

Transcript for Spaces 002 - Travel Planning

Hello :)

This is the recording of the second Twitter Spaces that I did with my friend V, in early February. As you probably know if you listen to my main podcast episodes, she decided after the first one that this was a really good use of social media that should work pretty well for my online style, so we've been doing them fortnightly since then.

We followed the same format, and indeed that's the format we've been using since, of creating questions and then getting me to answer them, in a kind of Q&A or casual-interview-type environment. We're always open to questions from you too though, so if you have anything you want me to answer, then drop us a line at the usual places. Or come onto a session and request the mic.

Upcoming Spaces topics will be: Solo Travel, Border Crossings & Visa Admin, Travel and Money (including budgeting, but also using money abroad safely), and Packing & Luggage. If you've got any ideas for future topics you'd like me to talk about in these sessions too, again don't hesitate to drop either of us a note.

This particular session is on Travel Planning When You're Really Not A Planner, and given that I once did a Twitter poll overnight to tell me which direction and country I should visit the next day, only to wake up and find it was exactly 50-50, I'm possibly either the worst, or the best, person to talk about Travel Planning.

But I tried. Kind of.

Again, be aware this conversation took place over the phone, so the audio quality won't be as great as my normal podcast episodes. Otherwise, I hope you enjoy it!

{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly series 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 Brit 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. Spaces recording begins}

BB: Oi

VICTORIA: Hello

BB: There we go. Fabulous

VICTORIA: We got there in the ned

BB: yes

VICTORIA: Which is quite fitting for our topic, really, all about planning. We didn't plan that one wonderfully well, did we?

BB: Anyway

VICTORIA: Anyway. So. Just quickly introduce us. I'm Victoria Pearson, you can call me V. I'm really just here to ask the Barefoot Backpacker questions, so it's not really boring and makes it sound like they're talking to themselves. You probably already know this if you are here, but if you are new, the Barefoot Backpacker is a podcaster and blogger, who goes Beyond The Brochure and visits places so you don't have to, although I have yet to convince them to visit Slough. Today we're talking about Travel Planning When You're Really Not A Planner, and just after we set the topic for this Space, decided to do a last minute trip, didn't you?!

BB: Oh yes, yes.

VICTORIA: So you're actually on a trip which you planned at the last second, right now.

BB: I am, absolutely. So today is Thursday, and I planned this trip, well, I say I planned, I booked my journey out, literally a week ago. Bearing in mind I, er, I left on Friday, this means that I booked my coach ticket two days before I left. Which I think is ...

VICTORIA: That's fantastic. Is that normal for you?

BB: It's fairly standard for me, let's be honest.

VICTORIA: So is that how far in advance you would usually book one of your trips?

BB: Yeah, kind of. One of my problems, problems?, probably not the word. One of my facets is that I'm very indecisive and I don't like committing to things. So often I'll uhm and ahh about: should I go here, should I go there, should I do this, should I do that, and then not actually book anything until the very last minute, because I feel I have to.

VICTORIA: Is that the case even when it's a trip to somewhere quite far away? Cos you're on a fairly local-ish trip at the moment, aren't you?

BB: Yeh, I'm in Northern Ireland so it's literally just a 6 hour coach trip from where I live in Glasgow.

VICTORIA: If you were somewhere very far away, would you plan it further in advance, or are you always a last-minuter?

BB: I've booked inter-continental flights on the day I've left, before now.

VICTORIA: Ooh that would give me the anxiety {giggles}

BB: Er, the first one I remember doing was, I booked a trip to visit one of my friends abroad, in Australia, and I booked it with about a week's notice.

VICTORIA: {giggles} That is, I'm not wrong in thinking it, that's about a 24 hour flight away isn't it?

BB: Er, I had four breakfasts that day.

VICTORIA: {giggles} So when you go on a trip and you are booking that close to you actually leaving, do you have a structured itinerary for the trip, or do you just sort of see how things go? Do you book tours and excursions in advance as well, or are you very much a 'turn up and see what happens'?

BB: The short answer is: it very much depends on what the tour is, because, I travel alone most of the time, so some of the places that I go to are quite tricky to get to on your own, they do require a little bit of forethought. And sometimes it helps to book a tour just to, erm, make sure I actually get there, if nothing else. Bute what I've tended to find a lot of the times is that it's easier to book it there rather than, you know, when I'm back at home scouring the internet. But even then I'll book it last-minute, but I'll book it last-minute because it's easier to book it there and then, on the spot, you know, there's a tour going hiking in Kyrgyzstan mountains, I'm not necessarily going to know about those tours when I'm back in Glasgow. Yeh, if I'm in Kyrgyzstan, I can go to the tourist office and go 'hi are there any tours', and they'll go 'yes, there's one tomorrow', and I'll go 'fabulous, that suits me fine'.

