

*PUBLIC ENEMY*

*NUMBER ONE'S GUIDE*

*ON HOW TO TRAVEL*



By Brendon Luke – Based on a True Story  
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## CONQUERORS -

### *Prologue*

I have been lucky to travel, and to have travelled far and wide (Editor's note: Bali, England, Italy. Yeah, you are a real regular Christopher Columbus). I would take none of these experiences back for anything. My life, for now, comprises of not settling down. Not because I don't want to, but because I don't have to. I want to see the world. I want to learn about different cultures, to experience the excitement of new places. I also want to be a judgmental cunt bitch about lots of other different places too. Travel gives you the opportunity to see who you really are.

Who you are at the very core, when the safety nets of home are stripped away. In my particular case, travel has taught me I am a typical middle-class white boy with a judgmental streak and no morals.

Throughout the book you will join me on some trips I have travelled, whether it was on my lonesome, or with a group. You will bear witness to the ups and the downs, and all the in-betweens that come with my inner being.

A guide, from adventure travel to relaxation, for travelers with different incomes, or travelers of a particular sexual orientation. I call it a travel book, but it's really all about me. Me while I am traveling, for sure, but it's still more about how delightful and woke and fascinating I find myself, rather than about actual foreign places. They are just the charming background detail in stories about me, being me. In this book you won't learn how or where to travel, but you will learn a great deal about me. A journey through my shallow psyche, if you will. So, fasten your seat belts, ensure your seats are in the upright position, and enjoy the journey, dear reader.

## *Intro*

"The basic condition of happiness is freedom". \*The Pocket, Thich Nhat Hanh Shambhala Boulder 2017, P.9

What does travel mean to you? Does it mean an undying love for newness? A joy found in continuous discovery? Or is it simply a means to an end? Travel, like many things, can excite a light in anyone. Here is where my middle-class privilege really shines. Here is where my pathological inability to walk in another's shoes becomes apparent.

A Syrian child fleeing genocide is probably not going to romanticise travel the way I do. A Kurd exiled from their homeland will not revel in the worldliness of travel brought about by the loss of their ancestral homelands. A migrant farmworker will not gain #wokeness from their travels for minimum wage farm work. The travel I know and love is the travel of middle-class white people with sufficient disposable income and sufficiently comfortable lives to find bar tending in London a novelty. I am disappointed to say I have no experience with the #RichKidsOfInstagram type of travel, but I'm sure I would take to it like a duck to water. In my last book I attempted to be inclusive, but this book will not be like that. I grew up solidly middle class and more than a little spoilt, not my fault, but I will write about what I know. I don't know what life is like genuinely poor; I don't know what life is like when your options are limited. I am what I am, and I make no apologies. For those of you who didn't grow up as me, this book will be your version of travel education, your opportunity to walk a mile in my shoes, your opportunity to ogle the exotic life of someone else.

I have never understood the 60-year-old woman called Wilhelmina that grew up in Rooty Hill, had her three kids from the age of 16, her husband dying from alcoholism in his 40's and is now raising her

grandchild. Wilhelmina has never left the country, probably never even left the state. My stereotyped white Westie, Wilhelmina has become too comfortable in her own racist space of white Western culture, no matter how multicultural Australia can be. She is closed off to the exuberance that can be found in, and knowledge that can be gained from others. She sees others as one dimensional, much the way I see her. She doesn't appreciate difference: different surroundings, a different sunset, a different sunrise, the different sands of a beach. It's like listening to Billie Eilish on a Tuesday night and realising you will do something bad, something so bad that's so good, and you will never regret it, because not only did you learn something from it, it enlightened your soul, either that or you're a psychopath.

When the chardonnay is gone, and you think the best idea is sitting on the end of the bottle, you know you need to adventure. You need to expand your horizons, step beyond your comfort zone, beyond the boredom of your job, beyond the stagnant relationships that you are trapped in. You need to step out of your self-imposed bonsai-hood.

When your existence is so dull that dying your hair no-longer soothes your soul, the time has come to move on. Challenge yourself, adventure, be alien, take charge, create, enjoy. Basically, the Live, Laugh, Love shit. The stuff of middle-aged Karen's inspirational wet dreams. We all know slumming it in a 5-star Balinese resort, or in an air-conditioned Contiki tour bus in Africa is the best way to see the third world up close, but not too close. Just close enough to have an Eat, Pray, Love story for your publisher.

Have you ever really lived if you don't have a twee inspirational story about your 2 weeks in Tuscany? Or that time you visited an African Orphanage for the Insta pics? Bear with me on this. I can reassure you, dear reader, that I am not a self-hating schizophrenic, I have an editor

who cruelly refuses to always agree with me. She scatters scathing commentary through-out my books I don't always pick up before publishing. The middle-class white boy #woke references are hers. I see myself through far more rose-tinted glasses than she sees me. So, apologies in advance, If I seem to take the piss out of myself or make myself look like a shallow dick, my editor can be very mean to me.

Why do you exist, do you want to take part or not?

They're alot of ways to travel, but the only right way is to be forthcoming with whatever you encounter and endure (Spoken like a true white boy. See Syrian child note above). Things won't always go right; they sometimes go wrong (Ground breaking stuff there Sophocles'). When you travel, things will just happen. When you enter a foreign place (Like Kmart, or another first world Western Nation that speaks a different language) you will be met with challenges and mayhem. Travel is the path that can't ever be described, but will be created as you go along (If you are the person who doesn't plan you can have that same experience trying to get a bus without looking up the timetable). As corny as it sounds, when travelling you won't be able to predict what you can and can't do, what you want and don't want, what will happen and what will not (Not universal, well balanced adults don't find their own personalities surprising or unpredictable) you can, but don't have to (See public freak-out compilation videos on YouTube).

Learn to go with the flow, you can learn to be a good example of a traveler (Again, but don't have to: Google sites and wonders ruined by stupid travelers). This book will act as a guide, to help you navigate those tricky moments you face as a traveler. It will help you know what to do, and what not to do, what is covered by the, "What happens in Vegas" rule, and what you should include in your, "Travel made me a better person" self-help book.

Life is a journey, as we know, but it is also a movie and you are the star. Travel is a way to flesh out the boring bits and add moments of drama and pathos and undergraduate philosophy and pop-psychology to the narrative. You will never know how unique and inspirational you can be until you visit Machu Picchu and trek the steps millions have trekked before you. You will never know how deep you are until you have a spiritual awakening in a Balinese massage shop. You will never know how sophisticated you are until you eat a baguette in Paris like millions of other tourists, and you will never really KNOW the world until you have glimpsed the homeless beggars of Vietnam through the carefully locked windows of your air conditioned taxi on the way to that cute little Pho place. Stay Woke people. You and I are about to undertake an epic Live, Laugh, Learn, Eat, Pray, Love, #Blessed, journey together. And when it is over, we can talk about how our holiday to Japan has ruined service station sushi for us because it's just not #authentic.

### *Contemplation*

Every trip has to come from an idea, an idea to leave something behind, an idea to create something new, an idea to change. Travel is, and always will be, the number one thing in my life. It's something that I want to continue to experience, whether it be with family or friends. For me it takes precedence over my career, a steady job, or a mortgage payment. This may seem odd to some, but this just means you probably haven't felt the joy I have felt from the travels I have had over the years. Or it could mean that you are a responsible adult who is not assuming there is a cashed up financially responsible sugar daddy in your future, who will ensure you are not living in your car just because you are 40 years old with a spotty work history and no savings.

Steady is a journey, (You just made that up. No-one has ever said that) but you will never have a steady travel trip. No matter how well planned, or how strictly you follow the schedule, something or

someone will always pop up to disrupt the authority of the trip's creator (I believe that is called Karma for Hubris). I think this is what I love most about the travel experience, it's not necessarily the surprise of things that could lead you down another path, rather you can always learn something new, enjoy something new, or grow in a way you thought your endurance could never handle.

As I sit on the level 6 specialist center at the hospital, covering for an incompetent person on their lunch break, I stare photogenically into the distance and ponder. My incompetent co-worker is an embarrassment to the company, they are as dumb as a bag of rocks, yet they earn the same pitiful \$23.20 an hour I do, for doing less than nothing. I stare at the blank grey desk, the pale and uninviting blue walls, and the moody emptiness of the room surrounds me. The sun breaks through the clouds and shines through the windows, highlighting my outline like one of those religious paintings, #evocative #mood, I realise I am an angel stuck somewhere they don't belong, and I am destined for so much more than I have. The position I occupy is not my destiny, I am not made for this dreary world that I live in.

I have the desire to be anywhere but here; I dream of what is still to be explored. Once you have travelled to a far and unknown destination, one that is so foreign to your upbringing, it sparks a fire within you that will never leave (Housing commission Rooty Hill would light your fire princess, but I'm pretty sure it's not unexplored or unknown because it's on google maps, just like everywhere else).



*Interview with Another Middle-Class White Dude, Just Incase I Got It Wrong*

Ben is the gay, sorry guy, that wants to be classy as fuck, but never has enough money to do so. If Ben had to choose an airline, it would be an affordable business class, which doesn't fucking exist. "My anxiety goes through the roof unless I have a bed in the air, not because I'm a bad flyer, it's because I just don't like people touching me". A concerning direct quote.

You could say Ben is a well-seasoned traveler. Ben's father is a pilot, so Ben has been travelling since he was the age of 1. On average, Ben travelled about 4 times a year. I am rudely interrupted during my interview with Ben, however it is his lovely friend Melanie from Melbourne, I continue to drink my mimosa. It's 10.30am and I am waiting for the second episode of the final season of Game of Thrones to air. To get a bigger picture of Ben, he just yelled out to Melanie, "OMG, that's like my husband! I met him online last night too! He's also from Adelaide".

Adelaide, is all about Stinky. I confirm this later. Two months after this conversation, Ben met up with Stinky, the online husband being discussed, and they engaged in some pre-marital shenanigans. When Ben went to go down on Adelaide man's dick, he was greeted by a foreskin full of smegma. Dick cheese for the less medically literate among you. Ben was devastated. All those marital plans he had been making for the past two months were washed away, unlike Adelaide man's penis secretions. Even if Ben wasn't more than a little OCD, who wants a mouth full of rank old penis secretions? Take a shower, "Yo Filthy"!

"I love flying and I have no anxiety around flying, it's a comfort thing, bitch don't touch me, and don't put me in economy". Ben's OCD

demand's class, it's just his bank account that doesn't agree. Ben also enjoys plane food, the kind where it's bangers and mash. So, not classy in every way. Ben is the traveler that has only stayed in a hostel once in his life.

Ben is so depressed by his home life that when he travels, all anxiety leaves him. Not being at home is enough to ease the mental load. There is a limit to what street food Ben will eat, however. He's open to the popular hipster street food that is made by the expat-Australian's in Bali, but he will not eat a hotdog off a cart. Ben is like me in the sense that he wants to see the tourist attractions. Ben likes to go where the locals go. He wants to live like a local. Eat what they eat (but not off a street cart), drink where they drink, and do what they do.

"I think we should write a book on me, about me, like record me", Ben announces. Ben is drinking his \$6.99 Pino Grigio from Aldi. He likes to pretend he only likes fancy wine, but he can't tell the difference when I serve him the Aldi stuff.

Ben pretends he is fat and gets angry at me because I am skinnier than him. He looks angrily at the unused exercise equipment littering his flat and declines my offer to co-write the next best seller. He does however want to dictate what I write about. Ben wants me to write about every bitch he hates that he has crossed paths with while traveling.

