

Transcript of Podcast 085: Love and Sex on the Road

{Intro:

"[miaooaooraoaoau] Charley says never go anywhere with men or ladies you don't know"

}

{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 :)

Yet again this is a pre-recorded episode, I mean obviously none of my episodes are Live, but this is being recorded a couple of weeks in advance because at the time of publishing, I should be in ... I think I should be in Armenia, if all goes to plan, but who knows. I'm in the Caucasus region because last weekend (as of this pod's release) I will have been at the Traverse Travel Blogger conference in Tbilisi, so hopefully I'll be coming back at the weekend with tales to tell. Maybe even one about Azerbaijan. Who knows.

This means I don't have any housekeeping or personal updates to bring you. So if that's all you listen for ... well, why don't you subscribe to my newsletter, because that's 100% housekeeping and personal updates. Link's in the shownotes and on my Linktree.

Anyway, on with the show.

{section separation jingle}

It's coming up to Valentine's Day. Not that that's a day that's particularly interesting to someone like me. It's also International Quirkyalone Day, which is, canonically, a coincidence, because of course it is. I'm sure I've mentioned Quirkyalone before - it was created in 2004 by American writer Sasha Cagen and she defines as Quirkyalone as "a person who can feel whole (or aspire to feeling whole) being single and so prefers to wait for the right person to come along rather than dating indiscriminately; relishing equal doses of solitude and friendship; attracted to freedom and possibility". There is, clearly, a lot of overlap between Quirkyaloneness and Asexuality, less so with Aromanticism, but the connection is there.

But this isn't an episode about either Quirkyaloneness nor Asexuality. The latter I've done many times, the former probably requires input from Sasha herself and I'm nowhere near important enough nor journalistic enough for that sort of thing. Rather, it provides some background context to this episode and why I'm absolutely the wrong person to be talking about a topic like love and sex on the road. Because what on earth do I know about the subject?

Some of you already know what I know about the subject. In sordid detail.

At this point I want to welcome Full Swap Radio listeners; finally you have a topic that goes beyond Vanilla Sundays. For the rest of you, Full Swap Radio is a community of podcasts dedicated to love and sex, and they operate a kind of 'radio station' or 'playlist' of quite a few of them on a daily basis. Mainly sex. They cover such topics as relationship intimacy, swingers, and kink. I'm involved because I'm very sex-positive; every Sunday they do a schedule of 'vanilla' pods, I can't believe I just said that, oh my god why have I never realised that before, but anyway, on Sundays they give over their airways to a playlist of non-sexual podcasts from people who are sex-adjacent, people like me. You'll have heard me mention them on the occasional episode, usually in the context of a double-entendre. And now you know why.

Anyway.

Given the subject matter, you might think this would be a popular subject for people to talk about, and everybody has something to say. Well, you'd probably be right, but lots of people declined to contribute to this pod, partly because it was too personal, which is fair, and partly because they didn't necessarily want other people to hear about their tales, which is also fair, but also, bold of you to think my pod is that popular outside your own bubbles. But I guess equally, it's true that I'm not a radio phone-in host, I'm not a therapist, I'm not a therapist on the radio, and I'm definitely not Frasier Crane. At least I hope not. I'm not quite as pretentious.

I trust who and what I do have will be informative and entertaining though.

{section separation jingle}

My first contributor is Maja, who blogs and Instagrams online at [Away With Maja](#). You'll be hearing from her a few times in this pod. But here she talks in general terms about relationships on the road.

{MAJA: So, traveling and dating! Damn! What a juicy topic! I've been traveling for a long time, both when I was single and when I was in a relationship.

Traveling somewhere new is always fun, and it's especially fun when you're single. I think for me, meeting new people is a huge part of solo travel, and I've been traveling solo for over a decade now, and yes, I still took solo trips even when I was married.

