

## Transcript of Podcast 089: 100 Episodes (Sort Of)

*{INTRO:*

*TagAlongDeb - "Yeh, travelling barefoot? I don't really 'get' that. I don't even go barefoot in my home. I mean, think of what the bottom of your feet are exposed to. I'm not sure how he keeps his toes so nicely manicured in that environment. I guess it works for him, somehow"*

*}*

*{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}*

... do you think this intro is too long? It's always irked me a bit.

*{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.}*

... I've definitely changed my intro and outro about six times since I started. I \*think\* I'm happy with the intro now, and it definitely represents who I am. I'd certainly say my travels are 'offbeat', although your mileage may vary as to what that word actually means in this context. Maybe it's like the word 'quirky'. I am, but how to define it without, you know, meeting me and realising it within the first couple of seconds, who knows?!

*{Music fades. Podcast begins}*

Hello :)

It's been a while, dear listeners, but I seem to be back for a new series. Or at least, I have concrete plans for another series of episodes, one of which will necessitate my taking a couple of days in that most delightful tourist spot of ... /me checks notes ... Milton Keynes. Because Everywhere Is Interesting. And in truth this episode has been delayed for a couple of weeks while I work out exactly what my upcoming future episodes will be on. Obviously I haven't written them yet, but I'm at least sure exactly what they'll be.

I still have undiagnosed ADHD and I'm still not medicated for it. Honestly, it clearly shows.

But anyway. How have you been? I hope you've been well. I've been, I mean, I'm still alive, which I guess means something. I've not done any episodes recently because I haven't, because I wanted a break I guess from it, because I felt that if I recorded an episode it would turn into some kind of rant, which I know you appreciate at times, but honestly, that would make for a very different podcast series. It's notable that some of my highest performing YouTube Shorts are where I rant, but then my highest viewed video is of two trains connecting together at Manchester Piccadilly station, and my second most performing video is talking about a cat in a nearby pub. The cat doesn't even make an appearance. Frankly, I don't know why I bother half the time.

I'd love to tell you I've been doing interesting things, but the most exciting thing to happen to me recently was discovering, after almost a year, what the mysterious second (of six) lightswitches in the kitchen of this flat does. I'd never noticed before but there are lights underneath two of the kitchen cupboards, and they were switched off at base so didn't react to the light switch on the wall. One of them the bulb is dead anyway, and the amount of light the other one gives isn't going to be bright enough even for Taylor Swift to dance around the kitchen with (though I've no idea how powerful her refrigerator light is; it sounds like she has some kind of floodlight in it).

I mean, I jest. But not about Taylor Swift; that was one heck of a light. I mean, I jest about not doing a lot. Travelwise, since my last pod, I've been to Italy and San Marino, I've been, finally, to Cork in Ireland, and I've been on a work trip to my organisation's HQ in Newport, South Wales. All of them involved beer. I've also been up to Glasgow to have my hair recoloured, I've been to a large concert, deets of which I'll talk about in one of my upcoming pods, and I've finally made it to a dentist after three years. The last time I went to a dentist was in the summer of 2021, and the morning of, I recorded a podcast episode. Which was just as well cos when I came back that afternoon, I was incapable of coherent speech, having had the remains of a tooth removed, the day before I went to Orkney. I'm hopefully going to plan my next extraction a bit better.

I'm not very good at dental health. Partly it's because I always forget to brush my teeth, because I go 'oh I'll do it later when it's more convenient' and then, literally, forget that brushing my teeth is A Thing, in exactly the same way as I lose hats, and partly because for some reason I have a weird and excessive gag reflex when I brush my bottom teeth. Never my top, they're fine, but always my bottom. Teeth. I do not have a gag reflex when I brush my bottom. Possibly other people's bottoms. I don't go there.

As an aside, I thought I'd lost my denim-adjacent blue hat with the stylised they/them badge on it when I had my hair recoloured, but it turns out it was just stuck inside my leggings which I took off to go home in, for some reason lost in the mists of time. I found it several weeks later when I was doing a fashion parade for Laura to determine how many of my clothes could be kept and how many donated to charity, Turns out I'm the only person in the galaxy who likes my 1980s stripes & dots shirt. Both Laura and V said they would happily burn it in front of me. Heathens. The lot of you.

The only other thing to note of major strategic importance is we might be moving again. Salford is very convenient but it's not the most aesthetic of places, and both me and Laura like to go walking. In addition, the flat we're in is very nice but if we're both working from home we have to share a living room which isn't always convenient, even if the living room is quite large. We may have found somewhere that's quite a bit cheaper (even cheaper than the Glasgow apartment), bigger, with more facility to do our own thing, in a much more ... in an area where walking will be more of a pleasure. The downside is it's going to be the smallest place I've ever lived, and less convenient for everyday pleasures like being able to grab a snack in four minutes. But that might be better for my bank balance anyway. If it happens, I'll keep you informed. Currently the letting agent are ghosting me, despite having already paid a holding deposit. And oh my god that admin form we had to fill in was The Pits, though when I phoned up the intermediary about it they were all like 'yeh, don't worry about that bit, we don't need it'. So I'm a tad bewildered, but hey, I'm sure it'll all turn out well in the long run.

Now. This episode. Another reason for the delay has been trying to formulate exactly how to do it. It's been noticed that I've now done 100 episodes. Quite which episode was my 100th is open to question as it depends on your definition of episode - indeed if you don't count the Twitter Space recordings I did with V, I've not got there yet. But, just like with counting countries, there's always going to be arguments either way, and in terms of what my podcast host and the podcast apps say, I've made three figures. So it seems kind of appropriate to acknowledge that. I am aware that one of my Glasgow episodes was 'what I wish I'd known before starting a podcast' and I didn't want to do another episode like that, so instead what I thought I'd do was an actual retrospective of the topics I've talked about in my podcast episodes thus far, so that people who may be new to my words and content can get a feel for the sort of things that I've talked about before.

