

Transcript of Podcast 093 : Everywhere Is Interesting

{INTRO:

AMANDA: So I love this idea of everywhere being interesting for someone, for some kind of particular niche. And I have lots of examples of my own travel experiences.

}

{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 'whys' behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

Despite my better efforts, this pod will once again likely be slightly later than originally planned. Theoretically my pods come out on Thursday morning my time. That's an intention rather than a known fact. I wonder how often in my 100+ episodes I've actually missed that day. You'd have thought the data analyst in me would plot that. It does not.

Two podcasts ago I was late because I was waiting on a contribution. My last podcast was late because, oh god how do I say this, oh let's be honest, my last podcast was late because for half the week I genuinely forget I had a podcast and that I needed to record it. I suspect this tells you all you need to know about my mindset.

However It's partly explained by the fact I was busy earlier this week, and in fact away from home for two non-consecutive nights. Sunday night I was in Manchester, and given that I no longer live in Salford and the fact transport isn't as efficient as it should be to get there at the moment due to a bridge replacement, I decided to overnight in the city. Which felt really weird to do, not least because I was in a hotel I'd pass the signs for on my way to and from work every day. I was there for an event at the Queer Lit / Social Refuge Queer bookshop and cafe - a bunch of people reading extracts from their old teenage diaries, and revelling in with the cringe, including one person who read some of their 'Glee' fanfic, opening with something along the lines of 'yeh, I'm kind of embarrassed about this myself'. The people who ran the event - called Queer Diary, directly inspired by the original 'Dear Diary' concept - are based in London and this was their first time holding it in The North. It was cool to go back to Queer Lit actually; they hadn't seen me for a while and wondered how I was, but when I told them I lived near Hebden Bridge, they were really stoked. It's that sort of place.

Three days later I was down in London myself, for an evening at the Royal Geographical Society, quite a highbrow place for the likes of me, but it was for something very on-brand. It was the celebration of 50 years of Bradt Guides, which I mentioned in my last pod. It was pretty cool, and definitely more people there than I expected. The bulk of the evening was a panel discussion with Hilary Bradt (who founded the company all those years ago), travel writer Colin Thubron, and travel presenter and documentary maker Nicholas Crane (who I like to think of as 'that chap from Coast but not the one who went a bit weird'. It was interesting to hear their opinions on solo travel, how much travel had changed, and what their experiences have been. There was also a charity auction of things Bradt-related to raise money for an organisation in Madagascar that's close to Hilary's heart; they raised over £3,000, helped by such oddities as a few original 1970s guidebooks to the Americas, a tour to Madagascar, and, uhm, an insect kept secure in a condom, said to be packaged by Hilary herself on the trip to Madagascar that started it all. Bradt Guides are nothing if not quirky.

I've otherwise been quite active going out and doing walks and jogs. Indeed I have now done both of my local parkruns. The parkrun in Halifax is ... it's not in the most convenient place for anyone unless you live north of the town, and the walk in from the town centre's bus station isn't exactly pretty, but it's not a bad little course. It's three and a half laps of a park and the route ... it's described as 'undulating' but I'm not sure that's quite right? There's very little of it that's flat, but the inclines and declines aren't sharp or steep, it's all quite gentle and gradual. It's also in quite a tree-heavy park so it always feels quite, well, interesting, aesthetically, rather than just

flat green lawn. The only downside is the long drag downhill that's basically a stone and gravel path, which is awkward when you're wearing minimalist running shoes and feel like you're going to trip over every little stone block. The other local course is Centre Vale, in Todmorden, which is in more of an open-plan park, but with two shortish sections through woodland. Both sections are quite rough ground, and the latter also involves a bit of a staggered short steep section up and then a run down a very stony bank. It's a more convenient parkrun to reach, although the bus times are such that I have to lurk around a bit before the start. Neither of them are terribly over-populated, so they don't feel congested, which is nice. To be honest I'll probably bounce between the two of them, rather than making one my 'go-to' course of choice, which is unusual for me.

Finally, away from running, I've written a whole host of blog posts. I'd been meaning to write them for a while, and then suddenly had the motivation to do so (and I need a lot of motivation to edit pictures and then write alt text for them, let me tell you!). They're all about pubs in the Greater Manchester area, well, Stalybridge, Salford, and the city centre of Manchester, but there's quite a few of them (and more to come). So, quite niche, but hopefully someone will find them useful. Or interesting.

Because everywhere is interesting, right?

{section separation jingle}

The second podcast episode I ever did was about 'Hometown Travel', so that whole idea has always been one that's important to me, and to my travel style. And while there's by definition going to be a large overlap between the two topics (if you're going to explore your hometown, you're going to find out why it's interesting, and vice versa of course; if you find out why your hometown is interesting, then you're more likely to want to explore it), I realised I'd never done a podcast specifically on the concept of 'Everywhere Is Interesting'.

