

Podcast 118 : V's First Time

{INTRO:

V: I just gave you a few sort of random so I could tell you about forgetting how to read. I'm very literate, by the way. I can normally read.}

{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a podcast looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Enby with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

Further to my last episode, I have now done a bit more running of late. I'm still not feeling quite fit enough to return to the queer running group I tended to go to on a Wednesday evening but I'm not too far away now. A few more ventures out and I'll be back. I can also almost once again stretch well enough to touch my toes, which is a good sign. I had a bit of FOMO over the Calderdale Way Ultra, not gonna lie, as one of my Instagram friends ran it (the 50 mile version, in fact), while another was one of the volunteers staffing a checkpoint. I, on that day, took a 10-12 mile hike up to Haworth via Wuthering Heights, for content creation purposes, and that was a heck of a hike, involving paths that existed on the map but not on the ground, over-excessive mossy grasses, and a mis-underestimated boggy patch that swallowed me up to almost the knee. I also ran out of water, and so by the time I reached Haworth after 6 hours, I pretty much fell into a pub and downed a pint of lime & soda before I'd even got around to paying for the rest of my order. Anyway, it was an interesting hike and there's just one final thing up that way I have to see before I can do a blog post about it. I'd've done it on this journey but by the time I reached the Bronte Waterfalls I was just too knackered to even consider the detour.

The following day I, having more-or-less recovered, wandered over to Shibden Hall, the local old manor house in Halifax. Every English borough needs an old manor house. This had me wandering up a bit of the Calderdale Way that I didn't do on my Ultra last year because I can't read maps. It was a much shorter journey this time. But anyway. This again was partly Wuthering-Heights related; you recall from my podcast episode I talked quite a bit about it, and that this may have been the inspiration for Thrushcross Grange.

Then, last weekend, I tackled even more of the Calderdale Way, hiking from Ripponden to Todmorden. This was the section subsequent to my dropping out last time because I didn't think I could face more hills, and anyway I would have missed the cut-off time at the middle checkpoint at Withens Clough. This time, and with the previous weekend's Haworth adventure in mind, I planned for a long, arduous, hike and took lots of water, cake, and even two energy gels. As it turns out, that stretch of the route is much easier than the northern stretch, and I did the 10 or so mile journey in less than 4 hours. This does actually give me confidence for next year and doing the 30 mile version of the Calderdale Way Ultra - I know with training I can *do* 30 miles and the hills aren't as bad as I'd feared.

When I reached Todmorden, late lunchtime, I had the intention of going to the supermarket and then a pub to rest a while. On my way through the town I was distracted by a crowd of people, some of whom were very specifically dressed. Turns out I'd come across part of Todmorden Folk Festival, and on the canal bank outside the Golden Lion pub, they were having a series of Morris Dancing performances. So I stayed awhile, had a couple of pints of beer, and watched several troupes from the regional area do different dances, including with sticks, with handkerchiefs, and with clogs on. Two of them were based in Manchester, so I messaged my friend Sarah, the one who'd got me doing the comedy course, and her response was 'I'd do Morris with you'. My reply was, of course, 'no-one in their right mind would let me near a stick that big'. {oer}

The following day was more sedate - every year, on the first Sunday in May, a local village to me decorates its

many wells and springs, and there's a community walk that visits and acknowledges them all. Well-Dressing is a tradition mainly marked in Derbyshire and parts of Staffordshire; we're quite a way North so it's strange to find it up here. The principle is to celebrate and give thanks for the life-giving and agricultural properties of water. Here though, it's more a way of getting the community together for a walk, and to give the local children something to show off their artistic talents. Every year there's a theme; last year was Sport and Leisure, this year was Literature. So each well was adorned with a different literary bent – one was all about Jules Verne, another represented crime literature and had police tape etc, while another was all about classic childhood fantasy and had depictions of Le Petit Prince, Winnie The Pooh, Alice in Wonderland, etc. Despite being in Calderdale, no well displayed anything referring to Sylvia Plath & Ted Hughes, and nor was Wuthering Heights present.

But to this episode. Earlier this week, I had a chat with my friend V, because she'd recently gone on a trip abroad for the first time this millennium, and she wanted to talk about how it felt on her YouTube channel. I said, well that might make a good podcast episode, you know, the whole 'this is what it's like to travel abroad properly for the first time as an adult', might be useful for other budding world travellers, so we recorded it for both. I'm not sure when her video is going live – it might be on the Monday following this pod's release, or it might be the Monday after, but once she's released it I'll stick a link in the shownotes to it. I think I've edited out a lot more than she has, so go there if you want to hear more details. And see us in the flesh, I guess. It was a weird chat to have, mainly because I'm not used to being in the interviewer role, but I think it flowed okay.

{section separation jingle}

Me: So what I shall do here is say hello to V

V: Hi

Me: Hello

V: thank you for having me on again

Me: it's because I basically only know about three people

V: I'm the least well-travelled travel vlog guest ever

Me: yeah but you're also the one that's most like to actually you know speak to me

V: yeah there is that

Me: that's not actually strictly true. You are the one that's most likely to be available to speak to me at any given point

V: yeah

Me: cool

V: only people with real jobs and real lives

Me: yeah yeah I need to do something about that but I need to do something about that but that's a problem for future Nel

V: that sounds like you're plotting to get all your friends fired by the way

Me: I mean no

V: all your friends have jobs we'll have to do something about that

Me: I was thinking more of me but that's beside the point um so why don't I have V on my podcast again for the umpteenth time the answer is V has just done something that's fairly vanilla for my circles but not for V's circles what have you done V?