*{section separation jingle - most popular episodes}*

My most popular episodes, in terms of downloads, are mostly all quite early ones, which makes sense, since they've been around the longest. Now, these earlier ones, terms of audio quality, they're not the best, although structurally and topically I don't have any faults with them; they're pretty much exactly what I wanted to do with my podcast and in a sense I've kind of veered away from that structure now, for better or worse.

Interesting to note they're also amongst my shortest episodes. Make of that what you will.

But, for a little more detail. Four of my ten most downloaded episodes are about destinations, including three of the top four. My most popular episode of all has been my eighth, which was all about my trip to Uzbekistan in 2014. Here's a few short extracts from it.

*{extracts from Uzbekistan podcast:*

*The biggest change in recent years, as my guests will allude to, is with the money. Back in 2014, the government was controlling the local currency, the Uzbek Som, fixing its rate and preventing free exchange. This was coupled with a bloody-minded refusal by them to accept that the real purchasing power of the currency had dropped. This meant two things: the exchange rate on the Black Market (US\$1:3000 Som) was considerably better than the exchange rate offered by banks (US\$1:2300 Som), and secondly, the largest value note in circulation was worth 1,000. Since larger denomination US\$ notes tended to be preferred, this meant changing money ... tended to take a while.*

*It also meant that everyone, most of the time, was carrying round large bundles of notes with them, usually*

held together with elastic bands. In many countries, travel advice is not to flash around wads of cash; in Uzbekistan you didn't generally get the choice. However, as everyone's more-or-less in the same boat, the only money-related crime in general practice was that the real **Black Market** rate that the locals got was nearer to US1\$:3300 Som. Also, obtaining currency was much harder when I was there - there were ATMs but few and far between (there was precisely one, I think, in the whole of Bukhara). This all affected locals too - I heard tales of people buying cars carrying wheelbarrows of notes.

-----  
Oddly, some of the inter-city coaches aren't exactly "fixed" in terms of price or schedule either. This is what happened in Bukhara:

"Where you go? Tashkent?" say the clamouring hordes of people. It's hard to know who's a tout and who's a driver in this mad throng.

"Samarkand" I reply.

"This way this way, come this one leaves soon." says one chap, directing me towards a mostly-filled coach.

"How soon?" I naively ask. His reply could be 'fifteen' or could be 'fifty', I ask him to clarify.

"One five minutes," he confirms.

There then follows a bit of negotiation over the price; something I've never been comfortable with but it's very much the way of the world. I'm not sure quite how that would work in the UK, trying to negotiate with the driver of a National Express coach to knock a fiver off the fare - maybe that's something for a UK version of 'Extreme Cheapskates' but it doesn't rock my world.

The trip from Bukhara to Samarkand is scheduled to be four hours, and in any case I can tell a little urgency amongst the passengers. There's also a fierce babushka with a clipboard, dressed in a bright blue blouse, who seems to be running the roost of the coach, making sure everyone's sitting in the right seats and chastising the driver and his running staff who are loading the coach whenever they wander off. In the end, the coach left around fifty minutes after I boarded, not fifteen.

}

What's interesting is, while I don't necessarily think it's one of my best episodes, it is very much true to my original ethos as a travel blogger and podcaster - the whole 'unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of' thing in my intro. Uzbekistan is a country that at the time many people in my spheres didn't know a great deal about, but importantly, in recent years, it's become much more known about and popular. I'm clearly not saying my pod was a part of that rise in Uzbek fortune, but I'm guessing a lot of people will have come across the country in other ways and then found my pod to learn a bit more from someone who's been there. Admittedly travel in Uzbekistan is much different than when I went, so it's more a historical artefact now than a travel guide.

My other popular destination pods are the Outer Hebrides in third, Malta in fourth (though I wonder how much of that is because of my travel blogger friends picking up on it just after the Traverse Conference that was held there), and Vanuatu in seventh. Another thing about the Malta pod is it, along with fifth place Backpacking Europe, where I talked about my more practical experiences of inter-railing and travelling around the continent as a whole, are the two newest episodes to make the top ten (I can tell from the episode title). This maybe suggests there's an audience for European Travel. I don't think I can do an episode entirely on San Marino - I'm not the 80 Days Exploration Podcast - but now I'm thinking about it, I'm sure there must be a 'European Microstates' geography podcast I could do.

Two of my early pods on 'aspects of travel' also hit the top ten - sixth is Solo Travel (episode nine) and ninth is Bucket List Travel (episode three). I will say that Bucket List Travel episode is actually my least favourite of all the episodes I've done, and is why I specifically revisited the topic later on (episode 38). Everything that could go wrong did go wrong - including a malfunctioning upload, completely losing someone's contribution, and recording while travelling on equipment that was not suitable for the job.