I say it a lot, but what do I actually mean by saying 'Everywhere Is Interesting'? Well, in the vaguest sense it's the idea that people live everywhere, and most of the places people live aren't places that are well known. Like, there are 67 million people in the UK, the vast majority of whom live in a place you've never heard of, especially if you look at a neighbourhood level rather than just at a 'nearest major urban area' level. Like, nearly 9 million people live in London, the vast majority of whom in boroughs you've never been to and know nothing about. I did three entire podcasts on why boroughs like Croydon, Hounslow, and Redbridge are Interesting, and if you think Romford is obscure, what about places like Southampton, Leicester, and Bradford. Big cities in the UK that few people talk about, never mind much smaller places that occasionally make the news (usually the sports news) like Southport, like Cinderford, like Hebden Bridge. All places chosen entirely not at random and which have been mentioned in previous podcasts. Very few people in the UK actively live *in*, and by *in* I mean, the nearest significant place, somewhere touristy, somewhere well-known, and yet, and yet, it might be that people come across the world to visit something close to even where you live. But I mentioned that point in that very second podcast on Hometown Travel.

Of course, what makes a place 'interesting' is very personal, or at least subjective, and I'll come on to a couple of different ideas in a moment. But one of them that isn't often defined with the word 'interesting', and yet is still a 'draw' for people, is scenery. And this is a very subjective point, depending on your background, upbringing, and reference points. I happen to find the Calder Valley quite pretty, and love to go hiking around parts of the Peak District (although admittedly, not the parts of the Peak District that look like the Calder Valley, but rather the parts that are much bleaker, much more open, and much more rockier. Give me Stanage Edge over Dovedale any day). My flatmate ... does not. This is because she's American and places like Colorado and Utah and Arizona are Right There, just down the road. A very long road from Minnesota, admittedly, and one that might go through Nebraska, a place that, I mean, the impression I get of it is ... it exists, and my only reference point is Bruce Springsteen named an album after it. One of his most depressing albums. Which feels quite apt. It's exactly the sort of place you'd expect me to podcast about, but I've never been there. I have been to Iowa, but don't get any ideas.

But as for those more notable places: I've never been to Yellowstone, I've never been to Bryce or Zion, I've never been to Glacier, mainly because I can't drive, but I have been to the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Mainly because I was passing by Flagstaff with a scheduled overnight stop, and it felt weird not to? Anyway I wasn't expecting much from somewhere so well-known and talked about, I imagined it would be just, you know, a hole in the ground, I'd look at it and go 'welp, that's nice' and then lurk around waiting for the bus back to Flagstaff. Dear listener, it was Not Like That At All. I walked up to it. I peered over the edge. And I stood. And looked. For a surprising amount of time. And then I walked along the rim for a mile or two, away from the crowds, along a path with distances represented by periods of geological time. And I stood some more. And I was

quiet. And I marvelled at the world. The Grand Canyon is indeed a hole in the ground, but that's a bit like saying Mount Everest is a pointy rock.

I still maintain Stonehenge is just a pile of stones in a field though. There's lots of similar stones in similar fields right across the west coasts of Europe, and most of them don't cost £17 for the privilege of looking at from a distance. They're not even original, but that's a whole 'nother podcast about what history actually is and how best to represent it. And that's a hornet's nest I've not yet been willing to poke.

{section separation jingle}

So what makes a place 'interesting'? Or rather, given any random place in the world, what can make you 'key in' to that location over and above any other. One important aspect is that there's something about that place that you can connect with through a theme you like, or a hobby or interest you have, or even just that someone you admire has a connection to it.

One example of this comes from Amanda Kendle, host of the Thoughtful Travel Podcast and someone who appears regularly on this pod because I know she'll do anything for me if I flutter my eyelids in just the right way. Well, anything podcast-related, anyway.

{AMANDA: When I was in my 20s, my boyfriend at the time was learning Kendo while we lived in Japan. Kendo is the martial art. It kind of uses a bamboo sword and apparently it was the basis of the fighting moves in the Star Wars movies. So he was learning Kendo and continued to practice Kendo as we moved around the world. So we would often end up travelling to random places for Kendo tournaments. Like once we were living in Slovakia but we travelled to suburban Prague so he could take part in a Kendo tournament and it was such a cool way to travel. You meet people from, well in that case it was all over Europe but they had a common interest and they were always really nice and interesting people and we weren't like in the city centre of Prague but out in the suburbs of Prague got more of an idea of how a regular person in Prague lives.}

I've spoken in a previous podcast about travelling for sporting events, and it's a really common thing to do. And often those contests or matches aren't taking place in the touristic centre of a well-visited city, but either in the less-attested suburbs, or in a smaller town that otherwise wouldn't be on someone's radar. A place might be interesting to you, personally, or to you, as a subculture, because of a team, or an event, that's notable or important, either for their own sakes (say, a particularly interesting or famous Parkrun) or more generically (Manchester United Football Club is in a partly-residential, partly post-industrial area of northern Trafford some distance from anywhere tourists would otherwise be seen, and yet people visit regularly from all over the world with a common interest, not just to watch a match but to visit the stadium for its own sake because the club and the ground themselves are world-famous. Most notable thing in Trafford Borough, if we're being honest.).

A lot of places inspire people to visit for similar reasons. Think of people who do tours of vineyards across the world - indeed I visited a few on a self-driving tour with a travel twitter friend in Canada, around Niagara. And as you'll hear in a future podcast, when I was younger I regularly went on family holidays to Scotland that invariably involved visits to whisky distilleries in otherwise un-notable small villages the road bypasses on the way to somewhere less remote. There are some people who make it their life goal to visit every single one.