VICTORIA: That actually brings me to something I was going to ask you a bit later actually, but erm, things like, when you arrive at a destination, you travel mostly by public transport, don't you?

BB: Yes.

VICTORIA: So do you look up when you're at home things like bus and train timetables before you leave, or do you just sort of work it out once you get there?

BB: Most of the places I go to, it's almost impossible to find local transport information online.

VICTORIA: That must make planning quite difficult if you're going to more than one destination?

BB: Yes. But, equally, what I do, and this is certainly what I did when I backpacked around Southern Africa for a couple of weeks a few years back, and my basic principle was: Masvingo is a fairly big city, Bulawayo is a fairly big city. There's a fair chance I can get from one to the other, don't know how I'm going to do it, but it makes logical sense that, you know, people in Zimbabwe can get from one to the other without driving, I'm sure I can manage it. I just have to figure out how they do it, where they go, and what they do. So very often it's a case of turning up to the bus station and going 'so, is there a bus today to wherever', and they'll go 'yeh'. 'When does it leave?' 'When it's full'. Fabulous.

VICTORIA: So that must mean you've sometimes been in a situation then where your plans just haven't worked out that day, maybe a bus hasn't turned up so you've missed a connection somewhere, or you turn up at a hostel and find that it's unexpectedly closed, something like that, how do you cope when plans go off track like that?

BB: By not making them in the first place.

VICTORIA: {giggles}

BB: The thing about the way I travel is, if something goes wrong, I can very much react very quickly because I haven't necessarily made so many plans off the back of it in the first place. So you know, if I'd've ... if I were going backpacking around, say, well I mean the one I'm on now, Northern Ireland, right, so, Northern Ireland is a fairly simple place to go backpacking around because everything's online, everything's simple, it's clear. But, you know, I still haven't planned everything in advance because, you know, a train might be late or something, or a bus might not turn up, or it might turn out that I can't get from A to B particularly well, which is what happened ... yesterday. I was in Derry and I was trying to get to Armagh. And there's one direct bus a day. And I wanted to lie in bed because it left at like 10 to 10 in the morning and I wanted to, I fancied a lie in, let's not get that bus, let's just do, let's have a casual thing, and see how else I can do this journey. And it turns out the

best way of doing the journey is going via Belfast. But there's plenty of other ways of doing it, but I wouldn't have known it until I looked, well, I looked online and there were about three or four different routes, but when I went to the bus station in Derry and asked them, they gave me a completely different route that hadn't been picked up online, and worked particularly well. So I went for that one instead, because it was cheaper.

VICTORIA: Do you feel a bit more secure doing that in a country where, like, English is very widely spoken, you feel confident in the language. Would that be more difficult if you were in one of your more obscure or far-flung destinations where maybe you don't understand how to communicate?

BB: Yeh, I mean my social anxiety is really bit for this sort of thing, which is why I have issues sometimes. But that's a social anxiety thing rather than a something specific to that county, I would have that problem in Italy. It's more about me, and my being able to cope with it. One of my phrases is 'Knowledge Is Power' and it's especially true for situations when I'm in a foreign country and don't speak the language, which is why it helps if there's things online, but again, what I tend to find is that if I go to, say, a railway station I can just look at the timetable, because they usually have them printed on the walls of the railway station.

VICTORIA: Yeh.

BB: But the other thing that helps with is knowing where I can get to. It's not just a case of 'can I get to X', it's also a case of 'oh I'd never thought of going to place Y, there's a train that leaves tomorrow at 3 in the afternoon

VICTORIA: And I suppose if you'd over-planned every aspect of your trip, you'd never get the chance to, sort of, go off your own map like that and go 'ooh I've never heard of this particular place, I'll go and check that out.'

BB: Yes, and, and, there's things that help. So before I leave, and it may help if I tell you how to choose a destination in the first place.

VICTORIA: I was going to ask you that, so do go ahead.

BB: Okay, fabulous It's not like we planned this talk or anything is it.

VICTORIA: You do go to some places that are, like a lot of people haven't heard of some of the places you go, like how do you decide where you're going to travel to next?

BB: A lot of the times it's because there's something interesting in that place. Now my interests are history, my interests are culture, my interests are scenery. So, oh and beer, but that's by the by. So. What will often happen is, there will be something, you know, I'll remember something from my childhood, like, one news item thirty years ago, or, there'll be something that's constantly in the papers or they'll be, maybe I'll have read a story or like, seen a documentary about a particular place and about something that happened in that place, and it'll lodge in my mind and I'll go 'ooh that's really interesting, I must go there' and that's kind of what I do, and it doesn't really matter where those places are because obviously everywhere, everywhere has history, some of it, most of it, quite dark history.