"People who clap when a fucking plane lands, the people that line up to board, before you're even able to board". Ben wants to be one of those people with priority boarding, but he can't afford it. He really fucking hates people who destroy the joy of priority boarding for others. He also really hates people who stand up as soon as the plane

lands. "The plane is still taxiing. Stop tapping your feet and being impatient. Watch your inflight movie, you will not make the doors open quicker by being an impatient dickhead. There is no excuse for this.

Ok, there are three legit excuses for this.

1. You suffer from claustrophobia,
2. You have a connecting flight,
3. Or you paid for a front row seat that cost you an extra \$45 and some back-row dickhead is trying to get out ahead of you".

Hotels, who do we hate? "The Karen's. The I want to see the manager types. Unless there is a human turd on your pillow, I don't want to hear your complaint. If you're paying standard hotel rates and staying in a standard hotel, stop complaining about the air conditioner". Ben, "You whiney middle-class bitch with lower class travel finances quit your entitled self-righteous complaining".

"We hate the American dollar. Why? Because of Americans. We hate them because, no bitch, your American dollar is not accepted anywhere in Europe, you're dumb. You are not in Kansas anymore, Toto. You travelled specifically so you wouldn't be in Kansas anymore, so don't expect this to be Kansas".

"It has been quite liberating writing about things I hate, I should do this more often", Ben states.

### *The Island*

Charles and I had planned a spring vacay earlier in the year so we would have something to look forward to. We booked it for mid-September, with the promise of the blossoming warmth September always brought. Heading to the far North would ensure hot weather and fun times. I needed a tan before my 30th and a short vacay in the sun would have me ready to shine like the star I am for my big three point zero.

My old roommate Paul had done a few trips up North, and the pics looked amazing. Connie Island looked like paradise, and I wanted a piece of that for my pre-30th celebrations. The Island looked small, remote, tropical, and had beautiful coral sand beaches with clear bright blue waters. It seemed the obvious option. A three-hour flight from Sydney, a short ferry ride, and I could be in paradise. I dug out the credit card and booked our getaway.

We really lucked up with our ferry over from Cairns. Aside from three other people, we were the only passengers. I kicked back with a cider and got ready to enjoy the 45min trip. It was quite a rocky ride, basically the boat version of riding a mechanical bull. But Charles and I had been living on The Beaches with the infamous Manly ferry, so it felt like a walk in the park. When the Manly ferry passed between the heads on a stormy day, it would rock so much you could drag your hand through the water, so the Connie ferry felt like being rocked in a hammock by comparison.

We caught the afternoon ferry over so we could check in straight away. We had an extra three bags which we rarely brought on our adventures. They were stocked full of cheap wine and snacks. Connie Island had only two food options: a sit-down Al Le Carte restaurant with entrees starting from \$18 dollars a night and mains ranging from \$35 upwards, while the cheapest bottle of wine was \$45 dollars.

The other option being an old pub that had not been renovated since the island had opened. It looked like a school camp kitchen from an American movie, but one where they served wine and cocktails in plastic cups. So, the school camp kitchen comparison sort of only half fitted. The point is, burgers, wraps and schnitzel get old, fast. The pub kitchen was only open from 12 to 3 and 6 to 9. Last drinks were served at 10 and the whole pub/ bar shut up around midnight. No dance floor, no party, nowhere to let your hair down even if you wanted to. I mean most people probably came to the island to do the whole "be amongst nature thing", but nature is best when you have a cocktail in hand. We quickly checked into our super cheap double twin room. It was small, dark, and dingy, and backed onto the hill that lead up to the top of the peak of the island. It was smelly, but we didn't plan on spending too much time in our room so it doesn't really matter.

Charles and I unpacked with excitement, and in my clumsiness forgot that we had wrapped a few of the beers in my clothes to conceal them better. I grabbed the end of one of my jackets and pulled it out to wave around like the drunken fairy I usually am, and one of the beers came flying out. It smashed, and damn did it stink up the room. The room already smelled a bit off, but this really ramped up the pub bathroom vibe. You could not bring your own alcohol to the island, so we did the best we could to hide the evidence. While we were trying to clean up, we discovered just how filthy the room was. There was already smashed wine bottle glass under the beds, that the cleaners had been too lazy to clean up so we figured a few extra beer bottle shards

wouldn't make it any worse. We gave up cleaning and changed into our swimmers, ready to test out the crystal-clear Connie Island waters.

After our swim we went to the cheap pub with a water front view for cocktails. I became quickly intoxicated and started smoking the \$40-dollar cigarettes that they sold at the bar. Charles soon headed off for a nap after our tiring journey, but I was already feeling my buzz and decided to stay and see if I could meet any potential drinking or smoking buddies. I had already made friends with half the bar staff so I wasn't really alone. That night I met Peyton, who was the night manager of the bar, along with her friends Jennifer, Dominique, and a super attractive Dutch god called Morgan. They all had a good chat with me at the bar and told me about the staff parties for the week and invited me to join them.

Knowing the bar staff was great. We got our cocktails twice as fast as others, the drinks were discounted, and food appeared on our table five minutes after ordering. Even when I smoked in the wrong area, the staff backed me up against dick head customers. The arseholes were so far away they couldn't possibly have smelt the smoke that was clearly blowing out and not in. Obviously, they had nothing better to do on their holiday than complain about someone else enjoying themselves.

Now being a guest, I can understand that management don't want the customers hanging out with the staff at staff parties, but I was invited multiple times by different staff and was told repeatedly that it wouldn't be an issue. I had meet another two randoms that night and invited them along. We headed up around ten, we waited for well over an hour and the only one to show up was this stuck-up French guy called Remi. Remi was unimpressed by the antics on the Island. I'm not sure why Remi was even there to be honest, Remi never looked happy. Remi was there to work and sleep and have as little interaction with the guests as possible.

Remi saw us sitting down at the end of the hallway of the staff accommodation, smoking and having a few drinks. We asked Remi what the go was for tonight and looking haughty and unimpressed, he told us he had no clue. If anyone ever didn't have a clue, it was definitely Remi. The staff accommodation was outdated. It was a big demountable, like they use for schools when they run out of building space on the grounds. The rooms were tiny, not well ventilated and looked like if you leaned on a wall too hard you would fall through. The walls were all white and boring, but a lot of staff had decorated them with chalk to brighten the place up a bit.

Helen had specifically told us to come back to celebrate her birthday. Helen was cool, not your average islander, a little geekier than normal, more knowledgeable than the others, and a little older. While we continued to wait, we decorated a few of the undecorated doors and wardrobes that were lining the hallway. We started off with rainbows and a few other things, but once we got into it, we lost control and drew huge dicks everywhere.

Probably not ideal to line the hallways of the staff accommodation, but we intended to wipe them off after they had subtly and dramatically shocked the party goers. Another hottie named Elliot that worked in the bar had come home without us noticing. Elliot opened his door when he heard the chalk being scraped along it. I had written, "I want Elliot" then drew a massive cock. I'm not much of an artist, but I have seen plenty of cocks, and I thought it was one of my better drawings. Elliot laughed and said "do you know how hard it is to get the chalk off these walls?" Our faces all dropped. I offered to clean it off but he told me not to worry. He joined us for a quick cigarette and a drink before returning to his room. The dick pic remained on his door.

While this was all happening, Helen also arrived with more friends. Remi came out to make sure everyone knew how distasteful he found the situation. Actually, he went crying to management like the bitch he was. He doxed us in. The manager told us that it was a staff area and we had to leave. We headed back up the beach, now that our partying had ended early, but at least we were already buzzed.

I slept in late the next morning. It was my fourth morning of being severely hungover, a standard day for old me. It had been a long time since I had done 4 days in a row of excessive drinking, but I was back on the horse in no time. The key to long term alcoholism is switching liquors between nights. Never repeat what you had the previous night. I met Charles at the bar, and she joined me for lunch down at Tiger's, the horrific pub. I was greeted with warm welcomes as usual. Dominique laughed when she saw me and said that the wall dicks had been a great success. The bar staff that lived there loved my dicks. The staff turnover on the Island was high. Most were there from 3 months to a year, but some gave it up after two weeks because they just weren't cut out for it.

We ordered our lunch with a hair of the dog hangover cider. I wanted to leave as soon as possible to avoid any embarrassing confrontations. We quickly finished up and walked off when one of the bar managers, Britney, said "Hey, you know management is looking for you right?" I looked back in horror and asked, "Why, what for?" Britney said "For vandalising the staff quarters, they want you to clean all the walls". I told Britney that I had offered to clean them last night and Elliot had told me not to worry about it. Britney seemed confused by this and headed back to the bar.

I felt like I was back in school again. Being told off by the teachers on a school camp trip for being naughty for drawing penis's in the toilet



stalls or something. Then I became angry. How dare management single me out? How dare they blame me? I delighted your staff the entire time I was here. I probably doubled the bars income with all of the cocktails I purchased every night. I brightened the stay for other holiday makers. My Joy De Vrie definitely encouraged the other patrons to drink more. Frankly the resort should be paying me.

The absolute cheek of the management is beyond anything I had encountered before. More hide than an elephant. More front than Myer. More cheek than a Madi Gras float. I was justifiably upset that instead of thanking me for brightening up their dreary dump of a "Resort", they were trying to turn me into a cleaner. The cleaners they employed were worse than useless, so who the fuck were they to whine about a couple of anatomically exaggerated penis pics. I was personally invited back to the staff quarters by multiple staff and told it wasn't an issue. By any reasonable standards I had not disobeyed any Island rules or upset any of the wildlife, so why was this becoming such a big issue?

Rule one when travelling to an island and staying for a few nights: don't make friends with the staff until the last few days, especially if there is limited places to drink or eat at.

We ended up leaving the island the way we arrived, kind of, but in reverse. We wrapped the remaining alcohol in our clothes and shoved it into the \$2 shop luggage and traipsed down to the wharf. In a bit of a huff, I dramatically tossed my bag to the ground. I heard a loud crack. I knew immediately what I had done. Once again, I had squandered my precious alcohol. Red wine started to leak from the bottom of my non water-resistant bag. Note to self: I should design a set of cheap but cheerful luggage suitable for sneaking contraband alcohol into holiday destinations. There could be a series of wine bottle compartments, with

enough padding to withstand rough handling by both baggage handlers and tired travellers. A light weight portable wine fridge disguised as a rolling suitcase. God, I have such marvellous ideas sometimes.

The wine was staining the wooden panels of the wharf. I emptied the bag and tried to fold it into a little, leaky wine and shattered glass filled package. I ran, no that's a lie, I power walked back to the bin leaving a trail of red wine in my wake, and tried unsuccessfully to jam the bag into the bin. Luckily no one else was at the wharf yet. My red wine trail looked suspiciously like a blood trail, and my bag looked like it contained the broken and battered body of a dwarf. Had a dwarf gone missing from the Island, the person who found my bag would have definitely shat themselves. Obviously further investigation would have proven the bag didn't contain the body of a murdered dwarf, I'm not a batman villain, but at first glance it definitely looked like the scene of a heinous murder. I washed the metaphorical blood from my hands in the clear blue waters of the coral beach in paradise. Then I moved my remaining bags to the other side of the wharf and pretended nothing had happened.

### *80s Saga's*

When I was young, and we were hitting the road, we would always come up with a name for our road trips, and a theme song to represent it. Back in the 80s, this was sadly not a thing, or it wasn't a thing my Mum and Dad did.

Mother and Father weren't married, not even engaged yet, those hussies. But they decided to go on a trip. The year before they had been on a trip to England, all the people they had met asked them about Australia. They realised the average English backpacker had probably seen more of Australia than they had. Mother counts backwards on her hands to figure out how old she was when they

started the trip. She agrees with herself that she was 22, and Father was 23.