Or people want to follow in the footsteps of some historical voyage or person. When I was in London I passed by a plaque in Kensington, at the entrance to Holland Park, that commemorates the route taken by Lieutenant Lapenotiere giving details of the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 to the Royal Admiralty (because, you know, mobile phone reception's pretty bad in the Atlantic Ocean). 271 miles in 38 hours, and there's 39 plaques, so roughly one an hour with one at either end. The route is now designated 'The Trafalgar Way', and people follow in his horse-steps. Obviously not all of these plaques are in places of significance, but to an aficionado of Napoleonic-era warfare, every one of them makes that location 'interesting'.

In Bolivia you can do tours of the Vallegrande area in the Santa Cruz Province, in the south-centre of the country. That part of Bolivia isn't the most scenic - you're headed towards the chaco, the flat, dry, plains that dominate western Paraguay and northern Argentina and make none of the three the most touristed parts of that country (not that Paraguay is that touristy anyway) - but in Bolivia this is the site of the last days of Che Guevara. In his youth he was a travel blogger himself of some renown, and people still follow the routes of his Motorcycle Diaries. He met his end in the small village of La Higuera, which Wikipedia tells me has a population of 119. To connect places related to his activities in Bolivia and the end of his life, the local

Guarani assembly has set up the Ruta del Che. It's one of the reasons Bolivia has been high on my list to visit since 2012; it's not the most interesting part of the country but its cultural resonance makes it interesting to someone like me.

On a different note entirely, so to speak, here's my friend Claire, who runs a part-time-travel blog at Curious Claire. I have never asked her what she is curious about.

{CLAIRE: So boyfriend is a very big Bruce Springsteen fan. I think he's actually playing some in the other room right now. And was it last year or maybe the year before now, God, how time goes. So recently, we did a month long trip around the States. And he wanted to go to New Jersey for Bruce Springsteen. And I like Bruce don't get me wrong. We've seen him in concert twice. I'm just not a huge fan like he is. So while we were there, we had to do the tour of Asbury Park. And it was awesome. Like we got to see some important sites, see some places he played. And actually, Stone Pony, which is, you know, quite famous. We went in there, we went to the outside during the tour. And then afterwards, we went back. And they had a few local bands play and saw actually a really good women's heavy metal band play and saw quite a few things. But that was the one that stood out. That was awesome.

So there are ways to see bands without seeing, you know, huge artists. And you can just go and appreciate where they grew up, where they got their inspiration, where songs came from were written.}

As I said in my last episode, there are those people who feel that music is a great way to be transported into a different culture and lifestyle. But it's also a way to get deep inside the soul of a particular town or place, no matter where in the world it is. Claire talks there about Bruce Springsteen, who famously grew up in the New Jersey town of Asbury Park. And I don't know about you, but I would never have heard of Asbury Park, would never have known anything about it, if it weren't for him.

But Bruce Springsteen is an important character outwith just the place he grew up in. Many of his songs are about not just the place, but the lifestyle, the culture, the objects he was surrounded by. So when you listen to lyrics like "they'll meet near that giant Exxon sign that brings this fair city light", note that that giant Exxon sign really existed - not *just* that, as a petroleum company would have advertised a lot anyway (and in 60s and 70s America, a lot of that was in vibrant neon, because it's cool and bright), but in fact there was a huge Exxon sign in Asbury Park, near the Flamingo Motel ("well the maximum lawmen run down Flamingo, chasing the rat and the barefoot girl"). It was notable for its size and location, and if it still existed now you know it'd be a draw for Springsteen fans. People like Springsteen, they make a place come alive with their words, they make a place feel 'real'. Because it is real. And you can retrace their steps, see for yourself the places they wrote about, that gave you a picture in your mind that you can see. As opposed I guess to the prog-rock bands of the 1970s that certainly painted pictures in your mind with their words, but if you ever found yourself visiting those places for real, I would query exactly what the last thing you put between your lips was, and whether it was in any way legal.

But on a more holistic level, what people like Springsteen, like John Mellencamp, like Bon Jovi, yes, them, but also here in the UK, people like Arctic Monkeys and Pulp (both of whom rarely pass up an opportunity to name-check suburbs of Sheffield if they can), or someone like Paul Weller, they sing about, they tell their stories about, places they know very well but yet which aren't necessarily well-visited by tourists and travel bloggers. Places where real people live, places which exist for a reason outside the usual array of tourist attractions. Now, granted, they're not always positive depictions of a place (think 'Well, we're waiting here in Allentown, for the Pennsylvania we never found' by Billy Joel, or 'The day dies down not a moment too soon under the Northenden afternoon' by Manchester indie band Doves; Northenden being a suburb of southern Manchester), and to be honest they're not always positive places in the first place (you'll recall John Cooper Clarke extolling the, uhm, 'delights' of Salford in my last episode) - it's a lot easier to write a song about urban decay and betrayal than it is to write a song about somewhere fabulous, at least not without sounding either slightly satirical - in the case of Style Council's 'Come To Milton Keynes', purposely so - or, more usually, very cheesy) but the very fact somewhere has been written about means it becomes in the public sphere, it becomes 'known', and there are people who then listen and go 'oh this place was mentioned in a song, that makes it interesting'.

