

Transcript for Spaces 003 – Staying Healthy While Travelling

Hello :)

This is the recording of the third Twitter Spaces that I did with my friend V, in late February. At this point, we're starting to get a feel for the format, and doing a bit more preparation in advance so I'm not so fazed by the questions. They're also getting longer – we allocate an hour when we plan it and we're pretty much now hitting that target rather than falling a few minutes short.

This session is on Staying Healthy While Travelling, and I probably should give you a couple of content warnings in advance, including descriptions of foot injuries near the start (that content warning is purely for one person, who may like to know that discussion takes place between about 4m20 and 7m40 after the theme tune ends), and a lengthy discussion about diarrhoea towards the end (47m52 after the theme tune ends). I mean, it could be worse; I listen to a podcast called 'Not So Bon Voyage' which has a regular interview segment about this very subject.

Usual disclaimer, 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: Ooh. Oooh. That's not good.

VICTORIA: What's not good?

BB: Well, I've just bent my elbow and realised there's a big scratch in it, as if I've just scratched my elbow at some point, probably in the night but I've only just noticed it.

VICTORIA: {giggles} Well that's quite 'on topic' really

BB: I mean, yes, let's be honest

VICTORIA: I don't know whether to do a little intro again.

BB: It's always helpful to do an intro. Always helpful to do an intro.

VICTORIA: Okay, so for the benefit of anybody listening later, I'm Victoria Pearson but you can call me V. I'm just here to ask the questions, so it's not really boring to hear Barefoot Backpacker talk to themselves. I'm here with The Barefoot Backpacker who travels Beyond The Brochure and goes to places so you don't have to, with very little luggage and hardly ever any shoes. I was going to say that you are @rtwbarefoot on all your Social Medias, but you're not, cos you're barefoot underscore backpacker on Instagram, and that's very annoying.

BB: I'm barefoot underscore backpacker on Instagram and I think I'm barefoot dot backpacker on Facebook, because they have different ways of doing things.

VICTORIA: But at least on Twitter and on Pinterest you are @rtwbarefoot though, aren't you?

BB: Anyone who has a better suggestion what to call me given the character limits, then please let me know. That was just a name that we came up with in committee that seemed apt at the time, that we never kind of ... I've never been terribly happy with it, but I've kind of ... it's a bit late now, like, I've been on Twitter for just over exactly eight years on that particular account.

VICTORIA: Yes, you're probably a little bit late to be changing your name now.

BB: Yeh, just a little, just a little.

VICTORIA: So today we are talking all about, uhm, health care and travel. Last time we talked about travel planning, and we sort of touched a little bit on planning for vaccines and things like that, but today we're going to be looking more into how to look after your health and general wellbeing whilst you're travelling, whether you're travelling beyond the brochure or going to sort of more ... I don't know what the word is, standard places, touristy places, either way, you still may have health concerns that might be holding you back from

taking your first trip, who knows.

BB: Indeed.

VICTORIA: Erm, so. I'd imagine that for you, especially travelling barefoot, right, a first-aid kit is a non-negotiable in your backpack, yeh?

BB: You'd be surprised.

VICTORIA: {giggles} hashtag Not A Role Model. So, when you've got your first-aid kit, what are your go-to things to put in there for when you're travelling?

BB: I mean ... I travel really light so I don't tend to travel much in the way of a first-aid kit, but partly because I know I can get stuff when I'm there, it's not like I'm travelling in the absolute back of beyond, there's always going to be some kind of chemist or shop where I can buy at least the basics, er, and also remember because I only travel with hand luggage quite a lot of the time, getting things into the aeroplane, if I'm flying, they don't like you carrying nail scissors, for instance, and they don't like you carrying large amounts of liquids, so when I'm travelling abroad and I'm backpacking, I don't tend to take more than you'd think, I tend to take, you know, a couple of plasters or stuff like that, and hope that when I get to wherever I am, I can find something to rip the plasters with if it's a bandage, or, you know, I carry tissues as well, and obviously I've always got water with me. When I'm hiking in Britain, obviously I've got more scope to take stuff with me, so I can take stuff like Germolene, because you never know when you might need ... when you get ... obviously I'm really dyspraxic so the chances of me scraping some part of my body and causing an injury is quite high, so something like Germolene is really useful for me to carry.

VICTORIA: An infection could get quite serious quite quickly if you were far from civilisation as well.

BB: I mean, an infection gets quite serious quite quickly whether you're in civilisation or not, just if you're near to civilisation there's probably more you can do about it. Erm. One thing I do carry with me at all times is a pair of tweezers.

VICTORIA: In case you get something stuck in your feet?

BB: Absolutely. Which has happened on occasions. But fortunately it's easy to ... I've now got the technique quite happily worked out where I can just remove things quite quickly.

VICTORIA: Have you ever had times when you're really wished you had a first-aid kit, and you didn't have one with you?

BB: Erm, no, erm, but, but when I did my Hike Across Great Britain in the summer of 2019, I infamously ripped off one of my toenails, cos I'm impatient. It wasn't intentional. And I didn't have anything anywhere near enough to bandage that up. But I was quite fortunately close to home at the time and it wasn't just me and my hiking buddy Becky at the time, it was a couple of other people with us, Becky's friends, one of whom had a myriad of stuff in his car, and that was quite useful cos obviously he was really prepared, cos he goes hiking a lot.

VICTORIA: So if you don't have a first-aid kit with you, it's a good idea to be hiking with someone who does?

BB: Yes, very much so. I mean I did have stuff with me, I did have bandages and some, like, antiseptic cream and stuff like that. But for the injury I did, there is no way I would have thought to carry some of the stuff that one of Becky's friends had, which was, you know, sort of like, toe-shaped plasters. It would never have occurred to me that toe-shaped plasters were A Thing.

VICTORIA: No, I didn't know. I'm surprised that you didn't know about those though, given than you don't really wear shoes at all when you're out and about. I would imagine that would be something you would use a lot.