{extracts from *Bucket List Podcast*:

*Although I do have lists of places I want to see, mainly countries (and, as mentioned in a previous pod, every county blah blah blah in the UK), I don't really have a 'bucket list' as such, merely a list of 'priorities'. I want to see Bolivia, for instance, and I know one day I will, so it's not so much a 'desire' as a post-dated fact. The question isn't will I, but when will I.*

*Rather, what I do have is a little more controversial. I was chatting a while ago with another travel blogger, and the subject of Maldives came up; I said it was one of the places on my 'places I'm unlikely to ever visit and that's ok' list; then I realised it might be an interesting thing to explain in more detail.*

*See, most travel bloggers always talk about the places (countries, towns, activities etc) they like, why they like them, and why they'd recommend them. Coming from a background in customer satisfaction, this tends to be unusual – people are more naturally inclined to talk about negative aspects of companies, of customer service, etc – although it makes perfect sense in a travel blog environment as people want to read about places they're interested in visiting, with a view to actually going there. And where there are positive descriptions from travellers, coupled with active marketing activity from local companies and governments, people will want to pretty much go anywhere and everywhere.*

*Now, one of my travel-related hobbies is to do research into most places in the world, to learn more about the history and culture, and to ascertain if it's a place that holds enough interest for me to want to visit. I'd have to say I'm quite open-minded on this – there doesn't have to be a lot to perk my interest, and sometimes the more obscure the better. However, even I have my, shall we say, 'reservations' about a small number of places, and why I doubt they'd be on any plans in the near future.*

----

*Now, Three: Maldives – or really “Honeymoon Destinations”/ “Small Hot Islands” in general*

*I always need a 'reason' to visit somewhere; I travel to see things and be 'active'. I also have a low boredom threshold; I'm restless and always need to be moving on (it's been suggested I have ADHD, which may explain also why I never get round to updating my blog in good time). Therefore I like to visit places that not only have an array of historic and cultural sites to explore, but which are also easy to leave and move onto somewhere new.*

*In addition, my style of travel is very much geared towards backpacking – cheap and cheerful, hostels, street food, etc, rather than luxury hotels with en-suite Jacuzzis and Michelin-starred in-house restaurants. In fact, even the idea of all-inclusive resorts makes my stomach churn, regardless of the quality and the other guests; my objections to these sorts of places could equally apply in principle to the likes of Benidorm and Magaluf.*

*Unsurprisingly therefore, destinations like Maldives, Seychelles, and many parts of the Caribbean are pretty much my idea of a 'Holiday-From-Hell'.*

*Stuck in a purpose-built resort on a small island (many in Maldives are even the entire island), with very little to do other than lie on a beach, do watersports (I can't swim), or ... er ... that's it, eating only what the resort/restaurant can provide (which is likely to be nothing like the food that the locals eat), and not really having the opportunity to explore the country, doesn't strike me as a terribly productive way to spend two weeks. I'd get bored after two hours.*

*Such places are also incredibly expensive. On my travels I was budgeting at £30/day and invariably came in much lower than this on average. This means, including airfare, I could comfortably spend £1,000/month on travelling. For places like Maldives, you'd be lucky if that gets you a week. In the resorts, what's not included in the initial cost is likely to be heavily marked-up (being an island in the middle of nowhere, as well as having no competition); this applies to everything from travelling to other islands to a simple extra bottle of water.*

*Yes I know you pay for the exclusivity, the paradise, the relaxation, but that's not what I want on a holiday. I go away to excite myself; my travels are amphetamine, not morphine.*

}

[INTERCESSION: Hi, it's Barefoot Backpacker from the future here. I was just editing this podcast and I was just listening to my old Bucket List episode and I realised something I forgot to mention when I was writing this particular podcast episode, and that is just how outdated it is, because that whole episode was about anti-bucket lists, and places that I wouldn't choose to go to, and there's several places mentioned that I either now have been, for example Philippines, or am actively intending to visit, like Japan and, bizarrely, Maldives, so I think it's just testament to the way our views can change, and sometimes you look back and go 'ooh I was a very different person in those days. That's kind of the beauty of it really, isn't it? It's ... we all change and it's interesting to see how we change.]

The top ten is rounded off by two deeper-dives and one personal episode. My second most downloaded episode is the very first one I did, on Barefoot Travel; keen-eared listeners will remember the contribution that opened this pod was the same that opened that pod, which makes it the very first thing you dear listeners ever heard.

In eighth is an episode history of Apartheid in South Africa, which was a strange episode for a White Brit to record, but I guess I just found the topic interesting and important. It started off as an episode on visiting Soweto but I figured it wouldn't make sense without the backstory, and then the backstory took over. It, and the associated blog posts, proved popular a couple of years ago with web searches specific enough to suggest a question had appeared on an exam paper somewhere that matched something I'd said.

*{extracts from Apartheid pod:*

*In what is now the south-western part of Zimbabwe, near the city of Bulawayo, lie a range of hills called the Matapos. People have lived here for millennia – there is evidence of human activity covering everything from cave paintings created in the last 2,000 years, all the way to remains of bones from the days of Homo Heidelbergensis some 300,000 years ago.*

*The most important aspect of the Matapos though is that they're sacred to the Ndebele and Shona people; it's been their home since time immemorial. It makes it all the more weird then to stand in one of their most sacred sites (World's View), at the top of a hill overlooking much of the plains of southern Zimbabwe, and realise that just a few steps to your right is a flat gravestone, inscribed with a memorial to a 19th Century white British colonialist, of the type so beloved of the empire.*

*Yes, that's what I thought as well.*

*At the time of my visit there, in January 2016, there was a bit of controversy about Cecil Rhodes – more so than usual, I mean; there were movements in South Africa to remove his statue from college campuses. In Zimbabwe, however, he's often lauded as the founder of the state, and without whom the Zimbabweans fear the colony would have simply become another province of South Africa.*

*However, as an introduction, let's make no bones about this. It would be so easy to blame Cecil Rhodes for what later became known as Apartheid, so let's do that.*