A huge part of solo travel for me is making connections with other people, and being single and traveling solo can be a lot of fun! No one knows you, you can kind of be whoever you want to be, with no fear of being judged or really being rejected, because if I don't like you, like you don't live there, you're literally never going to have to see them again, so who cares?}

Despite being predominantly a solo traveller, I've not tended to meet people for long when I travel. Partly because the reason I travel solo is because I like being on my own for long periods, so the idea of meeting people, let alone hooking up, feels weird to me. I'll go into that a bit more later when I come onto the subject of dating apps. But I do agree with the principle that when you're travelling, it matters less how you come across because you'll never meet those people again. I'm sure I've talked about this in my episodes on solo travel and on social anxiety; I feel more comfortable being 'myself' when I'm away, because no-one knows who I am, or where I live, so I feel a bit more secure being distinctive. And it's hard to blend into the crowd with purple hair and bare feet. Even in a backpacker hostel.

That said, I tend to feel that way more about 'people who live there' rather than other travellers I come across along the way. I tend to be the person in backpacker hostels who's sat on their own with a beer and a laptop, rather than the one playing beer pong in a group. Mostly this is introversion, some of it is a feeling that I don't really belong in that environment, and even if it doesn't matter, I'm still quite reluctant to say hi, especially out of the fear that they'll find me a bit weird or reject me even as a drinking buddy.

So you can imagine how I feel about the idea of dating on the road!

That said, Maja also talks about how it could actually be easier to find someone on-the-road, or at least likely to be more productive, at least compared to other ways of potentially meeting up with people.

{MAJA: Like when you travel, you're constantly meeting new people, like at hostels or campsites or hotels or at a beach or a bar. Like you meet so many more people organically when you travel than when you're just living like quote unquote real life. And I think the reason you kind of find people that you hit it off with more is because like when you meet people on the road, you're probably going to meet someone with similar interests as you. Like you probably already like the same things. Like if you meet someone while you're out hiking and camping, like they probably like hiking and camping same as you. You know, if you meet someone at a music festival, they also probably like going to music festivals.

And I think that just because you meet so many more people when you're doing these things all the time, as opposed to, you know, a festival like as a once off in a weekend or like, you know, a camping trip, you know, once a month or something. You just, yeah, you just meet so many more people.}

And it is true; if you're backpacking around Central America and you meet someone else in a hostel who is backpacking around Central America, right there there's a chance you have in common at least: travel,

backpacking, history and ancient ruins, culture, hiking, and possibly wildlife. There's a chance you also both have some rudimentary knowledge of a foreign language to your own, and, let's be honest, you're also both likely to have a similar cultural upbringing and socio-economic background. You probably have more in common with someone you meet in a backpacker hostel, even if they're from a country two seas away than you do someone you meet in your hometown Aldi. Or local Parkrun.

My friend Leila, the best friend of Laure, my ex-penpal who I was engaged to for a while, and who will be mentioned later in this episode in more detail, is married with several kids and living in Scotland. She's French. Her husband is Scottish. And about the same height, which to be is immensely amusing, but they met while travelling. In a backpacker hostel in China. She was travelling alone, he was with some friends. And they were travelling similar routes so they kept bumping into each other in backpacker hostels along their way. Evidently they realised it was fate and the rest, as they say, is history.

So for many people, it's a pretty reasonable idea to find 'the one', albeit probably quite an expensive one. But you're not going all the way to Guatemala or Cambodia purely to get your end away, right? Well, I mean, I know people do, but that's far far beyond the remit of this podcast.

{section separation jingle}

I used to know someone on Twitter, back in the mid 2010s, who said she used Tinder like many people would use Couchsurfing. She'd have a look to see who was in the area she was travelling to, swipe on them, and try to source some cheap accommodation and someone to go to the town with. Or someone to go to town with; she didn't specify in that much detail. But regardless, it served her well and she seemed to have had much success travelling around Europe on a budget.

I've never used Tinder, clearly, so I'm not fully up on its nuances, though I have seen other people use it (and similar apps) and it turns out the people my ex-gf Anne-Laure would choose to swipe on were almost the same as the people I thought she'd choose to swipe on, which ... does not mean I have the same tastes in men as my ex, just for the record, it just means I know what her tastes are. Which are not me. This is one reason she's an ex.