V: I have finally finally left the UK as an adult aged 41 and taken my first trip for 26 years my first flight since 1999

Me: which is quite something just proves that you know I am an influencer and she wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for me which is technically more true than she thinks um

V: yeah it really is

Me: indeed so I suppose my first question is um some background as to why you have taken your first flight for 20 odd years um why it's taking you this long and why that flight

V: okay so you kind of hinted at this by saying that I largely went on this trip because of you and of course it is your awesome influence in this as well right but

Me: it wasn't with me

V: it wasn't with you which is weird because I really thought if I was going to go abroad with somebody that wasn't in my immediate family it would have been with you

Me: it took me, it was hard enough getting you to go to Manchester to meet me for my comedy thing

V: actually when you messaged me about Manchester you said oh I bet you wouldn't come and I just said yeah I will that wasn't difficult

Me: yes and how long did you spend there

V: 24 hours and it exhausted me, you walked too fast. I don't know that I could have spent four days with you walk around Hamburg I would have got lost. but yeah so why was I in Hamburg I was in Hamburg largely because of YouTube actually which is again because of you so um I've mentioned this to my own followers but for your listeners I'll just quickly run down. I've never travelled um not as an adult anyway I've never been able to afford to travel I couldn't even afford to get a passport and then I started doing my YouTube videos and messing about on there and you asked me could I help you with editing some of your videos and so I started doing that and after a while you said to me I have another friend who is looking for a video editor why don't you message her and I did that was Sassy Wyatt of Blind Girl Adventures and I have been editing her videos for about a year now and in January late December early January she said to me would you be able to come to Hamburg with me I'm doing a product launch there and because my dog has retired I need a sighted guide and so I went along with her, she was going to the airline interiors expo which is about as interesting as it sounds, and she needed a guide dog essentially and hers has retired so I went there to guide her around. I do better audio descriptions than the dog but I am possibly not as good at guiding her as the dog is.

Me: How would you describe us, then, if you were wanting to, because obviously you have a video, so if you want to describe the two of us on this video to a blind person, how would you do it?

V: Well, I have in fact described you to Sassy before. I've also described myself to Sassy before, but I think it's much, much harder to describe yourself than it is to describe other people, and so I find describing you quite easy. You are a very tall, very brightly coloured enby with purple hair, your barefoot crop-top on, you've probably got bare feet, I can't see them. I've just realised that you're wearing the same shirt that I was wearing this morning, so I'm glad I got changed before the podcast. I had that on earlier.

Me: That would be a very, very strange bit of matchy-matchy.

V: It would. I was wearing it this morning, but I filmed another vlog this morning, and so I thought I'd better get changed so it doesn't look like I was wearing the same shirt for three weeks. So yeah, so that is how I would describe you. I've never once described you without using the word colourful.

Me: Yes, I am, life is too short to be beige.

V: Yeah. See, I can describe you in quite a lot of detail, when it comes to describing me. I was just like, I'll just think Barbies let herself go.

Me: When I was on the comedy course, one of the people described himself, his introduction on the stage was, I know what you're thinking, the milky-bar kids let himself go.

V: I remember, but he was very, very good. I liked it.

Me: Were you particularly I mean obviously because you hadn't because you hadn't done this for so long were you particularly sort of anxious about the I mean not just because you were sort of going there as a responsible adult who knew but were you particularly anxious about you know taking a flight for the first time, were you particularly anxious about how it was all going to go?

V: I was, I was most, well yes and no in that Sassy is a very experienced traveller she travels all the time she's got a travel vlog and I figured that I'd probably be alright with her especially as she had booked assistance I think we'll come back to that in a bit and and yeah so I was very anxious about the actual airport itself because I like to have a look online if I'm doing something new and I like to watch other people doing it and watch a whole walk-through. There isn't an awful lot of walk-throughs of Heathrow terminal 5 online especially the bits I was most worried about which is the security parts because you're not allowed to film there and so I was a bit I wasn't sure what to expect and as I said last time I flew was 1999 where I went as an unaccompanied minor breezed through security I made a joke about having a machine gun in my bag and leaving my grenade in my other coat and nothing bad happened to me as a result of that joke and it was all very sort of they forgot about me at the other end I made myself through customs you know so it was very relaxed and I've gathered there's been a few world events since then that might have changed air travel a little bit and so I was expecting it to be very very full on it actually wasn't at all though a lot of the things that I was anxious about were not things that came up at all. For example when I went to the States as a child they asked me why I was coming and this big thing was made about how I have to answer correctly right and I have to like because if you're going for business that's a different thing than if you're going for a visit in a family or on a holiday or whatever and so I tied myself up in knots about this on the way to Hamburg as well going oh no uh what do I say do I say I'm going for work because I am but have I got the right visa for that I don't know and my friend went don't worry about it why are you worrying about it and literally nobody asked me nobody asked me why I was there nobody asked me what I was doing what my plans were when I was coming back or any of the sort of security questions that I expected and it kind of threw me how easy that aspect was. the most overwhelming part was Heathrow Terminal 5 itself when we first arrived because we didn't have the assistance that we booked and I had two suitcases and a blind lady and the the little barrier is very very narrow right and if you're looking up at the signs and there's people all around you you're panicking that you're going to the wrong gate and you're dragging a suitcase that's very unsuitable behind you and you've got another suitcase and a blind lady guess what

happens you walk her into the barrier twice she gets very angry with you

Me: is this where we sort of um Sassy is obviously not on this um zoom call so we should sort of be a bit more polite but can you describe Sassy in sort of easy terms