*He was a typical middle-class white British male. And by 'typical' I mean 'nationalistic' and 'racist' – not in an outwardly aggressive BNP-like way, but more in that his entire world view didn't acknowledge being any different. A famous quote of his was telling Lord Grey, the then-Governor of the British Cape Colony: *<i>"You are an Englishman, and have subsequently drawn the greatest prize in the lottery of life."*</i>. Quite mild and jingoistic, nationalistically harmless, right? Well, the scholar Bernard Magubane quotes him as saying *<i>"The native is to be treated as a child and denied franchise. We must adopt a system of despotism, such as works in India, in our relations with the barbarism of South Africa."*</i>. Which is a little more ... the phrase 'white supremacist' has been bandied around by later historians and cultural commentators, yes.*

---

*Oppression, protest, and anger was the situation for forty years, including much of my childhood. I distinctly remember news reports from the Townships in the 1980s, showing the effects of government policy, the State of Emergency, and the resulting anger of the people, almost certainly provided by Michael Buerk, or at least until the South African government expelled him for being too ... well, honest.*

*Politically, after Strijdom came Hendrik Verwoerd, who may have been a Nazi (or at least he lost a legal case when the English-language South African newspaper The Star newspaper called him one) – he tightened the grip of Apartheid (and was in charge during the Sharpeville Massacre) until he was assassinated by a communist agitator, and was succeeded by John Vorster, who very definitely was a Nazi, or at least he had been a leading member of the South African equivalent during the Second World War – and it was he who was in charge during the Soweto Uprising. This didn't stop a Boer called Eugene Terre'Blanche from setting up a military organisation and pressure group (the AWB) in the 1970s because he thought Vorster was too left-wing and pandering too much to the Blacks. Imagine, a Nazi being considered too liberal.*

*White South Africans were a very strange bunch.*

}

Rounding off the top ten is my seventh episode, on Sexuality While Travelling. I later used this episode as the basis of a presentation I gave to the LGBTQIA+ group of the organisation I now work at. I guess it felt important to me even then, given I came to the subject quite soon after I started, and, note, while I considered myself asexual at least, it was long before I realised anything about any other aspects of my identity, including gender. I probably could update this at some point - I mean I am writing blog posts about travelling as an enby, but it's a slow process. Anyway, here's an extract.

*{extract from Sexuality While Travelling pod:*

*Being asexual does change the way I travel a bit, compared to other people in my peer group. Well, maybe not now, but certainly in the past. The average mid-20something male from the post-industrial heartland of the UK may be tempted with the delights of Ibiza and Ayia Napa [I'm not saying Geordie Shore is representative of a certain demographic, but, well ...]; where did I go in my mid-20s? Morocco, China, and small-town USA. /me shrugs.*

*One bizarre side effect is that it makes it easier for me to chat to people in backpacker hostels, especially women, even if they don't realise it (and to be honest, if I were an early 20-something woman, I'd be somewhat fazed if a weird middle-aged bloke started talking to me). Obviously only if they speak to me first - regardless of sexuality, my introversion is by far and away the most important aspect of the way I travel.*

*Now, see, when I browse my travel twitter feed, it's notable not only just how many people identify as gay and lesbian, but also how much they take that aspect of themselves and make it a core part of their travel writing and blogging. It's not just "I've been to this place, oh by the way I'm gay", it is very much "Barcelona as a Gay Traveller", or "Things To Do In Berlin For Lesbians". They also commonly post about safety and politics: "How To Travel Safely As A Lesbian", "Places For LGBT Travellers To Avoid", "Things To Be Aware Of If You're Gay". There are even specific blog awards in the LGBT community, including things like 'best travel blog'.*

*Yet. While the community's acronym is never-ending, LGBTQIA+, most of the blogs, most of the community, is at the left hand side. Asexuality doesn't really sit well with the other identities. No-one really promotes asexuality as a concept, no-one really has 'Asexual Pride'. With regards to asexuality in the travel community, there are no awards for 'Best Asexual Travel Blog'. There is, as far as I can tell, no-one writing about "Safety Travelling As An Asexual", or "Best Places To Be Asexual". It's almost as if Asexuality doesn't exist as a separate entity, almost as if asexuals themselves don't matter.*

}

*{section separation jingle - my favourite episodes}*

V has asked me what my favourite episode is. I don't know for sure, but I'd say certainly high amongst them is my episode on Travel Privilege. It's one which, for me, had a combination of allowing me to get really deep into a subject, but also get some really useful and insightful contributions from my peers about their very different experiences. It's one of those episodes that takes me out of my quite privileged bubble and puts some very different voices and viewpoints centre stage.

*{extracts from Travel Privilege pod:*

*{A glance through my Twitter followers does reveal something definitely revealing. The majority of people I chat with are American, European, or Australian; people who hold pretty useful passports, who don't have too much hassle getting in to most countries, and where the biggest gripes around border controls tend to revolve around visa fees - 'oh this country is hideously expensive to get into - the visa costs £50'.*

*I mean, seriously. Firstly, we have economic privilege, that means that while £50 feels like a lot of money, if we're the sort of people who can afford to fly halfway round the world to take holiday snaps for Instagram, we're also the sort of people who can afford visa fees. That doesn't mean, by the way, I endorse the concept - I've been to enough countries to get a feel where that visa fee goes, and it's not always to the development of*

*the country, otherwise somewhere like Democratic Republic Of Congo would be one of the lushest and richest countries in the world – just that we're showing our privilege by complaining about it then paying it anyway, or by choosing to visit somewhere else instead. Because having choice is a privilege.*