VICTORIA: You've gone to some pretty dark places actually, the deep dive section of your blog has a category called 'dark tourism', which is very dark.

BB: That's probably the subject for another Space.

VICTORIA: Yes.

BB: In essence it's a case of 'these places exist and I want to go to them'. So, the first thing that I do when I decide where I'm going is to, literally, decide where I'm going. Before I decide how to get there, before I work out, you know, can I even get there, it's 'I want to go here'. Then I look at a map and I go 'what else is in the area that's interesting?'. So I go, for example, let's look at, I dunno, well obviously I'm in Northern Ireland so let's look at Northern Ireland. So I wanted to go to Belfast and I wanted to go to Derry. So It's a case of looking, well, what else is there in Northern Ireland, what is there around? Okay, is there anything in Enniskillen? Having a look. Nothing that strikes out at me. What about Omagh? Well there's this Folk Park just outside Omagh, about Irish emigration to the USA, Living Museum, might be interesting, fabulous, right, never heard of it, how do I get there? That's my next question. Sounds interesting, how do I get there? Can I get there? Yep, there's a direct bus from Derry. Right. Let's do that. And that's kind of the way I do it. And it is quite last minute cos I tend to look at these things about a day or two in advance.

VICTORIA: And is that process the same, like, wherever you are in the world?

BB: yes, pretty much. Erm. The other advantage if this is that I can go 'oh I don't want to do X, I don't want to do Y, what else is in the area? Oh there's a place over here I've never heard of. Right, I'll do that tomorrow. And then just changed my plans, go somewhere else, slightly different,. Because I can. It's like today. There's, not far from where I'm staying is an old hill fort, it's the old ancient capital of the Irish Kingdom of Ulster. And I wanted to go, but it wasn't until last night that I decided to go today rather than yesterday.

VICTORIA: Fair enough. Is that sort of a big part of why you like to travel alone?

BB: Yeh, well, yes, in the sense that it's a big part of why I do travel alone because of my not booking things in advance and my going randomly. It's like sometimes I'll even walk through a city street and go 'ooh there's an interesting bit of street art over here' and then just veer off to the right down an alleyway without telling anyone.

Erm. I think part of it is, I don't think many people could travel with me, because I'd just frustrate them after a while.

VICTORIA: But then that does also show, if anybody is tuning in to listen to this Space because they are hankering after an adventure but they don't really know where to start with it, if you do even just a tiny minimal bit of planning, you will probably do just fine. {giggles}

BB: Essentially there are buses everywhere.

VICTORIA: {giggles}

BB: They might not be terribly regular or frequent but there's generally buses everywhere. Because the people who live there have to get to places, and my view is – if they can do it, I can do it.

VICTORIA: So before you go to a place, probably not relevant for Northern Ireland, but erm, say you're going to somewhere a bit further away, do you memorise phrases in the language? Like 'please', 'thanks', 'sorry', 'I haven't got any money', do you find out about local customs and cultures before you go? Or do you just sort of wing it once you get there?

BB: I would love to be able to learn phrases in foreign languages. I would love it. It'd be great. It would make my life a lot easier. However. I have the attention span of a dead gnat. So. I go into this with a great knowledge of 'right I'm going to take a phrase book', I'm gonna try to learn things like 'hello' 'goodbye', 'thank you', 'please', and the numbers, the numbers are very important, because everything revolves around money. So if you're like in a marketplace and there's no price tags on anything and you have to ask how much things are, you need to be able to understand what the answer is.

VICTORIA: Yeh.

BB: Or in buses, you know, if you're paying by buses, it helps to, because they don't have a, they don't very often have a display to say how much it is, so you're just reliant on what the bus driver tells you.

VICTORIA: And you've got to be able to say 'cheers drive' to the bus driver. Or you just come across as rude.

BB: I agree entirely. My problem is, I go into this with great intentions of, you know, learning phrases in the foreign language, and trying to be, trying to not be the obvious tourist, I blatantly am the obvious tourist, but it never works out like that because I can never remember the phrases. Because my brain ...

VICTORIA: {giggles} Is that because you do that at the last minute too?