What I will say though is, in my head, I tend to see apps like Tinder more as dating apps than hookup apps. I see them as ways to make a more solid connection than just a quick bonk round the back of the shed. Which is weird and slightly hypocritical, as I'll come onto in a second. But this means, even if I were cis-het-allo, the idea of using Tinder while travelling wouldn't be something that occurs to me, as I wouldn't be somewhere long enough to make a meaningful connection, and because I'm the sort of person who craves friendship more than sexual intimacy, that would feel like a waste of a subscription. I mean I'm all for making new friends, but I tend to do that organically and over time rather than 'hi, I found you on an app, you seem cool, let's spend the next five hours both wishing we were somewhere else'. And it feels weird to me to make a connection only to then break it two days later because I'm suddenly two countries away with no plans to return.

Maja has a tendency to agree.

{MAJA: I think dating apps can be both good and bad. Um, I've used dating app for traveling. I feel like I probably would say I have mixed feelings on it. I think it can be really draining and honestly really annoying, Um, trying to keep up with messaging or like making plans with someone while you're constantly on the road and changing locations.

Um, I stopped using dating apps unless I know I'm going to be somewhere for more than a few days because in all likelihood, I'll never probably get a chance to actually go on a date with them. Um, and for me, like the only reason I use dating apps is to go on dates and see if there's like a connection with someone. I see messaging without going on a date as a waste of my time. So I just don't bother with that. Um, and that being said though, I have met some really great guys using dating apps while I'm traveling. Um, I never would have met them or like encountered them, I think unless we match through the app instead of a date. Um, but I think that that is also a double edged sword because sometimes you meet someone really great that you'd like to date for a while, but then when you're travelling, you have to leave.}

We'll talk more about this in a short while, but firstly I want to clarify something. There is a huge caveat to this, for me personally, and it's directly connected to my attractions, and, fundamentally, who I am as a person and an identity. I mentioned the Split Attraction Model of attraction on one of my earlier podcasts on Asexuality,

and this is where it becomes important, and somewhat complicated, and explains some of my behaviour on this field.

I don't find people sexually attractive; that's a 'given'. I don't look at someone and go 'I want to bonk that'. However, that doesn't mean I don't find people either platonically attractive or aesthetically attractive. The former is 'oh they seem nice; I'd like to get to know them better and be their friend'. This happens a lot, for me almost exclusively with women or at least female-oriented people. It's something about the attitude and mindset I feel much more connected to on a personal level. The latter is 'oh they look nice, they're kind of pretty'. It happens to me very rarely, but it does happen, and again, almost exclusively with women.

And because I'm not looking for friendship connections in a town I'm only in for a couple of days, and because I'm quite happy going to the pub on my own, you'd think that alone would mean I have no truck with dating apps on the road. And you'd be almost right, but for the wrong reasons.

Be aware that asexuals, aromantics, and aromantic asexuals, all can and do hook up, and their sexual and romantic orientations do not prevent or preclude meeting people while travelling, or at any other time, for a spot of groping for trouts in a peculiar river, and those rivers would be very peculiar to an AroAce, for sure, but that doesn't mean we don't occasionally go fishing, just for the sheer craic, if nothing else.

See, I have been known to look up people, not on dating apps but on both hookup websites and on more ... shall we say, generic, websites catering to certai...Fetlife. Let's be precise about this. I'll come on to exactly *what* I've looked up later, because I've had experiences, oh yes, but for the purposes of this section, just be aware that I've actively looked up people for kinky and sexual-adjacent reasons. And, importantly for full disclosure, always men. Even though I'm not sexually attracted to men, not platonically attracted to men, and not aesthetically attracted to men. In fact, largely *because* I'm not attracted to men in those ways. Because then there's no lasting legacy, no emotion, no regret. It's purely transactional. And I can't, well, I don't feel comfortable having, the same type of connection with women.

Obviously this means how I feel about the idea of a hookup is very different to how I feel about the idea of a relationship; they're two very different sorts of people at two very different times and for two very different reasons. I'm absolutely not looking for anything long-term or concrete with any of the hookups I search for; indeed it would be weird if they did turn into anything long-term. In principle therefore, I should be all over apps like Tinder, Grindr, and the like. In practice, though, I seem to overthink it.

But going back to the idea of it being only a short-term fling. As I keep seeing on Instagram: "Someone has to leave first. This a very old story; there is no other version of this story". The question is, is the conclusion in two days, or two decades?