*Secondly, of course, as others stated, there's a huge number of countries that Western travellers can visit without admin. It's not just the visa fee either; it's often the rest of the admin. I've baulked in the past at the criteria for getting a visa for Nigeria as a British citizen, which at the time included having to pay not only \$144 US Dollars for a single entry visa, but also providing evidence of a return ticket, proof of accommodation, including a letter from the accommodation confirming my stay (not just a booking receipt), a letter from my employer confirming I had a job and was planning to come back to it, and evidence of bank details proving I had the funds to stay in the country.*

*But this is quite normal for non-Western citizens. My Twitter friend Pinkzenjoy, who holds an Indian passport, tweeted:*

*"Whenever I fill up Visa forms and submit bank statements, tax returns, salary slips, air and hotel bookings with day to day itinerary, reminds me of the unfairness but makes me more determined. Those who write blogs about spontaneous travel have no clue what many go through."*

*She also highlights there one of the privileges of having a preferential passport, and something I take full advantage of in my travels; the ability to travel without a plan, very short-term decisions, waking up in the mornings not knowing which country I'll be in that night. If you hold a less powerful passport, that becomes impossible, partly because of the need to obtain visas but also because some visas will only be issued if you provide full details of your entire itinerary – where you'll be going, where you'll be staying, etc. This concept is completely alien to me, but is the reality for the majority of the world's population.*

---

*But there is another aspect to passport privilege that gets round some of these issues, that of dual nationality. Here's Tayo, The 5 to 9 Traveller, who talks about her privilege holding dual British-Nigerian identity.*

*{TAYO:*

*My travel privilege is so multi-layered, so ...I have a British passport. Automatically that sets me apart from being able to walk into, waltz into, countries without a second thought. I have no responsibilities so that's another level of privilege, you know, I'm not tied down by children, by a husband or partner, kids, bills, mortgages – I have my day-to-day bills but that is not stopping me from travelling the world*

*Another level of privilege – I have a job. I think a lot of people don't realise that even being economically able to travel is a level of privilege. Some people are struggling to put food on the table. I'm totally aware of the whole rhetoric of 'quit your job, travel the world'; that is just not feasible and actually just irks me no end.*

*Another level of privilege I suppose is, even just thinking about the fact I have two passports, so, I have a British passport and a Nigerian passport. Now I know my British passport is stronger but my Nigerian passport allows me to enter into African countries without an issue, so in that sense I may not get hassled as much in an African country, but in comparison to going to Eastern Europe is where I can get hassled, so I'm very aware of the nuances of different levels of travel privilege I have.}*

*It's noticeable that some people here in Britain have picked up on this in the years since Brexit, and it's interesting how many of them have discovered they have an Irish grandparent.*

*}*

Back in Spring 2021 I did two episodes on Influencer Responsibility and Integrity, These were on a topic that I'd wanted to do right from the very start of my podcast, but didn't quite have the words or knowledge to make it coherent, rather than just a malformed rant. One of them looked at integrity - what is an influencer, if people are hanging off our words does it matter what we say, and how it's important to be genuine with details of our experiences - and the other looked more at political responsibility - about our choice of destinations, about what we talk about when we visit a place, and about whether it makes a difference if we visit a country or place in our capacity as influences as opposed to private individuals.

I'd like to think I was quite neutral and well-rounded on the topic, especially given my position as a Privileged Queer. Anyway, have a listen for yourself.

{extracts from *Influencer Responsibility and Integrity* pods:

*Firstly though I just want to say something about the word 'influencer'. Many people really hate this word, for reasons varying from being tarred with the same brush as 'people who climb mountains in frilly dresses and fall off cliffs taking selfies', to concerns about how understanding of the word misrepresents what people actually do, to it just being a 'meaningless' word that doesn't mean anything. Is it merely another word for 'advertiser'? Does it mean everything you do is 'branded content'? Are you getting everything for free? Do you even believe in what you write or produce, or are you doing it just for the clicks?*

*In truth, we are all influencers. Every single one of us. If you're eating a biscuit at work and someone goes 'oh that looks nice, what is it?', you're an influencer. If someone says 'nice dress' and you go 'it has pocketsssssss', you're an influencer. If someone buys a book, a bag, a game, visits a museum, a city, a country, because of something you suggested or things you've said. If someone takes up a new hobby, or uses a certain activity provider, or changes the style of their fashion or their garden or their house, because of a recommendation you've made or even to copy something you'd done. If someone changes energy provider, internet hosting site, or supermarket because of you. You're an influencer. Everything you do and say is seen by your friends, by communities, by strangers, from conversations around a chiminea at dusk in someone's garden, to simply walking past someone and having them like your shirt enough to go quickly online and buy something similar for themselves. And every time someone makes an action, takes a decision to buy or do something, which they may not have done had they not seen what you've done and seen, then you are, directly or indirectly, consciously or accidentally, influencing them - you are an influencer.*

-----  
*If your entire travel blogger branding and content involves visiting and writing about, say, cute cafés, or quirky B&Bs, or country hiking, then the finer points of political ethics probably don't concern you. The difference, and the difficulty comes, when part of your blog niche, your brand image, edges towards words like 'ethical', or where your blog is openly political in nature. Hi, I'm The Barefoot Backpacker, an Asexual, Aromantic, Demiboy, who openly writes political statements, is a member of a political party, and who chooses destinations based on history and culture that have been largely driven by political events.*