The same is true to an extent about books and movies. I don't mean 'where something was filmed'; I'll come onto that later. Rather, I mean, 'where something was set'. Obviously there's overlap where the place in question is accessible (classic 90s movie 'The Full Monty' was filmed where it was set, to the extent one of the notable locations was a Victorian-era school-type building which was later used as a community centre. I went

to a peer rope workshop inside it once), but more often than not it's purely a representation, but that doesn't so much apply to books. So, for example, there's a town in the NE of England called Saltburn. Not that one. This one is a seaside resort with a beach, some lovely Victorian-era buildings, and a notable funicular railway (officially a water-balance cliff funicular, which seems very specific), the oldest in the UK and one of the oldest in the world (dating from the mid 1880s). I had some sausage and chips on the beach. It was glorious. But the only reason I went there was because it was the setting in a novel by Freya North (Secrets), that I read when I was going through my chick-lit phase a few years either side of 2010. I liked the book enough and was intrigued enough by the way she described the town that I felt inspired to visit - plus of course it meant I had a reason to visit another admin area of the UK (Redcar & Cleveland) that I'd never been to and otherwise never would have. The denouement of the book takes place at the Tees Transporter Bridge in Middlesbrough. When I said to my then work colleagues I was going on holiday to Middlesbrough I got derided with an 'even for you, that's weird', but, honestly, it's an interesting place both culturally and historically, including colonialism, railways, and dystopian sci-fi movies from the early 1980s. But for the purposes of this podcast, that book was the first time I'd heard of the Transporter Bridge. Turns out, it's Grade II* Listed, and the longest existing Transporter Bridge in the world. It was also the first time I'd heard of a Transporter Bridge, let's be honest. It's about 50m tall, 260m long, built in 1911, and an example of something very rare - less than 30 in the entire world were ever built. It's a huge movable bridge, vehicles (yes, it's a roadbridge!) are carried across the span (usually water) in what amount to cabins, hung from a solid rail above, like a kind of gondola. For my US audience, only three were ever built in the entire country, two of them have been demolished and the third has been converted into an almost-equally-unusual lift bridge. This is in the highly on-brand town of Duluth, in Minnesota, a place not on people's tourist radar unless they're interested in industrial history (it's a blue-collar port city), metrological quirks (it's the coldest significant city in the lower 48 states, on average), or music (I mean, Bob Dylan isn't exactly small-fry). I'm sure Duluth deserves a specific podcast episode as it's very much a place that fits my vibe, and I even have a brochure extolling its virtues from a couple of World Travel Markets ago, but it's unlikely I'll visit given where it is. I wonder if I know anyone who's been there. *{pause}* Yes that's obviously a subtweet but Someone fell asleep while listening to my last episode so I'm seeing if she stays awake long enough this time to comment.

Anyway.

Another example of a place unexpectedly thrust into pop-culture is much more personal to me, in a way. At the time of podding there's a second series of a TV drama called 'Sherwood' being aired. The series was written about the small town of Kirkby-in-Ashfield - specifically the area of Annesley Woodhouse and/or Nuncargate, which I'd walk through on a near-daily basis to get to and from the office I worked in. Long-time listeners to this podcast will know I mention Kirby-in-Ashfield a lot, and will equally know it's very definitely not a place that'll be on anybody's tourist radar or bucket list. Unless you're fond of cricket, I guess, as it holds, I believe, the only statue of Australian legend Don Bradman outside of Australia, facing a delivery from hyper-local bowler Harold Larwood. It's niche, I'll grant you, but if you're a big cricket fan, especially cricketing history (the 1932-33 Australia v England 'Ashes' series the statues represent is one of the most notorious in cricketing history, they even made a TV drama series about it in the 80s, just look up 'Bodyline' and you'll get the gist), then it's definitely going to be a place that's on your list to visit.

But places associated with famous people cover a wide variety of concepts, both ancient and modern. Here's Amanda again, talking about something more literary than sporting.

{AMANDA: Last year, my journalist friend and I, as a podcaster, were invited to do a self-guided walk with Walk Japan. And they said, yeah, just pick from any one of our walks. There were dozens of different walks. But so we both had a look independently. And both being writers and lovers of writing and literature, we were both most keen on following the Basho Trail, which is basically a walk which followed a pilgrimage from that Haiku poet Matsuo Basho did about 300 years ago. And so we took this walk. It was a five-day walk. And it included visiting two museums dedicated to him, this Haiku poet. We constantly came up with our own Haiku as we walked. We got photographs with the multiple Basho statues. We just loved all of it. It was in like a niche place as well. It was in a part of Japan that's not super well known or visited by many non-Japanese tourists in the Tohoku region, so the northern part of the island of Honshu, just a few hours north of Tokyo, but not as far as Hokkaido, starting from Sendai and going into the mountains. So it was Basho themed, Haiku themed the whole way, and it was absolutely wonderful.}

And similarly, the area just south-west of Kirkby-in-Ashfield is notable for being the setting for many of the novels by D H Lawrence, who lived in Eastwood and where there is a trail dedicated to him. There is also a museum in the house he was born in that goes into detail about him, his works, and his times. Many places featured in his novels are based on places that really exist in the area. D H Lawrence, in case you're not

familiar, wrote novels like 'Lady Chatterley's Lover', the subject of an obscenity trial in 1960 that resulted in a legally much more permissive society. Lawrence would have approved, had he not died thirty years previously of Tuberculosis. One of my old school friends described his work with the pithy: "This book has a very innocent title but it's obviously all about sex". I've never read one. Obviously.