V: physically you mean

Me: yeah I mean physically physically and and attitude wise

V: but, see Sassy is and I'm sure she wouldn't mind me saying this she is absolutely tiny right in fact I was editing a video of hers one time as she is at Universal Studios and the height cut off for a ride is 100 centimetres and she's having to argue that she is 104 centimetres and can be on this ride so she's very very tiny she's got very bright red hair and she dresses in quite bright colours as well like so she's not easy to miss even though she's very tiny but when she's shouting at you when she does it is quite difficult not to laugh at her and in fact at the end of the trip I said to her you can just pretend that was all nervous laughs because you're so scary if you want to that really is but yeah so part part of the issue was that we had been let down by passenger assistance they weren't very helpful they didn't turn up and I was having to do all this stuff and so obviously she's feeling my overwhelm and then I've walked her into a barrier twice so she's not in the best of moods and then when we went to go through this fast track the barrier let her through but it didn't let me through for some reason and she was going just jump over it just slide under it I'm like there's armed police I'm not going to that is a hard limit for me but actually that was the most stressful part of the trip was actually the airports and I didn't walk her into anything else again for the whole four days and even on our last day we went to this flower garden and apothecary garden that was opposite our hotel absolutely massive garden in Hamburg I think it goes across the whole of the city sort of thing and we're walking around there and I said to her oh we're going to have to double back on ourselves because the path that I've led us down has led us to a lake and there are stepping stones to cross over this lake so we'll just go back and she went no no no I trust you you can guide me across and I was like wow considering that I had walked her into the barrier before you think she'd be a bit nervous about this but she completely trusted me to do it which is amazing now I could see that each of these stepping stones is a good two and a half meters wide and has like three four millimetres in between them and there's only one inch of water even if I did hoof her off but she didn't know any of it she just knew stepping stones across a lake and she let me take her anyway and I was very very pleased with it

Me: excellent

V: I did not dunk her

Me: yes oh dear um so quick question um you got through the airport fine how was the flight because obviously it's been a long time since you flew um was it sort of as you remember it or did you not really not really remember your flights back in 1999 or

V: I mean my flight in 1999 was a long haul so that was a bit different and that might be why it felt like I had more room but I suspect that there is just less room nowadays because obviously I was only 14-ish when I last went on a flight and I don't recall having um feeling very cramped um but and this might have partly been because of the seats that we had we were on the last seats on the plane so we couldn't recline even a little bit and the person directly in front of me reclined all the way immediately before we'd even taken off and so my knees are touching the seat in front I'm five foot three my knees should not be touching the front seat anywhere what's happening there how do how do you deal with that I'm guessing you don't

Me: I sit in aisle seats yeah or on

V: whereas Sassy was in the aisle seat because she needs to get up and down to go to the bathroom more and she thought I'll be nice I'll give me the window she's content creator she can film out of the window however my seat didn't have a window my window seat did not have a window

Me: yeh, no, I sit in the aisle seat or on sort of quite a few long hall flights I've specifically paid to get the exit row seat leg room

V: see I don't feel like we could have done that purely because you have to help in an emergency don't you and I don't know how helpful a blind person and a person with EDS would be in an emergency. one thing that I did have on the plane and I should have grabbed it to show you, I bought one of those foot hammocks from Amazon so it's just a little strap and a slightly wider padded part at the bottom you hang it over your tray and you can put your feet on it to raise your ankles slightly or elevate a little bit and being able to do that gave me some different sort of positions that I could sit in and it made it a lot lot more bearable for me but I did feel very claustrophobic the whole hour I was sitting there thinking it's only an hour it's only an hour I have to get through it and as well and this is so silly right and you will laugh at me for this but I do not know when it's okay to switch airplane mode off on your phone when you are in an airplane so I just didn't so for the entire flight I didn't have a book because I get motion sickness can't read I didn't have my phone didn't have any music anything like that just for an hour just sitting there staring in space so that was fun

Me: you speak to Laura she was on a flight from I don't remember it's I think it was like to New Zealand or something like that where there was a lady who sat on the same row as her and did that basically what you've

described for the entire flight um just sort of sat there and stared

V: yeah I mean maybe she was quietly freaking out because I was what I didn't like I didn't get motion sickness in the plane but when we were climbing I kind of had that sensation in my tummy like you're going over a bump too quick in a car and you left your belly behind I had that sort of feeling on the way there and it wasn't the most pleasant but I think that I exacerbated that because um Sassy has travelled enough that she has silver status and so we had gone a little bit early for the flight we went to the BA lounge where they have free alcohol and also free food. they didn't have a lot of vegetarian food and I hadn't had much to eat that day but I thought well I get my money's worth so I drank quite a lot of the free alcohol and I think that contributed to me not feeling great on the plane it also caused me problems later after we had landed as well so