*My podcast Episode 7 was all around Sexuality and Travel, and the concerns that people in the LGBTQIA+ community (hereafter referred to as the 'Rainbow People') have when they choose somewhere to travel, and why they/we might choose to go to a certain country over a certain other country. Being asexual puts me in less danger for my sexuality than being, say, Gay or, especially, Trans (I can certainly give the presentation and impression I'm a straight male, albeit a slightly quirky and off-kilter one), but being one of the Rainbow People makes me feel I should have a certain solidarity with the others and restrict my voyages away from places where they would be repressed, or at least made to feel unwelcome.*

*That said, my brand is strongly aligned to 'difficult' places, to going to destinations others may not want to, or even be able to, go. Remember 'I go to these places so you don't have to' also applies to people travelling vicariously through me, and, especially with a country like Russia, or even Uganda, where being a part of the Rainbow Community is not just illegal but also punishable by life imprisonment, my going there with a Queer bent, but also with the knowledge that I can probably travel there quite safely, means one might argue it's, rather than being a place I should avoid, in fact actually quite important that I go, so I can assess and feed back the situation to the rest of the community about what life is like there for Rainbow People, and show how it feels 'on the ground', speaking with people rather than just judging what the government says.*

}

Laura has told me one of her favourite episodes was a more recent one I did about Instagram v Reality, where I started by talking about the voyage of the pseudo-mythical Carthaginian explorer Hanno The Navigator. I mean, she did also say she'd've liked it better if the sound quality was better, and to be honest I didn't record it in my usual setting on my decent microphone with a duvet over my head, and one of my lessons learned is that I need to remember that sometimes quality does indeed trump output. I might re-record it. From The Vault (Nel's Version). Maybe that has a ring to it.



Anyway, it's actually an interesting episode because it allowed me to research something not many people knew about, while still combining it with my own observations and experiences. It's quite a rounded episode, for sure, and I'd say it proves that not only do none of us live in a bubble, but also the questions we ask of ourselves as travel bloggers and influencers are the same questions that have been present in this sphere for, well, millennia.

*{extract from Instagram v Reality Pod:*

*The problem with early writers in the Ancient World is partly 'how much is fact versus how much is fiction', but mainly 'it wasn't them whose writings are the ones that have survived'. Everyone is obviously aware of Odysseus, who famously took ten years to get home from the Trojan war back to Ithaca. He didn't write an account of that voyage; Homer did, and Homer was writing a couple of hundred years after Odysseus lived, if indeed he did live at all and wasn't just a figment of Homer's imagination. But even if he did exist, it is approximately 1,130km (700 miles) from Troy to Ithaca if you walk overland. On my Hike Across Great Britain I did that, pro rata, in 42 days. Including rest days. I have Questions. Not as many questions as how it took Moses 40 years to get from Egypt to a point between Amman and Jerusalem at the north end of the Dead Sea, given there was literally only one way you \*can\* go without going 'oh, there's the sea', \*and\* the Sinai Peninsula isn't very big, but it seems whenever there are Gods involved, time becomes nebulous.*

*Anyway. The only way it could possibly have taken Odysseus ten years to get from Troy to Ithaca is if he took a detour via Kiribati. And even then. I'm not calling The Odyssey a Travel Blog.*

----

*It may be a cliché, but the term 'Instagram versus Reality' is very much applicable when it comes to looking at a place, a society, and a past. Just as in the past people writing about their mates won't actively put themselves on the wrong side of history (as my French ex-Fiancee used to half-joke; 'most people joined the French Resistance in 1946'), so it is with travel bloggers today. Remember that every picture on every travel blog or Instagram feed, every video on YouTube and TikTok, has been created and edited in such a way to be the best representation of the reality, rather than the most accurate one. It's not 'lying', but it is promoting a particular view and representation, one which must be compared and contrasted with other sources. I do it myself; I'm not always barefoot but you'd never believe that from the selfies I take. This is on purpose; I have a brand image to cultivate!!*

*What I'm talking about here by the way is how a place is represented; I'm not talking about actual editing of pictures and videos to change the views. And while it feels a little cheating to digitally remove a person from the shot, I don't think that matters as much, since you can just wait for an empty space; it just might be that emptiness only happens at 3.57am and only the truly dedicated have time for that. And in any case, no picture or video is ever going to accurately replicate what a human sees, because technology and eyes work in different ways. The very act of taking a picture means what you end up with is an edited view of a place, that can't be seen in exactly the same way by humans, because the processes used by the camera will change the view, the light, the colours, the textures.*

*The best example of this is the Northern Lights, which look far better on camera than to the naked eye, not because of any jiggery-pokery on behalf of the photographer, but simply because of the way our brains and eyes work.*

*Unless you digitally change the image in such a way that the view represented is not actually possible, like, I don't know, removing an entire backdrop, then there's nothing inherently wrong with editing. Even making the sky purple, or, more prosaically, turning an image into black/white to emphasise things, that itself tells a story and could be argued to be 'artistic representation', as long as what the view is of, is possible. And anyway, it's clear that neither of those things \*are\* possible, so they're not something that ought to affect the way we see the photo in comparison with real life. This is Earth, not an exoplanet with different conditions. And even then, pictures of space are very likely to have been taken in black & white (with filters applied) and then coloured in post-processing, for all kinds of reasons but mostly to do with science. Mars is more of an orange than a red, and even that's only a few cm thick, and Venus is ... too dim at the surface to make out properly because of the clouds blocking the sun but if you could stand on it it'd probably look a bit brown-ish. And then you'd die. Because Venus is quite a hostile environment for life. As opposed to the UK. But that's a story for a different podcast.*

}

*{section separation jingle - episodes I'm proud of, for any reason}*

Are there any episodes I'm proud of? This is an interesting question, because there's an episode I really liked doing, despite the fact it was quite inconsequential and doesn't rank highly. The episode I did on The Wars Of The Roses was personally very interesting to me, partly because it allowed me to geek out about a subject close at heart to Teenage Me, but also because, from a technical point of view, it encouraged me to experiment with my audio editing software to create fancy effects. I had a short battle scene that I created in three tracks, combining clashing swords, cheering crowds, and a couple of specific effects. What it proved was that even someone with as little holistic 'vision' as me could create something quite effective.