Maja goes on to say more about this.

{MAJA: I think it can be really difficult to move on and stop wondering what if, when you're the one that needs to keep traveling and even though you really like the person, like you have to be the one to leave. And it's great if your circumstances mean, you know, if you meet someone and you're both traveling and then you can kind of combine your plans and travel together, like that's awesome. And that's amazing. But I think it's not always, you know, practical or, or realistic and I think it really depends on kind of what you're looking for and what you want. Um, if you're after a serious long term partner, dating when you're traveling can be draining and at times like, really depressing, I think if you're looking for someone that you want to, like, have a life with.

But I think if you're just wanting to date casually and have fun, like meet new people, see what happens. I think dating on the road is great whether or not like whether you use dating apps or not. Um Just depends really on what you want from both your trip and from your life, whether you travel to specifically meet someone or hook up with someone or whether you just, yeah, kind of like meet people on the road and find a connection. I think it just comes down to the kind of dating experience you personally want. Um, and figuring out what you want and what you're happy with, I think is a good idea before you try any kind of dating. Um, whether you're traveling and kind of on the road or, or not, and just kind of, you know, dating normally.}

I've no idea what I want in life. Maybe someone to take pictures of me running through cornfields in a sundress? Maybe someone to tie me up and feed me chocolate brownies? Both very odd questions to ask of someone you've only just met in a backpacker hostel.

{section separation jingle}

This opens up an important question: if you're, for instance, using dating apps to guide your travels, how do you stay safe on the road, especially if you're in an unfamiliar country where you may not know the language.

Despite rumours to the contrary, and despite how I often come across, it's inescapable that I was born male and have definite male-body vibes, so even though I have to be wary when it comes to safety, especially, as you'll hear later, because of the, uhm, hobbies and interests I personally have, I'm fully aware that I'm relatively less likely to be in danger than most of my friends, who are female-bodied (if not always female-presenting, physically or situationally).

But let's talk about basic principles first. Here's Kitty, a friend of mine from back in Nottinghamshire, and part of a friend group called The Unicorn Squad, for reasons lost in the mists of an early Winter morning over a derelict coal mine. As you'll hear later, Kitty is no stranger to dating apps.

{KITTY: Um, how I stayed safe? Um, staying safe first and foremost is messaging you lot in the group chat telling you where I'm gonna be, Live 360 on, so Kira can see where I am. Uh, giving everybody the guy's name and his address so that they're aware, checking in every couple of hours or so, just so that you all know I'm not dead. Um, and then having like a you know a chat with everyone afterwards, normally when I'm home, to say that I'm fine and laugh about the situation. As you are aware.}

Kitty herself tends to only stay within a small radius of home, say about 15 miles. In fact, as she puts it, somewhere within Uber-range. And that, too, is an aspect of safety.

{KITTY: being a public transport girly, um, travelling is, I mean, fairly easy. I can get to most places, but my favourite thing to do, or like the funniest way to do it, is getting Ubers, especially when you know that they know what you are travelling for. Because when you book an Uber from your house at two o'clock in the morning and you get in the back of that Uber looking you know your best and maybe a little bit slutty, they know immediately what you're going for and they will talk to you and they're like oh, where are you going? Oh, I'm just, I'm just going to see a friend. Oh, will you be there for long? Probably about half an hour. I just love, like the I dunno, the knowing look that you get when you get into a taxi at two o'clock in the morning, looking like you're about to get fucked, and they know, and you and when nobody's saying anything, and then they drop you off and they're like have a good time, like I do intend to.}

Book an uber, tell the driver where you're going, and, to be honest, book the uber back. Possibly even with the same driver. Maybe even show them a picture of the person in question. If you don't turn up, then the driver knows exactly where you are, what the backstory is, and when you should have been out, so he's in exactly the right place to raise the alarm if he thinks there's any foul play. This obviously relies on an honest and trustworthy taxi driver, so maybe it's better to go through a reputable and official taxi company rather than an uber, but they're not available everywhere so you may not have a choice in the matter.