BB: You'd be surprised. I just never thought to look for it. I genuinely never knew that they existed. So that was quite useful to know. I still have, I still need to buy some new ones of those as I did use quite a lot in that incident. Further record: it stopped bleeding after about a day.

VICTORIA: Oh, that's horrid.

BB: Yes. Becky was wondering if I'd actually come back on the hike afterwards, but obviously I did because I'm made of sterner stuff.

VICTORIA: Yeh, and you'd made the commitment by then. The hike that you're talking about is the one where you went from the easterly most point to the westerly most point of the UK, is that right?

BB: Er, of Great Britain, yeh. 57 days. Half of it in the rain.

VICTORIA: That's a long time to be on the road.

BB: Yes.

VICTORIA: Especially in bad weather and things like that, but I think we'll come to that a little bit later about how to keep yourself happy and hydrated and all that sort of thing when you're on the road for a long time, but before we move away from first-aid kits, has there ever been a time you've been really really glad to have on with you?

BB: Erm, I mean, sometimes when I go running I take plasters and tissues because (I have dyspraxia) I will

quite often scrape my toes on the pavement, which is how I ripped my toenail off in the first place by the way, not by running, it was more complicated than that, but, yeh it's quite useful for me to always carry at least tissues with me around, but in terms of actual travelling and backpacking, I had once instance that we'll probably talk about several times on this Space, but, when I was in SE Asia and got ... I'm gonna call it food poisoning, I was very very glad my friend back in Britain forced me take rehydrating salt sachets. I wasn't going to and she said 'but you're going to need them', and I went 'yeh all right, whatever', and I did need them and that was quite nice. They were blackcurrant flavour, unfortunately, but still quite nice.

VICTORIA: I suppose when you're dehydrated you don't really care what the flavour actually is.

BB: Well no, the important thing is to just get it down you.

VICTORIA: Yes. So presumably another item you normally have in your first-aid kit, if you're going travelling, is bug repellent of some kind? Like, how do you avoid mosquitoes, ticks and midges to reduce risk of Lyme disease, dengue fever, malaria and stuff like that?

BB: I'd love to say by wearing long sleeves, by wearing trousers tucked into thick socks, and by wearing sturdy boots, of course. That would be of course what I would suggest people to do. Because I'm a role model. Yes. Embarrassingly I don't. Erm. Bug repellent. I do carry bug repellent. I carry it both when I'm at home, and when backpacking in certain parts of the world. Now, I don't always take it cos cos there's quite a few places where I don't really need it, you don't tend to get problems in places like Lebanon, the Middle East I've noticed, and you do get it in Australia but it's the really small annoying midges that you just accept, but in Scotland and South-East Asia I was carrying bug spray for different kinds of things. I was carrying bug spray, citronella wipes, and in Scotland on the hike I was carrying smidge - basically a series of midge-killing equipment, you've got lotion you can wipe on you, spray that you can spray around, wipes that you can just, you know, wipe the tent with. What I've noticed in my travels is mosquitoes, particularly, like my ankles. It doesn't matter how much stuff of the stuff i spray onto myself, it doesn't matter how much citronella candles I've got, anything like that, they will bite my ankles and I've no idea why. I got very bitten in Lesotho, and I didn't even know you could get mosquitoes at that high altitude, but I got very badly bitten there and my ankles really blotched up. I mean they're harmless in Lesotho, they don't carry any dangerous diseases up there but it was still quite messy and annoying.

VICTORIA: Yeh, I was going to ask you if any of those bug repellents particularly worked, but I'm guessing 'not on your ankles' would be your answer.

BB: I mean, for the actual diseases themselves, Lyme Disease which is common, certainly in the UK, and places where I've been hiking, which is why you should always wear long socks and trousers tucked into them when you're hiking over fields with cows and sheep in them, erm, I've got a ... it's like a credit-card sized tick-removal device, because the thing with ticks with Lyme Disease is you have to remove them in a certain way, you can't just tug them out, you have to ...

VICTORIA: Yeh cos they can spit back blood into you, can't they? And cause health issues that way.

BB: But I didn't get a tick ... well, I didn't notice if I got a tick. Becky did, but my card didn't work cos the tick was in such an awkward place that she used specialist tweezers instead. The thing with ticks and me, and this is a problem with a lot of things to do with my body, is that I never look for them. Partly because it feels like too much work. And because I'm not very observant it's a lot harder for me do because I have to concentrate a lot more and I mentally can't concentrate that hard on looking for things, so I generally just ... don't. Which is really bad, I know, But yeh, I'm just unobservant and easily distracted, so I mentally can't do the work. Now if I were hiking with someone else and they were willing to, then I would have them look me over, but when I'm on my own I just kind of ... I risk it.

VICTORIA: Yeh. And this is why We Are Not A Role Model.

BB: As for the others ... Dengue Fever you can't really do anything about Dengue Fever, you can't take any medications or precautions for them, so the only way to avoid Dengue Fever is not to get bitten. So you just don't go out when the mosquitoes carrying it are alive, which tends to be dusk or dawn. But I'm not a party animal anyway so that tends to not be much of a problem. And as for Malaria, I do have malaria tablets, I always tend to get them. I know in certain parts of the world they're becoming ineffective, and that whole antibiotic resistance is a very big issue for the future, that we're not talking enough about, I find. But I carry them where I can.

VICTORIA: So if I was planning to go backpacking for the first time, where would I get malaria tablets from to take with me? Would I have to buy them when I got there or is it something I could take from the UK, go to my GP, and then take on a plane with me?

BB: The malaria tablets I tend to have, or end up with, is Doxycycline, and it's an antibiotic, so you basically just go to the GP and go 'I'm going abroad, I need a malaria tablet, I need this malaria tablet, or actually, they might tell you which malaria tablet you need cos there's like books, well not books, but material that says 'for this country you need this tablet'. Malaria tablets are quite fun because as I say some of them are, so

Doxycycline is an antibiotic so it has all manner of benefits, but there's another, I think it's called Malarone, and for certain people it gives them some very interesting and lucid dreams.