BB: Well, three things. I don't give myself enough time to learn them. Erm, I'm too socially anxious to use the phrases because I'm scared of getting them wrong and being laughed at, because I'm the obvious tourist. But also my brain doesn't actually work that quickly live, so I find it very difficult to use phrases in a foreign language, and I find it very difficult to learn the phrases in the foreign language. And I especially get really scared when people reply. Cos it's one thing memorising by rote, like you know when you're at school and you do those role-play exercises. It's one thing memorising by rote what you're going to say, like, you know, can I get, how do I get to the railway station, for instance.

VICTORIA: Yeh, but they might not stay on script

BB: Exactly, they may not stay on script, and there's no guarantee that you'll be able to understand the answer.

VICTORIA: Yes.

BB: So, doing stuff in foreign languages is a lot more, it's a lot more than just taking a phrasebook. You either have to ... in my head, you either have to be reasonably competent at the simple stuff or ... you just can't do it, and I just can't do it cos my, I just, I would love to be able to speak foreign languages but my brain just doesn't work that way.

VICTORIA: So do you do a lot of miming and acting things out?

BB: Yeh, I mean, there's quite a lot you can do with 'I want that one' and pointing at it. And one finger for one, two fingers for two, that sort of thing. Erm. I mean, I try. Things do lodge in my head, and I have learned some ridiculous words, but, in general it's, and I find it quite embarrassing, because I know it just makes me appear like this ignorant English tourist who doesn't know anything. I'm conscious of that and I don't want to be seen as that, but I can't ... for some reason I just can't do it.

VICTORIA: Do you think maybe if you did book and plan things a bit further in advance you would be able to sort of practice the languages a bit more beforehand and feel a bit more confident in doing it?

BB: No.

VICTORIA: I suppose a lot of the places you visit though have such a wide array of spoken languages and no sort of main language.

BB: Yeh, I mean, a lot of the places I've visited are colonial. So while they'll have a lot of local languages, they'll also have, probably, grudgingly, a colonial language that they use as a kind of lingua franca. And a lot of the time it's English, because, hey!

VICTORIA: Wonder why that could be?!

BB: I've really no idea why that could be (!). Erm. But. Quite a few of the places I've been to, the colonial language is French. And I haven't studied French since 1991, despite at one point having a French fiancée, and

a couple of French friends who shared a house with me. Er, they all preferred to speak English. But. I can get by in French, because I've remembered enough of it from so long ago, and have vaguely kept up with it since, so it's not as difficult for me to get around in Francophone countries as it might otherwise be.

VICTORIA: Yeh.

BB: I find it more comfortable to visit West Africa than Italy, for that respect.

VICTORIA: That makes sense actually, that you'd be more comfortable in French. Erm, yes, so, you often travel barefoot. In fact I don't think you ever don't travel barefoot, do you, really?

BB: Right, okay, right, just on that note, I'd like to point out that it is, what is it, the 10th of February?

VICTORIA: Yes.

BB: It's the 10th of February, I'm in Northern Ireland, it's about zero degrees out there. I am not barefoot. Well, I'm barefoot right now cos I'm inside, but I have been wearing sandals.

VICTORIA: Oh. You do surprise me. I thought you mostly wore your sandals when it was too hot rather than when it was too cold. I've seen you walk barefoot through snow.

BB: Yes. I have seen me walk barefoot through snow as well.

VICTORIA: Yes, so you're often travelling barefoot. Some cultures have, like, some quite specific things about feet, in that you can't show your soles of your foot to a person, that's seen as very rude, things like that. Are those sort of cultural and local customs things that you'd look up before you go to a new space, or do you just sort of wing that as you get there as well?

BB: Yeh, I wing that as well.

VICTORIA: Things like table manners differ between countries and cultures, things like that, is that the sort of thing you worry about before you go somewhere? Or do you just kind of take a cue from the people around you?

BB: Yeh, I mean, so the thing with, okay so there's a number of things here. So, the barefoot thing, erm, yeh there's a lot of cultures where it's rude to show the soles of your feet, but equally it's those are the same cultures where, you know, you take your shoes off before you go inside a building. It's very much you sort of, you just act 'normally', cos the only way you'd show the soles of your feet is if you're sitting down on the floor and your legs sort of along it. And you know, you shouldn't really do that anyway in a public place cos you're just getting in the way. So a lot of those cultural things are things that wouldn't ... it's not that you wouldn't do them anyway, it's just that you'd have to go a little bit out of your normal way to do break those customs, I think. It's like, there's that whole thing where you shouldn't, there's certain parts of the world where, you know, being topless is frowned upon. But I never go topless anyway. And a lot of my clothing attire, so temples in South East Asia certainly but presumably also, yeh mosques as well, you've got to kind of cover your knees and cover your elbows and things like that, and the vast majority of what I wear, I'm going to cover my knees and my elbows. So in that respect I dress relatively conservatively I mean I dress quite, you know, I dress like a very queer, I would say a queer man but that would be pushing it

VICTORIA: Or a CBeebies presenter. {giggles}

BB: I dress quite flamboyantly, but it's still, in terms of length, I very rarely wear shorts, for instance, and even tho I'll tend to wear t-shirts or a short-sleeved shirt, as long as my shoulders are covered it's fine, and if, on the rare occasions I need to cover my elbows, I've probably got a fleece or a coat or something that's light enough to flick on. So that sort of thing isn't a problem.