Now, if you're on the road in a foreign country, you might be a bit more wary, and that's fine. And of course when you're 4,000 miles and several time zones from home, it's much harder to take those same kind of precautions. You can still, for instance, text a friend their address, a pic of the house, a pic of them, a rough expected timetable of when you're due to arrive and how long you expect it to take, and then arrange a kind of 'check in' so they know if you fail to message after a certain time, they know there's a problem, But it's going to be harder for them to do much about it - it may even be tricky for them to even simply call the authorities. They're certainly not going to be close enough by to cause a scene.

Here's where places like backpacker hostels help. Because they're places where there are a lot of people, and there's a fair chance that you're not going to have been the first person to stay there while using a dating app. So the other guests, the staff, everyone, can provide you with a means of support, advice, telephone numbers, and act as accountability partners while you go do your stuff. Just don't do your stuff in the dorm rooms, okay? I mean, it's the safest place of all, because there are people around all the time, but also the most annoying, because there are people around all the time who might support you and might even be interested to know the details, but just not while they're happening, you know? It's one of those rare situations where recorded highlights are better than watching live.

Of course, the simplest solution is not to do any kind of hook-up at all, but his kinky setup looked amazing.

I am not a role model.

{section separation jingle}

Now, I'm not saying I've plotted my backpacking routes at times for specific nefarious purpose. I'm not saying I've deliberately taken trips through particular towns like, say, Huntsville, Alabama, and arrived in them with nothing more than the vaguest comments from someone on Fetlife with the promise of bed and bondage, and the hope they'll meet me in this bar otherwise I've got nowhere to sleep that night. But when I said his setup looked amazing, what I mean is that he had a large set of wooden stocks built into the footboard of his double bed. They were used. It was awesome.

I mentioned earlier that I have used hookup websites and kink sites to find people en-route. I don't very often do this, partly because there's an awful lot of people on those sites who use them just as a way to fantasise and jack themselves off without ever having an intention to follow-up on their words and thoughts. FabGuys is especially noted for this. And one of the problems with using sites to hookup is indeed that fear of 'but what if nothing happens', 'what if it's all a scam or a waste of time'. My initial meeting with Dayna, even, was delayed by an hour or so because Detroit has two terminals and we never managed to agree about which to meet in, so we ended up keeping missing each other as we both searched the wrong terminal for each other. So there was that fear that 'oh my god what do I do now, she's not here', and it was quite late at night and I'd never been to Detroit before; it was only my second time in the USA, even. But it was fine eventually; we had a bedraggled snog with moist eyes when we did meet up so it was all fine.

But for the most part, while my on-travel hookups have been quite rare, they have at least all been successful. Apart from the chap in Huntsville, I had an afternoon with a guy in Sweden, when I was visiting Stockholm for a couple of days. This was again for bondage and tickling, and saw me visit the very pretty town of Uppsala, albeit I didn't get to see a lot of it. And not just because I was blindfolded for much of my time there. And, again in the USA and again related to tickling, I passed through New York City on another of my USA adventures, and had an afternoon at an all-male tickle party hosted by a chap who had a flat near the High Line footpath. That was a weird event as although there were maybe about 10-15 people there, everyone was really really shy and quiet at the start, in the living room, and it took some cajoling from the host to get us to even move, never mind do any action in the designated tickle-room (his bedroom). It was a pretty big bed though.

In the UK I've had less success, although in the UK what's worked has often more been 'I'll happily travel to play with you' rather than 'I'm in the area, let me suck you off'; I've seen bits of Bristol I don't remember, bits of Birmingham that aren't worth remembering, and it was the reason for my first trip to Derby. Not that I went to Derby that much even when I lived a direct bus ride from it, because it's Derby, and the East Midlands as a whole isn't the most exciting part of the country. It's a flyover state, quite literally given it has an airport.

Maja talks about a couple of good hookups she's had on the road in the past.

{MAJA: I've met some really great guys, and I have some great memories. I've also met some not great guys, but they're not as fun to talk about. So, yeah, back in 2011, on my first ever trip to the UK, my friend and I accidentally crashed a private party in a pub.