VICTORIA: Hmm. I'm surprised that hasn't become a recreational thing then.

BB: It probably is. They are prescription medications.

VICTORIA: While we're at the GP, is that where you'd find out about what vaccines you need to travel to particular countries and things like that?

BB: I tend to find that information at the Foreign Office website. But yes, for a lot of countries, your GP will know. I mean, some of the countries I go to, the GP has about as much knowledge as me, but in principle they should know and they should have a list. How up-to-date that list is, that's not my problem, but, you know, they should have a list of 'for this country these are all the vaccinations, these are the medications that you need'.

VICTORIA: Have you ever been somewhere where you realised you did need a vaccine and had to obtain it while you were there?

BB: Er, no. Fortunately. One of the things for me is that ... the only vaccine I've ever had to get before I go is Yellow Fever. I'm assuming because of all the jabs I may or may not have had at school, and I've no record of what they were, I just assume that I've had them, I've no idea how I'd check this... there's very little else that I need as there's very little else that has a vaccine for. When I was looking around a couple of years back, for certain countries, a couple of them wanted a meningitis vaccine, and a couple wanted a cholera jab, but as far as I'm aware we don't offer them in this country anyway, and those countries that required them weren't countries I was planning to visit, and I can't remember which ones they were, I think it was something like Gabon or Equatorial Guinea or somewhere like that, you know, interesting to go to but not yet.

VICTORIA: yeh.

BB: But I would just go to the GP and say 'I'm going to these countries, can I have the jab', and they might say 'yes'.

VICTORIA: That's probably a much better plan than turning up and hoping you don't have to get jabbed at the border.

BB: Well yes, and in some of those places you need the jab to get the visa. You need to have proof you've had the vaccination. But I have had one instance in crossing from Burkina Faso to Benin. Benin requires Yellow Fever. It requires you to have the vaccination and proof of the vaccination, and I've got this vaccination booklet, I got it when I got my Yellow Fever jab and it is, ironically, yellow. And I could prove that I was vaccinated but the other, of the other 6 people in that 4-seater car, only one other person had been vaccinated, so we had to lurk around in the hot sun in the middle of the day waiting for the other five people to get vaccinated in a shed at the border.

VICTORIA: So the moral of this story is 'get vaccinated before you go otherwise everybody who has to share a car is going to hate you'.

BB: Basically, yes.

VICTORIA: So. How do you handle the admin for travel insurance and things like that, because that must be quite difficult for you if you don't pre-plan your trips very far in advance?

BB: Er, about 80% of the time I get my travel insurance online at the airport or travelling in the coach to the airport.

VICTORIA: {giggling} Your style of travel gives me the anxieties.

BB: Well yeh, but the the thing with me and travel insurance is, I never really need to get fancy travel insurance. The only thing I do that's in any way unstandard is hiking at over, 2,000m tends to be the cut-off point, hiking over 2,000m you need an extra level of travel insurance.

VICTORIA: You do do other sort of dangerous things, like you did say in one of our previous Spaces about being held at gunpoint in Palestine, things like that which I'd imagine makes you more difficult to insure?

BB: That's just to do with the location that I'm in rather than anything else, and generally speaking the only countries where travel insurance isn't valid is countries the Foreign Office have a travel warning for, and this rarely happens. It's possible Palestine's one of them, but it rarely happens to me in practice that I would go to a country with a Foreign Office travel warning. It happens a lot less than many of my friends think it does. Obviously with me there's certainly the danger that a country might switch while I'm there, but ... eh. Personally I'd argue the Foreign Office are a bit wet-blanket about things. You know, it's like, overcautious. But apart from visiting countries like Burkina Faso that had a revolution three weeks before I got there, and was possibly yellow [on the Foreign Office list] at the time, I'm quite an easy person to insure, because I don't do anything dangerous. I don't do watersports, nor those kinds of watersports either, I don't do high-adrenaline high-risk activities, I don't do white-water rafting, I don't go skiing ...

VICTORIA: I can't imagine you bungee jumping.

BB: Bungee jumping is one of the things I have vowed never to ever do.

VICTORIA: I don't blame you to be honest. I don't see the appeal.

BB: I mean, I have a coil of rope tattooed around my left ankle, but that doesn't necessarily mean I want to go dangling off a bridge with it. Erm, I think the most dangerous thing I do is ride on the back of mototaxis, and I did once call my insurance provider at the time, I think this was in SE Asia, out of curiosity, by saying 'am I going to be insured if I ride on the back of a mototaxi without a helmet', and they said 'if they don't have a helmet to offer you, then yes. If they have a helmet and you refuse it, then you're not insured, but if they don't have a helmet in the first place then yeh, just be careful'.

VICTORIA: It kind of makes you wonder how they would find out if there was a helmet available at the time or not.

BB: That's easy to do: they wouldn't find out, people lie, and it would be all fudged.

VICTORIA: We mentioned annoying bugs and diseases you can get from them, but do you ever have to look into other potentially dangerous wildlife before you go somewhere, like, dealing with predatory animals like lions, tigers, bears, things like that?

BB: No. I mean, I got chased by a goose once.

VICTORIA: Geese are dangerous. I know someone who has guard geese instead of guard dogs and they do a much better job.

BB: I agree entirely. Geese and swans, they're evil evil creatures.

VICTORIA: What about venomous things like snakes, spiders and scorpions? Have you ever had any encounters with those?

BB: I've eaten them? I dunno if that counts?

VICTORIA: I'm not sure if that counts from a health-worrying perspective.