Both Mother and Father worked at the local TAB. They were set up by a lovely lady that worked in Father's department called Narelle Gay. The two hit it off, and soon became lovers, eeeeeewwww. Not really, back in those days they didn't do the whole lover's thing like we do (Editor's note: ROFL yeah, they wore bobby socks and held hands and were virgins until marriage. After marriage, they had sex twice. Once to produce your sister, and once to produce you). So, Mum had worked at the TAB since she was 16, she wanted time off. They held your job for you in those days, so Mother and Father applied for 6 weeks leave so they could discover Australia (Editor's note: What company doesn't hold your job for you if you take holidays?) KRONOS Pathology, that's bloody who.

They bought an old Land Cruiser together. Dad was a part-time mechanic, well, sort of. He figured he was a man, and men knew cars, so yeah basically a part-time mechanic. It was tan coloured. Mother and Father decked it out. They put Ricardo seats in the front and Father put roof racks on the top, they fitted a mattress between the roof racks and strapped it down to the car so at night they could fall asleep to the stars. If it rained, they would camp. Sadly, there was too much rain to really get any use out of the roof top bed. One day it took them 6 hours to go 50 miles. They were just sliding around in the mud. They went off-road, not that there were many major roads through central Australia at that time. They were on their own, they headed inland.

They went to Coober Pedy. All the houses are underground because of the extreme heat. They did a tour there. It was a pretty rough sort of town, an old school mining town. Mum is anything but rough. There were no mobile phones then. They only had a CV radio and they had to report their travel plans to the police along the way. This was so

someone knew to go looking for them if they didn't arrive at their next destination. They had to carry enough supplies to replace everything on the car. Because of the heat, cars broke down all the time in the Australian bush. Mum and Dad bumped into scads of European tourists who had just grabbed a car and hit the road. Now they were broken down in the middle of nowhere. Australia is a different beast to Europe. It tries to kill you. Europeans just don't get this. Dad got wonderful at fixing fan belts for stupid Europeans.

They then headed into Birdsville, but they came across a torrent of water. It was the river. Dad walked Mum across the water and left the car on the other side. Dad had a winch on the front of the car. So, Dad waded into the river to attach the winch to the other side. I remember thinking, "What would we do if Dad got swept away? What would I do?", Mother states. Father clearly wasn't worried, but Mother was. Luckily, there was so much weight in the car it didn't float away. They got across safely and headed to the pub in town. The locals were surprised by Mother and Father's arrival. They said "How the bloody hell did you get in?". They knew the river was flooded. Dad told them about the winch. One guy called him "A lucky son of a bitch". Apparently, that same day a couple had drowned and been washed half a mile down river trying to do the same thing.

"The flies there were unbelievable. You couldn't talk without a fly trying to get inside you. Dad had to buy net hats, so they didn't choke while walking down the street". They made it to the caravan park and retired for the night.

They then went to Alice Springs. That's where Mother first saw an Aboriginal. "It was sad to see them. They were intoxicated, just lying there in the street. They wore clothes until they rotted". Mum and Dad went for lunch, and through the pub window they saw an Aboriginal man stealing petrol from their car. Father went out and asked the man

to stop. He didn't. Mother got a shotgun out of the car and pointed it at the man and made him put the petrol back. My Mother is a Rockstar.

Next, they visited the school of The Air. It's a school for students who are so disconnected from the world because they live in such remote areas of Australia. It's a radio school, where the kids communicate with the teacher via radios. It's pretty awesome. They also visited the Flying Doctors. Again, a service for people living on remote properties. The doctors fly out to remote properties to provide medical care.

After that they went to Ayers Rock. It's now called Uluru. "You don't realise how big, and how beautiful it is until you see it for yourself. There was a book on the top of the rock, for you to sign. Like a visitor book. If it rains, it takes two weeks for the water to reach the bottom of the rock. Uluru is massive. It takes hours to walk around. There are caves all around the base. The sunset there is so beautiful. Orange, yellows and every colour in between that you could imagine". No dingo's stole my parents' baby, but only because they hadn't had one yet. They stayed there a few nights, and then went on towards Kings Canyon.

Kings Canyon is like an oasis. A natural water source in Calm Valley. It was actually called Calm Valley. Mother and Father had brought jars of food. The vibrations of the dirt road caused the lids to pop off. They lost a lot of food to the dirt road. Mother didn't do too much driving, but could drive a manual.

They had a CB radio. Truckers still use them to communicate with each other today. There was a tray above the seats, with maps of Australia, and spare batteries. No GPS, no phones, just the CB radio. If

you got into trouble, you got on the CB and asked for help. If no one was on that channel, you tried the next one until you found someone to help. You could usually get hold of a passing trucker for help. But if no one answered, bad luck.

Sometimes you would see this huge dust storm coming towards you. These days you will see double trucks on the freeway, back then on the dirt roads things were different. Instead of double trailers, you could see a truck with 5 or 6 trailers coming towards you. They called them road trains. You knew they were coming by the huge plumes of dust they kicked up. Like with boats and gyms, the rules are the little guy gets out of the way of the big guy. Road trains stop for no man, and it's your job to get yourself out of their path. In Australia, they tell you to pull off the path and turn the car backwards if you see a road train coming. This is so the stones flying off the road hit the back of the car. That was so you don't lose a front windshield to a rogue stone kicked up by a monster truck. Mum and Dad had to sit in the car, facing the wrong direction, while they waited for the road train to pass. During their trip they sometimes wouldn't see people for days. If they were lucky, they might pass a stream along the way. Australia is indeed a sun burnt country, a land of sweeping plains.

### *1979 – Contiki*

So, Father and Mother had just started dating, and Dad proposed to Mother that they go on a trip to England. He wanted to introduce her to his family. Air fares were \$700-\$800 dollars return to London back then. They flew British Airways; Mother despised those British trolley dollies and their attitude. Once they arrived, they went to a local pub to get a drink. Mother ordered a soda lime and bitters. When the order arrived, they brought her a separate glass of soda water, a lime in a glass, and a shot of bitters in another glass. Rather than laugh it off, she saw it as one more thing to hate about the British. London is an expensive place and the British aren't very forthcoming. It's still like that. At the time Mum's Mother and Father were on a Woman's Weekly Tour. So, on arrival they met up after their drink and went for

dinner on a double date. They were at the end of their tour so the timing was perfect. My grandparents flew home the next day, leaving my Mother and Father to continue their adventures together away from prying parental eyes. They visited all the usual tourist sites. Big Ben, the Tower of London, Tower Bridge, and Parliament. It was very hot at that time of year, which didn't make sense. It was November, it was winter, there should have been snow. Mum has some hare-brained global warming explanation for it. They stayed there a couple of nights. In London Mother went to Camden markets, she bought a lovely caramel coat from an Indian.

There was something wrong with it, so she had to go back and exchange it. He wasn't happy about replacing the faulty coat, but he did. She has worn that coat for 40 years now.

This was 40 years ago, so the details are quite vague. They hired a Mini minor to head North West to Wales. They went to Carnarvon Castle. It wasn't a caravan; it was a castle. It had all the old knights' armours from history. They didn't stay long here, as they were headed up to The Lakes District to meet up with Dad's family.

They met up with Dad's Grandmother, Grandma Luke. "She was so pretty. She had a wonderful thick head of grey hair". She was living with a policeman called Jack. Her previous husband had died years before. Dad and Mum went out with them a few times. They went to Whitby where Captain Cook sailed from to colonise Australia. Whitby was a freezing place. It was right on the cliffs overlooking the sea, and had a lighthouse straight out of a Netflix crime drama. They spent a few days there. Grandma Luke's house had the bathroom, kitchen and laundry all in the one room. She only ever offered them tea or coffee. Mother drank neither, but learned to tolerate it.

They then headed to Dad's Auntie Carol's place in Shotley Bridge. Shotley Bridge was named for the shootings that regularly occurred on the bridge. Dad and Mum were trying to find a place for dinner on a Monday night, but everything was closed. They found a fish and chip shop, they ordered fish and chips and beans. In England beans mean baked beans not green beans and Mum was horrified. She still goes on about it. "Who on earth would serve baked beans with chips!" Honestly, I wouldn't mind, but Mum's a bit fancier than me.

They also went to see The Lakes District. What lakes you ask? Mum doesn't know. They went to The Lakes District and passed the steel works. That's all she knows. After that they headed to Edinburgh. Edinburgh was beautiful. Mum and Dad went to the shop where they made the family name, Luke tartan. Dad got a scarf made from such a Luke tartan.

After that they went on their Contiki tour. Mum had an awful cold from spending time in Wales and Scotland. It was raining and miserable and Mother was so sick she stayed in the room and slept. All she remembers from that part of the trip is some Asian girl who kept stroking her hair. At the time Mother had hair down to her bum. It was thick and glorious, and mostly blonde, but also a bit light brown. The Asian girl sat near them on the bus, she would follow Mother into the shower with scissors, trying to get a piece of the magic hair. Mum says she was harmless, but it sounds a bit lesbo to me. Maybe this was a lesbian affair that should have happened, maybe I am ¼ Asian. I say that a lot, just for shits and giggles.

They then headed to Switzerland; Lucerne was beautiful. Mum says she can still see it in her mind. They stayed in a glorious little motel on the lake. There was a huge wooden bridge that went over the lake that was covered in flowers. Mum wishes she could have stayed there



forever. Her one regret about that trip was only staying one night in that motel. Mum's parents gave them some money to get a gift. Mother bought a gold bracelet from a famous jewellery store she no longer remembers the name of.

I have convinced Mother to leave me that bracelet in her will. Gaia is not happy, but Mother and I shook on it, so bad luck Gaia. After that they then went to Liechtenstein, Mum can't remember much about it other than it was the smallest country in Europe. They walked around, it was very pretty, then they headed off to Germany, Munich and Frankfurt. All her memories from this time are lost. She tosses out some vague recollections of sauerkraut and sausages, maybe a pub with a fire. So, she probably spent Germany drunk. After that, they went to Austria. Chalets on the side of the mountains and geraniums. That's Mum's memories of Austria. Apparently, they have geraniums on their balconies because it stops the insects from coming in. But most of the time they were just on the bus looking out.

They then went down to Florence, Italy. Mother bought a leather bag on the Point Vecchio Bridge. Gaia has it now, obviously Mum has a thing for leather. They then headed to Rome, "It was a dirty, filthy place, and everyone drove like a crazy maniac. A Fiat Bambino decided to take on the Contiki bus. A guy got so annoyed about being stuck behind the bus, he overtook it, stopped the car in the middle of the road, stood up through the sunroof and waived his arms like a true Italian".

Mother says The Colosseum was very interesting, an incredible site to see. She also says she nearly died in Venice. Apparently, there're no rules or regulations about ferries over there, and "There were too many people onboard and it started to tip". As it started to tip Mum and Dad went upstairs so when it tipped over, they would fall straight into the water. The ferry could reasonably hold 25 people but had 169 people

onboard. Mum was preparing herself to jump overboard, when they arrived at the dock. They went to the most beautiful motel they had ever seen. It had gold trimmings, turn down with chocolates on the pillow, it was one of the nicest places Mum had ever stayed. Mother however, was still shaken up from the boat experience so she didn't really enjoy the fanciness of the hotel.

The last stop was Spain. Barcelona and Andorra. Mum bought a beautiful red dress, red with black trim (Unfortunately, it got stolen when our house at Cherrybrook was robbed). So, basically, my Mother remembers little of her travels. She remembers what she bought, but everything else is background detail to her, so what we have learned here is to buy, buy, buy!