I was 18, and we met these guys, they ended up walking us back home to our hostel, I kissed one of them, and then three years later, when I moved to Nottingham to study abroad, I messaged him on Facebook and said if you wanted to meet up in London, and yeah, and we saw each other, yeah, probably once a month for the first couple months that I was studying abroad, and yeah, that was really fun.

Obviously, like, I met them when I was traveling through social media, like we stayed connected and everything. I also met a Dutch guy when I was traveling solo in Riga, Latvia, he was in my hostel, and we connected pretty instantly. A group of us all ended up drinking in the common room. We ended up going out for karaoke. We just, yeah, we just got on really well. And I knew literally nothing about this guy, besides his first and his last name, because we were friends on Facebook. I knew his phone number, and I knew that the city he lived in had direct Ryanair flights to the UK that were cheap. So I flew out a few months later to see him, which is probably one of the craziest things I think I've ever done when traveling.}

Kitty, however, and I'll be honest, the conversation where she talked about this in the Unicorn Squad's WhatsApp chat was the original impetus behind my making this pod, because I thought, 'this is feckin' awesome, I love every part of this', talks about a couple of bad hookups she's had. And by 'bad' I don't mean

'harmful' bad, I mean 'this would go viral on Tumblr' bad.

{KITTY: *Best or worst? Um, there's no outstanding best, unfortunately. Worst was definitely the, um, 2am tryst to see the guy on Tinder who had told me while we were talking that his bed was quite squeaky, and I said it as a joke, 'oh well, uh, put a duvet on the floor and we'll fuck on that and it's fine'. And then I get into his house and into his bedroom and there is in fact a duvet on the floor and I was like shit, I was joking, but okay, uh, he then proceeds to spend about five minutes shagging me on this duvet, which had absolutely no friction to it at all. So I was just sliding straight the way up it and ended about the time I'd moved up so that my shoulder was against his wardrobe and every thrust had my shoulder banging into his wardrobe leg and I was in great pain.*

And, um, yeah, it wasn't the wasn't the best experience, definitely not. I didn't go back, so that says enough. But I mean, he did make me a cup of tea and give me a homemade ginger biscuit, so that was something, I suppose, I got something out of it, but in terms of the encounter itself not great shoulder pain I was on the floor and, um, I don't know if it was, you know, nerves or the awkwardness of the situation, but it didn't last long, it wasn't very good and it was all just a little bit awkward afterwards.

Uh yeah, like I said, I haven't really got a best. They're all kind of faded together into one. That was the only really like standout one, I suppose.

I mean, I suppose there was the other guy I met on Tinder whose bedroom looked like every 18 year old boy's bedroom, except he was 26, and probably should have owned a bedroom bin by then, but just used a carrier bag. And I went one week and we did what we did. And then I went back the next week and the same carrier bag with the same condoms from the week before was still in the bedroom and that was around the time I stopped going to see him because it gave me the ick.}

There are advantages with being AroAce. There are also advantages with turning up to a hotel room and putting the blindfold on before you walk through the door. I am sometimes very glad I am who I am.

{section separation jingle}

I want to now talk about long distance relationships, as they're another aspect to love and sex on the road. By which I mean, they're a reason *to* travel; the point of your vacation is to meet someone you get along with on an intimate and personal level. You're not just travelling to a different country to meet up with a friend and see the sights, you're travelling to meet up with someone special. And seeing their sights. As it were.

It possibly won't surprise you to know I've had many long distance relationships. Indeed it may not surprise you to know that that's exactly the kind of intimate relationship I've tended to prefer. A short burst of close connection followed by a couple of months where nothing happens, and I'm perfectly fine with that because I've never been fond of people being too clingy or constantly around me. I like my own space - ideally that space is a couple of counties in area. Maybe it's the aromantic in me, but I just feel most comfortable in relationships where neither of us feel squashed, or that feel too intense, or even ... I don't know, it's hard to explain to most people because I just don't 'get' the passion or desire to be around someone for the majority of the time. I like being with people in short bursts. Sometimes very intensive and deep bursts, but in bursts nevertheless. And in the between times I go about my life and they go about theirs and we'll occasionally swap messages and the like.