Me: if it helps to um relieve your anxiousness about that particular thing um Laura has flown more than most people I have ever come across or even on travel twitter hates flying hates flying her method of coping with it is alcohol

V: yeah

Me: and on the flight we had to Antigua um the flight was like 10 o'clock in the morning so we went to Wetherspoons and had a few pints she had a few pints and it got us through the air it got her through the plane but she was feeling a little bit rough when she when we got to Antigua because she hadn't eaten

V: yes that was exactly my problem I had alcohol and an empty empty ish stomach and then when we landed I forgot because it's been so long since I've been a passenger in a car because I'm the family driver I forgot just how bad my motion sickness gets and so we got off the plane straight into a taxi half an hour in the taxi by the time we arrived at the hotel I was a very charming shade of greyish green and covered in a thin layer of sweat, and then at that moment I meet the founder of the company who were going to work there in my hangover she and just green and then we went for dinner together that was lovely

Me: yeah you went you went straight out to the restaurant after you'd ride

V: we did and yeah it was I didn't get I wasn't able to eat at all which I think actually offended the restaurant owner but English was like his third or fourth language and I'm not sure if I was able to adequately convey it's not your cooking I was ill when I walked in they ended up boxing it up for me which was really nice it's back to the hotel room which was less nice because then I'm feeling sick and sleeping in the smell of Lebanese cauliflower it was unpleasant

Me: yeah

V: but that is that is actually the night where I thought I'd forgotten how to read

Me: excellent because I mean was was that was that down to the fact that you just had a a rough not a rough flight

V: yeah well see we arrive at this restaurant and there's three of us there and two of us get given menus because obviously people don't give a menu to Sassy it's my job to read the menu out to her my head is spinning I'm dizzy I'm feeling sick I'll keep having to excuse myself and go and splash water on my face and come back and I'm looking at the menu and I'm like Sassy I think this is in German like I can't read this and I'm looking on the other side there's no English there and I'll say I'm going to have to I'm going to have to ask him for an English menu or see if they've got an English menu or maybe I can use google translate or something and then the guy that we're having dinner with says it is in English and I'm like oh and I look at the menu and the first thing I see is this octopus dish and octopus is spelt o k t o p u s and I thought has it always been spelled like that am I just so tired I've forgotten how to read and I even said I think I might be feeling so ill I've forgotten how to read anyway it turns out they're just giving me a German menu and that happened everywhere we went as well people just kept giving me a German menu I don't know why I wasn't even attempting to speak German

Me: was that something that worried you about the trip just having to communicate in a foreign language

V: yes but again needn't have worried it's Hamburg they speak better English than I do and actually the event that we were at was very very international and so um before we went I remember thinking I wish I spoke more German but at the end of the trip I was like gosh I wish I spoke better French because we spent so much time with French people I spent a lot of time working out how to yell stand aside please in German because I'm guiding a blind person and 'move bitch' is a thing that I say in London a lot so I wanted the German equivalent didn't have to use it once there is something about I don't know if it's something bad about the UK or something good about Germany I never had to say excuse me to anybody, they saw the blind person coming and they moved out of the way. That has never happened in the UK ever people see the cane and freeze in front of them

Me: so it's kind of like

V: yeah usually when I've spent time with Sassy come away saying she should be allowed to end the lives of whoever she wants but after Germany I was like oh that wasn't too bad actually

Me: yeah one of the things that when you travel a lot you sort of see the differences in culture and society between different countries so, was there anything else in about I mean you obviously didn't experience much

of Hamburg because you're in the expo for much of the time but, was there anything else that surprised you about that that you obviously hadn't experienced much because you've not been out the country

V: I mean one of the things is that consideration actually um this is probably a law here or something right but where we were in the hotel we were quite near a very busy road there was up six lanes and so it was obviously a main trunk road quite often there were emergency vehicles that went down it. Any time that one did all of the cars would just move to the side create a lane in the middle for the emergency vehicle to go down, the emergency vehicle wasn't having to like weave in and out of traffic ever and you wouldn't get that in the UK, it just it just doesn't happen like that in the UK, people might move or they might not but then you definitely wouldn't have this really efficient sort of parting of the sea so that this ambulance can come down middle of it and I thought that was really really nice um yeah I really enjoyed that I do wish that I'd got a chance to see a bit more of Hamburg and the people in Hamburg because as you say I spent a lot of the time inside the exhibition hall um which maybe wasn't the most picturesque part of Hamburg um but I would definitely go again because it felt really really friendly there it felt really really safe there and somebody had said to me before I leave oh don't pay any attention to the news about how dangerous it is well I'd never heard that on the news about Hamburg being dangerous but I was like okay I won't but after they said that I thought well I am in a big city it's Germany's second biggest city I think there's probably going to be a lot of people around maybe that is the sort of place where you'd have your phone snatched out of your hand or something like that so I bought one of these anti-theft devices that you sort of put into the charger port and you can wrap it around your wrist or attach it to your bag but I never once used it because it would have felt ridiculous it felt so safe there I was wandering through this part which I doubt you've seen my video yet because you watched my videos about as often as I listened to your podcast but I was walking through this neighbourhood there's graffiti everywhere it's looking really run down and it felt so safe I felt so much safer than I ever have in London or anywhere like that in the UK because I don't know there were kids playing out on the street and you know the graffiti made a difference to me actually because you know I have this thing where I think that the graffiti that you see around a place tells you a lot about that place