### *Hamilton Island*

I don't remember a lot about our family trip to Hamilton Island. I must have been in primary school as we were quite young, and we sadly all shared one big room where Mother and Father had a double bed and then we had two singles lined up next to it. One of my worst nightmares is to share bedrooms with others, unless it's a hostel and there are half naked straight hotties in the room for me to masturbate furtively under the sheets over, that's the only exception. Hamilton Island is one of those destination's that seems like a good idea at the time, but never quite lives up to its promise. It was that destination that looked amazing, and everyone wanted to go there in the 90s. At the time the Barrier Reef was still well and hadn't yet suffered much damage from global warming. To get to Hamilton Island you first had to take a normal sized plane to somewhere, then from there you would swap planes to a 10-seater propeller situation. The sort of primitive shit you see in Jurassic Park 3, where if you accidentally miss-placed your foot it would go through the floor and out the other side. I was not impressed with this less than sturdy and less than glamorous introduction to air travel. As an anxious gay boy, it triggered my theatrics and offended my sensibilities to find myself air-bound on what was only one step up from a paper plane.

I remember my Mother having a panic attack, she had always had a fear of flying, so to this day, I still don't understand why she had ever agreed to do it in the first place. It was a 2-hour flight from the mainland and the pilot was a stoner dude. I metaphorically shat my fabulously gay green and blue pinstripe shorts the entire journey. The flight was nearly cancelled due to dangerous winds, but in true stoner "She'll be right Mate" style, our pilot threw caution and common sense into the wind and flew a crappy little toy plane into a gale. I'm pretty sure he didn't give a fuck whether we made our destination or not, but against all odds we did. We landed on the runway which wasn't very long, on that note, neither was The Island. We walked straight over to the foot path that led us down to the resort. It was a lot like Connie Island, they had the one resort, two shitty restaurants, and no corner shop to buy anything fucking useful at any point of time.

Before that miserable excuse for a holiday my only "experience" of travelling was what I had seen on TV and in movies. Needless to say, landing in Jurassic Park in a fucking paper plane did not live up to my glamorous first-class international travel expectations. Where were the sassy Air Hostesses? Why couldn't I have a passport? Where were the camels and exotic dancing ladies and mysterious men with moustaches smoking cigars? Here I was surrounded by bushes and ferns, trekking through undergrowth to the sounds of distant dinosaur cries (my Mother says it was the wind, but what would she know?). Just to share a shitty room with my parents and get bored staring at my toenails for a week. Needless to say, my life as a world traveler was off to a pitiful and disappointing start.

### *Freud & Cambridge*

I had just finished my HSC and received a great score of 86.9%, which would allow me to study most courses I wanted in most universities. This meant I wouldn't have to move to The Outback just past fucking

nowhere to study in the country to get a degree. I do like a slow drawling cowboy type but this would not be enough motivation for me to spend 4 years of my life out bush. My over achieving Father was happy with the results of my, non-studying, non-caring, non-effort efforts in my studies. For those of you who are interested to know, the trick is picking the right subjects, the ones that are scaled up instead of down. That is how a functionally illiterate, educationally lazy person can hack the tertiary entry system. That is basically how I go through life, finding ways to maximize outcome while minimizing effort. Not in a business-like efficient way, but in a do as little as possible way. My Dad is more of a work hard, give it all you have got, do it the hard way, and aim higher kind of guy. So, needless to say, my Dad and I don't exactly see eye to eye on a lot of things. This doesn't mean we don't get along, or that we don't love each other unconditionally, it just means we have different ways of doing things that may cause us to despise each-other, and may cause savage conflicts when one of us doesn't back the fuck down.

Since I was in the loser group at school, we hadn't really planned on going to schoolies, or any end of year celebrations after graduation. Dad had said that if I studied hard and got good grades, he would treat me to a European holiday on the way back from his work trip to Cambridge. I got the good grades, but I never studied hard. White middle-class privilege infiltrated my high school existence. My Dad was earning good coin, I wanted for nothing, and I was simply cruising along knowing my parents would bail me out should I need it. We hadn't always had this much money. When I was little, I wore hand-me-downs, but by the time I hit high school we were solidly upper-middle-class. Dad's work was paying for first class tickets back and forth to England every two weeks, it seemed stupid not to take advantage of the opportunity. Dad and I had never really had a great relationship, but we didn't have an awful one either. Dad was at work a lot. I was in the closet and put up a lot of walls. Credit where credit is due, my parents parented me through some hard and arseholish years. They were stern, but always loving, even when I didn't deserve it. If I had the misfortune to ever father a child as fucking awful as I was, I would drown that fucker in the bath, no hesitation. It's actually

a good thing I am gay, I can't accidentally conceive a child that I would consider drowning for being boring and not interesting enough.

Our trip would have us flying first-class to Japan where we would then grab another flight direct to Heathrow. From Heathrow we would catch the train to Cambridge where we would situate ourselves for a week while Dad attended the offices and meetings. I would walk around Cambridge and pretend I was in a novel and was the sort of person who was interested in history. I was old enough to go unsupervised in an English-speaking country but couldn't drive due to insurance. I couldn't get far unless I used public transport, but I was happy to just chill before the real trip would start. I was having the time of my life. It was the time of the Black Parade, by My Chemical Romance. The first new James Bond movie, Casino Royale starring Daniel Craig. Life was good, life was easy. I was in that magical place. The time before Uni began and the real world would hit with such an intensity that it would leave me breathless. I was in that place between what had been and the unknown that was to come, a place that couldn't be understood or appreciated until many years later.

At this fecund time in Cambridge, I was an 18-year-old, unformed version of myself. I knew I was gay but I still didn't really understand how gay sex worked. The porn I had been watching was pretty much dudes jerking off, and my youthful hormones didn't allow me to last too long before the excitement got too much and I blew my load. I'm pretty sure that even if I had watched a full porno, I wouldn't have made it past the foreplay to the penetration part. It wouldn't have even occurred to me to skip straight to that part, in my naïve homo chrysalis, gay sex was awkward jerking. Back in the old days of dial up internet, downloading porn was painfully slow so what you got, you took, and did what you had to do to get off. I was a sexually naïve young chap, and it took me many years to learn that sex with another man involved another penis that was most of the time inserted somewhere. I theoretically understood blow jobs, but anal sex never crossed my mind. Sex Ed at school taught me the penis goes in the

vagina, but I didn't have a vagina, and didn't really understand what a vagina was. Truthfully, I still don't, as a 100% gay man, I experience traumatic black-outs when I even contemplate "The Vag". I know it's basically the girl version of my man-gina or arse, but it's still a bit gross to think about. I'm pretty sure, just to make things clear about my level of innocence, that I still believed that cranes, (the birds in cartoon movies) delivered babies to your door step. There was no penetration, bleach smelling liquids (Bleach smelling liquids is not normal. Please see a doctor), or little sperm guys that swam like their life depended on it to win the pregnancy race. I really wonder how the sperm that made me won out of the millions of little guys. I hate exercise, anything physical and so on, it seems unlikely that I am the result of a race winning sperm.

So, while The Black Parade was playing in the background at our apartment for the week, I decided that I was bored and horny. I had this weird urge to shove something up my butt, I wasn't sure why or how, but I knew I had to try it. I looked for objects that would be appropriate to enter my orpheus from down under and wondered how it would feel. The best thing I could find was the toilet roll holder. This wasn't a regular straight edged toilet roll holder; it was a fancy design. It was metallic, it was a zig zag, about 30cms or taller, with a thick top head that led into the zig zag body, followed by a circular bottom. Why I ever thought that this would be a good tool, or good substitute for a penis, I will never fucking know. So, without lube, and a naïve enthusiasm for the idea of finally getting something up my butt, I took the toilet paper off the holder, pulled down my baggy jeans, and bent over.

The tip was cold, a shock to the skin, I tried to push it in. At this point let's call the toilet roll holder something just so we can get away from the visual of me fucking a toilet roll holder, let's call him Mr. D. Mr. D entered my hole and got at least two centimetres in before the idea of lube entered my mind. I had never seen any porn where lube had been applied, so it never occurred to me that you needed some form of

lubrication to allow something to enter your asshole. I look back with some embarrassment and shake my head at my stupidity. In fairness to my younger self, I had no prior sexual experience, and the ins and outs of anal buggery had never been explained to me. I was massively under prepared for what I was trying to achieve. My next plan of action was to take Mr. D and place him on the floor. The plan was to basically sit on it and use my body weight to get the twisty metallic big penis up my arse. Hopefully the angle would allow my arse to be penetrated without the awkward bending involved in trying to back swing a make-shift dildo at my own bum while standing.

I placed Mr. D on the floor, I then like an Instagram fitness model, tried to squat my way to glory. I tried valiantly to get that innocent decorative toilet roll holder up my hole with little success. To cut a long story short, I was unsuccessful in my endeavours. Poor Mr. D probably didn't venture further than 1 inch up my poop chute, and rightly so (Yeah, I'm sure that if a toilet roll holder was capable of feelings, that it would deeply regret not traversing the entire length of your colon). A gay man with a little more experience could have told me an unused, tight, virgin asshole wasn't going to give up the goods without a bit of a fight. It wasn't my time, and it wasn't going to happen until I learned how to relax, and learned the joys of lube. In time, I would learn to love a good pounding, but that time wasn't now. Thank God I didn't puncture my bowel or get the toilet roll holder stuck up my arse. My relationship with my Father couldn't have survived him discovering me with a decorative toilet roll holder stuck up my arse in an early attempt to self-sexy times my own asshole. Surprisingly, I got through the remainder of the Cambridge part of the trip without sustaining any rectal damage, and we flew off to Rome.

### *Father Vs Son*

The plan was to visit Rome first, then drive to Naples, while also visiting Sorrento and Pisa. In what order I'm not sure, but I vividly remember the experiences in each place. We arrived in Rome, picked up a hire car and made it in one piece to the hotel. Somehow my

Father was able to successfully drive on the opposite side of the road with aggressive Italian drivers, in a place where road rules are seen as an inconvenience.

The Trevi fountain was on the agenda, the Acropolis was on the agenda, the Colosseum was on the agenda. The Colosseum was a bit of a letdown to be honest, in your mind it is massive, in reality it is less awe-inspiring than you built it up to be. Everything is smaller, it's not oversized like on film. No wonder actresses get anorexic and want to look thinner, everything looks bigger on film, Including your ass!

If I could go back in time, I would do over that trip. I wish I could go back now with my Dad, and to be able to enjoy and appreciate what he had not only paid for, but saw as an opportunity to bond. Rome was bearable from memory and since Dad was paying for everything it made living life to the fullest pretty easy. I now see reading this, that I look like a spoilt brat, and the truth is, I was. I was a little cunt who was given a European trip, that didn't appreciate it and treated my Father like dirt. My Father wasn't completely innocent in all of this, but if I could do it all over again, I would do it differently. What should have been a magical holiday, bonding with my Father, full of happy memories, is a trip marred in negativity. The negative memories outweigh the positive ones, and a lot of that is my fault.

I feel like I owe my Father at least 25 apologies for my behaviour on this trip. Even though I was 18 and technically and legally an adult, I acted like a bratty child. I am not trying to defend my younger self, I know I was a bitch, but I had been raised in a very conservative home. Things were not talked about, feelings were not expressed, it was the way the world was in my bible belt corner of my world when I was growing up. Sorrento was where it all went to shit. We had already had a fight prior, on our way to Pisa. We had decided to drive there from



Naples and my directions had been inaccurate. Dad lost his shit, like a tantruming two-year-old.