We need not talk much about the Kirkby-in-Ashfield area's most famous literary figure; I'm sure people do come and visit Newstead Abbey (Lord Byron's manor house -lost in a gambling game) for the man himself, but aside from that connection, and the family grave in Hucknall (more notable for being the last resting place of his daughter, Ada Lovelace, the first computer programmer), there's not a lot there to cater for his fans. Not even a swimming pool. He's no Harold Holt.

So, let's fast forward to three hundred takeout library books later. Just south of Manchester is the small town of Holmes Chapel. It's a relatively well-to-do place in Cheshire, of the kind mostly associated with footballers, Tory MPs, and other people with large enough disposable incomes to make the area a little 'exclusive'. And yet it's on many a Millennial's hit list because it's the home town of global musical sensation Harry Styles. There are tours you can go on that take you around all the sites in the town connected with him, that he mentioned in interviews, that are just places people know he hung out in, even down to places he worked and where he had his first kiss. Now, that might sound quite niche, but remember, the concept of 'Everywhere Is Interesting' is by definition 'niche'. If you're passionate enough about something, or someone, then that place is by definition going to be interesting to you. Think about how places market themselves. Here in the UK we have Haworth, a pretty, if quite small, village, that would be kinda cute even without the 'this is the home of the Brontë sisters' vibe that's very strongly marketed. Parts of the Lake District are 'this is where Beatrix Potter talked about'. We have railway lines literally branded 'Tarka Line' (Devon, after the tales of Tarka the Otter), 'Mayflower Line' (Essex, as it goes to Harwich, where that ship was apparently built), and 'Robin Hood Line' (self-explanatory, runs from Nottingham to Worksop via Kirkby-in-Ashfield, so obviously I'm going to mention it). While 'Everywhere Is Interesting' might sometimes sound like me clutching at straws trying to find a justification for visiting a place you'll never have heard of, in essence it's a fundamental policy of tourist board advertising. Everywhere wants the tourist dollar, so everywhere looks hard to find out how to to get it, how to 'key in' to what people might be interested in.

Of course it helps to have an external 'boost', as we'll now see.

{separation section jingle}

So. Related, but also very different, is the concept of visiting a place because it was actively seen in a piece of media, like a film, or a TV series, or music video. People will see a place that's the background for a scene, or even the full entire setting, and go 'you know, that looks quite cool, I want to visit there'.

Now, there's a caveat to bring in from the start, and that's in more modern media many places are rendered through CGI rather than being an accurate and absolute portrayal of a real place. This will irk no end of people who want to, say, find that exact location in Scotland where this particular shot in one of the Harry Potter movies was filmed. It wasn't. And it doesn't look like that anyway.

But for the most part, and certainly for iconic spots in movie and TV history, there are plenty of places that were used 'as is', and the fact things were filmed there is something that brings in the tourists. Before I get onto details, I want to bring in a contribution from someone for whom this is their 'bread and butter', so to speak. One of my travel blogger buddies is Rebecca, who blogs at AlmostGinger dot com. Her niche is visiting and writing about places that have been used in films and videos, and she recorded a contribution for me that talks about it in much more detail.

{REBECCA: Hello, this is Rebecca and as I like to say, I'm the human under the hair behind the blog AlmostGinger.com. So it's a film tourism blog and I've been running it for about ten years now and I mostly write filming location guides on there. So that means places that have appeared in film or TV shows. I think I became interested in visiting filming locations long before I realised I was. I remember I was fourteen years old and I was on a family holiday to London. I made my parents' traipse across the city at least a couple of hours looking for the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. I think that's where it was because it was in the classic 2001 Mary Kate and Ashley film, Winning London. All of my millennial Mary Kate and Ashley lovers will be nodding along. Yes, we loved their travel films.

The first film and locations guide I wrote wasn't until 2016, so after I've been running my blog for about two

years and that's because again, I was with my mum and we were going on a Game of Thrones filming locations tour in Northern Ireland, so I thought may as well write about it. And then later that year I was in Amsterdam for the documentary film festival and I thought, hey, what filming locations are here? So I visited the locations from the Weepie 2014 hit The Fault in Our Stars and I did actually quite enjoy visiting the famous bench on the canal and then a couple of months later, planned a trip to Paris, which is an incredibly prolific cinematic city and making a special effort to visit and write about the filming locations just kind of made sense and it all snowballed from there really.

I don't have to love a film or TV show to want to visit the locations. Just as a recent example, I visited some of the beautiful filming locations from 2007's PS I Love You, which is set in the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland, but I do not think it's a very good film. So I do prefer visiting filming locations of movies I like, but it does help if it's already a particularly interesting, beautiful or notable place, even if I don't love the film. I do think that a place appearing in a movie or a TV show gives it another layer of notability, but I think it's one of those beauties in the eye of the beholder situations, whether you think a place is interesting because it's been on film is definitely up for debate.}