Me: yeah I did a podcast on that very point

V: yeah well one of the first pieces of graffiti that I saw was a massive great big banner hanging out of someone's window that said what I read to translate as a never again fascism here and then loads of pro trans graffiti down this one particular street like stickers everywhere pride stickers everywhere and yeah it just it has felt nice it felt really really safe there it was very very good

Me: Hamburg does have a reputation of being a very left-wing city um one of the one of their football teams St. Pauli is is pretty much the archetypal anarchist football club um and I have if memory serves its supporters kind of fly the pirate flag and things like that

V: I like that and yeah I can totally believe it for that I don't know if it was just that particular part of Hamburg that I was in but it felt very sort of artsy indie latest sort of vibe to it I would like to go again for a longer trip and see a bit more of it I think

Me: yeah I've never been there

V: you would love it you should speak to you should get somebody to visit Hamburg rascally drunk and talk to them about it but not so drunk that they forget the conversation though

Me: what, again?

V: we'll tag them

Me: oh dear dear dear. The majority of this podcast tho was how it feels to be travelling after a long period of time without travelling out the country because I know you've travelled around the UK a bit and you've certainly done vlogs about UK travel um but um as a bit of a question the obvious question that springs to mind here is do you feel overwhelmed at all like in general by it I would say it's slightly different than others so because you're in the expo all the time it it kind of was you're going to be around a lot of people you're going to be busy doing things um but did you feel like particularly oh my god this is all too much um or did you did it all feel quite comfortable and calming

V: most of my anxiety was before the actual thing so I had a lot of worries of all how is it going to be and everything and on my first night when I went back to the hotel room I did feel very overwhelmed because I've been feeling sick I had forgotten how to read I had walked Sassy into a barrier I went in I called my husband I said I'm the worst sighted guide in the world and this is awful I don't know how I'm going to cope with the next four days but after it had some sleep was absolutely fine and yeah I wasn't feeling overwhelmed at all actually the only times that I had a little spiking anxiety was around meal times and that was because I was worried that I would accidentally order something that wasn't vegetarian and and I was worried that I wouldn't understand the menus that improved when I started requesting English menus people just kept giving me German ones but once I got the English ones it was a lot easier and actually as a vegetarian eating in Hamburg was much easier than I expected it especially because I'm not just a vegetarian I'm fussy I've got texture sensitivities all this sort of

thing I thought I may well end up living on bread which would be no terrible thing in Germany because it is to die for but I did manage to find food and proper food as well so I was quite pleased with that as well

Me: as opposed to my old flatmate and his wife back in the day who went to Germany and had Burger King once McDonald all the other nights

V: I did see KFC Burger King and McDonald's there and I thought well worse comes to worst I can go and get myself some fries but you don't want to do that when you're visiting somewhere do you go and have fast food somewhere that you've had before um but yeah

Me: we were talking about the anxiety of Heathrow Airport how was Hamburg Airport on the way back did you have any problems?

V: beautiful compared to Heathrow partly because I decided that I'd deal with any overwhelm by going to the nearest person in a uniform and saying this is my first day on planet earth I have no idea what I'm doing please help and it was very very good he went welcome to planet earth did your home planet issue you with a passport can I have it please and it was very very good if in fact it would have been absolutely awesome had it not been for the fact that we again decided to arrive early because we've been tired and eat there and then head to the plane after that and so we arrived a good three hours three and a half hours early and there was no one at the BA desk and we stood there for over an hour waiting for them to come and then they were like oh yeah we were on lunch and Sassy was like and you couldn't have put a sign up or something so we didn't just she was getting very very stressed and so that's why I was like okay first day on the planet let's go, but by the time we'd stood there for an hour because we've both got chronic pain we were both kind of grumpy about it but again they have free booze in the lounge so what are you gonna do, but in terms of I don't I don't want to make a thing about German efficiency right but, the airport is so much easier to understand, there are big yellow arrows and you follow the big yellow arrows and you literally cannot get lost; it's a lot smaller than Heathrow it has to be said, but it's just all very clear there's a very obvious pathway that you obviously go to and it takes you past the baggage claim and out to the taxis and it's just all very smoothly done and I much much preferred that to Heathrow which was scary

Me: do you think having now done it once you would be able to do it on your own or do you think you would still need to have someone around with you and I suppose the other question about that is if you had someone around with you would it be someone like Sassy or would it be someone that's sane

V: I would like it on record that you were the one that said that because she scares me but I think

