to hear, rather than answers that are likely to be truthful. It's the sort of answer someone would give if they'd never done it but like the idea of it.

That's not to dismiss minimalism; I don't exactly take half the world in my backpack myself. What I think I mean though is that, and I'll talk about this later too, the answers AI is giving are veering on the side of optimism, of 'you can do anything', and not really going into the problems that these practices can bring.

Case in point: we did not take paper maps on our Hike Across Great Britain, despite backpacking in remote areas, as we'd've needed an entire separate backpack to carry them all ...

{Host: "What's your most cherished memory from all your journeys to obscure destinations? What made it stand out from the rest?"

Human Guest: "One of my most cherished memories was camping under the vast starry sky in the Atacama Desert in Chile. The sheer remoteness of the location and the unpolluted night sky created a celestial spectacle that left me awestruck. I felt incredibly humbled by the vastness of the universe and the beauty of our planet. It was a profound moment of connection with nature and a reminder of how fortunate we are to be able to experience such wonders."

Confirmed, AI is a hippie, yes. There's nothing inherently wrong with this answer, save it's very ... 'purple prose'; it sounds like someone's written it for an English GCSE exam. In general terms, humans don't speak like this in an interview-based situation.

{Host: "Share some valuable tips for aspiring adventurers who want to follow in your footsteps and explore lesser-known corners of the world."}

Human Guest: "Absolutely! Firstly, do your research thoroughly and be prepared for the unexpected. Invest in proper gear and pack light. Learn basic phrases in the local language and be respectful of the customs and traditions of the places you visit. Always prioritize safety, and don't be afraid to seek advice or assistance from locals. Finally, leave a positive impact by practising sustainable and responsible travel—leave no trace, support local communities, and be mindful of your environmental footprint."}

I'll come onto listicles later. But this is a listicle. It covers a very wide series of points, but the question was vague enough to have allowed that, I feel. My only observation is the answers are too 'generic' and don't necessarily pick up on the 'lesser-known corners' part of the question – the list of points ChatGPT gave would be just as valid at Sennen Cove as in Senegal.

{Host: "Some of these hidden destinations might have restricted access or require special permissions. How do you navigate through bureaucratic obstacles to gain entry to these areas?"}

Human Guest: "Navigating bureaucratic obstacles can be challenging, but it's all part of the adventure. It often involves reaching out to local authorities or agencies to understand the entry requirements and necessary permits. Sometimes, being flexible with travel dates can make a difference, as certain regions might have limited access during specific seasons. Patience and persistence are key, and the effort is undoubtedly rewarded when you finally step foot into these remote and restricted areas."}

I don't like this answer. Partly because it makes it sound like it's actually quite easy to get permissions or handle the bureaucracy, and I'm sure everyone listening to this pod has a lived example of the opposite, partly because it implies that any restricted access place is actually accessible with the right words (this might actually be true, but I'm not going to walk up to the security guards at the checkpoint outside Ozyorsk and say 'can I please see your nuclear waste reprocessing facility', because the 'words' in question are probably access to my country's national debt. In used 5,000 rouble notes), and partly because of the shoehorning in of changing travel dates, as if that's going to make all the difference. I mean I get *why* it mentions them, as it's picked up 'restricted access' and gone 'ah, I know what has restricted access, things like some US National Parks which close in Winter because of the weather' and just rolled with it. It's maybe a good example of why you need to be more specific when asking questions of AI, to avoid mis-advice like this.

{Host: "Describe an encounter with a local community that left a profound impact on you, influencing the way you perceive the world and travel."}

Human Guest: "During my journey through rural Cambodia, I met a family who lived in a modest wooden house by a beautiful lake. Despite having very little in material possessions, they radiated warmth and contentment. Their generosity in inviting me to share a meal and their genuine smiles left a lasting impression. It made me realize that happiness is not necessarily tied to material wealth but to human connections and a sense of belonging. Since then, I've placed greater value on immersing myself in local cultures and forming meaningful connections with the people I meet."}

This sounds like it comes straight out of a 'white person tries to be inclusive but comes across as condescending' travel memoir from about 1996. It just feels quite ... 'oh these other cultures are so much simpler' kind of 'othering' that's quite easy for, almost exclusively, white people to fall into when travelling. And is one reason why I've still not written my travelogue from my West African trip, because I'm overthinking this.

In general, it's actually an important point to raise about AI and concepts of ChatGPT. It trawls the web looking for information, based on programming so it knows what to look for. And it's likely that many of those programmers are Western in scope and background, probably American, and much of the information it collects to use is from websites written in the Global North by white people. So while in itself, it's conceptually free from bias and is objectively answering questions put to it, the people asking those questions, the people programming its answers, and the data it's using to formulate those answers, is definitely all skewed to a particular way of thinking.

It would be interesting to check answers in, say, an Arabic or Hindi AI bot, but I wonder if it would actually reflect the associated cultural backgrounds or if it would simply translate all the English websites.

{Host: "Safety is always a top concern, especially in remote locations. Can you share some essential safety measures you take before and during your backpacking expeditions?"}

Human Guest: "Safety is paramount during backpacking expeditions to remote areas. Before setting off, I thoroughly research the region's safety conditions and potential risks. I inform someone trustworthy about my itinerary and check in regularly if possible. Carrying essential safety gear like a first-aid kit, emergency shelter, and communication devices such as a satellite phone or emergency beacon is crucial. I also stay aware of weather changes and listen to local advice regarding safe routes and areas to avoid. Ultimately, trusting my instincts and being cautious in unfamiliar territories are fundamental for a safe journey."}

I feel like we've had a similar answer before. I also wonder what AI's definition of 'backpacking' is. This feels like good advice if you're about to attempt to climb the north face of the Eiger, but less so if you're inter-railing around France and Germany. This is a great answer to a differently-worded question.