VICTORIA: So when it comes to that sort of thing, is that something that you feel you can generally figure out once you're there, and people aren't going to get too mad about you doing anyway because they can see you're doing your best?

BB: Yes, yes absolutely. I mean obviously there are, things like, you know, temple attire, it's stuff that people generally know anyway. And even if you don't, there's usually signposts outside telling you anyway telling you what you can and can't do.

VICTORIA: Yeh, and in religious buildings it's quite obvious that you tend to dress more conservatively anyway.

BB: Yeh, so that's not so much of a planning thing, that's, I'd like to say that's common knowledge, but sadly, {giggles}, so you know, it's other things, like, uh, there's museums in South East Asia where you're not supposed to wear shoes, so you have to leave them outside.

VICTORIA: Is that because they're sort of religious museums or is it that they just don't want to keep washing the floor?

BB: It's a cultural thing. Because you tend to take your shoes off in the house, you'll tend to take your shoes off in other buildings as well.

VICTORIA: Is this like most public buildings, rather than museums specifically?

BB: Errrrrm, in Laos it was museums and religious temples, that sort of thing. But I definitely, in Philippines, we wandered into a travel agents, that required us to leave our shoes outside.

VICTORIA: Oh, interesting.

BB: Yep. But I mean, we wouldn't have known that. But there were signs. So we didn't need to plan, {giggles} it seems weird to say 'plan clothing attire to go shopping with', but ...

VICTORIA: But I suppose that's an important aspect, especially if you are backpacking, because you have to be quite discerning about what you take with you, and so knowing what kind of clothing you're going to need when you get there in advance is probably quite an important aspect of it really. How are in advance do you pack for a trip?

BB: My record is 20 minutes.

VICTORIA: {laughs} Was that for somewhere far flung for a long definition, or was that just a quick weekend away somewhere?

BB: Erm, if memory serves, that was a trip to the USA.

VICTORIA: So quite far then really, if we're UK based.

BB: But I was staying with friends at the time so it wasn't as bad. But the only reason it took twenty minutes is because I only had twenty minutes between leaving work and catching a bus to the airport.

VICTORIA: What, did you book it that day as well?

BB: Nah, I booked it a couple of days earlier.

VICTORIA: So you actually had a few days! {giggles} Before we go on holiday I actually pack quite far in advance, but that's because obviously I'm packing for six people.

BB: Yes. I'm just packing for me. But generally I'll do the washing the night before, so by the time it comes round to packing my clothes, they might actually be dry.

VICTORIA: I don't think that I could travel with you. {laughs} No offence. I don't think I could travel with you. Plan Ds. We'd have lists.

BB: But on that note, when it comes to packing for travel, I don't generally plan what I take for clothing, because as I say, my clothes are all fairly standard anyway, so as long as I've got something that keeps me warm, and as long as I've got something that keeps me cool, then everything else is just ...

VICTORIA: I presume you take more hats than you're going to need?

BB: No.

VICTORIA: On account of leaving hats. Well maybe you should! {giggles}

BB: There isn't enough space in my backpack for an infinite number of hats.

VICTORIA: {giggles} You just have a pile of them on your head. And just keep losing the top one.

BB: Hats, fleeces, coats, yeh.

VICTORIA: So yeh, you lose a lot of stuff because of your ADHD, yeh? So that must make the admin side of travelling quite challenging as well. How do you keep track of, like, what vaccinations you've had in the past, and stuff like that?

BB: Well, fortunately, not very many places require them. Er, but I have a small yellow booklet that I got when I got my Yellow Fever jab in 2014. And everything I've had since then, except for the Covid jabs because I couldn't find it, is in that booklet.

VICTORIA: I think you can get that digitally now, but I don't know if that would be, like, acceptable when you're travelling. I don't know how you find out what vaccinations you need to travel, whether the drinking water's safe, how do you find that sort of thing out and how far in advance do you find out that sort of thing before you travel? If you do a lot of your things very last minute, it must be difficult if you want to go to a place and then you realise that you're supposed to have this vaccine three months in advance, or something like that.