Me: she can just headbutt me in the knee it's fine

V: Well, one thing that I didn't experience with this trip, that most people would if they were doing their trip for the first time, is I didn't book a single thing. I didn't book the flights. I didn't buy the fast passes. I didn't book the hotels. It all got taken care of for me. It was like being a child. And so I kind of feel like I haven't done that part of the experience yet. And the thought of doing that stuff makes me feel a bit anxious. So I was actually talking to my husband about this last night, and I said to him, I think that he would really like Hamburg. We have been married for 23 years and we never did get a honeymoon. No, we've been together for 23 years, but we never did get a honeymoon, it is our 20th anniversary next year. I said to him, I would quite like it if we could go there for a long weekend over our anniversary together. And I know that I will be the one that does the booking and everything then. And that does make me a bit anxious, to be honest. So that aspect of it, very, very nervous about the idea of that aspect of it. So yeah, in terms of booking it and doing all that stuff, I would be a bit anxious. If we are going to go back to Hamburg again, I'll probably stay in the exact same hotel. So I know exactly where it is. I know that the people there speak great English and will happily ring taxis for me to go places as well. If I wanted to, although I might avoid the taxis this time and try to do a bit of public transporting, but that's a bit anxiety inducing as well. But I feel like a proper trip has to include some public transport and taxis don't count. I would go again with Sassy, even though she scares me. But because she is a very well-seasoned traveller and so she finds it all fairly easy. And yeah, I would happily come along on a trip with someone like you because you are an experienced traveller as well. Although I'd have a different flavour of anxiety if I was travelling with you, which would be that you're going to walk through first and I'm going to get lost and left on my own.

Me: I mean, that's a better anxiety than most people have when they travel with me, which is, Nel, you're going to die.

V: I would probably check borders and things like that more carefully than I would with someone else because I know you have a kind of laissez-faire attitude to such things. And I don't want to live in a different country without my passport. Thank you very much.

Me: Yeah, I would do well travelling with Sassy I mean, neither of us would get back.

V: I would pay very good money to watch that collab on YouTube, I have to say. I'd be hilarious and I'm not sure who would start shouting first.

Me: That's all right I could just pick her up and shove her in the dustbin.

V: Do you know when I was walking her across those stepping stones, she said, this is the one and only time that you have my permission to pick me up and leave. And then she followed that with, if you can, because she knows I've got a shoulder injury.

Me: Yes.

V: But you weigh about the same as a pencil.

Me: Yeah, but like a cat, she is fierce.

V: Yes, yes.

Me: I wouldn't want to pick up a cat.

V: You could pick her up, but you wouldn't want to.

Me: No, no, quite, quite. I wonder if she's listening to this podcast.

V: If she is, I'm going to get told off.

Me: Just as an overview, what do you think was kind of the most... I'm not going to say important, important is the wrong word. Defining moments of the trip. Was there a moment that you thought, yes, I'm actually doing this, and yes, this is fun or yes, this is horrible, but was there a particular moment where you felt that you were doing it, if that makes sense? Like, you have stepped outside of your comfort zone. You are, you know, in a foreign country, guiding someone around. Was there a moment that you felt, oh my God, I'm doing this?

V: I mean, defining that big, big moment for me was leading Sassy across those stepping stones. Because as I said, she had no idea, like she could have been picturing soaking wet, jagged rocks and waves and all sorts. She had no idea what she was being led into and she trusted me to lead her through that, and that's going to stay with me for a long time. But actually, and this is a random thing to say about Germany, but we went out for Japanese food on the second night, I think, and it was my first time eating Japanese food, and I didn't really know what I was ordering, and as I say, I'm a bit texture-averse, I'm a bit anxious about food in general, but I thought, I'll just taste lots of things, and that's very unlike me. I'm very much a, these are my safe foods person, and those things are mostly just bread. And then there I was with all these different things, and we had a lot of appetizers and we were all sort of sharing, and luckily I chose things that you could eat with your fingers, because I didn't want to be the only person there that couldn't use chopsticks. That would have been embarrassing, but it was big for me to try a food that I didn't know what to expect from it. It was big for me to try a food that I didn't know what the texture was going to be like. I managed to order vegetarian food when I wasn't 100% sure that's what I was doing, but I managed to, and I thought, ah, look at me, I'm sitting here at a table with all these people that I've been working with for a couple of days in a foreign country, eating the different foreign country food, and everything's been fine. In fact, the only thing that was weird was that I kept asking for tap water and being brought bottled water, which irked me somewhat, because it added a lot of money to the bill, and I resent paying for water, but apparently tap water isn't really a term in Germany. It's pipe water, and if you ask for pipe water in a restaurant, they all think you're weird and cheap, which is probably why they were just bringing me bottled. But yeah, it was very much a case of who would have thought this time last year that I'd be sitting in Germany, eating Japanese food with a bunch of strangers that I don't know who were telling me how impressed they've been with the work that I've done and stuff like that. It was a moment where I was like, oh, wow, I'm doing something very out of my comfort zone.

Me: You're now officially a travel influencer.

V: But am I, though? We're coming back to what we talked about on Spaces years ago, when I said to you, I've been to Turkey, but I only did two weeks of spent all of it in a tourist resort or on a beach. Have I really been to Turkey? You said yes, but I feel a bit like that about Hamburg as well. Like, I went there, but most of Hamburg that I saw, or I saw from the back of a taxi and the rest of it was inside an exhibition hall where I don't think I met a single German person. Although I have to say their conference centre huge

Me: yeah I looked it up as to how big it was and it's what did I say it was like twice as big as the Excel in London or something like three times but it was a challenge and that's big

V: it's two big things as well and they're linked by the skybridge and one time like the only time I left Sassy for the four days was I wanted to pop to the shop for 10 minutes right and so it's a it's a six-minute round-trip walk I was gone for nearly half an hour because I came out of the south entrance across the road walked straight down found the place that I was going to go stuff happened and then when I was coming back I got all turned around and when I googled on google maps the conference centre it took me all the way around to the north entrance which is very very far from the south entrance very far and that was a bit of a disaster but we found each other again in the end yeah

Me: good always nice when um when we have happy endings

{oh my}

Me: To be fair, that's just a lot of business travel. Yeah. If you speak to a lot of, you know, people that go abroad to conferences or meetings on business, it is a lot of, it is actually quite dull. It's a lot of staying in identikit bland hotels, going to conference rooms for most of the day and then going to a nearby pub or

restaurant in the evening. That's basically it. You hear a lot of people about business travel. Oh, you go all around the world. You do go all around the world.