BB: They were cooked correctly. In general, so, I've certainly been to places where wildlife ... was potentially an issue, like encountering a wandering monster in the D&D world as it were, like, you know, I've been hiking Kyrgyzstan and China's Sichuan Province in the mountains, but I've never encountered anything particularly bad. I've been close to big animals like elephants and crocodiles, but always only ever in what you might call controlled environments, like, I've been on walking tours with a guide, or I've been in the vague protection of a big jeep, and I've been literally close enough to an elephant to be able to touch it, so if that thing had wanted to ram us it could well have done, but it didn't. As for bugs and things, I've been to Australia. And I survived

VICTORIA: Were you mostly in the cities in Australia?

BB: Yeh, but spiders tend to be in the cities as well often. The snakes, the snakes are more likely to be found in the outback, but ... I've also never encountered one of those box jellyfish that are about 3mm long and cause you to go 'aaagh' for an entire day - they're nasty, nasty buggers. But then I don't go in the water so that's not going to happen. I saw a huge cockroach in a toilet room in Ghana. It was about as big as my hand. I didn't stay to have a poo. But apart from that, I've just avoided them, I think it's just because ... I suspect everything runs off when I approach, cos I'm a galloping oaf. They're kind of scared of me so they run off. I take the view that certain creatures, well the bigger creatures anyway, only attack you if they see you as a threat. My policy is not to taunt anything bigger than a ferret. I could probably do a ferret, I could probably have a ferret.

VICTORIA: I dunno, it could run up your trouser leg.

BB: What trousers?

VICTORIA: Oh yeh, you're a shorts person, you could probably beat up a ferret then. {giggles}

BB: There was a question on Twitter, what's the largest animal beginning with [the same letter as] your name you could feasibly survive a fight with, and I'm thinking, possibly a badger? Could I take on a badger?

VICTORIA: I dunno, they're bigger than you think they are you know, badgers.

BB: Badgers are fearsome, fearsome creatures, they're ugly and just sort of, you know, big, but could I fight a badger? Could I run faster than a badger? It's not an encounter I particularly want to have, because badgers are quite fearsome, but, you know. Given that other creatures beginning with B are like, you know, a bear. I'm not going to win a fight with a bear.

VICTORIA: We have become wildly off track here. {giggles}

BB: It's all to do with health and stuff, it's fine.

VICTORIA: {giggles} Don't fight a badger, might result in injury. I don't know. {giggles} Anyway. Having not listened to that, and fought a badger when you're somewhere abroad, how do you deal with language barriers if you're trying to obtain healthcare?

BB: I've actually never needed to, quite fortunately, because the only times I've ever needed to get any kind of medication abroad have both been in nominally English-speaking countries. It was in Australia and New Zealand, and I was able to explain what I needed. Both times, incidentally, for malaria tablets, because I procrastinated too much in Britain and didn't want to see my doctor, because seeing a doctor in this country is, you know, I can communicate with my doctor by fax. It would be useful if they moved into the 20th century never mind the 21st. So I procrastinated, didn't, then ended up having to go 'oh my god I need to buy some malaria tablets in Australia and New Zealand'. Australia was fine, because all I did was, I was staying with my

friend over there and all she did was take me to her GP and we sorted it out, and in New Zealand I had to find a GP open to travellers, which happened to be on the 7th floor of an office building in Wellington, an ugly little place, and while I was there they looked at my yellow jab certificate it and went 'oh, your Tetanus jab is out of date, let's jab you, ooh that's a nice jab, can we have NZ\$50 for the privilege', yeh whatever. So yeh, But my Yellow Fever jab, for instance, I got that in Britain, and I got that in Britain because, I'm not going to get that abroad, as we said, but it was actually quite difficult to get hold of because no-one, in the town I lived in at the time, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, no-one had ever heard of it, and no-one ever leaves it, except for the one other Travel Twitter account who lives there. I've never met them, as far as I know, but there is another Travel Twitter account from Kirkby-in-Ashfield.

VICTORIA: Do they also do like backpacking and light travel and stuff like that?

BB: Yep, yep. They're backpackers. I don't know if they're sisters or they're friends, but I think there's two of them, but yeh they backpack. I'm amazed. But yeh, that was an interesting experience, getting that, so sometimes even in your own country it's not that easy to get hold of because nobody goes abroad from Kirkby-in-Ashfield, so they don't know what a Yellow Fever jab is. But apart from that, I've never had issues. There are two reasons for this. One is, and I'm sure we'll talk about this later, when I was in SE Asia and got food poisoning, it was my last day in Cambodia, I only had three nights left, one of them was in Singapore and two in Dubai where I was staying with my step-cousin, so it wasn't a hassle, there was no point doing anything, it was like, let's just get home, it's fine. When I was in Mexico City it was the same thing, I got issues in Mexico City that we'll come onto later I'm sure, and ...

VICTORIA: We're saving all the crappy parts of the Space for the end.

BB: Yes, yes, very much so. And again, I suffered literally on the last day I was there, And then in Uzbekistan, we don't how how I did this, I broke a bone on the top of my foot, no idea how, couldn't walk very well for a week or so. I took the decision to go back home rather than spend another four or five days going into Afghanistan and back. So the reason I've never been to Afghanistan is because I broke a bone in my foot, which is one of those strange stories that people don't really expect.

VICTORIA: I'm surprised that you don't injure your feet more often to be honest, because of travelling barefoot and being dyspraxic, and dropping things a lot.

BB: I mean, the best, apart from the ripped toenail incident, the best injury I had for that was when I was walking on Kinder Scout, in the Peak District in Derbyshire, England. And I have genuinely no idea how I did this, but I'd been hiking barefoot over the whole of Kinder Scout, up a rocky waterfall, over the moorlands, getting lost, stuck in bogs, and then over the hills back down, and then on the final farmer's road, flat, completely flat, wide, I somehow managed to bang my right foot on the verge of the kerb in such a way that it bent my toe back.