BB: Yeh, I mean that's never happened, to be fair. The way I find out is by looking at the Foreign Office website, that's generally the way.

VICTORIA: Do even like the obscure places come up on there? If you wanted to go somewhere no-one's ever heard of, sort of thing, would you still be able to find stuff like the visa requirements and the vaccine requirements and things like that online?

BB: In theory. The Foreign Office website in theory has everything like that for every country. In practice, we don't have consulates or embassies in every country, so getting visas for some countries is a little tricky, does require a little bit of planning. There have been visas that I have had to buy in advance. A couple of months in advance. Which was distinctly worrying cos I don't know what I'm doing in two months time, I don't know when I'm going to be leaving, I haven't booked a flight yet, oh wait, I need to book the flight for the visa. Very very annoying, Uzbekistan, please don't do that again.

VICTORIA: So has that ever put you off going to a place then, because you're like, I can't be fuffed with all that admin and planning in advance?

BB: Yes.

VICTORIA: {giggles}

BB: There are a couple of places I have not been to because the admin is too much. Turkmenistan. I have not

been to Turkmenistan because it requires far too much admin. As a British Citizen anyway, because it's a country that requires you to go on an official tour.

VICTORIA: Oh, I see.

BB: Now, when I say 'official tour', generally it means you have to be guided around the country by an official tour guide, and the official tour guide could be, you know, a twenty year old called Bob, who happens to live in Ashgabat and wants a bit of money on the side, but ...

VICTORIA: So you have to take a tour and then you can go off on your own? Or you have to be accompanied the whole time that you're there?

BB: When I last looked into this, which was admittedly a couple of years back, for British citizens you could get a transit visa for about three days, or you had to be guided by a chap for the whole of your trip.

VICTORIA: I mean, I can't say I blame a lot of countries for wanting to keep an eye on us. We have got a bit of a habit of nicking things for our museums and stuff.

BB: {laughs} There's that old joke about, you know, the Egyptian, the pyramids in Egypt and Sudan, you know, 'these are great, how long have they been here, they're still here, I'm impressed', yeh that's because we couldn't nick them.

VICTORIA: {giggles}

BB: They wouldn't fit in the British Museum so we had to leave them there. Erm, yes, erm, so there's a couple of places like that. I wanted to go to Iran, but I couldn't, because again, I needed a tour guide and I couldn't be fuffed with the admin. And there's a couple of other places like that as well, erm, Nigeria, for a British Citizen requires all manner of admin that {sighs}, the thing is, and what you've always got to remember is, I'm obviously very privileged to have a British Passport because this only happens with certain countries. If you hold a passport for, I've got a Tweep who's Indian and she can't travel last minute because pretty much everywhere requires her to get a visa in advance, and proof of bank balances, and proof of employment signed by her employer, things like that.

VICTORIA: Gosh, that's quite overkill.

BB: It is, it's very much overkill, but it's the norm for a lot of citizens for a lot of countries. We just, and you get all of these, now we've left the European Union you have a lot of Brits going 'oh my god there's so much admin going to the European Union now' and I'm just going 'yeah, welcome to the real world'.

VICTORIA: You're making me wish I could remember which of your podcasts you talked about passport privilege on, because ...

BB: I think it was episode 25.

VICTORIA: Episode 25, which is on barefoot-backpacker.com along with all of the Travel Tales podcasts.

{giggles} That was very smoothly done, wasn't it?

BB: My mother said you sounded like a radio presenter.

VICTORIA: Oh really? {laughs} That's very sweet. Erm. So have you ever wished you'd planned something a little bit better or more thoroughly than you did? Has it ever ruined a trip, your last-minuting?

BB: It's never ruined a trip. I mean the answer to that question is both yes and no. I like the way I travel, and I like the way I travel last minute. And I miss out on things. I know I miss out on things because I discover, you know, this place has something interesting two days after I left it.

VICTORIA: {giggles} Have you ever then cycled back and go 'oh I must go and visit that thing' because I missed it, or are you just like 'meh, I might get back to you in ten years or so?'

BB: Yeh, it's pretty much the latter, it's like, yeh, it's gone now, I'm not gonna go back, I don't like retracing my steps on a journey, so I'll just do it next time.

VICTORIA: On the flip side of that, have you ever over-planned a trip and ended up feeling restricted by your own plans or anything like that?

BB: No, god no.

VICTORIA: I can't imagine you doing that to be honest.

BB: I mean, I've travelled with other people who have over-planned And it's very restrictive and it's like 'okay, tomorrow we're going here. Thursday we're going there, Friday we're going there, and I'm going ...

VICTORIA: But I might wake up with achy feet and want a lie-in.