V: But you just see hotels.

Me: Yes, you see a lot of hotels.

V: Yeah. So, yeah. I've got that kind of imposter syndrome. Have I visited Hamburg or not? I don't know, but yeah.

Me: I mean, all I will say is that two weeks ago, I was in a small room performing a comedy routine in front of about 12 people, and they gave me five pounds for it. I am putting on my CV that I am a professional comedian.

V: Absolutely.

Me: No one needs to know that it was five pounds in a room above a pub in front of 12 people.

V: That's how paid is paid.

Me: I spent it all and more on one half in the, because I'm a beer snob, so I went to a craft beer place opposite and the half pint of beer was about five pounds 70.

V: I'm really glad that you're doing more of your comedy. Because I remember after your first one, you said you weren't sure you might have ticked it off now and it might be done. But I think you're very good at it. It's good that you're carrying on.

Me: We'll see. We will see. But you have imposter syndrome. We all have imposter syndrome. Everybody has imposter syndrome. Sassy has imposter syndrome. I know because she told me. And that is amazing when you consider that this is someone who has been on CBS.

V: Yes. Yes. And she often thinks that, you know, her experiences don't count. Or, she's not quite big enough. So maybe it's a universal thing for us all. In travel influencer vein, though, I have to say, if anybody listening is listening or watching because they are planning a trip to Hamburg and they were hoping I'd say something vaguely useful. Here is my vaguely useful thing. If you are staying in the Mercure Hotel in Hamburg, know which one you're staying at. There are four. It helps if you have it written down so you can kind of helplessly go to the texture. What are we doing? I don't know what I'm doing. It also really helps, though, if you have one of Hamburg's most famous landmarks directly outside your window, which I did, which is this, I can't remember what it's bloomin' called. So you're going to have to look it up and tell your people what it's called. But it is this TV tower. It is the tallest structure in Hamburg. It was right outside my window. And it also meant that from pretty much everywhere that we were, you could see it and know you were heading in vaguely the right direction. So yeah, maybe pick a hotel that's right next to a massive landmark. Is that useful?

Me: A quick search online suggests it might be the Heinrich Hertz tower, which is 279.2 meters tall. Hamburg's tallest structure. And was built in 1966.

V: Which tracks, actually? Because it kind of looks like somebody's stuck a UFO on a stick.

Me: Admittedly, that wasn't my first thought, but then I wouldn't know I'm AroAce.

V: Yeah, it was quite. But yeah, that was directly outside of my hotel room window. And it being that tall meant that when we did have a hairy moment where we thought this taxi driver appears to be driving in the opposite direction to our hotel. A few minutes later, we could see it on the horizon. We were like, ah, we are heading in the right direction. It's right over there.

Me: Wikipedia tells me that until 2001, you can actually bungee off it.

V: Oh, that would be terrifying, actually, because you'd be bungee-ing down towards concrete. But yeah.

Me: I mean, bungee is terrifying anyway. I would never.

V: It feels like suicide for indecisive people. I don't like the idea at all. We're not supposed to jump head first off of cool things with humans.

Me: No, no, no, no.

V: We don't glide.

Me: We do not. Obviously, this was your first travel experience for a while. Did you worry about what to pack? Did you have a packing list?

V: So much worry and angst about what to pack. I took too many shoes to Hamburg, and do you know...

Me: How long were you away for?

V: Four days. Four days altogether. I used about a third of what I brought with me. And it also didn't help right. I've got this 90s suitcase with two wheels. It's big and jolopy, and it goes off in its own direction all the time. I've got an anarchist suitcase, right? And then Sassy has got this little four-wheel spinning thing that's so light and easy to control. I wish I'd had one of those instead. But basically, I had packed what to wear. And I had gone for sort of smart casual day dresses, right? Because we're doing business, but I need to be able to move around. And then at the very last minute, I thought, what if it's freezing? And I spend four days absolutely freezing. I need to bring smart jumpers in case it's really, really cold in the conference centre, and I'll still look business. So then I've got four jumpers in there. And then, I don't know why I packed four, because I was only at the

conference for three. And then I thought, well, I need my hoodie that I'm wearing to travel in. But what if, because it's a light-coloured hoodie, I spill something down it immediately, I'm going to need a hoodie for travelling back in as well. Now, I actually did use both hoodies, because I did spill something all down myself, of course. But also the hotel had laundry service, so I could have just done that. But yeah, so I had all of that. I had alternative shoes in case the first shoes gave me blisters. That isn't just me overthinking, my disability gives me blisters easily. My skin is too soft and it rubs off.

Me: Were you at the expo, were you standing up all the time, or were you sat down?