Back then Dad was easily set off, me being my Scorpio gay self, I was an incurable shit stirrer. I fight fire with fire, because I enjoy being a cunt. Now, to be honest, my memory is hazy at the best of times. The events in question occurred 13 years ago, so I remember in broad brushstrokes. There are key moments I remember, whether they are correct or not isn't important, it's the emotional memory that counts and the reactions.

From there we moved onto Naples. I had told my Father I would love to see the sight of Pompeii. All the burnt-out houses and figures that were left behind frozen for all eternity in that final tragedy and destruction. What I had pictured in my head was soon disabused on arrival. Instead of seeing an exploded volcano top, houses below with the burnt corpses which would lay in their natural place when they were scorched to death. Rather than leaving it naturally exposed, it was a recreated tomb of objects. They had destroyed realism to make it easier for us to walk through, instead of an awe-inspiring wreckage caused by nature, you had an ordered boring little museum.

Our fallout occurred when we finally reached Pisa. We had lost our way to the small town and Dad had been furious at my directions. I'm sorry but I can't direct in a foreign country that's on the opposite side of the road. Isn't the whole point of travelling that you have spare time to get lost, find hidden wonders, and take it all in. To look at the bright side of things, enjoy the mystery of Italy and all the vastness that comes with it. After I had been yelled at for the 65th time on the trip for not giving correct directions, we pulled up into a car park where we would walk to the Leaning Tower of Pisa which was just a few kms away. Dad's rage had sent me into a fucking rage. From him not understanding my directions, to refusing to fucking chill the fuck out.

As soon as we parked, I jumped out of the car, slammed the door, and stormed off. I was 18, so in theory, I was well versed in being able to walk a few 100 meters in a foreign country and finding my way back. I sat down on a corner in the middle of Pisa to cool off before I returned to my disgruntled Father. I didn't want to say anything I was going to regret; I mean, we still had another two week of our trip to get through. I slowly made my way back to the car after ten minutes assuming my Father would be waiting for me there. No, he was flapping around like a giraffe with wings, worried I was going to be TAKEN, like that movie if I wasn't in his presence at all times. I waited for half an hour until he returned, even more angry than before because of my “childish” decision to walk off in the middle of a foreign country. We didn't talk for the rest of the day. We visited the site of the Pisa in silence and slowly made our way to Sorrento.

I was thoroughly sick of the amount of fighting my Dad and I had done on our trip. I decided that I had had enough and rang the airline to book my flight back home early. In my anger I didn't really think things through, or think to inform my Father. The airline would not allow me to change the flights as it was booked under my Father's name and on his credit card. The cunty airline then rang my Father and informed him of my plans. We sat down to dinner that night at the hotel restaurant that looked over the cliffs of Sorrento out into the sea. You could tell that something was on Dad's mind. He wasn't angry, he wasn't disappointed, he was hurt. Why do men have such a hard time showing their emotions and feelings, yet they can build up their anger so easily and let it spit fire at any moment? Is it some weird masculine dominance thing?

What is it? Its fucking annoying that's what it is. Dad burst into tears. It was like he had packaged up all this hurt about me seeming like I had not given a crap about the effort and expense he had put into the trip. Then out of nowhere it all came rushing out. I did appreciate it; I just didn't appreciate his anger and temper tantrums. We both needed to learn to communicate better.

### *Expect the Unexpected*

My sister and I had been in London travelling with our Father while he sorted out some business. He was based in Cambridge for his work but had to travel to London to attend to a few work-related things. My sister and I would be travelling by train down to London a few nights before Dad arrived as there really wasn't much left to do in Cambridge. I had been to Cambridge before, two years before in fact, so Cambridge had been used and abused. We were there for one day when the Kings Cross bombings and the bus explosion that killed many occurred. Mother wanted us to fly home immediately, it made her anxious that her children would be wandering around a foreign land surrounded by bombings and terrorist attacks. But something like that was not going to frighten off this heroic traveler, this was the perfect story for my future biography: That time I survived a bombing. In reality, the bombing was over and London was likely going to be the safest place to be, due to the heightened presence of police and the stiff upper lip of the British that would never allow something so lower class to upset the rhythm of their Capital City.

We caught the train down the next day and they had already reopened most stations into Kings Cross. With the obvious exception of the damaged sections, which had been cordoned off while investigations continued. To pull up into the infamous platform 9 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  was nostalgic on several fronts, both from a Harry Potter fan boy perspective, but also from a CSI perspective. To see the devastation that had ripped most things to pieces, sectioned off by police with large dogs, and an overwhelming presence of investigators and crime scene tape was a harsh and surreal reminder of what had just transpired a few days prior. Once we had gotten through all the red tape, we exited the train station to a memorial of thousands of flowers, photos and candles at the station entrance. People were crying, mourning the lost. The directions we had for our hotel were useless, streets had been closed off because the bus bombing had occurred outside the hotel we

were staying at. With some side street wandering, we eventually made our way to the hotel.

To enter and exit the hotel we had to have our passports on us at all times. The actual bomb site where the bus had exploded was only 10 meters from our hotel entrance, so we had to have them to exit and enter and to be able to prove that we had had an actual booking at the hotel. The hotel walls embedded with the glass from the windows of the bus. It is a testament to that famed British stiff upper lip that they continued with the day-to-day business of being a hotel, like a terrorist attack had not occurred at their door less than 24 hours earlier. I was in disbelief, but to the City of London it was just another day. A day that would go down in history, but one that showed their no fucks given commitment to continuing on in the British way. I was actually pretty impressed with their endurance and swiftness in getting things back up and running the way they had been. To see that red double-decker bus: an iconic symbol of the English way of life, transport, and history, torn to shreds from the middle outwards, you wondered how anyone could have possibly survived. When I think about walking past that bus, the image that best describes it is of a chimney on a train. A red chimney, that has been blocked, and explodes from the middle to tip, ripping the sides at all angles and into sharp triangular edges at the top, smoke still spilling from what lay beneath from the blockage.

### *The Tiny House*

The tiny house was always going to be an experience, an experience in the sense, one I was going with my sister Gaia, two it was situated in the Hunter Valle, one of my favourite places that had copious amounts of good wine that I wanted to inhale, and thirdly the fact that we were staying in a very small space that only had solar and gas to work anything inside it. I call it, because the idea of a tiny house is something that has become more popular, but has it become so popular that you need to pay \$336 a night to stay in an ill-equipped fancy caravan that you can't drive away with, that supports no technology or normal functions we use to survive and get through each day. Ok yes, I

see the “experience” in it, to detach from the real world for a few days and chill, but do any of us actually really enjoy it to some point?

Look, the answer is both yes and no, it is an “experience” like I said, but boredom is a nature that is now engrained in us as a society, soon the idea of going backwards rather than forwards just isn't going to cut it. If your lonely, if you're a lone man or woman, or you're the into the wild without being so wild it's probably going to be your thing. I did enjoy my time there and with Gaia, but I also enjoyed the ability to visit some wineries, learn a few things, drink far too much, start a fire and use what solar there was to charge my phone and play WorldScape or Grindr on my phone while Gaia took in her surroundings.

The wooden floors were polished, the bathroom was all high quality, and did I mention the stove cook top was gas. These are all luxurious that we can endure every day, yet we see ourselves trekking off into “the wildness” to do the exact same thing we would be doing at home, just surrounded by a bit more nature and the idea of decluttering for a few days, makes us believe we are ready to return to the same life we were trying to run away from.

### *Losing One's Groove*

When I was deeply and utterly devoted to Jordan, I had bought him some Groove in the Moove tickets for his birthday. The festival was in late March. After I had purchased them, I wondered if it was a good idea in case we broke up. Always looking optimistically towards the future, I'm a glass half empty kinda guy. I guess I had already planned for our downfall from the beginning. At this stage we had been going steady, as the oldies like to say, for a good year. Things seemed steady enough and strong enough to at least last another two months. I was reasonably certain that in two months' time I would still be oddly devoted to Jordan and his disappointing ways. Salazar had decided to join us. In hindsight, it was a stupid idea. Jordan and I should have

gone alone. We were all sharing a room to cut down on costs, which left us with no privacy. Jordan and I would have to find somewhere else to fuck after the festival unless we wanted to include Salazar. I didn't want to include Salazar in our fuckfest. Sadly, it never came to that.

When March arrived Jordan and I were still together. We headed off to Canberra and of course I drove. I was the only one with a 3-seater car, not that Canberra was far, or that I minded, it's just that I always seemed to make the plans. I was a plan person back then. We booked the Novotel as I still had my old AHL card from the cinema days and could get discount rates as staff. We drove down after work on a Friday. Most festivals are on Saturdays, which is impractical if you're not from the area, but great if you are. Let's be honest, no one is going to the Maitland version of Groove in the Moove. Not unless you come from a household that has couches with cup holders in them, enough said. We arrived late in Canberra. We were living at Windsor at the time and getting through peak hour traffic was a bitch. It became a bit confrontational, not between us threesome, but between me and the other road users.

Road rage lurks below the surface in me, but not very far below the surface. We arrived in Canberra around 9pm, checked in to the hotel only to find the restaurant was closed. Who the fuck closes a restaurant at 9pm on a Friday in a hotel? Canberra does. The Capital of Australia, where fucking Parliament is. A place where a politician uses actual real coal, a real rock of coal, to illustrate what coal is. We ended up having beers and peanuts for dinner. We had to be up early to have our pre-drinking game on, so we were ready for the 11am start of the festival. We wanted to make sure we were all well fucked before we got there because a standard canned drink was \$10, with a two-drink limit person. This was obviously not going to suffice. We had paid over \$150 for the tickets per person, travelled with expensive petrol, booked a hotel, and wanted to get lit. We had MDMA caps, and we

wanted to be off our faces while we watched the amazing artists that would be performing that day.

Jordan wasn't a morning person. Salazar could be. She was a florist, but also enjoyed her sleep ins on her occasional days off. She ran her own business, so days off were few and far between. During this time, she wasn't making much profit, so her stress levels were sky high. These days she's a high flyer doing flowers for high end weddings and clubs. She has hit her stride now, but back then she wasn't there yet. She deserves her success, her flowers made me emotional. They had a certain soul to them most florists never understood. She was, and always will be a driven woman. We awoke and went downstairs for our complimentary breakfast. We were, to say the least, starving from the night before. We over loaded on food knowing our daily intake was going to include a lot of alcohol. We were stupid, but also smart. You don't drink and drive, but you should always eat and hydrate before drinking.

We went back to the room to get our pre drink on. We started, and I had this odd sick feeling inside my stomach. I had to lie down. I know, as the doctor I am, I was having an anxiety/ panic attack. I was in the backwaters, going to a festival with my boyfriend, who was semi still in the closet back home. We didn't go out much together at home, we were not publicly proclaiming our love kind of guys. I knew Jordan was an affectionate guy, and rightfully so, I think I became so worried about being seen in public with another man. Gay marriage still wasn't even on the agenda, and I was scared of being shamed by people for being gay. I felt sad, I felt angry, I felt worried, I felt every emotion under the sun. So, what does one Scorpio do when real life finally hits them, they shut down, their body starts to disintegrate from the inside out. I became useless in all my angst. I was still not out to my parents; how could I be out to the world? I was done.

I tried my hardest to participate. I tried my hardest to drink, but my head and my stomach said no. I wanted to throw up and couldn't, I wanted to shit myself but couldn't. I felt tired I had to lie down, I was sweaty, I was weak. Why was I so concerned now after a year together that I was going to look gay? I was afraid to look different, afraid to be judged. I wanted to be strong but I was weak. Jordan was never ashamed. That very morning, he stripped off naked in front of Salazar with his thick dong flying free, he ran onto the balcony to give the morning a welcome. He was never ashamed of himself; he may have been a useless dude who was using me, but he never doubted himself.