VICTORIA: Ow! It seems like you've been quite lucky in that most of your injuries happen in the UK, or in English-speaking countries where it's really easy for you to obtain healthcare,

BB: Er yes, but I didn't actually get any healthcare for that, I just let it ... 'oh my god this doesn't look right, let's just not go to the doctor because that involves speaking to people, and it seems to ... I've had no ill effects from it so hopefully it's fine.

VICTORIA: I wonder if you injure yourself in the UK more because you're more relaxed you could get help easily in the UK.

BB: Possibly? Er, yeh. {laughs} Or at least mentally I go 'this is fine, this is safe, I'm comfortable here, I don't need to worry so much, and then I worry a lot. You know what my most common injury is?

VICTORIA: Go on.

BB: It's banging my little toe against a shopping trolley.

VICTORIA: Oh I'm not surprised actually. Yeh. I mean that happens often enough when you're wearing shoes.

BB: Yeh, there is a simple solution to this. A really simple solution to stop me injuring myself. Can you guess what it is?

VICTORIA: Order your shopping online.

BB: That wasn't the answer I was expecting! But yes.

VICTORIA: What was the answer you were expecting?

BB: Wear shoes.

VICTORIA: Well yeh, but I know you're never going to do that. Come on!

{laughter}

VICTORIA: One of your little unique niches is that you're a Gen-X traveller in a world full of 20-something backpackers. Do you have health or wellness concerns now that wouldn't have bothered you in your 20s? Like for me, now that I'm over 35, I'm not spending more than one night that isn't on a proper bed. I need a proper bed otherwise I'm not going to enjoy the next day. Have you got anything like that now that you're a little bit of

a more mature traveller?

BB: I don't think so? I mean, I think partly it's that I wouldn't feel as comfortable doing it as longer term as I used to, so while I can still do things like sleep on trains, and take overnight coaches and not sleep while I'm sitting on a coach with no legroom, I couldn't do it for days in a row. Like, I could do it a couple of times, but I think when I was younger I'd be able to do it for longer. And I'd rather not do it at all, and I don't do it that well, but I don't think that's an age related thing, that's just a preference related thing. I've also never been one for late nights and partying anyway, so I've never had that whole 'stay up late, get up early' mentality. I mean part of me still travels like I'm 26, so I still do the whole backpacker hostel thing, and the only issue I have with backpacker hostels is that I'm 6'3; backpacker hostel beds tend not to be. But since I generally sleep on my side with my legs bent anyway, it's never as much of a problem as you'd think. I am very partial to a decent mattress tho. That's one of the luxuries. But apart from that I don't think there's anything ... I know that a lot of my peers, a lot of the people the same age as me are very much different from me, but I think because I've always had this tendency to travel the way I have, I've never known anything different so I've never really explored it, if that makes sense? Most of my friends who are my age are amazed at the way I travel.

VICTORIA: Yeh. I'm younger than you and the way you travel sounds exhausting to me. Erm, but, because you don't plan very much before you go, and you're not really a 'I must tick off all these things on this things to do in this place' kind of person, that probably does help slow your pace a little bit, which might maybe be good for your general health and wellbeing while you're travelling?

BB: Erm, possibly, erm, I mean, part of it is I've got this issue that when I go to a place, er, I go to a place for specific reasons. So I have a kind of a tick list of things to tick off but those aren't, you know, the standard touristy bucket list things, they're things that mean a lot to me. So as long as I do them, then it's fine.

VICTORIA: Have there been times where you feel you've had to rush through things and you're feeling rough because of that?

BB: Yes, yes. The thing is ... because I have a really short attention span, and I get bored if I stay in a place for too long, like, three, four nights is maximum for me, I can usually see everything I want to do in that time. But what I've got to be careful of is that I take that time slowly, because I am a very fast-paced person. I walk quicker than most people I know, so I'll ... if I'm pushing myself I'll happily casually walk a mile in about 14 minutes, which is ridiculously quick. And I get issues with that, so, for example, in Mexico City I went to, twenty years ago, I was meeting a friend there, who lives there, and Mexico City is quite high.

VICTORIA: I was going to say, does altitude sickness come into that one?

BB: This wasn't altitude sickness per se. I don't know how high Mexico City is, I think it's about 2 and a half thousand metres, so it's high, it's something that you're not used to, but it's not high enough to cause excessive altitude sickness itself, in that sense. But because it's high, and I wasn't used to it, I walked around that city and I did a lot at my usual pace. And on my last day that pretty much knocked me out, cos I was just knackered and my body just went 'nah, this is a bad idea', and I had a fun journey back home on that plane, shall we say. And the only other issue I've had with altitude, the highest I've ever been was about 4,000m in China, and in Kyrgyzstan we went over a pass that was about 3,700 but we ended up camping at a lake at about 3,200m. The only issues I had were, in China I had a mild headache, and in Kyrgyzstan I had, you could tell I was at altitude, I could feel my breath and I knew I couldn't ... I wasn't going to do a 25 minute parkrun, put it like that. So I could feel it. Altitude's not something I'm going to be complacent about and I'm not going to push myself about, but I've never really had, I've never really been high enough for it to be notably a problem. At some point I will, but a lot of the places on my 'I want to go' list aren't that high. So at some point I will make it over 4,000 but I'm not ... for example Everest Base Camp is not on my hit list, I've no interest in going there, and that's the, that's one of the highest places people would normally go. So altitude, I'm aware altitude is a problem, but it's not one I'm going to worry about. Where I do have an issue, there is one time where it did really affect me, it wasn't altitude, it was heat. So, I went to Cambodia, in SE Asia. That SE Asia trip is coming up a lot in this. I went around the Temples of Angkor at Siem Reap, and I'm guessing it must have been the mid-30s°C. And I'm walking at my usual pace for several hour, cos these are very big temples and they're several miles away from each other. So I was doing a lot of walking, in the open air, in the middle of the day, in that heat, with no shade. I had a hat. But that was it. Most people would have hanged around with their taxi guide, but I decided to walk it, because that's what I do. While I was on my way there I bought a lot of water, and I bought a lot of mangoes from the people selling them at the entrances to each temple. Evidently, not enough. So the last last temple I visited, which I think was Bayon, you know, one of the really big famous ones, visited it last, have almost no memory of it. Then at the gate while waiting for my taxi back, nearly threw up, nearly fainted. It was ... very very unpleasant. What I did then was I went back to the hotel and just lay on the bed for a couple of hours with the air-con on about arctic.