BB: Absolutely. Absolutely. Erm. So no. I know why people do it. They do it for, as far as I can tell, for security of mind, peace of mind, they like to know what's going on, they like to be sure of things, they don't like leaving things to chance, they want to know what they're gonna do that day, and it's great, it's fabulous, I just can't ... I just can't do that.

VICTORIA: I think if I was travelling with my children I'd want to make sure it was a bit structured so I felt like I hadn't wasted time, but also so that I didn't have to waste brain space on thinking about what to do that day. But I think that your way of travel has got a lot to recommend it, especially because it means you can't really be thrown off course by a change in plans, because you can just spontaneously embrace your new plan.

BB: What it does mean is that sometimes I go to places that haven't been worth it. You know, I've looked on the map and gone 'ooh that sounds really interesting' and I get there and it ... isn't.

VICTORIA: {giggles} But I thought you said that everywhere was interesting.

BB: Everywhere is interesting but not everywhere requires a two-night stay.

VICTORIA: {giggles} Yeh, fair enough. I will make sure that when I finally do convince you to go to Slough, it'll be for just the one night.

BB: I've been to Slough! Well, no, I've changed buses in Slough Bus Station, which has now been demolished.

VICTORIA: I think you should go and find something interesting, cool, and unique about Slough

BB: It's almost certainly got a craft beer hipster bar

VICTORIA: Probably. I don't know why my children tell each other to go to Slough, but there we go.

BB: I mean when I was growing up it was Coventry, and then I lived in Coventry and I realised why.

VICTORIA: {giggles} So, "not role model"-ness aside, what advice would you give to people who want to have a go at backpacking for the first time but are feeling a bit overwhelmed by the whole idea?

BB: Er, the best thing I can do, the best thing I can say, is: Make sure you're going for the right reasons, make sure you're going to the right places, and make sure that you, and I'm going to say this cos it makes me a huge hypocrite, plan it so that you enjoy it.

VICTORIA: Yeh, so you maybe don't want to over-plan it but have a few ideas of what you want to do when you get to a place.

BB: But all of those three things are tapered by 'you have to know yourself'. You have to know what you're capable of, and you have to know what you really want to do.

VICTORIA: When you've just said 'make sure you're going to the right places', I think it's important that those are 'the right places for you', and what you want to see, rather than 'the right places' as in 'it will look very shiny on Instagram and everyone will be jealous'.

BB: Yes. The thing with Instagram is lots of places look very shiny on Instagram and lots of places deserve to because they're absolutely fantastic places. There's a kind of movement in some parts of the travel, certainly Travel Twitter, that's trying to sort of get away from the Instagram, that's trying to, sort of, slow travel.

VICTORIA: Get 'Beyond The Brochure' a bit?

BB: Yeh, but I'm thinking: there are some things that are popular for a reason, and deservedly so, because, you know, they are pretty, they are interesting, they will be, you know, they will look good on photographs, and you do, you should deserve to go and see them because they are definitely worth seeing. There are some places that are not. {giggles}. When I say 'go to the right places for you', what I mean by that is: know what you like. So if I were to say, if someone were to ask me, where should I go, completely ... you've got the whole world in front of you, you want to go somewhere abroad, where would you suggest that I go as a new backpacker, I would generally always say South-East Asia. And the reason I say that is because it's relatively cheap, there's a lot of other people backpacking there, so there's a lot of other people to join with if you're feeling a bit lonely, or you want to join a tour group, there's going to be plenty of people there to join with, obviously this is all in non-covid times, and there's a lot of interesting historical stuff, there's a lot of interesting cultural stuff, there's a lot of interesting decent scenery down there, so I would say South East Asia, but that doesn't necessarily mean you should go there if you've got no interest in South East Asia.

VICTORIA: Yeh.

BB: You have to decide what you want, why you're travelling, what you want to see, and what you want to do. I've been to a number of parts of the world, and, so I had a really enjoyable five weeks backpacking around West Africa a few years ago. But I know I wouldn't have enjoyed it as much, and I wouldn't have got as much out of it, if I hadn't done other backpacking trips before that to different parts of the world, because West Africa is a place that doesn't have very many other backpackers, so you are very much on your own doing this. And you have to either be really good at planning, really good at winging it, or just, you know, probably be fluent in at least four different African languages.

VICTORIA: {giggles} So yeh, that's one for when you're comfortable with spontaneously changing your plans really.