My first was back when I was in my early 20s. A penpal came to visit me. I'm aware there might be people listening who were too young for penpals, and to be honest I only just made it, but in simple terms a penpal is a friend you write letters to rather than meeting up to chat regularly with. And, in fact, it was during her visit that I first got myself an internet connection at home so from that point on my penpals slowly become more like e-mail pals, then Instant Messenger type pals, and now I have ex-penpals as Instagram friends etc. But. Back in the day it was a lot less 'instant', and you had to wait for the postman to bring a letter, so communication could take weeks to have a conversation with.

But anyway, enough backstory; this was in the days when I was still developing my identity so was living life pretending to be cis-het-allo. And wondering why I was having difficulty finding love. This particular penpal, Laure, was French and, as it turns out, having similar thoughts to me about loneliness and relationships. Unsurprisingly we hit it off within two days. Although this was not as quick as her mother had expected.

For the next two years we'd write and e-mail regularly to each other, and take visits to see each other every couple of months, including travelling on holiday together (for example we went to Poland over Christmas that first year). Then, in the summer of 1998, she unexpectedly turned up on my doorstep, and lived with me for the next four years. This, by the way, is the lady I went Inter-Railing with in 2000, as per one of my previous podcast episodes.

Obviously it didn't last, which is actually a bit of a shame since we mostly seemed to be well-suited. We even got engaged, which, yeh. And I think who I am now would probably have worked better for both of us. Apart from the whole 'she wanted children, I did not' thing, which, you know, is quite fundamental. Full Swap Radio listeners may be interested to know if we'd stayed together we'd probably have ended up as Swingers, possibly even with our own podcast.

But for the purposes of this podcast, this was the first time where I'd used love and romance as a way to travel. As I say, we visited each other quite often before we moved in together, including my going to different parts of France to meet up with her relatives, places I'd have never otherwise have thought to go (including, if memory serves, the small town of Brie-Comte-Robert, near Orly Airport, because of course everywhere is interesting).

Now, Laure isn't the only time I've had a long-distance relationship; she's not even the only time I've had a long-distance relationship with someone from France called Laure. Or, well, Anne-Laure, at least. I'm still friends with her, she's appeared on this podcast, we went travelling together a couple of years ago to Ireland, you know all this. But her, I came across through the online blogging site LiveJournal, in the days when 'having a blog' meant 'it's actually my diary, but online rather than in a secret notebook'. We, I mean I don't know how we found each other, but we ended up leaving comments on each other's LJ posts, following each other, and then eventually we got around to meeting up. And hitting it off almost instantly. Obviously her being in France, albeit a different part of France, meant there was a lot of visiting each other, so again, travelling for love. We even took a couple of holidays together, including to Tunisia over New Year one year.

Another long-distance relationship I had was with my American friend Dayna, who again, has appeared on this podcast before. We met in a more conventional way - OKCupid, in the days when OKCupid was a quirky, independent, and comprehensive site rather than the 'Match Dot Com, but we pretend we're not' site it is these days. We liked each other's profiles, sent messages, and arranged to meet up, over in the USA as I was a full-time office worker and she was a student at university. Our actual meeting up wasn't as smooth a process as you'd've hoped, but she has ADHD and it turns out so do I, so what do you expect. But anyway, we hit it off almost immediately. There's a theme developing here. Obviously as we were on different continents, it was much less frequent that we met up, since EasyJet and Ryanair don't fly across the Atlantic, and to be honest even if they did I wouldn't be keen on that journey.

Obviously I'm not dating neither Dayna nor Anne-Laure. Like most of my relationships, they kind of gradually faded out into just friendships, and to be honest I'm happier with it that way. And of course I still chat to them, meet them, albeit less often, but I know if I'm ever in the area, or they in mine, we'll welcome each other with open arms.

It may surprise you to hear that Maja has also had a long-distance relationship.

{MAJA: And of course, I can't talk about travel and love without mentioning my ex. We got together on a trip to Poland. We did long distance for several years, eloped in Gibraltar, and then I moved from the US to the UK to be with him.