We'll hear more from Rebecca shortly, but I want to interject here with a few observations. I mean, you may be unsurprised to know I have, to all intents and purposes, never seen an episode of Game Of Thrones. That's not entirely true; in a backpacker hostel in Fremantle, the one that didn't have WiFi for 'oh there's free WiFi across the city, we don't need it in the hostel, and anyway, it's a hostel, you should be talking to people anyway' mindset, the same hostel where my room-mates were kicked out having banged on the door for about half an hour at 4am because they were too drunk and drugged out on literal illegal substances (not the prog-rock kind), it was an interesting stay, for sure, but anyway, in that hostel, I was in the common room and someone put on an episode from series two, all I recall about it is someone had their head chopped off in an execution event, and honestly that doesn't pinpoint the series never mind the episode, but to all intents and purposes I'm not the target market for Game Of Thrones tourism. I've been to two related sites though; you may recall my podcast about Northern Ireland in the Spring of 2022 where I met up with my travel blogger friend Clazz and her partner and we road-tripped the coast, the Giants Causeway, the Game Of Thrones pubs with genuine iron doors and replica thrones, where we had 50mph gusts and lots of rain. I just liked the vibe. Did I sit in the iron throne? Maybe. There is no evidence of it. The other was Dubrovnik, because in 2019 I backpacked along the Balkan coast from Slovenia to Greece and it was a convenient stopover point. In all fairness, Game Of Thrones didn't make Dubrovnik famous. When I was a single-figure-aged kid, I had a passion for jigsaw puzzles, and especially for what were marketed as 'jig-maps', These were jigsaws in the overall shape of a country or a continent, and everywhere on the map was represented by a concept. I had one of Europe and that part of the Balkans was a drawing of the city buildings of Dubrovnik - even in the dark days of the Cold War, the city was marketed as a place with beautiful old buildings in a stunning location; indeed its vibe was why Game Of Thrones used it as a film location, rather than the other way round. It had always been a popular place for tourists, just that Game Of Thrones amplified it and blew it out the water. We'll come onto that later, but TL;DR it was a place I'd always known about and was on my radar long before half the people involved in Game Of Thrones were born.

That's not to say I'm immune to the draw of places I've seen in pop-culture, just that the pop-culture I've seen is quite limited in scope. I will admit I do have a particular fascination for, amongst other things, music videos; it's mildly disappointing to find out that impressive scenery, barren rocky roads, and the like, were actually filmed in Spain (Almeria and Majorca) rather than, you know, Scotland (Stone Roses (Fool's Gold) and Deacon Blue (Only Tender Love), I'm looking specifically at you here). Although I will give kudos to the early 90s music video to 'This Is How It Feels' by Inspiral Carpets, an indie band from Oldham whose budget evidently got them only as far as a bus ticket to the Peak District, where they filmed the video of them playing in the wild moorlands. Wearing anoraks. Because it was raining. The drummer, Craig Gill, looks *incredibly* unimpressed with it all.

But I'm always intrigued with music videos, with where they were filmed. I always wanted to visit the main street in Hoxton, in London, and walk the steps that Richard Ashcroft did in the video to 'Bitter Sweet Symphony'. Though without the social anxiety it would involve to replicate.

On a different tack, one of the villages near where I live now, Luddenden, was the filming location for early 80s UK sitcom 'In Loving Memory', which, I mean, it was an early 80s UK sitcom so even my uncle has only the vaguest memories of it. The area (especially Sowerby Bridge) is also the setting for a more recent Sky TV series called 'Happy Valley' which more people will have heard of but which I also have never seen. I'll be honest, I know the Calder Valley mostly from an album track by the anarchist punk collective Chumbawamba, who hail

mainly from Leeds and whose biggest (nay, only) hit is not representative of their 14 studio albums. Anyway they wrote a song about the late 18th Century coin forgers in Cragg Vale, south of Mytholmroyd, called "Snip Snip Snip"; I wrote a blog post about it when I was in the area, long before I moved here, where I also passed through Hebden Bridge (UFO and Lesbian capital of the north of England, tho I'm sure the two are unrelated) and Heptonstall (last resting place of the American poet Sylvia Plath who I'm a little surprised Taylor Swift hasn't referenced yet). Ted Hughes stans often vandalise her grave. The fandom of mid-20th-Century poetry is a remarkably rabid place. At least Dylan Thomas had the foresight to drink himself to death before anyone cared. Anyway, that's a side issue, but it is notable that Mytholmroyd does have a series of 'Ted Hughes' footpaths, so you can walk in the steps of the famous poet and maybe get inspiration from seeing the same views as him. I guess similar to how Wordsworth is iconified in the Lake District. But Luddenden, Hebden, Mytholmroyd, and the like, these are all places I can now walk to. And willingly. They're all either downhill or, in the case of Heptonstall, on the level and I can manipulate a route to not get too steep. So even the Calder Valley, a slightly obscure part of West Yorkshire, has notable people and cultural reference points to be seen as 'interesting', at least to some people.

Someone else who's travelled to places because of what they've seen in pop-culture and media is Amanda Kendle.

{AMANDA: But in terms of like where I decide to go or the niches that guide my travel decisions, it's not just one niche. I'd say it's pretty kind of esoteric and random. Like when I went to Denmark a few years ago, I was super curious to see the city of Aarhus because I'd loved watching a Danish crime show called Dicta that was set in Aarhus and visited a particular art gallery because the building was part of the intro credits to that TV show, etc, etc. But I don't always watch crime shows. I don't watch many at all and then want to see where they're made. It's just one that I happen to. So I guess it's more about just things that I get interested in and then those places kind of demand my visit.}

I'll admit to not being a very visual-media person, especially regarding pop-culture; I've not been to the movies since 2009 or 2010, not had a television since about 2012, and I don't have an account on any streaming service like Netflix, Disney+, or Amazon Prime Video. But that's not to say I've not heard of things by cultural osmosis, and when I crossed the train bridge connecting Denmark and Sweden, I wasn't thinking of what a marvellous feat of structural engineering, even if some people would of course specifically visit it for that very reason, but rather I was thinking about artsy Scandinavian crime dramas. Even if I didn't watch it. I did see the Franco-British remake 'The Tunnel', but I get less excited about tunnels than bridges. Even if they're arguably the same thing – how wide does a bridge have to be before what it spans could be said to be in a tunnel? [You may be surprised there's an answer to this – at least on UK railways. According to a forum post asking that very question back in 2010-ish, a 'tunnel' is defined differently by each rail company but in general, it's only a tunnel if it's constructed of more than one section. Or, about 65m.]