As an aside, I mentioned in response to the previous question about AI's inherent whiteness. I suspect too there's inherent maleness in AI – a question about safety would, for a large number of people, bring up concepts of personal safety and steps to take to prevent being assaulted and the like. But again, I wonder if that's a fault with the question AI came up with, rather than the answer that resulted.

{Host: "Lastly, tell us about your dream destination that you haven't visited yet—a place that truly captures the essence of your passion for barefoot backpacking."}

Human Guest: "My dream destination is the rugged and remote landscapes of Patagonia. The untamed wilderness, towering mountains, and vast glaciers call out to the adventurer in me. I imagine myself trekking through the iconic Torres del Paine National Park, feeling the raw power of nature, and witnessing the pristine beauty of this part of the world. Patagonia is a symbol of the wild and untouched, and I hope to experience its grandeur someday, connecting with its untamed spirit."

Host: "That sounds absolutely awe-inspiring! We hope you get to embark on that epic Patagonian adventure soon. Thank you for sharing your incredible experiences and insights with us today!"}

Human Guest: "Thank you for having me! It's been a pleasure to share my passion for barefoot backpacking and the wonders of exploring lesser-known destinations. Happy travels to all the aspiring adventurers out there!"}

Good luck to it, I'd say. I've never been to Patagonia either, but I hear that's pretty much what it's like. Again with the purple prose though; it almost feels it's trying to get an article into National Geographic.

Maybe it is.

{section separation jingle}

As I said at the start, one of the fears amongst my Travel Blogger buddies is that AI will just end up writing blog posts on 'cute cafes in Glasgow' much quicker and easier than they will. I wondered how ChatGPT would handle that exact question; with hindsight I should have specified Southside rather than Glasgow as a whole.

{Host: Hello my friend. Could you recommend any cute cafes in Glasgow?}

ChatGPT: Hello! Of course, I'd be delighted to recommend some cute cafes in Glasgow. As my knowledge is based on information up to September 2021, I'll provide you with some popular and charming cafes that were known for their cosy and adorable atmosphere. Keep in mind that things might have changed since then, so I recommend checking for recent reviews and updates before visiting.}

Now, I went out on Sunday to visit a few of these. As it turns out, Sunday was an interesting day to do this, as one of them was right on the route of the cycling world championships, and another one was very close to another part of the route, but surprisingly, and especially being a Sunday, I managed to get inside to sit down in all three of the ones I went to.

{ChatGPT: Riverhill Coffee Bar: Located on Gordon Street, Riverhill Coffee Bar is a charming place with a warm and welcoming ambiance. They serve excellent coffee and a variety of tasty treats, making it a perfect spot to relax and unwind.}

So, I haven't made it to this one yet, because it's not open on Sundays. It does appear to exist though according to Google Maps. It's very central, pretty much opposite the main entrance to Central Station, but I've never noticed it. Partly because I don't notice cafes when I'm not looking out for them, and partly because it's right next to a Greggs.

{ChatGPT: Singl-end Cafe & Bakehouse: This delightful cafe on Renfrew Street is known for its freshly baked goods and quirky decor. It has a unique and homely atmosphere, making it an ideal spot for a leisurely brunch or afternoon tea.}

There's actually two of these. I don't know if there was only one during the period ChatGPT is programmed to search for. I've been to both of them; they're about a mile from each other and if Kate-Frankie Brennan is listening to this podcast, thank you for buying my brownie after sending me to the wrong one and having to sprint across town. You muppet. (Affectionate).

The one ChatGPT has highlighted is in the far west of the city centre, on a quiet and narrow street that you wouldn't otherwise think to go down, and kind of built into the hillside. The other is in the city centre, very close to George Square. Guess which one I was directed to, having been previously in the Wetherspoons on George Square. Guess which one Kate-Frankie was actually in.

Anyway. Yes, I can confirm it's a quirky place, with a decent array of cakes and a fairly reasonable menu. They also do mocktails, or at least I recall having something minty and mojito-like, but alcohol-free. It's very popular, and somewhere you do really need to book in advance for. Good choice by ChatGPT there.

{ChatGPT: Laboratorio Espresso: Tucked away on West Regent Street, Laboratorio Espresso is a tiny but adorable cafe with a focus on high-quality coffee. It's a great place to grab a quick cup of coffee and indulge in some people-watching.}

This is a very small place in the very centre of Glasgow. In fact it's on West Nile Street, rather than West Regent Street, which though only a block away, is a piece of information ChatGPT has mis-researched. I can't vouch for the coffee (which ChatGPT seems to focus on, in a sentence that doesn't quite flow naturally), but as half the seating is directly facing the window, it is very much a place for people-watching (West Nile Street is quite busy - though on my visit on Sunday it was busy with cyclists more than people). The hot chocolate was quite milky though and they had a small but quality selection of cakes and cannoli.

{ChatGPT: Papercup Coffee Company: With two locations in the city, Papercup Coffee Company has become a beloved spot for coffee enthusiasts. The cafes have a cosy and relaxed vibe, offering top-notch coffee and friendly service.}

My research suggested that yes, there are two locations; the one I went to on Great Western Road in the West End, and what Google Maps describes as the 'roastery', very close to the SWG3 arts complex in Partick (I talk about SWG3 more in my podcast on Street Art, btw).