By the time we needed to leave by my usual standards, I would have finished a bottle of vodka. Instead, I had sadly had only one vodka and orange juice. I hadn't even finished that; it was sitting on the bed side table looking very forlorn. It was here that I made a choice. Obviously, the idea of Jordan and I being together in public was affecting my mental state. I sent him and Salazar off to the festival. I had to meet them there later, or end up wasting my ticket.

I slept for another two hours and still felt like shit. Anxiety and panic attacks don't last this long right? I was getting sick of myself. I decided to get up and deal with it. Probably not the best idea, but I wanted to prove to myself that I was capable of anything. I got a cab from the hotel to the festival grounds sadly still sober and entered the festival to find my lover and roommate. We found each other easily enough, I started to feel a little better. Had my worries been for nothing? Had I grown emotionally from my panic attack? Probably not. But when you are blinded by love and off your shit on everything, what else are you to do?



## ASSIMILATION -

### *Travel Simplified*

With the rising availability and distribution of technology, travelling has become easier and more affordable. It's a growing industry targeting the experience compulsion of the privileged. With the internet penetrating every household planning your travels has become even easier. You no-longer have to make the trek to your local travel agent, they come to you. Every experience you could ever want is described, photographed and vendors rated in detail on travel guide websites. Custom experiences can be picked and tailored to your preferences. Now instead of relying on a travel agent in a suburban strip mall to plan your trip of a lifetime, you can finally plan your dream trip from the comfort of your own home.

To think back only ten years ago when I first hit the world of independent travel, it was a different universe. I had been on a few family trips overseas so I figured I would be more than capable of organising my own overseas jaunt. I was sure it wouldn't take much. Soon I could be running around like a drunken panda in a city I had never been to before, unable to remember where I was staying. When I first started traveling on my own, we didn't have smartphones like we do now. I remember having a small Nokia that was capable of text messages, phone calls, and, oh yes, our favourite first phone game, Snake. For those of you retards that don't know what Snake is, I feel sorry you. Obviously, you grew up in a time without Tamagotchi's, black and white Game Boy's and Tazo's. Your loss, Loser. It was the time of Space Jam! The movie, starring Michael Jordan. I really hope your keeping up with these references otherwise Google it Millennial. Anyway, before I ramble too much it was a card that came in a packet. It was obviously made of some scientific materials that I can't even begin to understand. You would then put this extra unicorn magic related material into the microwave for 15 seconds, no more, no less.

The cards would then implode inwards into a smaller thicker card that was like a hard-unbreakable candy. You could string onto your key ring and collect, amaze balls right!

So, my phone couldn't direct me to the embassy, couldn't direct me to my hostel, couldn't tell me where the nearest train station or bus stop was. I was in a foreign place where they spoke a foreign language with only a map. I had to guess how to get from point A to point B and then back again, using only a useless piece of paper that wasn't clearly marked Top and Bottom. I couldn't Google the trendiest gay club (Editor's note: They wouldn't have let you in anyway), the safest gay meeting places, or even where to just hook up. I had to have my wits about me. I had to engage in conversations with random's, hoping they would not hurt me or mug me for being gay.

The stresses of travelling can heighten anyone's emotions. Throw in genuinely worrying about your safety because you are gay and some people really don't like that, and yeah. It was in a time where you had to book the ferry a week prior. This meant trying to find the specific company you booked it with on the Island you were on, having them unable to understand what you were trying to say, needing to bring a paper printout of the ticket you didn't use because you met a handsome Island boy and made 48hrs of Island boy love. These days you could cancel your ticket from your phone in between rounds of boning Island hotties.

Try and do something like that the old-school way when you've been drinking for 3 weeks straight, are burnt to a crisp from the European sun, hungover and moving slower than a sloth you've seen on a David Attenborough documentary. Having had to do all this is the reason why I'm a tough cookie now and travelling these days seems like a breeze.

It may not give me a practical advantage in modern times, but it damn well gives me a psychological one. I know I am a survivor and things will work out. No matter what problems come my way I know I have it in me to find my way off a Greek Island without speaking any Greek and having no money after missing my ferry for a fabulous Greek peen. It's a mindset thing. Modern travel in the smart phone age doesn't erase all problems, but they are easier to fix. I'm like Bear Grylls, I can do it without the bells and whistles if I want to. I now have the confidence in myself to know I will be able to handle any situation that may occur during my travels.

I think David Attenborough should do a documentary about me. My life would be complete. A 94-year-old man narrating my peni's journey across the globe would be absolutely perfection. His dulcet tones, his gentlemanly language, his scientific nous, honestly someone start a Kickstarter and get this thing made.

### *Port Macquarie*

I had just joined the Cinema crew and was once again beginning to feel like I belonged within a friendship group. The girls from the cinema had organised a little weekend getaway to Port Macquarie and I was invited last minute. Technically I was one of the girls, but fuck them for correctly assuming I didn't already have plans. Looking back on it all, it was odd. How was it possible that I didn't have a full and sparkling social life that meant I was unable to accept last minute invitations?

The group came together because of shared employment, not because of shared interests. I'm not sure what really happened but the original group that went to Port Macquarie would not have been seen dead together two years later. We had two supervisor managers; Mona, the

stereotypical strong lesbian. She was a ball buster pretending to be a straight white woman and was married to a small gay man version of herself. She had short bleached hair, pale skin and swung between confrontational and damn boring.

Gemma, my friend was the opposite of Mona in every way. Short, sweet and blonde. Then there were the triplets. Not related to each other but all named Patricia, we called them all Pat. Pat Gay, was boring. Pat Paccett, was just plain rude. And last but definitely not least was Pat Blood, who could only be described as loveable and voluptuous in her breasts. If she ever has a lesbian daughter or hetero son, they are going to have very fond memories of sucking those titties. There was Charles who became one of my long-term friends. Taylor my lifelong friend from preschool. There was Brit, an Iraqi terrorist who could eat more pizza than a carb-loading bodybuilder. There was whiny fucking Maggie, a sad chubster with a deeply ingrained victim complex who found a way to feel like a victim in even the most positive of circumstances. Lastly you had Mic Rac pay me back, enough said there. For those of you wondering how I can call these people my friends then reduce them to a single sentence based on their weaknesses, I am much longer winded about the failings of my enemies. My general inability to say something nice, inability to see people as anything other than one-dimensional and a tendency to reduce others to vulgar caricatures is part of my "sassy gay man" schtick.

After two years the original group split into two. The first group was Gemma, Charles, Brit and I. The three Pat's and Mona in another group. Maggie, the people pleasing looser needed a regular supply of people to listen to her whining, so she tried to keep a finger in both friendship group pies. Everyone rejected Mic Rac because she was a cunt.

Back to the Port Macquarie story. We all drove up in groups and I remember the weather was lovely but quite crisp so it was probably around May to June. We stayed in a Novotel as it was part of the AHL group with the cinemas. That allowed us to get a mighty discount on the rooms when we booked. We had two apartments, one that fitted the three Pat's and Mona and the top-level for the cool kids, plus Mic Rac and Maggie, \*sigh. The only contribution of any note that Maggie brought on that trip was that she had now been constipated for 10 days. This made her even more weird, needy and attention seeking than normal. She probably spent the days leading up to the trip mainlining Imodium tablets so she had something to whine about and an excuse to demand to be the center of attention. She refused to drink alcohol because she couldn't poo and didn't want to feel more bloated. I don't know about you, but alcohol tends to make me shit pretty well, so she was actively avoiding anything that could have helped her. Charles and I thought the situation hilarious. We bought her some laxatives and prune juice the next morning, because we are caring people and wanted to see if the bitch was faking or not. We never did see the bitch take the tablets, she probably couldn't. She was probably one of those people that had to have the dissolvable laxatives because she was too damn precious. I did see her drink a single glass of prune juice though that night, and after that a little nugget was born (Editor's note: What the fuck kind of people discuss their bowels with their friends? Then involve their friends in their constipation relief efforts and discuss the effectiveness of said efforts over breakfast the next morning. Honestly if someone tried to have that conversation with me I would nope, the fuck out of there).

We had a round of drinking games in the cool kids' apartment to get to know each other a little better. Over our years working together we had formed vague friendships, but we didn't really know each other all that well. We all sat around in a circle and drank (Editor's Note: Like teenage girls in a Disney movie? Did someone pull out an acoustic guitar so you could sing Kumbaya while writing in your burn book?). I can't remember what we were drinking but it was probably either yellow champagne or a bottle of Bacardi mixed with Lift. How classy we were (Editor's note: Yeah, your tastes have matured and are now

far more sophisticated \*ALDI wine). Somehow by the end of the night we all embraced and sat around the circle like we were at some bible study camp (Editor's note: Called it). We sat around our imaginary fire holding kitchen utensils and congratulating ourselves on how mellow and drunk and random we were. We were all holding different utensils from the kitchen drawer, I was holding a spatula naturally. The others had things like wooden spoons, whisks, but no full on knives, that would have just been too dangerous. I wish Mona and Mic Rac were holding knives though and both accidentally fell on them, oh sorry did I say that out loud. Anyway, back to the bonding moment. So, we sat around the fake camp fire and chips started to spill from the packets we were munching on and the brilliant and talented Brit picked up her wooden spoon and swiftly but delicately smashed that chip into the soft carpet. We all laughed. I then stood up with my chip packet and flung them around with wild ambition. I was like a glorious merry-go-round, flinging my chips in all directions. I was in the moment. The girls looked at me in shock, had I gone too far? No, I was a glorious boundary pusher, showing those peasants how to break free from the shackles of normality. As one we all attacked the scattered chips with our kitchen utensils, creating a glorious symphony right up there with anything Beethoven could have produced. Thanks to me, the girls had become one (Editor's note: So, a "you had to be there" story?).

### *The Hunter – Pat Blood*

You know those people, the ones you think would be great to go on a weekend away together, but in reality it just turns out that you both end up being your natural lazy shit selves and end up watching 2 whole seasons of true blood in 3 days and drinking 18 bottles of red wine in bed while doing so? That was this trip.

Pat and I needed to escape our lives for a few days. We had both been to the hunter before, or had we? Well I had definitely been there before, so I decided to drive. I had a bigger car. Not that we needed to fit much in, but I still had to do the "mines bigger than yours" thing,

and "I'm a control freak who thinks I am an exceptional driver despite evidence otherwise".

We had booked a full day wine tour with lunch included. Luckily for us our group included two boring losers and a couple of big old lesbian' chefs (Editor's note: were you and Pat the two losers?). We had a fantabulous time. I had been to the wineries before but they were good wineries, so a repeat visit was no hardship. Pat and I had pre-gamed before the tour. At the time we were both broke so we were looking forward to the free wine tasting. Then we planned to just return to the comfort of our one bedder suite, rug up under a snuggie blanket and drink cheap red wine and watch True Blood. You couldn't fault it as a plan really. The point of the trip was to visit as many wineries as possible, taste as much wine as possible for free, then mooch around watching vampires do their moody pouty thing.

The lesbians really took it out of us. They knew their shit. Well they knew their wines and food anyway. It's funny how you sometimes end up with some perfect people on your perfect trip. The ones you wouldn't necessarily gravitate towards usually but they elevate a particular experience. Lady Luck can be an unpredictable bitch, but this trip she chose to smile on me. The lesbians were sadly only in the Hunter for the day, so Pat and I were only able to bask in their superior knowledge and taste for all things epicurean for a short time. It was a shame. I would have loved to have continued the party with them throughout the night until we drunkenly welcomed the morning sun like glorious Dionysian wraiths, but it wasn't to be. Maybe not a bad thing. The more time I spend with people the greater the chance I will think they are a cunt. So perhaps the brevity of the moment was a blessing in disguise. It was mid-week in the Hunter Valley at the tail end of summer, a quiet weekend of drinking and Netflixing was the perfect holiday.