VICTORIA: I bet you were glad to have had air-con that day!

BB: I have never been as glad for air-con as I was on that day, I can tell you!

VICTORIA: We are going to come back to water again in a minute, but before that, you mentioned Parkrun briefly then. Is that something you keep up with when you're travelling, doing your usual fitness routines and things like that? Do you still go running, and how do you plan your routes and stuff like that, to avoid getting lost, straying into unsafe areas, bad terrain, that sort of thing?

BB: Parkrun itself I've only ever done once and that was on my recent trip to Northern Ireland. Partly that's because a lot of the places I travel to don't have it.

VICTORIA: Yeh I was going to say, I'm not sure how many places to have an actual Parkrun.

BB: Quite a few but some places you wouldn't expect. There's about five in France. I don't think Belgium has any. And the Czech republic has a few and Poland doesn't, or is it the other way around and Poland has a few and the Czech Republic doesn't. Australia has a few, the USA has a few, but a lot of places I go to don't, so it very rarely comes up as an option. But the other thing is, when I'm travelling, I tend to walk around a lot and be active, I'm not necessarily going to be running as well because that's excessive and no-one needs to have that much fitness. Also, because I only travel with hand luggage, I only have a limited amount of clothing. And the obvious answer is to wear yesterday's clothes to go running, but equally I already to enough washing of clothes as it is, I don't want to pack specific running clothing, cos that's what I'd have to do, I'd have to pack specific running clothing and then wash it.

VICTORIA: Or spend all your time scrubbing it in the sink; that's not very fun.

BB: No, I had an entire morning of that in Vanuatu, scrubbing my clothes in the sink, quite fun and quite relaxing, but it was cold water.

VICTORIA: Nice.

BB: Very nice. So yeh, and obviously, you know, yeh, normal people would take running shoes. I don't, because I don't have any. And as for the terrain, I won't necessarily have the time or opportunity to check it out. Or maps. So, it's like, I would do when I'm walking, but I'm not necessarily going to do the extra effort when I'm running as well.

VICTORIA: Yeh, so obviously if you're going to be doing a lot of walking about in hot and humid places, hydration, really important, so how do you keep yourself safe from water-borne diseases and parasites when you're travelling, and how do you even check the quality of the water of a place before you go?

BB: The only way you can really check the quality of the water of a place is to ask the people who live there. And even then there is a caveat to that. So for me, this is a bit vague and generic. I kind of assume there are three kinds of water. One is 'this water is perfectly fine to drink'. One is 'I've got a filter bottle', and one is '.... nah'. And some places ... like, Vanuatu is a good example. So there's an island on Vanuatu called Ambrym. It's got no running water, there are no rivers on that island. There are however at least two volcanoes. And the trouble is the locals in the villages, because there's no fresh water supply, they just get rainwater tanks. So all the water that falls out the sky, they collect in tanks, and they use that for everything. Because Ambrym is so volcanic, that water has got a very strange and specific mineral content. So the people that live there, the water's fine. As a foreigner, I'm not used to that water, so that water might not be safe for me to use. And that's the sort of thing you need to be aware of before you go anywhere. I was in Lebanon and staying in an AirBnB, and my AirBnB host was surprised that I was drinking the water from the tap. But I was drinking the water from the tap through my filter bottle, because as far as I'm aware, there was nothing excessively dangerous about the water in Lebanon that a filter bottle couldn't switch. This is at odds with somewhere like Burkina Faso, where you just don't.

VICTORIA: So what do you do in places where you just don't? Is it just a case of buying bottled water all the time while you're there?

BB: Yes, unfortunately. In Burkina Faso, well actually across the whole of West Africa, you have these water sachets, purified water I think it's called, 500ml, for about 5 cents, and you can get them everywhere, like there are people walking the streets carrying big tubs full of these sachets, so it's really easy to get hold of, it's really cheap, and it's really useful. The downside is the environmental cost of it but that's a whole different pod, a whole different space.

VICTORIA: We'll probably do a Space on eco-friendly travel or something in the future. Maybe.

BB: Yes. That is very definitely not eco-friendly travel. But there's no feasible real alternative, unfortunately. Erm. A couple of people I've met en route have done things like Iodine tablets which purify the water; it takes a while to do, I think it takes about, like for a big bottle of water it can take up to about an hour? But that's what they use.

VICTORIA: Do they have an advantage over things like life-straws and filter bottles then? Do they clean the water more, or ... what is the advantage of using that over something more instant?

BB: I suspect it's because it's smaller so it's easier to carry. I don't know, because I've never used an iodine tablet. One of the issues I have with some of the filter bottles is that because of the design of the bottle, you can't get all the water out.

VICTORIA: Have you ever been really careful with your drinking water only to forget and eat, for example, salad or ice cream or something like that that's washed with the water or made with the water or not refrigerated really well?

BB: Er, not knowingly. But if you think about it, I'm not actually the target market for some of those foods. Like I don't really eat salad and I don't really eat ice cream. Hot drinks are good in practice, so a good hot chocolate would be safe, bit weird to be drinking in the middle of Cambodia, but I do it. Also beer, cos that's the whole point of beer, because it's designed to kill bacteria etc.

VICTORIA: But you like to eat local when you're travelling don't you? So how do you avoid getting digestive issues from introducing new foods into your diet from things like that?

BB: {sighs} I don't think you can. I mean it's a bit like Russian Roulette in a way. You might get sick. You might not. But the only way to guarantee not to get sick is to not eat it in the first place. Which is kind of not the point of travel. A couple of my friends from way back, they're a married couple, I call them the most boring couple in the world, they went to Germany for a week.