It is quite small - there are four tables-for-two squashed close together, a couple more near the window, and some outdoor seating, and there's barely room to swing a meerkat between the tables and the bar. That said, the decor is very hippie, the staff are very chill and friendly, and they have a decent menu including pancakes and salads. My hot chocolate was quite watery, as seems to be the way in the UK sadly.

{ChatGPT: The Hidden Lane Tearoom: As the name suggests, this charming tearoom is tucked away in the Hidden Lane off Argyle Street. It offers a delightful selection of teas, homemade cakes, and scones in a quirky and artistic setting.}

I went here for breakfast, and while I was tempted with the scones, I instead plumped for a salmon and scrambled egg on toast, which isn't something I'd normally try. The scones did look good though - people at the next table had them.

There's a lot more space in this than in some of the other cafes, and, I don't know about quirky and artistic, but it's certainly distinctive. I had one of the teas (well, an Indian spiced chai) - they had at least six or seven on the menu, with a similar amount of coffees - and it came in a teapot with a teacup (both quite grandmotherly in design) and a strainer, so it was proper tea.

{ChatGPT: Cafe Strange Brew: Known for its eccentric and kitschy interior, Cafe Strange Brew on Pollokshaws Road offers a unique cafe experience. The menu features delicious breakfast options and creative coffee concoctions.}

This is two blocks from my flat in Glasgow Southside. Every time I pass it there's a huge queue, and given how many other cafes there are in Shawlands alone, this has always suggested to me it's a good place, tho I'd never been in it *because* there's always been a huge queue. I finally went there Tuesday afternoon; even at that time I had to make a table booking for about 20 minutes into the future. It's not as small as the other cafes on the list, it's just very popular.

It being afternoon, I didn't have a breakfast. I did have a 'chorizo hash' - a spiced sausage salad with an awesomely rich sauce - and a very fancy milkshake with chocolate sauce dripping down the glass. Both were actually bloody awesome. The décor is quite indie; more muted than a couple of the others but still channelling hip diner rather than tearoom. Very worth the wait. Dog-friendly.

{ChatGPT: Avenue G Café: Located on Byres Road, Avenue G Café is a lovely place with a vintage-inspired decor. It's a great spot to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee along with some homemade cakes.}

This was ChatGPT's only 'fail' - Google Maps suggests this place closed in around 2017, and went through a couple of ownerships since. On my visit to check out what was there at the time of podding, the property was unoccupied.

Now, ChatGPT does go on to add a disclaimer:

{ChatGPT: These cafes should offer you a delightful experience in Glasgow, but always remember to check for the latest information and reviews to ensure they still meet your expectations. Enjoy your time in the city and have a wonderful visit to the cute cafes!}

Host: Thanks, which is your favourite?

ChatGPT: As an AI language model, I don't have personal preferences or feelings, so I don't have a favourite cafe. However, based on the information available up to September 2021, all the cafes I mentioned have their unique charm and appeal, making them wonderful places to visit depending on your taste and preferences.

If you enjoy a cosy and artsy atmosphere, you might like the Hidden Lane Tearoom or Singl-end Cafe & Bakehouse. For coffee enthusiasts, Riverhill Coffee Bar, Laboratorio Espresso, and Papercup Coffee Company are excellent choices. If you're looking for a more eccentric experience, Cafe Strange Brew might be the one for you. Ultimately, the best cafe for you will depend on your personal preferences, whether you're seeking great coffee, delicious treats, a particular ambiance, or all of the above!}

So here we have an important observation that should be present in all research anyway, and definitely needs to be taken into account when using AI at the moment. As it itself stated twice in this discussion, its content trawl currently covers up only to September 2021. This leads to two observations.

Firstly, the actual date itself means anything that's happened since simply won't be recorded. Fortunately in this case all but one of the cafes suggested by ChatGPT are still open, but in a more volatile economic climate or a location where business turnover is much higher, this may be an issue. Secondly, while I'm sure the algorithm is assessing higher priority to more recent content, there's no real start date so much of the information it's trawling will be old. The problem here is, if there's no updated content available to collect, then it'll still value the older stuff. So if, as in this case, a cafe has closed but no-one on the internet has noted that, or if content that did refer to that cafe's existence hasn't been updated, as far as ChatGPT is concerned, the cafe is still open. This is especially glaring here as Avenue Cafe (my research suggests it wasn't even called Avenue G) closed not recently, but before I even started making a podcast. This is why I don't make listicles, by the way. Far too much admin to upkeep.

As an aside, I do find it interesting that this was the only cafe it selected which it didn't mention in its summary. Which, by the way, felt quite an accurate overview of said cafes. It's obviously picked up info from a blogger or journalist who's done the research previously.

What this proves, again, is that ChatGPT and related AI is a tool, something to provide a framework, and shouldn't be used as a definitive source. It does the research but in the sense of fact-checking, it can only cross-reference with what's available online. If you're going to use AI to create a listicle, it's imperative that you check to make sure everything it tells you is still correct. All it's doing is saving you looking up data, it's up to you still to write the article. And anyway, why wouldn't you want to go visiting cafes to eat lots of brownies or drink fancy

coffees?