My podcast is nothing if not full of useless, but interesting, information.

{section separation jingle}

I am a great promoter of Hometown Travel and of the belief that Everywhere Is Interesting. However, what happens when a place becomes *too* interesting? By that I mean, what happens when somewhere becomes so popular in pop-culture that it goes from being a curious backwater to a full-scale tourist trap? Rebecca has thoughts on this.

{REBECCA: But what I don't think is up for debate is that there are a growing number of people travelling to places because they've seen them on screen. Film tourism is definitely a thing. Even Expedia did some research into what they call set jetting at the end of 2023 and apparently interest in visiting locations from TV shows and films has gone up by 30% in the 12 months prior. Another example searches for the two main locations in the HBO anthology series, White Lotus, so season one is set in Hawaii and season two is set in Sicily. They both saw their searches increase by around 300% after the release of each season.

But I do think this type of tourism is a double-edged sword, Dubrovnik Old Town, which is a UNESCO site. It has been completely overrun with tourists because of its appearance as King's Landing and Game of Thrones. And I have found that this is more likely to happen when a location is already famous for something else and it's also quite easy to get to for most fans.}

I made that point earlier, that Dubrovnik was already famous, or at least on people's tourist radar, even before

Game of Thrones; to be quite honest it was probably the only place in Croatia people ever visited anyway. Indeed it was placed on the UNESCO world heritage list in 1979, long before even the parents of many a Game Of Thrones fan were worldly-knowledgable But Dubrovnik isn't very big. It has a population of around 41 and a half thousand people, which isn't a lot, it's a football stadium, and while the area covered by the city municipality is 55 square miles which, in UK terms makes it the size of Gateshead or Oldham, and in US terms, including water, is similar to The Bronx, its urban area is less than 5, about the same size as Kensington-and-Chelsea in London, or 3 and a half times bigger than Central Park. And yet, both with the people who always knew it and the people who came upon it through Game Of Thrones, it sees over a million tourists per year. One is well to ask the question, how does a town of that size cope with that level of tourism?

The same question could be asked of anywhere small and popular. There are a number of small towns in England, in the Cotswolds, that are, I mean, Bourton-on-the-Water has a population of just under 3,300 and yet if you look at what makes the village interesting, there's a whole list of things that make much larger cities (hi, Southampton) relatively dearthy by comparison. As well it just being, simply, a pretty place. The Telegraph, and I would say it irks me to quote The Telegraph but I did appear in it on a piece about Asexuality so I guess that proves even people like me aren't morally pure, suggested in an article in March 2024 that around 240,000 people visit each year, which means on a yearly basis every resident is outnumbered by 72 tourists. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine 72 tourists a day coming past your house, queuing in your supermarket, eating in your local cafe, taking selfies outside your house, because it's a very pretty house and honestly if you can afford to live in Bourton-on-the-Water you're the sort of person who *would* read The Telegraph (a search at the time of writing suggests there are two properties valued less than £300,000, and one of them is 'shared ownership'. It is categorically Not Kirkby-in-Ashfield). I may have socialist 'eat the rich' tendencies but everyone has the right to privacy, and I wouldn't like people forming a queue outside my house to take a selfie of it, so why would I approve of it happening to other people, even if I don't align with their culture and belief system. Yeh, I checked, it's still a Tory MP, with a healthy majority of over 3,000. (It was 20,000 in the 2019 election. It's very much That Sort Of Area).

The other problem is that these places simply aren't big enough and don't have the infrastructure to cope with the vast numbers of tourists who pass through. One could argue that it matters less for the likes of Bourton-on-the-Water than Dubrovnik, because the tourists who come don't generally stay for very long, they're on tour buses, passing through, taking pictures, and leaving. It doesn't do anything for the local economy, but for somewhere like that, does it matter anyway? It's the cultural equivalent of a lay-by, or possibly a service station, somewhere people pop in, spend a few moments, buy a snack, and move on. The main problem here is the transport infrastructure isn't ideal; Bourton's one of those villages that's not really anywhere convenient - the UK, well, the world, is full of them. So all the roads in aren't designed for that level of traffic, never mind the town itself, so you have issues of congestion, of parking, of making the surrounding network being a lot less efficient than it should be. And you can't just stick a motorway in because that would eradicate the reason for its popularity; you're not going to go to a quiet pretty village if there's a six-lane highway just beyond the houses, you're going to go somewhere else.