In spite of everything that happened in the end, I don't regret it. I loved him very much, and it was what we wanted. That being said, there are a lot of difficulties in international relationships that I don't think get talked about very much. Especially like visa issues, whether or not you can actually live and work in each other's countries, all that kind of stuff. Those stresses put a lot of pressure on our relationship and I don't think it's anywhere near as romantic as everyone thinks it is or what you see in movies and stuff. It's actually really hard, it's a lot of work.}

Someone else in my Travel Bubble who has famously had a long-distance relationship is Kylie, whose old blog was called 'Between England and Iowa', reflecting her very journey. Here she talks about how it started, the problems she had with it, and how it ended.

{KYLIE: My past relationship was one that I found while travelling. It wasn't something I was looking for, I

was just on holiday in Jamaica at an all-inclusive resort actually, I was just there, just gonna have a chill week, and I ended up finding someone who was single, in the swimming pool, just by talking to them, like I said I wasn't looking for them, but then we found each other and we started the never-ending cycle of 'Right, I'm from England, you're from America, how do we make this work as a relationship if we really want it to carry on.'

So there was a lot of tough decisions that you have to kind of make, and a lot of communication you have to do as a long-distance couple, and so being of two different nationalities we couldn't live in the same country, so then you had the whole process of "well, does one of us move country, how do we make that work?", and for me it was, kind of the only option was to get married, so we would long-distance for two years, and then we ended up getting married, and then I relocated to to the USA but that's a whole other story.

But there's a lot of pressure, it's, you need to have a lot of trust in the other person, your communication has to be absolutely on point because especially if there's a time difference involved, erm, so it's very strange, it's very full-on, and it's a lot faster than what a normal relationship would go at, just because you have the difference, obviously it made the trip very interesting because obviously you ended up finding someone that was then almost like your best friend, we hit it off straight away and within that week we just spent like every minute together, so it was ... it was nice. Like I always said it was like my fairytale for a bit, but then it didn't work out because I struggled with living abroad in the end because I was the one who relocated, and I did struggle with that so ultimately it didn't work out, so then I ended up moving back, but ...

I don't necessarily think it'd be something I'd do again. I mean, it was a lot, and I don't think that I would go through it again that way. I know it's sad to say something like that but it is an awful lot of pressure and paperwork and I'm glad I had the experience and I wouldn't change it, but it is tough going, it's not like how it is in the movies.}

And this is the lesser-spoken side of travel and relationships. If you're only hooking up for the sake of hooking up, then it's less important, but if you're looking for love, and something lasting, from a connection you find on the road, then while it might be all beauty and blowjobs when you meet, there's an awful lot of admin to deal with in order to make it work.

One day I'll do a podcast episode about immigration and living in a foreign country, and be sure the costs of doing so will get a mention, along with the literal paperwork and time spent waiting to get the right visas, the citizenships, etc. Several thousand pounds, and in some countries, hello UK, the citizen needs to be earning above a certain amount before the government will even entertain the possibility of the idea of bringing in a foreign-citizen as a spouse. And that amount is more than you think. More than the average salary of a full-time salaried employee. Possibly more than I make, even, though I haven't checked my payslips for a while. I'm not saying I'd be open to marrying someone for the citizenship, because, I mean, why would I do that, but it's almost certainly not worth you asking anyway. I am open to offers from other country's citizens for me to immigrate elsewhere though, because, I mean, have you *seen* the state of the UK recently?

I should have married Laure back in 2001. Maybe we'd've moved to France and I'd be doing this podcast from La Rochelle. It'd be prettier than Salford. And better weather. Neither of those things are difficult.

{section separation jingle}

So what have we learned in this episode? It's quite easy to meet up with people in backpacker hostels, especially if you're travelling solo, but only if you make yourself open to meeting people in the first place. People you meet while travelling are likely to have similar interests, meaning it's easier to get into them before you get into them, but unless you're prepared to put in a lot of post-coital admin, it'll only ever be a quick one-and-done thing. Hookups might sound cool in theory but often are complete disasters when you get to do them in practice, if indeed they turn up at all, while long distance relationships might feel like the opposite although they generally only work if both people have the aptitude for them.

And that once again, I, am absolutely, not a role model.

-- {end pod jingle} --

Well, that's about all for this pod. Join me next time for another adventure beyond the brochure. Until then, remember, there are rules against it in a dorm room, and maybe use a ball-gag if you're in the private room

next door, 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.}