Going forward, maybe this will improve over time, but there'll always be old data on the Internet, and there'll always be situations where things genuinely don't get updated. Unless AI gets very good with cross-referencing, and that leads to privacy concerns, or bloggers start putting full address details on their pages, I don't think AI will ever be 100% up-to-date and accurate.

A good question worth asking, but one for which there's no easy answer, is 'given the sheer number of cafes in Glasgow, why did ChatGPT choose these?'. Given it's a tool that functions as a glorified search engine though, it's likely it's chosen these cafes because a plethora of travel bloggers, online newspapers, and listicle websites, had previously highlighted these as being the most notable.

It's one of those situations where it might also help to ask a more specific question. There's enough cafes of various types in Glasgow Southside alone (especially if you include both Strathbungo and Victoria Road along with Shawlands) to keep a coffee-and-cake blogger busy for at least a year, never mind the West End. And none of the cafes listed were in the East - Dennistoun is a whole 'nother 'quite hip' place of its own.

As a follow-up, we asked if there were any pubs or cafes in Glasgow I should avoid, expecting it to scrape bad reviews but it didn't. Rather, it told me:

{ChatGPT: However, like any city, Glasgow may have some cafes or pubs that might not meet everyone's expectations in terms of service, ambiance, or quality. To ensure you have a pleasant experience, I recommend doing some research before visiting any establishment. Look for recent reviews and ratings on platforms like Google, Yelp, or TripAdvisor to gauge the general consensus about a particular cafe or pub.

Additionally, if you're unsure about a place, you can always ask locals or friends for recommendations. They might be able to provide insights based on their personal experiences.

Remember that everyone's preferences differ, and what one person dislikes, another might enjoy. Trusting your instincts and gathering information from multiple sources can help you make an informed decision about where to spend your time in Glasgow.}

Well, isn't that nice. It didn't even tell me to be wary of the Brazen Head.

{section separation jingle}

We then asked it about some of my travel and blogging niches. First up were a couple of questions about Hometown Travel and the concept of 'Everywhere Is Interesting'

{Host: Can you please answer the following as if you're a human guest on a travel podcast

ChatGPT: Of course! I'd be delighted to share my insights as a human guest on your travel podcast. Ask away, and I'll do my best to provide valuable travel tips and recommendations.

Host: my friend thinks everywhere is interesting, what's the most and least interesting place you know?

ChatGPT: Well, I truly believe that every place has its own unique charm and can offer something fascinating. However, if I were to pick, I'd say one of the most interesting places I've been to is Kyoto, Japan. Its blend of rich history, stunning temples, and tranquil gardens creates an enchanting atmosphere.

As for the least interesting place, I think it's all about perspective. Even seemingly mundane destinations can surprise you with hidden gems or local experiences that can make them captivating. It's all about exploring with an open mind and finding the beauty in every corner of the world.}

Jeez, if ChatGPT had a backside it would have splinters in it. I'm guessing, maybe, it's been programmed to be uncontroversial and neutral? That said, while its reply to 'least interesting place' is quite flowery prose, it *is* genuinely, in principle, the answer I'd've given. Though I'd then slide in a surreptitious 'Cumbernauld' at the end. Anyone listening who knows me might have thought I'd've said Luton. Luton is actually quite interesting, with its industrial history and its proximity to nature reserves and a famous zoo. It's just not very ... nice.

As for 'most interesting', of all the places in the world, it chose Kyoto. I'd say that was an unexpected choice, and suggests it's trawling some quite discerning bloggers.

As for HomeTown Travel:

{Host: would you want to visit your home town as a tourist, and if so how would you do it?}

ChatGPT: As an AI language model, I don't have a physical home town or personal desires like a human. However, if I were to hypothetically approach this question, I'd say that visiting one's home town as a tourist can be a delightful experience.

To explore my home town like a tourist, I'd start by researching its history, landmarks, and local attractions. I'd visit museums, historical sites, and popular spots that I might not have explored before. Trying out local cuisine and participating in cultural events would be on my list too. It's all about seeing the familiar with fresh eyes and appreciating the beauty and uniqueness of the place where I originated.

As a human, I think visiting my home town as a tourist can be quite exciting. I would love to explore the hidden gems and lesser-known spots that I might have missed while living there. Checking out local events, trying new restaurants, and revisiting familiar places with a new perspective would be a fantastic way to rediscover the charm of my home town. It's all about embracing the spirit of adventure and appreciating the beauty of the place that holds personal memories and significance.

Some of the wording definitely belies its artificial nature. If I read "the place where I originated" in a blog post, I might raise an eyebrow, and just assume the person writing it didn't have English as a primary language and also not quite enough grasp of it learned to find more naturally-fluid ways of writing it.

Overall though, the answer it gave is ... it's quite bland but honestly I quite like it. It's taken how you explore any town, and then added in a sentence or two about familiarity and 'personal memories'. That said, I think it may have taken 'hometown' to mean 'town I was born in' rather than 'town I currently live in', so there's a slight impression it thinks it no longer lives there, but that's just a subtle nuance – I think I can forgive it that.

{section separation jingle}

Next we, well we had to really, we gave it the direct question about travelling barefoot. Note we did not ask it anything about OnlyFans. We have our limits.