### *Picking Your Airline*

Travelling as much as I have you get to experience a range of airlines and a range of class levels. If life was simple and we all had enough money to fly first class every time, we would. First class is pure bliss. It's over the top and totally pretentious. You can get your steak cooked med rare. You can have as much wine as you like. Your seat turns into a bed and you have the luxury of the internet and any movie you want readily available to watch. I think the ratio of air hostess to first class passengers is one to three, but it felt like I had my own personal slave for the entire 13-hour trip. People who say you need to travel economy to truly appreciate the trip, are full of shit. If you could travel in comfort class and style for a reasonable price, why the fuck wouldn't you? (Editor's note: I think your definition of a reasonable price is different to most peoples).

Business or even prime economy is only a little step down. Sadly, it's not available on all flights. You still get all the glorious food and services, just not a bed that was made by the hostess for you with the sheet folded down perfectly horizontal. In business class you get a comfy chair that reclines to basically a 45-degree angle.

Economy is the worst of the worst. The only way it is acceptable is if you get extra leg room by paying extra for the seat adjacent to the exit door. But then you are also opposite the toilet, so you get people knocking you on their way in and out. The light from the bathroom glaring in your eyes every time someone needs to piss when you are trying to sleep negates the benefits of the extra leg room.

Imagine crying kids, or tantruming mother-fuckers lining the hallways, or even better an autistic fuck that just won't shut up (Editor's note: You are an absolute beacon of sensitivity. An example for us all in how to be graciously accepting of others). Having an entire family on top of you, people's feet shoved through the back of your seat, their



dirty toe nails scratching your butt from behind. All these things are things I have encountered at some stage in economy. But in economy you get what you get. If like me that's all you can afford, then you are fucked. You just have to make the best of it or stay at home.

You are probably thinking this is a pretty stupid chapter, but you are wrong. Everything I say is interesting, and nothing I say or write is stupid. You are probably thinking, "Well I would get the most affordable airline that goes to my destination". Well that's the sort of answer a person with no appreciation for the finer things in life would give. Price isn't the only thing that matters. You don't want to fly with an airline with a habit of crashing into mountains, hiring suicidal pilots or serving shitty food. No-one needs a mid-air dose of bowel cramping gastro. My worst experience would have to have been on Malaysian airlines flying back from Vietnam. When we sat in our seats, I noticed the pillow covers had brown stains on them. They looked like they had never been washed or replaced. I took the cover off to look underneath the pillow which had mould on it. I gagged in repulsion. When I tried to get the air hostess's attention to replace my pillow, she just ignored me and basically said bad luck. We didn't even get a choice of meal. All the other passengers were offered a choice, but ours were just thrown at us.

### *Annie Lennox*

Annie was for better or for worse, completely and utterly messed up. Having a hardcore psychotic Christian Mother didn't help. Her mother tried to raise a child that was never going to comply with her wishes. Annie was always going to be a rebel without a cause. In Annie's defence I did meet her mother once and she was completely crazy for the 5 minutes we encountered each other. I got to watch her grunting around the house, throwing shade and complaints about us not living "the right Christian way", to whoever would listen. Obviously, Annie and I took no notice of her closed minded and unwarranted preaching. Annie was in the unfortunate position of being born into a family that sucked and because of genetics so did she. When I look back now and

analyse the girl she was as well as the girl she would become, I can see that she had and will always have a lot of mental health issues (Editor's note: Your compassion is astounding).

Annie had lesbian short hair that was dyed blonde and was perpetually grown out to the seedy dark brown underneath. Annie was on the chubby side but had great boobs (Editor's note: Dionysus has a fixation on lesbians, weight, and women's breast size. Psychoanalyse the fuck out of that one). She was also promiscuous as fuck. Annie would sleep with either side, or I guess you could say sideways, up and down ways to be inclusive of all the fucking gender identities out there these days. Annie would sleep with men, women, anything in between and often between one of each at the same time. I can't judge, I have defiantly fondled in a few threesomes and other situations in my lifetime, they however were less frequent than what Annie participated in. So, I do judge. My sex life is whimsical and about being in the moment, hers was about being a tramp. Annie's sense of fashion was also very grungy rock looking with piercings, holes and plugs, dark leather accessories and strong makeup. With what Annie had been given by god she did damn well to make it look a hell of a lot better, sexier and more confident than it should have looked. Though I had only known Annie for a short amount of time, we became quite close in the three years our relationship lasted.

Annie was one of the cinema crew. Annie joined us a few weeks after the death of Ella with the opening of the new Gold Glass Cinema that would be taking over "The 6" in The Towers. We had decided to dedicate the Gold Class Cinema and experience to Ella. It was oddly somber to be opening a place of events and entertainment dedicated to a girl who had committed suicide a few months prior.

Annie was hired mainly for Gold Class and I was training with her. So, I could then work in both sites (The 10 and The 6). Annie and I

naturally bonded. She was messed up and at the time, so was I. It was a match made in heaven, more accurately it was a match made in hell that was going to fail dramatically. The sort of match where the willing but misguided participants are self-destructive and self-loathing. I am the sort of person who needs a crew. I also need to be the center of that crew. It's who I am, I need a posse. Between us, Annie and I collected a group of disciples that became the Gold Class Crew.

There came a time when Annie had decided to leave the cinemas and venture onwards and outwards. She needed to escape the hellfire of her mother and decided the best way to do it was to fly half-way across the world and start fresh. Annie left and the Gold Class Cinemas crew only grew smaller. I began to miss her devilish ways. We stayed in contact over Facebook and I decided to meet her in Manchester. She was living with a crazy Christian family about 20mins from Manchester. Not as crazy as her mother was, but crazy nonetheless. I suppose the leap from her mother's house to a non-crazy set-up was too big of a leap for her to make. She now had a bit more freedom than she had had at home, but the watchful judgmental eyes were as much a part of her Manchester life as they had been back home. Manchester is a very gay every day is a party kind of town. Annie and I met up immediately. With limited time together, we didn't want to waste a moment of it. Naturally we hit up the pubs, the bars and the boys. Everywhere we went we would be drinking, smoking and meeting random crazies all night long. We would head home at dawn, crash all day, then do it all over again.

Annie was one of those demanding travelers, not that we were ever really traveling together. I had come to Manchester to visit Annie but also to use her as my host when it suited me. I wanted to soak in her devilish ways, I had missed them but only when it suited me. It makes me sound like a self-righteous prick, but I'm sure everyone thinks stuff like that, I just say it out loud. In my mind things were flexible. I had spent over 2k to come to Manchester and I wanted to pack in as much

“Annie time” as I could, but I wanted to do other stuff too. Annie however, saw things differently. She believed that from the time I arrived, until the time I left, that we would be spending every waking and sleeping hour together. At first it was endearing to be so loved by someone, it was fabulous that she had missed me so much. But gurl, back the fuck off! It became more annoying than anything, it was suffocating. Having set times, set places, set drinking events, every moment of my day mapped out by my shadow. I was on a budget yet Annie always wanted me to buy the drinks and smokes. I mean she was frickin living there yet somehow, I was now responsible for her, once again. All the memories of the past years came flooding back. Her neediness, her shame, it's funny how you forget people's faults when they aren't around you 24/7.

I met all of Annie's new friends, partied with her and even visited her coffee shop that she was now working at. Visiting her was out of my way, I had to come from Manchester but I did it because I am a good friend. I did the friend thing but apparently the friend thing wasn't enough for Annie and she became more and more demanding. I started venturing out on my own to try to escape her suffocating grasp. Sadly, she knew where I was staying so she would just turn up uninvited at random times. This is when I met Ishan.

### *Dating a P.I.M.P in Manchester*

Where to begin, well I guess we will start with the city of Manchester itself. What a wonderful and interesting place. Not only home to Sir Ian McKellen, he also regularly marches in the pride festivals that take place. Gay street is beyond amazing. Way bigger than Oxford Street in Sydney. Most importantly, there is more selection and more 2-pound shots. Becoming a shameless alcoholic is within reach of even the poorest traveler in Manchester. Not only was the alcohol affordable, so was the food and accommodation. I remember booking my hostel for two weeks for just under 180 pounds including breakfast. Not that I ever got to see much of breakfast. It was an 18-bed dorm-room but I must have been travelling outside peak season because I don't

remember there being many other occupants. I was even able to sneak Annie in a couple of times to occupy one of the vacant beds, so she wouldn't have to catch a 20minute train back to her Christian soul sucking relatives. She had offered to let me stay with the Christian crazies, but I had to not at all, sadly decline.

Ishan was a business man, to put it politely and euphemistically, Ishan was a P.I.M.P, a legit one too. He had a little website where you could view "his girls" and hire them through a "legit" escort agency. It was basically a whore-delivery service for dirty old men and sad fuckers who couldn't get a fuck without paying for it. I met some of his girls, and they were mostly single mum's trying to support their children by doing a job that allowed them to still do school drop-offs and pick-ups. They bred with fuck-wits who quickly abandoned them, leaving them to support the kids alone, and hooking was easy cash. Not only was this business basically an illegal one, it was a very successful one. Every time Ishan and I were driving somewhere he would receive constant calls about bookings. It was not a 9-5 kind of business. All in all, he probably had 14 girls that cost from \$300 to \$1000 per hour depending on the girl and her status. Ishan's cut was a pretty substantial percentage of this. I never asked for specifics, but his two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment in the mid of Manchester said he wasn't just taking a 5% cut of his girls' earnings. The apartment was basically new and Ishan lived alone. Pimping was his full-time job, so he had a lot of spare time when I met him.

Ishan was originally from Birmingham and was of Sri Lankan descent. He was a large fella in the sense he was tall, strong and bulky. He was perfect for the PIMP life. If the girls ever got smacked around, he had the ability, and the power to visit a client and show them who was boss. His head was shaped like a more attractive version of Drakes (the rapper). He also had a Drake beard, but it wasn't as cut tooth. His hair was dark and tied into lots of little curls. Ishan was an attractive young man. He was obviously into white boys because we had basically started dating as soon as we had meet.

Annie finally backed the fuck off, when she realized I was extending my trip for another two months to stay with Ishan. Annie knew if I stayed longer, she would see more of me. Ishan had agreed to let me live with him, and basically paid me to be around. It was a funny situation really; it was like he was still acting like the PIMP, but he was also the John. I was for hire, he paid for my time with food, alcohol and accommodation. I wonder if that's how he saw this arrangement. With him as the John and me the hooker, or if he was capable of seeing sex and relationship as anything other than transactional.

If anything, it was a winter fling that allowed me to stay longer in Manchester, and to get the real feel for the city and its people. For a time, Manchester became my new home and my new love. Or so what I had thought and believed at the time. I don't regret any of the time I spent in this wonderful town or the people I met. Especially Ishan. I always felt he treated me with respect and took care of a young traveler out of the goodness of his heart, or at least that's what I like to believe. To make things even better this was not long after I had lost my virginity. I was very inexperienced. I was the boy toy of a big black pimp who was more than happy to help me explore everything about gay sex. I learned a lot from Ishan. I would not be the sexual genius I am today without him, he taught me all the best things that I know. Ishan was a loving lover, and being my first real sort of relationship, I remember him very fondly.