BB: And that's another point, and I referred to it earlier. There are some parts of the world where you can't plan, there are some parts of the world where you'll turn up to a town and you'll end up sleeping on the sofa of a moto-taxi driver because it's just the easiest thing to do. There are some parts of the world where the hotels don't have websites, they still have phones. There are some parts of the world where the buses leave once a week, and you won't know that until you get there and find out. And guidebooks used to be really good for this, because someone's already done the hard work for you. But of course things change. And there's no guarantee that you'll get to somewhere and find out that the bus that used to go on Wednesdays now goes on Thursdays.

VICTORIA: In general, when you turn up at a place, maybe your plans have gone a bit awry, or the bus doesn't go this Wednesday of a week, it goes on the third Wednesday of a month, or you know, the hostel that

you turned up to isn't operational any more, have you been able to rely on strangers, people who don't understand you very well, that sort of thing, to help you out and get you out of that bind? Have you ever been in a situation where you've thought 'I really genuinely don't know what to do right now'?

BB: Yes, yeh yeh I had that problem in Tamale in Ghana, where I turned up and none of the B&Bs or hotels had any room for some reason, so that's how I ended up sleeping on the sofa of a moto-taxi driver's house.

VICTORIA: Is that the worst place you've ended up sleeping?

BB: It's the least planned place I've ended up sleeping. Yeh I've had that a couple of times on my trips where I've turned up to what my guidebook says is a hostel but which apparently has been closed for three years. And I just end up finding another one. It's just that in Tamale, there weren't any.

VICTORIA: But still, things were okay, you're here to tell the tale, and it all worked out all right in the end.

BB: The one thing, I mean, certainly travelling in Africa does this but it's probably true across the whole of the world, the one thing that you end up realising is that people will generally never let you suffer. There will always be a way, there will always be an opening. No matter what goes wrong, people will generally always look after you and make sure you get to your destination, or make sure you have a bed for the night.

VICTORIA: Oh that is such a lovely, lovely thought, and I think that's where we should wrap up actually, cos I know that you have to be somewhere at half past and it's quarter past now. But I like that note that you can generally always rely on the goodness of people.

BB: Yes, yes.

VICTORIA: And we will go more into that in a future Space where we're going to talk about 'Travel and Personal Safety', but I don't think that's going to be the next one. I think the next one that we're going to do in two weeks is likely to be about 'Travel and Health'; because it kind of feeds in a little bit to what we've been talking about today around vaccinations and things as well.

BB: Yeh, planning ahead for vaccinations. Oh, the other thing about planning, and we talked a little bit about it earlier, and I wanted to bring it in, is admin and visas and stuff, you said.

VICTORIA: Yes, I think we will talk more in depth about that in a future Space as well, as we can talk about money and things there too.

BB: yeh, all I was going to say is that one of the things you do need to do is look to see if you need the visa, but also how you get the visa, cos some places you can get visas on arrival, and some places you can only get a visa on arrival is you fly in, rather than go overland, and it's very complicated but it, you have to work it, you have to, you don't necessarily have to plan anything, you just have to bear it in mind, if you're plotting something complicated across international borders it's something to bear in mind.

VICTORIA: Yeh, and I suppose if you were planning a few border crossings in one trip it's well worth looking at visa requirements way before you set out in case you do need to apply in advance.

BB: Alternatively you could just backpack around the USA and then you don't need to.

VICTORIA: Well yeh there is that too {giggle}. So yeh, we will be doing a future space that's all about the admin of travel, vaccinations, we'll be talking about travel and health, so hopefully by the time we've done a few of these little Spaces, a listener will be able to plan an entire backpacking trip and know that they'll probably survive it.

BB: Yeah, all I will say to that is that I've survived it. Yeh, if I can survive it, anyone can survive it, I think that's the ... yeh.

VICTORIA: Now, if, er, if a listener doesn't want to wait that long to find out a bit more about you, they can read more about travel, packing, and planning on your website, which is barefoot-backpacker.com, or you can listen to them chat with other backpackers and travel Tweeps on their podcast which is "Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure", which is also on the website as well. And yeh, I think next time we'll be talking about Travel And Health, I think in two weeks' time. Yeh?

BB: Yes.

VICTORIA: Yeh. We will obviously tweet about that beforehand as well.

BB: Yes.

VICTORIA: Hey look at that, we managed to start on time and just about finish on time.

BB: I know.

VICTORIA: Pretty well planned, if I do say so myself. {giggles}

BB: {giggles} Excellent. Well.

VICTORIA: Well enjoy the rest of your trip.

BB: Thank you.

VICTORIA: And yeh, we will speak again in two weeks on Spaces again, around this sort of time probably.

BB: Yeh, sounds like a good plan. Speak to you later.

VICTORIA: Bye.

BB: Bye-bye.

{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}

{Outro voiceover:

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