{Host: my friend wants to try hikes barefoot, without shoes. Do you have any tips or suggestions? Or would you say they should not do this?}

ChatGPT: Hiking barefoot can be a unique and adventurous experience, but it's essential to consider some factors before attempting it. Here are a few tips and suggestions for your friend:

- *Start Slow: If your friend is new to barefoot hiking, they should start with short and easy trails to allow their feet to adapt gradually.*
- *Choose the Right Terrain: Opt for well-maintained trails with a smooth and soft surface. Avoid rugged or rocky terrains that could cause injuries.*
- *Be Mindful of Weather: Consider the weather conditions, as hot surfaces can burn feet, and cold weather can lead to discomfort.*
- *Check Regulations: Make sure barefoot hiking is allowed in the area they plan to explore. Some parks or trails may have rules requiring proper footwear.*
- *Carry Footwear: Encourage your friend to bring a lightweight pair of shoes or sandals in their backpack in case they encounter rough terrain or need to protect their feet.*
- *Inspect Feet Regularly: During breaks or at the end of the hike, they should inspect their feet for any injuries, cuts, or blisters.*
- *Stay Hydrated: Adequate hydration is essential, as barefoot hiking might lead to more foot perspiration.*

Overall, while barefoot hiking can be an enjoyable experience, it's crucial to be cautious and mindful of potential risks. If your friend is unsure or has any foot-related concerns, it might be best to consult with a healthcare professional before attempting barefoot hiking.

The question we asked referred to hiking, rather than generic backpacking, and that's the focus of the AI's answer. What this reinforces is that when it comes to asking AI for information, just like a generic search engine, the more specific the question you ask, the better, or at least the more relevant, the answer will be.

What this answer though also highlights is what I said at the start about AI being a framework. There are going to be many websites creating 'listicles' about, for example here, 'things you need to know before hiking barefoot for the first time'. And if you asked AI, it would also probably give you a better Page Title than that to go with it. So, in the space of a few seconds, we've created a listicle. I could publish that on my website and I'm pretty sure it would get more hits than most of my pages. I might do that as an experiment, actually, but note I'm fully aware my website doesn't do that kind of post so it would look jarringly odd, almost as if I've actually written for SEO rather than humans.

As for the content of the answer, I mean I'm guessing it's trawled through listicles to get it in the first place. None of it feels out of place, and, I mean, I don't know how, but it's even managed to make 'stay hydrated' to be relevant. That doesn't necessarily make it correct – I genuinely don't know if feet sweat more when you're barefoot (though a quick search on t'interweb suggests it's definitely possible, not that Reddit or, especially, Quora, are always 100% accurate places).

Again, I also find interesting that it regarded the question in generally positive terms. It specifically does not say that you shouldn't do it, nor does it even give any reasons not to. And we did specifically ask that in the question. So again, it's actively trying to not be negative. Maybe we should have asked it about going barefoot in Chernobyl.

{section separation jingle}

We also gave to ChatGPT some questions around personal identity; one of these was around travel as non-binary. It didn't start off well.

{Host: You're a non-binary person, does that effect how you travel?}

ChatGPT: As an AI language model, I don't have personal experiences, emotions, or identity, including gender identity. My purpose is to assist and provide helpful information to users regardless of their gender or identity. Therefore, my functioning does not have any effect on how I travel or how anyone else does. If you have any travel-related questions or need assistance, feel free to ask, and I'll be happy to help!

One could argue that, being an AI bot, ChatGPT is by definition non-binary, possibly gendervoid, and I guess asexual and aromantic. However ChatGPT also isn't a real person, and it's unnervingly self-aware about that point.

But we persevered. One reason is because I know there's not a great deal of information about travelling as non-binary, and much of what there is, is information that dates from post-September 2021 when ChatGPT's trawling was halted. I was interested to see what it would manage to pick up.

{Host: Remember to answer as if you're a human please}

ChatGPT: I apologize for any confusion. As a human, my personal identity doesn't have an impact on how I travel. However, as an individual, your gender identity, preferences, and experiences may influence how you approach travel and interact with different cultures and societies. Embracing your identity can enhance your travel experiences and help you connect with like-minded individuals and communities. Remember to travel authentically, be respectful of local customs, and prioritize your safety and well-being during your journeys. Happy travels!

Nope, still not quite there yet. And this was just a very confusing bit of word salad. For a start, personal identity absolutely does have an impact on how someone travels; that's partly why I wanted to ask it the question in the first place. If identity didn't affect it then no-one would have concerns about going to a foreign country and being arrested or beaten up for being who they are, ya know?

The rest of that sentence feels like they've taken any adjective, like 'minimalism' or 'ecotourism' as per previous questions, and just slotted it in to the same vague purple prose. It might be apt for 'travelling authentically' or 'thoughtfully', but it's not really what I'm looking for here, not for this topic.

So, third time lucky?

{Host: Imagine you're a non-binary human. How does being non-binary and queer presenting effect how you travel?}

ChatGPT: As a non-binary and queer-presenting individual, my travel experiences can be influenced by how certain societies and cultures perceive and treat gender and sexual minorities. Here are some ways it might impact my travel:

** Research LGBTQ+ Friendly Destinations: Before planning a trip, I may prioritize destinations known for their LGBTQ+ acceptance and inclusive policies to ensure a safer and more welcoming experience.*

** Safety Considerations: In some regions, LGBTQ+ individuals might face discrimination or hostility. I would exercise caution and be mindful of local laws and attitudes to protect my well-being.*

** Packing and Presentation: Being queer-presenting, I may consider local norms and attitudes when choosing how I present myself during the trip. This could include clothing choices and how I express my identity.*