Dubrovnik has the additional issue that people don't just pop in, take the pictures, and pop back out again, People stay. Which means there's a whole industry in feeding this million people a year, in having beds for them, in giving them entertainment. And that market is much more lucrative than the local market, because, well, that's where the money is. This means that so many properties are owned and operated as accommodation rather than being places for locals to live; this means that so many restaurants and cafes are overpriced because Tourists Are Easy To PriceGouge, so even if you are living there permanently, there's less options and choice for you to go out to drink, to eat, to shop, to entertain. For the record, yes I use AirBnB but my policy is to use it as a more expensive form of couchsurfing; I'll nearly always choose the 'room in shared house' option rather than the 'exclusive use of property' option, so most of the time I'm staying in local people's houses rather than in somewhere owned by a faceless property manager. I suspect that whole subject is a podcast of its own.

Where the relevance for this podcast comes is in the concept of 'Everywhere Is Interesting', and specifically that nothing exists in a vacuum. Granted Dubrovnik has the Game Of Thrones crowd, but places that look very similar, and with far fewer tourists, exist all the way along the Adriatic Coast, all the way from Split further north in Croatia, to Gjirokaster in Albania. Indeed Montenegro's coast is lined with towns like this, and while the cruise ship crowd have discovered Kotor, Herceg Novi is Right There and even Budva isn't as busy. Bourton is in The Cotswolds but not only is that part of England full of similar villages (especially useful if you have a car) but also there's a lot more of England that has similar places, just maybe a bit further out (and by 'a bit further out' I mean 'not signposted from London'). There's just as pretty villages and towns in places like

Lincolnshire & Rutland (Stamford and Oakham), the nearby Vale of Belvoir in Nottinghamshire, places in Wiltshire close to Salisbury, and all manner of places in Yorkshire and Northumberland. The Internet also suggests Lyme Regis, but that's a big subtweet. And also probably popular already; the Internet also suggested places elsewhere in the Dorset and Somerset area that are already close to capacity. And the whole 'second home in Cornwall' thing is itself an annoying trope.

The point is, there are always alternatives, that are just as good, or just as relevant, but people, media, travel bloggers, rarely mention them, because everyone goes to This One Place, everyone goes to Dubrovnik, because that's all anyone talks about. I'm certainly not advocating for Herceg Novi to be the, what you might call, The New Dubrovnik, but certainly if you don't have a Game Of Thrones specific obsession and just want to see an old walled town by the sea, there's not a lot of difference between them.

Rebecca talks about this, even in the context of movie settings.

{REBECCA: But I've personally visited places that are just a little more out of reach that I think have seen some positive effects of film tourism. So last year I visited the city of Crema in Northern Italy and I booked a tour to visit some of the locations in 2017's Call Me By Your Name. The tour guide said that a bike shop had opened in the city after the film was released because people really wanted to live out their Elio and Oliver fantasies and cycle around the idyllic countryside. He's also employed to run these tours and it's small but it is a city so there are restaurants and accommodations already there to support these extra tourists. Even Lord of the Rings, which was as you probably already know, is this world-famous very successful mega trilogy. It didn't have a huge impact on tourism, definitely so much so that it was detrimental because New Zealand is just so far away and expensive for fans in North America and Europe to reach so it obviously does still get some tourism because of the films but hopefully it's a little bit more manageable for them.

I've probably visited hundreds of filming locations at this point, maybe thousands but definitely hundreds. I think one of my favourite filming location experiences was in Vienna a couple of years ago. I visited locations from The Third Man which is a British film noir from 1949 and also from Richard Linklater's 1995 romantic film Before Sunrise. Even though the latter film is almost 30 years old, almost all of the locations were exactly the same and the movie was like my own personal tour guide so I ate strudel in Cafe Sperl. I rode the oldest ferris wheel in the world. I had a drink outside Cafe Kleines in this beautiful tucked away square but I also managed to find the charred stumps of the from 1973's The Wicker Man in southwest coast of Scotland. It's a bit of a spoiler I guess but it's over 50 years old so not really. And last year when I visited Napoleon Dynamite's house in Idaho I was in costume and when I got there another family just happened to pull up who were also in costume as characters from the movie. It was just a truly unbelievable experience. Honestly one of the best unexpected bonuses of hunting filming locations is visiting these fantastic places I never would have made the effort to visit otherwise.}

It's a fine line to walk, especially as a travel content creator and influencer (because we are all influencers, as I have said before); by guiding people away from the usual places and onto roads less travelled, even ones that already have some pop-culture or historic resonance, are we alleviating the problems of overtourism or merely pushing them into places unsuited for them. If only Hollywood would make a film in Kirkby-in-Ashfield. Actually, I don't know how I'd feel about that. Confused, probably.

{section separation jingle}

So what have we learned in this episode?

People live everywhere, and that makes those places notable. Some of those people become famous, and that makes their hometowns even more notable. Some of those famous people make films or music in or about a place, and that makes those places even more notable still.

Also, Everywhere Is Interesting to someone, but for different people in different ways; one person's "and this is where they kissed, oh my god" is another person's "250 years ago a major feat of science was tested here". Possibly related, if you read too much vampire fiction. And of course conversely not everywhere is interesting to everyone; it very much depends on your own hobbies, knowledge, and mindset.

Even Kirkby-in-Ashfield.

{end pod jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me again next time for another adventure **Beyond The Brochure**. Until then, here's one final thought to ponder. Everywhere is interesting, but not necessarily for very long. 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, tell your friends that I rocked your socks. If you wear socks when listening to my pod; that's your call not mine. And don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Show-notes are available on my website: barefoot-backpacker.com.

Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}