VICTORIA: I bet they love that.

BB: Their average food is chicken nuggets and chips. They went to Germany for a week and had McDonalds every night except one. The one night didn't have McDonalds, they had Burger King. The reason is because they wanted to eat food they trusted. Now I'm thinking 'it's Germany,, but equally, I'm thinking it's fair, it's like, if you're not used to foreign foods it doesn't matter where you're going.

VICTORIA: I suppose you can react to anything you're not particularly used to, I suppose.

BB: Yes, yes. But as for eating local, I'd say make sure the food is cooked, That's be a good start. Like, properly cooked. Eat at popular places. Eat where the locals eat. Because unless it's a particularly cheap joint, or the people in that village, town, or city have all the imagination of the inhabitants of Kirkby-in-Ashfield and think the local Wetherspoons is the height of sophistication, the locals are always around to be eating there, the tourists may come and go but the locals will always be eating there, and any place with bad hygiene and dodgy food isn't likely to survive too long, so if the locals are eating there, it's almost certainly safe. I would also say 'try to train your stomach to cope with that sort of food before you go', like, some places' cuisines are heavy on the oils, others on the spices, and if you're not used to even the style of cooking, you could have something as simple as a plate of fries and still feel a bit icky afterwards because of the way it's cooked or what they've put on it as a topping, but I think for me, because I cook for myself at home a lot, and vary my food, I go through all manner of different styles and flavours myself when I'm cooking, I'm kind of used to it, so I'm kind of the wrong person to ask that question because I'm kind of going into that environment already used to that kind of food, in a way.

VICTORIA: I suppose that is actually quite a good tip for somebody who is thinking about travelling somewhere for the first time, is, you know, see if you can introduce some of those foods into your diet a few weeks before you go, then it's not a massive shock to your digestive system.

BB: Yes. Absolutely, absolutely. Oh. I have another point about water, by the way.

VICTORIA: Okay?

BB: So I go hiking a lot, so obviously I'm going to be taking fresh water from streams when they're available. Two principles: only take water from streams that are flowing. Don't take it from stagnant pools, and only ever take water upstream of cows.

VICTORIA: And villages and things I suppose.

BB: Yes, I mean obviously when you're hiking in the middle of England or Scotland or what have you, cows, cows and sheep, are the most important things, but in other places like Vanuatu, yep villages. Oh, and carry hand sanitiser. Hand sanitiser is your friend.

VICTORIA: So, we've come perilously close to it so obviously we have to discuss it. We can't talk about food safety and water safety without talking about getting the shits while you're somewhere. You do a lot of camping, wild camping, things like that. How do you handle diarrhoea when you do not have access to running water?

BB: I'll be honest, it's never happened.

VICTORIA: You're just like the luckiest traveller.

{laughter}

BB: Right, so. There's a couple of things here. When I'm hiking, I tend to eat less than I should, so there's less to come out.

VICTORIA: Again, not a good role model thing to say.

BB: Not a good role model. Also, my biggest hike was the one across Great Britain, 57 days. I did not do an outdoor shit. At all. I managed to take advantage of pubs, campsites, public toilets, that sort of stuff. I had an outdoor wee, including one across the English-Scottish border, but in terms of having ...

VICTORIA: Which side were you standing on?

BB: I was standing on the English side.

VICTORIA: Oh. That's rude.

BB: Most of the time we were walking, the path is on the English side of the border.

VICTORIA: So before you organised your great big hike, did you think about things like toilet facilities? Or were you just lucky in your route in that you didn't have to take an al-fresco poo.

BB: No no no, we thought about it, it was one of the things we considered. And my hiking partner Becky has an entire blog post on how to shit while you're wild camping. So it is something we were aware of and we were fully prepared to do. It's just that I didn't end up needing to.

VICTORIA: So you ended up needlessly carrying a trowel around with you for 57 days?

BB: Oh well I didn't carry the trowel, but yes.

{laughter}

BB: But yes. The thing is when you're hiking, and certainly when we were hiking, we were generally carrying at least 2 litres of water with us anyway each; that's what we were using to cook, that's what we were using to drink.

VICTORIA: That's pretty heavy though.

BB: Yes. Yes. If you think about it as 1 litre is one 1kg of water at room temperature and pressure, so when you're already carrying a backpack that's like 17 or 18 kilos, and you've got 2 litres of water either side ... but you have to.

VICTORIA: I bet you finished that trip a lot stronger than you started it.

BB: When we started that hike, every time we took the backpack off it felt like we were floating. While we were in Scotland, and the end of the West Highland Way has a really steep bit on the last day to Fort William, everyone that we passed was struggling with daypacks getting up the hill. We were running up that hill.

VICTORIA: Yes.

BB: We actually calculated how many calories we'd need to eat to maintain our weight for that trip.

VICTORIA: That must have been driven from Becky; there is no way you'd be that organised.

BB: I can tell you the exact place-time we had that conversation, we were in a pub, and I was just on my phone idling because I couldn't be mythered with the conversation. It was very very definitely a Becky-driven conversation, that one. But we calculated that I'd need something like 5 to 5 and a half thousand calories per day.

VICTORIA: yeh, because of the extra stuff you're doing and carrying and that.

BB: And how many calories did I eat? Not that much.

VICTORIA: So what is the very worst place you've had an attack of diarrhoea when you're travelling?

BB: So. This is where we go back to all of those things. So. I had three, right. I've had, mainly on flights, stuff like that, In China, I think partly because I exerted myself at high altitude, I ended up with a couple of days of being quite squitty, including one day on a train where i was both squitty and constipated, which is a really really inconvenient thing to happen, but I know why that was.

VICTORIA: We chased a load of our listeners away with that little bit, made me laugh, just as soon as we mentioned diarrhoea, loads of people just left.