V: There were chairs there, and like I said, I had my little foot stool as well. But there was a lot of standing too, because we would sit down when people weren't at our sort of stall, but when people come up, I would have to guide Sassy over to where the product was that she was demonstrating, stand there and wait for her to do her demonstration, however long that takes, and then sort of take her back to sit down again. And then we were sort of walking around to get a tea and coffee and stuff like that in the day. And so there wasn't loads and loads of walking, but I didn't know that in advance. And so I had trainers and I had boots, and then I almost took a third pair of shoes and really glad that I didn't. And then I thought, oh God, what if it rains? I better take a raincoat, but then what if it's like cold, and then what if it's hot, and so do I need sunscreen? And like I ended up taking just one lot of bollocks that I didn't use, and stuff to do that I took with me, like a book and my knitting and stuff like that, that just stayed in my suitcase the whole time and didn't get touched. I didn't have time and I was too tired when I got back to do anything like that, I would just crash out as soon as I got back to the hotel. And so next time, if there is a next time, I would be taking a bag that's about half the size because I could have got away with just hand luggage so there's absolutely no need for it whatsoever.

Me: Yeah, the more you travel, the more you learn what you use and what you don't use.

V: Yeah, yeah. I don't regret taking my portable power bank, although I didn't use it, I think that that was probably worth the weight, but pretty much everything else. Also, and I don't know if you do this as well, because you're a much more experienced traveller now and you've gone to 100 countries, so you're well used to it. Why is it when I pack? I'm a completely continent human being who has been potty trained since I was two, and yet why did I need 16 pairs of underwear for a four-day trip? Was I planning on just crapping myself every day?

Me: If you're not used to the food, who knows?

V: Yeah, I didn't need that much underwear, definitely didn't need that many socks. The weather was really, really nice, but in Hamburg at that time of year, it's similar to here, really, so you never know if it's going to be hail or boiling. Luckily for us, it was warm and sunny, but not too hot, so it was perfect for me.

Me: Yeah. Excellent.

V: And I didn't even use my brolly.

Me: I haven't used a brolly for decades, because they're stupid things.

V: I don't know why I brought it with me, because I never ever use one, because it hurts my shoulder to hold it up, and also my other arm's going to be occupied with Sassy, so it would be hard to hold it across my body to hurt anyway. And I don't like using umbrellas. I don't like how it blocks my peripheral vision. I don't even know why I put it in my suitcase. It's useless dead weight.

Me: When I was hiking the Pennine Way back in 2019, we came across a chap who had a brolly attached to his backpack.

V: Oh, that's a good idea. It's all very well until the wind starts blowing, I suppose.

Me: I mean, yes.

V: That's the trouble with a brolly, is that they don't work in the wind, but it never rains without the wind, so...

Me: Yeah, I never... The main reason why I don't... Well, the two main reasons why I never take brollies is, one, because wind, and two, because I like my hands free.

V: Yeah. Yeah. So have I convinced you to go to Hamburg?

Me: I mean, I was always going to go to Hamburg anyway. It's just that when you get the Visit Hamburg delegation drunk in Malta and have conversations, they tend to forget them.

V: You should probably remind them about that. Over a hot chocolate maybe instead.

Me: Yes. Yeah. OK. Well, thank you very much for turning up. And may you have more experiences of travel now that you've got used to it and know that you're comfortable knowing that you can.

V: Knowing that I can, yeah. I think that this trip was probably going to be the hardest one because it was the first one. I think after this, hopefully we'll get easier and easier.

Me: And you had a lot of responsibility on this trip as well, which may have helped.

V: Yeah. I think it kind of did in a way because being a mum of four, I'm quite used to pushing my angst aside to deal with the immediate person that needs my help in front of me. And so, not to infantilise Sassy like that because she doesn't really need help in that sort of way, but yeah, I'm quite good at sort of pushing the angst aside because somebody else needs me. And in my head, she needs me more than my panic needs me. So it

was good in that regard.

Me: Excellent

V: Back in even as late as December last year, I would not have imagined having done this trip. So yeah, it's pretty crazy how quickly things can change. And when people ask you things, if you say, I don't know how, but I'll find a way to do it rather than, oh, I can't do that, then you open yourself up to these things and it's never as bad as you think it's going to be.

Me: So as a final question, then what's your next plan? Do you have an insight that you'll go somewhere else Do you have an insight that you'll do something else abroad?

V: I really like the idea of going away again. Like I said, I would like to go back to Hamburg and explore a bit more of it. But Hamburg wasn't actually on my radar before. I've got a sort of bucket list and I also just like you, put me on this as well or have an absolutely not list. But I don't want to say any of those places in case I accidentally like end up going to one of my absolutely not places.

Me: I've been to several of my absolutely not places.

V: But yeah, there's a lot of places that I would like to explore. I think I would probably do at least one more European trip before going further afield. Purely because I'm lazy, everybody speaks English and it's just a bit easier in a lot of ways. So yeah, for my first time of actually booking stuff myself and all that sort of thing, I would probably do a European place again. But yeah, I'm definitely open to travelling a lot more and going a lot further afield. I'm hoping to go further afield.

Me: Excellent. Thank you very much.

V: Thank you for having me.

Me: It's a pleasure. Thank you for having me as well. Until the next time.

V: Speak soon

{end pod jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me next time for another adventure Beyond The Brochure. Until then, remember, everyone's gotta learn sometime, 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.}