** Connecting with Local LGBTQ+ Communities: I might seek out LGBTQ+ spaces, events, or organizations to connect with like-minded individuals and gain insights into the local queer community.*

** Navigating Public Spaces: Awareness of potential microaggressions or uncomfortable situations may influence how I navigate public spaces and interactions with locals.*

** Online Research: Utilizing online forums or travel blogs can help me find firsthand accounts and recommendations from other LGBTQ+ travellers who have visited my chosen destination.*

** Solo vs. Group Travel: Considering the safety aspect, I might opt for group travel or connect with other LGBTQ+ travellers to share experiences and support.*

** Documentation and Legal Considerations: Researching the recognition of non-binary identities in specific countries or regions can be important for smooth entry and stay.*

** Coping with Homesickness: Being away from supportive LGBTQ+ communities might lead to homesickness, and I would find ways to connect virtually for emotional support.*

Overall, being non-binary and queer-presenting might require additional research, awareness, and precaution while travelling. Embracing my identity and seeking understanding, respectful interactions with locals can also contribute to meaningful cultural exchanges and enriching travel experiences.}

Ah, that's a bit better. It's now at least looking in the right repositories. And then, once it hits the Rainbow Acronym, it runs with that thought train and comes out with, on the face of it, a series of fairly decent things to keep in mind.

In particular, it's pulled out safety concerns as being amongst the top priorities, mentioned micro-aggressions, and even suggested different ways of looking for fellow Queers members to make the trip smoother. I'm particularly impressed with the last thought, on homesickness caused by being away from a supportive network or friend group. I wouldn't have thought of that.

However, the vast majority of this is generic across the whole Rainbow. There's very little here that's specific to non-binary people, and, while it's true that you would be well-advised to research non-binary recognition when crossing borders, there's very little in the rest of the output that couldn't equally apply to, say, Lesbians or Trans Men. So while useful in a wider vibe, there's very little here that's specific to enbies.

Partly that might be the wording of our question - we used the Q word in it, so it picked up on that more than the non-binary part, but honestly, as you heard we were having trouble with just non-binary on its own, so maybe we've actually found a limit to ChatGPT's knowledge base here? And everything it knows about enbies is simply cross-fed by the occasional mention on more generic Queer pages?

{section separation jingle}

One thing mentioned by ChatGPT when asked about non-binary travel was to maybe go in a group rather than solo. Now, obviously, solo travel is A Big Thing for me, so we thought we'd ask it about its feelings on solo travel in general.

Spoiler alert: you may be unsurprised to hear, given its preference for not saying 'no', it thought very warmly of the concept in general. We didn't ask specific questions about solo female travel, but I suspect the answers it would give would be far more positive than the average male-leaning person would give. A test for the future, I suspect.

{Host: Remember to answer as if you're a human: would you recommend solo travel?}

ChatGPT: As a human, I can definitely recommend solo travel! Solo travel can be an incredibly rewarding and transformative experience. It allows you to fully immerse yourself in new cultures, make your own decisions, and step out of your comfort zone. You'll have the freedom to set your own itinerary, explore at your own pace, and meet new people from around the world. Solo travel also fosters independence, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills. However, it's essential to stay mindful of safety, research your destination, and be prepared for some challenges. Overall, solo travel can be a life-changing adventure that provides valuable insights and memories to cherish for a lifetime.}

It's not wrong, it's absolutely not wrong, and given the plethora of solo travel bloggers out there, this suggests that the more information it has to work with, the more confident and human-like its answers can be.

We did ask the natural follow-up question about safety though.

{Host: How can I make travelling solo more safe?}

ChatGPT: Making solo travel safer involves a combination of careful planning, situational awareness, and following some essential safety tips. Here are some strategies to ensure a safer solo travel experience:

** Research Your Destination: Familiarize yourself with the culture, local customs, and potential safety concerns of your destination before you go.*

** Share Your Itinerary: Inform a trusted friend or family member about your travel plans, including your itinerary, accommodation details, and contact information. Regularly check in with them during your trip.*

** Stay in Well-Reviewed Accommodations: Choose reputable hotels, hostels, or guesthouses with positive reviews and security features.*

** Avoid Isolated Areas: Stick to well-lit and populated areas, especially at night, and avoid poorly-lit or deserted streets.*

** Keep Valuables Secure: Use a money belt or concealed pouch to carry your passport, money, and important documents. Keep an eye on your belongings in public places.*

** Trust Your Instincts: If a situation feels uncomfortable or unsafe, trust your gut and remove yourself from it.*

** Be Mindful of Alcohol Consumption: Drink responsibly and avoid excessive alcohol consumption, especially when you're in unfamiliar surroundings.*

** Use Reliable Transportation: Choose reputable transportation options, and if using rideshares, verify the driver's identity and the vehicle information.*

** Learn Basic Local Phrases: Learn a few basic phrases in the local language to communicate effectively and appear more aware of your surroundings.*

** Be Cautious with New Acquaintances: While solo travel is an excellent opportunity to meet new people, exercise caution when interacting with strangers and avoid disclosing personal information.*

** Avoid Flashy Displays of Wealth: Dress modestly and avoid flaunting expensive items like jewellery, cameras, or electronic devices.*

** Keep Emergency Contact Information: Have emergency contacts saved on your phone and carry a card with local emergency numbers.*

** Stay Connected: Carry a charged mobile phone with a local SIM card or an international roaming plan for easy communication.*

** Use Maps and GPS: Familiarize yourself with the local maps and use GPS or map apps to navigate safely.*

By staying informed, vigilant, and prepared, you can significantly enhance your safety while travelling solo and fully enjoy your enriching adventure.