{laughter}

BB: We did warn them, we did warn them. Yeh, the thing about China is they've got squat toilets, and at the time, and I'm still not very good at squatting, cos I don't have the body strength. They're easier if you have handles to hold on to, like in the Middle East, on this train in China, no handles, so I was like, 'I really want to go' but 'I can't go, I'm not comfortable'. That was very unpleasant. So yeh there was that, erm, there was, in SE Asia, the time when I got food poisoning from, little tip: Local food is really good, and all that advice I gave, really great. Here's another bit of advice. Do not eat fish from a market in Cambodia at midday when it's 33°C.

VICTORIA: {giggles} I don't know what you thought that would end well for you.

BB: Because it was squid, I was passing it and I thought 'ooh that looks really nice'. So I had a bit of squid and it did not end well. It did not end well at all. But as I say it was my last day, so I was just really bad for that, and then I was dosing out on rehydration salts in Singapore, and then I was in Dubai for two days with my step-cousin, and just made sure I wasn't that far from a toilet, and the only time I really felt the need we were in a museum so it was really easy just to wander into a toilet and go. Erm, so yes, and as I say, Mexico City where I overexerted myself in altitude, I was basically dosed out to the high heavens on diarrhoea-prevention medicine for the whole of the flight back; I daren't even fart. Though that did lead to probably the worst toilet I'd been to for a long time, which of all places was Coventry Pool Meadow Bus Station.

VICTORIA: I just knew it was going to be somewhere in the UK!

{laughter}

BB: It was one of those instances where it was like 'oh my god this is the toilet, I just have to, I really need to', so I just did. It was an unpleasant place to have an unpleasant experience. Erm, yes.

VICTORIA: Presumably though, when you're travelling, you don't want to take up loads of space with toilet roll? So tell us, what are the best and worst emergency toilet paper substitutes

BB: So the worst, the worst, that's easy, it was in China, it was on a bus ride through a part of the country where there wasn't much around, I needed to go, so I ended up in this weird, overgrown, stone building with a hole in the ground. It was a designated toilet but if it was in Britain it would have been described as 'abandoned' and it'd be one of those urban explorer visited places. I had no toilet paper. It had no toilet paper. I had to use the rubbish on the floor to wipe with, which, the best I could find was some really dodgy-looking scraps of newspaper.

VICTORIA: I bet you were very glad you had your hand sanitiser after that!

BB: Oh yes. I mean when I say scraps they were literally about the size of my palm.

VICTORIA: Oh no!

BB: And there weren't really many of them either. Basically I just mopped up what I could and then just, yeh, you know, this is not going to be a comfortable journey back but it was all I could do. So that's the worst.

VICTORIA: So what's the best loo roll substitute?

BB: Okay, the best is absolutely 100% Arabic. Predominantly Arabic, it's not just the Arabian countries that have this but it's the Arabian countries that have the best of them. Places like the UAE and Lebanon. It's the shower bidet. Ever come across a shower bidet?

VICTORIA: I've seen a version of them that you can buy from UK Toilets called a 'bum gun'. Is that the same sort of thing? Like a water pistol attached to your toilet.

BB: I want one of these, I think these are great! Basically if you've never come across them it's a hand-held jet of water. You fire like a gun and it shoots a jet of water up your bum. They are a-maz-ing and they are even better when you have the squits though.

VICTORIA: It cools you down a bit as well.

BB: That as well, but also think of it like this. So when you've got toilet paper and you've 'had an incident', shall we say, it's basically wipe, wipe, wipe, pull another bit, wipe, pull another bit, wipe, half a roll later it's tolerably clean. And then you've got a blocked toilet cos it's full of toilet paper. Shower bidet? Ten seconds, clean as a whistle. It's brilliant.

VICTORIA: And no blockages as well.

BB: No blockages, just a wet floor. But they have floors designed for that purpose cos they're all sort of like ceramic tiles. It's great.

VICTORIA: So it's like a wet room?

BB: Yeh, basically, a wet room. So they are fantastic, it's really really really simple, it's like 'oh my god my bum is really dirty' - squirt - 'ooh nice and clean'. {laughter} so yes, it's great.

VICTORIA: I imagine because they're predominantly in warmer places, you don't need to worry too much about drying off, cos you just do.

BB: I mean yes, but obviously when you've had a jet of water shoved up your backside, it's going to take a bit of drying, because what you're not gonna want to do is stand there with your kecks down waiting for your bum to dry so you can pull up your trousers otherwise you'll end up with a soggy bum, so you'll be uncomfortable for like the first ten minutes, but yes, absolutely.

VICTORIA: So on that crappy note, I think we've pretty much gone through all of our health and travel chat. We do have a lot to say about mental health and travel too, but we'll save that for our next Space cos we've been chatting for about an hour now. In the meantime, if anybody wants to catch up with The Barefoot Backpacker's adventures, you can go on barefoot-backpacker.com, and there you can find blog posts about different aspects of travel, and also the archive of the Beyond The Brochure podcast, hosted by Barefoot Backpacker. And as I said at the beginning, they are @rtwbarefoot on Twitter and Pinterest, and barefoot_backpacker on Instagram. Have I forgotten a social network you're on?

BB: I mean I'm on Facebook, but I always forget I'm on Facebook so don't worry about that.

VICTORIA: I can't remember oh you're barefoot.backpacker on Facebook aren't you?

BB: Yeh I can never remember if it's a dot or a hyphen/dash. And I'm also on YouTube but again, I haven't really done a lot about YouTube yet. That'll come in time.

VICTORIA: Yeh we'll get to that soon won't we?! If I can steer you away from TikTok for long enough.

BB: I'm not on TikTok!

VICTORIA: Yet!

{laughter}

VICTORIA: So yeh. I still don't know how to end a Spaces. It feels like I'm ending a phone call each time.

BB: Well I shall do it then.

VICTORIA: Okey Kokey.

BB: Bye Bye. Thank you for listening.

VICTORIA: Have a lovely day.

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

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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