*{extract from Wars of the Roses pod:*

*It was a sunny day towards the end of August (not long after my birthday); although dry and bright, between the two sets of troops was an area of boggy ground that would take a few centuries before it dried out. On one side, atop Ambion Hill, stood the army of Richard III. At the bottom, over the fields, stood the much smaller army of Henry Beaufort, made up in part of French mercenaries. With the higher ground and much larger army, there could only be one winner of this fight, right?*

*The joker in the pack (and not just because of his non-standard forename) was Thomas Stanley, 'King of Mann' and later Earl of Derby, traditionally one of the leading supporters of Richard III ... and stepfather of Henry Beaufort. With divided loyalties (and one of his sons held as a hostage by Richard to ensure his support), his fairly substantial force was parked up on one side of the battlefield, watching, waiting.*

*[battle scene noise]*

*In the event, his force wasn't needed. Innovative (Roman Army-esque) tactics from Henry's force, coupled with worry about Stanley's troupe, forced Richard's hand and he stormed over the boggy ground straight into Henry's bodyguard. His horse got stuck and he had to dismount, but still he kept fighting, wielding his sword like a possessed man on a mission. At one point he got close enough to kill Henry's standard-bearer, but ultimately his battle was, like his dad's, in vain - Henry's troupe was too strong and soon overpowered and killed Richard.*

*Ever since, there has been much dispute over where the battlefield was. On Ambion Hill, believed for a while to be where much of the battle took place, there is now a museum. Although reasonably small, it's a good combination of accessible and in-depth - using interactive tales of several of the types of people involved in the battle (including a representation of Thomas Stanley himself), it goes over the background to the battle from both sides, a brief overview of the order of battle itself, and then goes into a bit of detail about the long-term aftermath.*

*The museum also has a small arena where, on special occasions, they hold mediaeval tourneys and have falconry displays. They also offer guided walks around the general battlefield site - although archaeological research has finally proven that the site of Richard III's death now lies a mile or so away in a farmer's private field. It's only by going to sites like this that you get a scale of just how big a battlefield is - when looking on a plan it feels like it's only a hundred or so metres between the armies but sometimes it can be much more than that.*

}

Another pod I'm proud of, for different reasons, was one I did about Queerness in a variety of countries. This had been going down a whole rabbit hole of research, of endless PDFs and statistical analysis, to create a podcast episode that kind of resembled a university dissertation. This coming from someone who never graduated University, not even with a Bachelor's Degree, for reasons that surely are incredibly apparent. I'm quite capable of doing it, but only on my own terms, and it's very annoying that you can't do a Masters without first getting a Bachelors. Or at least I assume you can't; I've never actually looked into it. I'm not saying this podcast episode is in any way Masters quality, god no, I spent precisely two weeks on it; what I am saying is that it's about the length of a (admittedly short-end) Masters dissertation and this was a damn good start, something that would be really useful as a framework to build upon.

*{extract from Do You Have Pride in Your Country pod:*

*El Salvador is not a good place to be anything but a cis-hetero male. This is a country, remember, that jails women for miscarriages. It's predominantly a modern cultural thing, stemming mainly from religion, specifically the long-term Catholicism and upcoming Evangelicalism, neither of which are particularly open to new cultural ideas, including equality and freedoms of lifestyle - especially in the LGBT scene which they hypocritically view as 'displaying signs of immorality'. It being a country with a long recent history of both civil war and right-wing dictatorship hasn't helped, especially when funded by Republican USA Presidents (Nicaragua, so 'beloved' of Ronald Reagan, for instance, is 'just over there', and evidence of CIA activity in El Salvador is pretty clear). And of course Reagan loved the gays. Loved them so much he laughed. Often when they died. But this is not an American Politics podcast; go to NPR if you want those.*

*Bear in mind, by the way, in surveys conducted by the AmericasBarometer organisation, support for same-sex marriage in El Salvador was 10% in 2010, and by 2017 it had improved to ... 19%. In addition, and something visitors to the country may want to be aware of, a survey by SciELO Brazil in 2013 reported that over half of the population (62%) didn't accept the concept of LGBT in the first place, while a whopping 85% believed that, specifically relating to Transgender, it should not only be illegal but in fact be legal and acceptable to assault someone Transgender purely because of their Transgenderism.*

*To give you an idea on how bad LGBTQIA+ people are treated, the Human Rights Watch point out that in September 2020, a non-binary Salvadorean was granted asylum because, and I quote, "their gender expression exposed them to police violence and daily abuse and degradation.". The country which granted their asylum? That bastion of human rights and home to the safe right of gender expression ... the UK. Good God! If the UK can be seen as a 'safe-haven' for enbies, can you imagine what El Salvador is like for people like me?*

*It's a shame really, because with my travel blogger hat on, it is exactly the place for someone like me. But I've talked about this sort of dichotomy before, in my pods on travel influencers.*

}

A third episode I'm proud of, from a research and development point of view, was the one I did about cafes in Glasgow. This was when I embraced the concept of AI head-on, and made a point of seeing what AI would make of the task of creating a podcast about, and I quote, "cute cafes in Glasgow", then going to all of them and seeing if AI was right.