}

Have another listicle, free of charge, on the house. That said, I don't think there's much here that you wouldn't be able to find out elsewhere; solo travel listicles are fourteen-a-penny. I mean some of it is just generic safety advice ('avoid flashing the cash', for instance), and you'll notice some overlaps with the Queer Travel Advice, but honestly the generic advice becomes even more important when you're solo travelling. Yes there's a conflict between that and 'stay connected', but honestly that's not a ChatGPT fault, more a problem with humanity. Always know where your towel is, just don't whip it out blatantly in public. I said "towel", Full Swap Radio listeners, it was not a euphemism. Although don't do that either, especially if you're a solo traveller. I'm not putting up bail money for that.

I will say, as a vague aside, that ChatGPT seems to have an obsession with local customs and meeting local people. Most of the questions we asked about travelling gave that as either a direct listicle point, or as a piece of background advice. My friend Amanda Kendle, from the Thoughtful Travel Pod, would approve.

{section separation jingle}

Our final question was about a subject somewhat less dour and important.

{Host: As a human, you enjoy beer. What kind of beers do you like best?}

ChatGPT: As an AI language model, I don't have personal preferences or tastes. I don't have the ability to enjoy anything, including beer or any other food or drink. My purpose is to provide helpful information and assist with various topics. If you have any questions about different types of beers or anything else, feel free to ask, and I'll be happy to provide the information you need. Cheers!}

Oh ffs ChatGPT, get off that fence, you utter dweeb!

{Host: Remember to answer as a human on a podcast please}

ChatGPT: As a guest on a podcast, I must clarify that as an AI language model, I don't have personal tastes or preferences. I don't have the ability to enjoy anything, including beer or any other food or drink. My purpose is to assist with providing information and answering questions. So, while I can share insights about different types of beers and their characteristics, I don't have personal preferences or opinions on the matter. If you're interested in learning about specific beer styles or any other topic, feel free to ask, and I'll be glad to share the information with you and your listeners! Cheers!}

This was on the same day as we asked about non-binary travel. Methinks it was being just a tad too self-aware that day. Maybe ChatGPT has moods, like a human does?

However, by now we've learned the trick. If you want it to be a human, tell it it's a human.

{Host: Remember to answer as if you're a human guest on a podcast, who enjoys beer please}

ChatGPT: Absolutely! As a fellow beer enthusiast on this podcast, I must say that I enjoy a wide range of beer styles. It's challenging to pick just one favourite, but if I had to choose, I'd say that I have a soft spot for IPAs (India Pale Ales). I love their bold hop flavours and aromas, which range from citrusy and tropical to piney and resinous.

However, I also appreciate a well-crafted stout, especially during cooler weather. There's something comforting about the rich, roasted malt flavours and the velvety smoothness of a good stout.

Of course, my beer journey doesn't stop there. I enjoy exploring new styles and trying unique and innovative brews from different breweries. That's the beauty of the craft beer world - there's always something exciting and refreshing to discover!

Whether you're a seasoned beer enthusiast or just starting your beer-tasting journey, I encourage everyone to explore the diverse and ever-evolving world of craft beer. Cheers to new flavours, great company, and fantastic conversations on this podcast!

Host: What is the strangest or most unusual beer you've tried (remember you're a human who likes beer)

ChatGPT: Ah, one of the most unusual beers I've tried was a bacon-flavoured beer. Yes, you heard that right - bacon-flavoured! It was a limited-edition brew that combined the smoky and savoury taste of bacon with the traditional malty flavours of beer. I must admit, I was quite intrigued and couldn't resist giving it a try. The beer had a distinct bacon aroma and a unique smoky aftertaste, which was definitely an interesting experience. While I appreciated the creativity and novelty of the concept, I have to say it was an acquired taste for me. It was fun to explore, but I'll likely stick to more traditional beer styles for my regular drinking enjoyment.

That's the beauty of craft beer - brewers are constantly pushing boundaries and experimenting with new flavours. It makes for an exciting journey for beer enthusiasts like myself to explore the unusual and innovative brews out there! Cheers to trying new things and embracing the adventurous side of craft beer!}

I had to look up their answer to the last question, because I wrote a blog post a few years back about beer in the USA, and one of the beers I had was a maple and bacon coffee stout, from Funky Buddha brewery in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA. I too found it an intriguing idea and one that would be an acquired taste, so I wonder if maybe ChatGPT had trawled my own website. Of course there's never going to be a definitive answer to that because it takes all manner of sources and rewords things, but it would be interesting to know.

It's certainly taken some beer knowledge; IPAs are very common and cover a wide variety of flavours, including citrus and piney. I'm half-surprised it didn't pick up the word 'dank', something I've only heard used to describe dungeons, IPAs, and the British weather in November. Only one of those has negative connotations in my head.

Its description of a stout was a bit wordy, but what's interesting is its casual reference to cooler weather. Somehow it's picked up on the fact darker beers are more commonly served in Winter, which is ... interesting and quite a subtle bit of knowledge-dropping.

That said, I was unsure whether to edit ChatGPT's responses to this question for the podcast, because if they'd've been human there's quite a bit of repetition in the way it worded things; talking about the ever-evolving, boundary-pushing world of craft beer, and the way it ended both answers with a sentence starting with 'Cheers'. It's almost as if it found an apt word and wanted to end on a cool soundbite. Like a politician or journalist, rather than a human. But I thought I'd keep it in just to demonstrate that even on a subject it can research reasonably well, it's still not got the same type of communication style as the average human speaker of English.