Obviously by its very nature, it's one of my most time-specific podcasts, and if I repeated the exercise now, the results might well be very different. But it was something I thought it was important to do, given that many of my travel blogger peers are going to be very affected by the rise of AI in creating such posts, and it also exposed me to what is potentially The Future Of Blogging.

I'm unconvinced AI will ever replace me as a travel podcaster, if only because no-one in their right mind would actively programme an AI to have ADHD. I mean, you could, but honestly, why would you?!

{extract from *Glasgow Cafe AI* pod:

*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."*

*Me: 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.*

---

*{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*

*Me: 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 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 why I don't make listicles, by the way. Far too much admin to upkeep.*

*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, so it's kind of repeating old data and repeating old information.*

*}*

*{section separation jingle - any other facts and figures?}*

As a data analyst, I surprisingly don't really pay attention to my podcast stats as much as perhaps you'd imagine. But over the course of the 100-ish episodes I've published, there's a few interesting facts and figures you might be interested to know:

Between 70% and 75% of my contributors (and contributions) have been from women. This is partly reflective of my friend base, but also partly because if you think about my pool of potential contributors, this is mostly a travel podcast and the majority of travel bloggers, at least active ones, are either female, or they're a couple with at least one female party in them. There are a variety of reasons why this might be so, and at some point I'll do an episode that looks into that.

48.5%, or just less than half, of my downloads have come from people believed to be in the USA. This feels slightly weird for someone who's British, based in the UK, talks about the UK a lot, and has done many destination episodes about places in the UK. Obviously the USA has more people than anywhere else high on my 'most downloads' list, and I'm not expecting many downloads from Indonesia (95, apparently), but I'd be interested to know how you, as an American, find quite UK-centric vibes?

19.1% of my audience is British, which, fair; you're my second largest audience, and rounding off the top four, you may be unsurprised to know, are Australia and Canada. The rest of my most avid audience are mostly Western European, though New Zealand, South Korea, and India should get honourable mentions. Obviously the high proportion of Europeans might explain the popularity of some of my destination and travel guidance type pods, but also suggests that more European content might well be in order. Hmmm, European Microstates.

More of you listen to me through Apple than anywhere else (46.1%), with Spotify coming in a distant second (9%). However my podcast stats show over 140 different methods/places people have downloaded me through, many of which I have never heard of. The Internet is a marvellous world-wide tool with so many different facets, and it's great we're not all doing things the same way. A literal shoutout by the way to the small number of people who have downloaded me through Echo and Alexa. The idea that people are going 'Alexa, play the latest podcast episode from Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure' actually quite thrills me, so cheers for that.

Podcast stats aren't anywhere near as informative as, say, Google Analytics stats are for websites, or even the similar YouTube stats for video, and kind of understandably so as all I know are downloads; once it's on your device and offline there's no way of tracking anything, and there's no google-backed cookies to pull extra info from, so there's a whole welter of information I don't know. Like, I have no idea about demographic stats; I don't know what age range you all fall into, I don't know what the internet thinks your sex and gender are, I also don't know when you listen, how long you listen for, what devices you listen on outside of device-specific download applications, and I certainly don't know how you listen - at home, in bed, while cooking, while eating, or while travelling, on a commute, on a country walk, during exercise, or at work. But whoever you are, and wherever you are, I appreciate you all. Thank you. You are all starlets.

*{end pod jingle}*

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me again next time when I talk about nostalgia, I know this because I actually wrote it before I wrote this pod. So there. Until then, have a listen to some of my older episodes, and remember, 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.}*

Oh, I never do that. Actually that's one of the problems with podcast stats I forgot to mention; Over 140 different ways of listening to a pod and they all have their own comments sections, and there's nothing (that doesn't cost a-plenty) that searches them all and combines them in one place. I never read my comments, no idea if you've left me any, and even if I were to write a comment on the pod app I use (Castbox, for the record), I doubt any of the podcasts would ever read it.

*{Outro voiceover continues:*

*Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure was written, presented, edited, and produced in the Glasgow studio by The Barefoot Backpacker.}*

I should probably update that. I haven't lived in Glasgow for a year.

*{Outro voiceover continues:*

*The theme music is "Walking Barefoot On Grass (Bonus)" by Kai Engel, which is available via the Free Music Archive, and used under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.*

*Previous episodes are available on your podcast service of choice, and show-notes are available on my website: [barefoot-backpacker.com](http://barefoot-backpacker.com). If you want to contact me, tweet me @rtwbarefoot, e-mail me at [info@barefoot-backpacker.com](mailto:info@barefoot-backpacker.com), or look for me on Instagram, Discord, YouTube, or Facebook.*

*Don't forget to sign up for my newsletter, and if you really like what I do, you can slip me the cost of a beer through my Patreon, in return for access to rare extra content.}*

Honestly, I ought to promote some of this more. I mean, I did stop advertising my Facebook Group because I

don't get along with Facebook as a Social Media platform, but my newsletter exists and I really ought to advertise it more, and I absolutely need to make more of my Patreon, I probably need inspiration for what to do with it.

V? Help?

Oh wait, V doesn't listen to my pod.

*{Outro voiceover continues:  
Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}*

Is this too long? Does it matter, as you'll've all probably quit by this point anyway. But I wouldn't know that cos my stats can't go into that level of detail.

*{Rest of Outro jingle}*

... is anyone still listening?

No?

Hi, I'm Nel, I'm a Trans Demigirl travel blogger, my pronouns are they/she and I vibe far better in a dress and breasts than I do in trousers with a cock.

Still AroAce though.

And still mostly barefoot.