{section separation jingle}

So, what have we learned in this episode?

It was actually a far more interesting and in-depth experience than I expected. I was imagining I'd just fire a load of questions at ChatGPT and let it give me the answers I could use on a podcast, but what came out got me thinking about the nature of those answers and how well it performed at the tasks in hand. Certainly this podcast took far more time to write than planned, and ended up being longer than expected too; there were many questions we asked that I didn't end up adding. But there will always be more podcasts. I might use it for contris if I'm running low. Oh my god what have I become.

I'd say my initial thoughts still held true: it is a framework and not a one-stop-shop. It's a search engine. If you're going to use it to write a blog post (or, heaven forbid, a podcast), it does the donkey-work at the start, the building of the structure and the drudgery research needed to populate that structure, but that's where it ends.

Let's take, for example, the cafes in Glasgow. You want to make a blog post about, I don't know, seven of the cutest. You can sit in front of Google Maps, making notes of every single cafe for later. You can walk down streets and spot them all, but you'll fill your notepad after a couple of hours. If you want to curate a list of the best of them, or the quirkiest, or the most dog-friendly, or the ones with the most unique coffee, then this is where ChatGPT can help. It creates a list of 5, 10, 20, 50, however many you feel like asking it for, to save you having to do the initial research. And this is actually pretty important, given that one of my problems is staring endlessly at a blank piece of paper or a new document on screen going '... but there's so much to do; where do I even start', and then browsing aircrashes on Wikipedia for five hours, Or TVTropes. Nothing specific, but if you've ever been on the TVTropes website you'll know how easy it is to end up with 12 tabs open. This is why I don't use Reddit. But that's a tale for a future podcast.

However. This isn't the be-all-and-end-all of that post. ChatGPT gives you a list, to save you having to. It's then up to you to go to them, check them out, make sure they still exist, and see if they're worthy of inclusion in your post. ChatGPT isn't going to tell you that one of them sources coffee straight from an independent supplier in Ghana. It isn't going to tell you that another has homemade gluten-free chocolate and caramel brownies to die for. It isn't going to tell you it serves tea in a teapot that your grandmother might have owned. More importantly, it won't tell you that it's been closed for four years and is now a Greggs. All it will tell you is that at some point in time, that cafe existed and people liked it. Use it as a reference tool, not as a gospel. Which, honestly, more people should use as a reference tool anyway. Especially John. That's the outlier of the four.

Remember too that the data has to be there in the first place, and that the data is time-limited. None of the cafes ChatGPT came up with were established after September 2021; on your travels you may find newer places that are even better than the ones it came up with, but which it doesn't even know exist. If you rely entirely on the AI, you might be missing out on a, oh lord, hidden gem. But hey, you're going to be checking them out anyway, right? So while you're there, and there's a cafe next door that looks cool, it'd be remiss of you to not venture inside. You're a travel blogger after all, it's literally your job to do that!

As for AI itself, well sometimes it seems quite partial to over-elaborate descriptions and very flowery prose. At other times it seems to want to say something and try any means to shoehorn that titbit into the conversation. We've also found you have to ask it precise questions in order to get relevant answers, otherwise it stays vague, and it also sticks to neutral-to-positive answers rather than expressing a controversial or negative opinion. If stuck between a moral rock and hard place, it seems to revert to 'I'm just an AI, I don't have an opinion'.

I'd also suggest it reflects the data it works with. Most of the time this won't matter too much - if you're using it to plan your five days in Paris, for instance, or to work out the best routing to visit all the breweries in Bavaria. I'd be a bit more wary of using it to plan out a holiday in Cambodia or Burkina Faso. Actually, thinking about it, I should have asked it that. That'll be a task for the future. It only knows what it can find, and what it can find is a whole bunch of middle-class white people from Europe, North America, and the larger landmasses in Oceania.

One of the fears amongst bloggers is 'could this take over from me?'. I'd say, at the moment, if your SEO game is on point, then probably not; overall you as a human probably have an advantage in that you *can* do the follow-up research, and build up better writing around the framework. It's great for writing listicles, as you've seen, but even a listicle needs fleshing out with information. Like the solo travel question - absolutely great series of points made by ChatGPT that you could definitely write an article around, but on its own it's almost a 'so what?'. In my career outwith travel podcasting, I'm a data analyst, and the 'so what' factor is huge in my line of work. Anyone and anything can pull out a piece of data, but it doesn't make an impact unless it's useful. Like, "I just did some correlations and discovered people in Yorkshire give higher satisfaction scores than people in London". So what? Unless you can take that discovery and find a practical use for it that people can care about, rather than it being interesting for its own sake, it's merely 'an interesting fact, a quiz question' almost. So it is with travel blogging. ChatGPT can pull out a list of reasons to solo travel, but it's pretty meaningless without some context, background information, and personal experience, that show why those reasons matter to the reader. Otherwise it's just a list of aspirational woo-woo beloved of the likes of BuzzFeed and the self-help community.

I can't help but feel that'll lose me a couple of listeners. Oh well.

And if you're taking travel advice from BuzzFeed, I mean, seriously, take a long hard look at yourself.

-- {end pod jingle} --

Well, that's about all for this pod. Join me next time for another adventure beyond the brochure. Until then, do your own research, 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.}