It's hard to picture where Ishan would be now, or what he would be doing. I remember he wanted me to come back to Sydney and open a branch of girls under his business and have me run it. I just didn't feel like it was the right fit for me. I would have had to have hired security to do my dirty work if anyone pushed it too far with my ladies or boys. Too many loose ends, too many criminal acts, too much politics, and

far too many conservative Christian fucks in Sydney for it not to go haywire (Editor's note: You would be beaten within an inch of your life by SE Asian Madams if you tried to push in on the Sydney Sex for \$ scene. No way could you win a fight against a Thai Madam, and no-way could you match their business skills). Manchester was the perfect place for Ishan's business, and that's where it should stay.

### *Expenditure*

Money really sucks. I would rather live off a barter system, probably one that deals in wine. I mean I would swap anything for wine. It has to be a semi decent Pinot Noir, or semi decent Pinot Grigio. I wouldn't trade my wine for food, so I would probably just be on a liquid diet.

Now that I have started to think more about wine, wine seems to be on my mind (Editor's note: Circular reasoning my little pop psychologist) but don't worry, we will come back to this money deal very soon. If I had a dream job it would be a wine taster. Not one of those poncy wine tasters that can decipher which grain of squirrel shit they added into the whole barrel to give it its pepper taste, no no no, a wine taster that just enjoys wine and gives opinions based off their experiences, love and personal tastes (Editor's note: So, an alcoholic whose addiction is funded by others? Pay for my habit but don't expect any kind of genuine expertise for your money, just my feels. You should become an Instagram influencer). Wine is something to be enjoyed yes? Something to indulge. I like the way it can inspire you or make you feel.

I always loved the white wine but it took me a long time to discover and love the red. What awoke my love for red wine was Tuscany (Editor's note: Such a 90s boy. Every second movie made in the 90s romanticised Tuscany. No 90s teens life was complete without a

backpacking trip to Tuscany to live out their Stealing Beauty moment). The amazing beautiful hills of Tuscany, the Villas, their indulgent cafés and waiters. Tabitha, who I had been traveling with through Tuscany brought me to a new understanding of what red wine could bring to one's conversations and love for life. That did sound a bit wanky didn't it? (Editor's note: Yep). When I discovered red wine in the hills of Tuscany I was on a budget. I had been back packing for weeks and I'm not the kind of guy who funds his travels with cleaning toilets or cheap manual labour, so I wasn't going to be earning as I went. Luckily, I was travelling during the recession, so I was able to buy amazingly cheap red wine for one or two Euros. Italy's pain was my gain. I was able to live like a king, or a raging queen, drinking next level wine on a beer budget.

Tabitha was my good friend from my Cinema days. She had dated Charles brother Anthony for a few years before I met her. Tabitha was fun, naturally beautiful, but had a serious case of the Peter Pan's. She thought and acted like she would never grow up (Editor's note: Our humble hero doesn't seem to see the irony). I loved her sense of adventure, her determination to allow life to slowly unfold in front of her. Like me, Tabitha needed a constant distraction to keep her life from falling apart. Tabitha loved the drink, but travel was always more her thing. I had recently been fired from the cinemas after the whole "dress up as Event Boy" situation. I had pre booked my 3-month getaway in the aftermath of Ella's suicide. Tabitha and I had become closer in my last days at the cinema, so when I found that she would be in Italy at the same time as me we decided to meet up and travel together for a bit.

Tabitha and I would be meeting half way through my trip. I figured this would be perfect in case I had started to miss home or get lonely. In any case, I didn't become homesick.



I met with Tabitha the next day and we did the Athens touristy things. I had arrived before her so I snuck her into all the sights, as I now knew the layout and gave her a tour of the town. We were poor travelers who wanted to see it all but didn't want to pay to see it all. Much better that we steal from the overseas vendors who were poorer than we would ever be, than diminish our alcohol budget. I really don't understand why people don't like backpackers. Sure, we steal stuff, refuse to pay for stuff, drunkenly shit on your floor, and write disparaging travel guides about how inferior your culture is, but travel is a mystical journey that makes you a better person. I will still steal from you, shit on your floor, and criticise you, but I am allowed to because I am a #worldtraveler.

We soon headed off to discover the joys of the Tuscan hills. Before we went there Tuscany was an unmapped wilderness, not the setting of every fucking 90s movie. So, I can use the term discover without a hint of embarrassment. After that we ended up back in Rome. Tabitha had forgotten to mention that we would be meeting up with two other people from work. One was called Scratchy; an immature man prick that had small man syndrome and abandonment issues. The other was his good friend called Itch. Itch came from a prominent family that had paid everything for him from birth to the day they moved out when he was 16 (Editor's note: Shocking! Most parents start making their kids pay their way as soon as they can hold their own heads up. How outrageous that a 7yr old wasn't already down the mines supporting their 12 younger brothers and sisters). Itch's parents gave him a whole house in a prominent Hills district (Editor's note: not a 1/2 house? Or a timeshare deal with some local drug dealers?). Itch was handsome but dumb, in the way only handsome boys can be. He had no drive, his days were usually spent with his high-school girlfriend presumably having sex and working out. Like Tabitha, Itch was naturally beautiful and his upbringing allowed him to be irresponsible. Inevitably, they matched well and had started sleeping together before Tabitha had left for her trip with me. A detail she forgot to mention.

We checked into our hostel in Rome where Scratchy and Itch also "happened" to be. Tabitha and I had a shared room, but she never ended up back there. I look back now and realise I would have done the exact same thing she did. There is definitely no judgement there (Editor's note: Bullshit! Every word you have written about them is dripping in judgement you jealous little fuck). If I had had an opportunity to sleep with Itch I would have. He was the dream boy of dream boys. Imagine the dude from Stranger Things Season Two that becomes the smoke monster thing. Like him, but less 80s looking.

So, we meet up with the boys on a floating bar that ran along the canal. I'm pretty sure we interrupted some work party. We didn't know Italian and a-lot of them didn't know English so it was a whole new ball game for us, trying to order drinks, communicate with anyone on the dance floor, and trying to fit in. Not to mention the speed boats that would fly past and rock the pontoon. Not a great way to drink and hurl.

Being one of the first times I had had ever travelled seriously for a stretch of time, I was worried when Tabitha had disappeared for half an hour without telling me she had left or when she would be back. Scratchy was sadly still present, but Itch however was not. I guess I should have put two and two together and realised they had snuck off for a quick fuck, but being the naive innocent boy I was back then, these thoughts didn't pop to mind. Thinking of pops besides having my cherry popped by Tristan when I was 19, I had only slept with two other people before I headed on my European tour. Since Scratchy was being his super annoying masculine self, I decided to go for a walk outside and see if I could spot the missing travelers. To my dismay I found them hiding behind a corner making out. Until this point, I had not known that they were sneaking around behind Itch's girlfriends back.

For them to hide what they were doing from Scratchy and myself was an admission of guilt in itself. I was annoyed more than anything. Tabitha had abandoned me with that fucktard prick Scratchy, knowing I hated him so she could be Itch's side hoe. Scratchy didn't know either. I self-righteously went straight back into the pontoon and told him I was leaving because Tabitha and Itch were fucking. I walked 5 kms back to the hostel as Uber didn't exist back then and the taxis ripped you off. Public transport was out, because ew public transport. I made it back to my hostel with a map and a tired face and waited for Tabitha to return to our room.

I awoke at 7AM knowing full well we had to return the hire car by 9am to the airport or we would have to pay for an additional day. The airport wasn't far but if I wanted to shove my free breakfast in and get to the airport on time, we had to leave by 8am. At 8am Tabitha was still not back. Had she been out all night? Or was she sleeping in the boy's dorm bedroom where she shouldn't have been? I finally found Scratchy checking out downstairs and found what room they had been in. Tabitha hadn't responded to any of my messages. I found Tabitha and Itch on Itch's top bunk naked. The other 6 beds filled by men. I'm sure they enjoyed the show. I lost my shit again and started yelling and saying that it was already past 9am. Now I would probably give her a high five and say let's move on when you're ready. Tabitha broke my heart on that trip. Mostly because I was jealous. I hadn't found love, and I didn't get to sleep with Itch.

### *Ancient Greek Learning's*

Before I met up with Tabitha, I had spent 3 weeks with Charles, Raka and Teagan. Teagan had never travelled before and she didn't really have any good friends until she met us. Raka was always the wandering type, crashing cars constantly, ending up drunk in a ditch or losing her passport and wallet every other second of the day. Raka was beyond love able, she was just a clumsy mess. It was just her nature,

she was too smart for her own good and had a habit of losing things, it was her thing.

Teagan had then recently broken up with her good-for-nothing boyfriend. Looking back, I think Teagan had Stockholm syndrome (where you fall in love with your captors). Teagan had dropped out of school in year 10. I'm assuming it was due to bullying or mild depression. She met her boyfriend through her older sister who pretty much kept Teagan locked away in her house. Except for when GFN-Ex visited, Teagan didn't have much interaction with the outside-world. She had shitty parents who didn't care enough to do anything about the fact their daughter was basically a shut-in. She spent her days watching TV with her cat. Her cat was a piece of shit (sorry Teagan, I know you loved it but it was always a shit). I hate cats and I did my best to avoid Teagan's, but this cat was an extra cunt. It knew I didn't like it so it went out of its way to claw me. I think Teagan enjoyed the cat's vindictive misery, like it was an external expression of the stuff she didn't dare express herself.

Charles was Charles. She always knew who she was and wasn't backing down for anyone. So, it was a damn interesting mix. Useless, I lose everything Raka, a semi depressed no drive Teagan, Charles and of course the up and down Dionysus you have come to love and hate at the same time. Teagan was also very precious. If Teagan had a choice, she would travel first class, have 5-star hotels and limousine transfers. Charles will do whatever is logical and most likely to be the cheapest transport that gets us to our destination. Raka won't give a fuck what we do as long as there is a party and a drink nearby. The four of us all had some great moments.

It was the night before Teagan and Raka were flying back home. Charles had already left for her yearlong sabbatical in Berlin. I was going on to meet Tabitha in Greece, then together we would head to

Italy. As usual when on holidays with friends, too much alcohol is consumed. When your head ain't right, don't start a fight. I should probably use that as a slogan from now on (copy-right that Katie!). But for some reason, Teagan and I had an argument where I told her she was basically fucked in the head and nothing was going to help her. Raka, stuck in the middle, had to escort us home while trying to stop us from clawing each other's eyes out. Luckily for Raka and us we passed out before too much physical damage was done. When they got up early for their flights back home, I ignored the noise and pretended I was asleep. I wanted to avoid any drama or more honestly, I wanted to avoid having to say sorry. I would like to say I grew out of my spiteful bitch phase soon after, but I didn't. As I stare down the barrel of 31, I am still a petulant cunt with a mean streak.

I remember it left a bad taste in my mouth after Teagan had left. I knew I was wrong. I probably started the fight and exacerbated the whole situation, it's the sort of thing I do. I can't remember the details or even what the fight really was about, just that it was harsh, hurtful and unforgivable. I don't think Facebook or Facebook Messenger was around yet, so I had limited ways to reach Teagan once she was back home. I had 8 weeks left traveling around Europe before I would see her again. I told myself I would apologise when I got home. Would it be too late? Would ignoring the situation for 8 weeks mean she would move on and forget what I said, and think I was awesome again?

### *Getting locked in Toilets*

Traveling can really suck, especially when your prone to getting locked inside unfamiliar toilet cubicles, where the door fits from floor to ceiling cutting off all routes of escape. Even worse is knocking from the inside to try and get someone's attention on the outside, so you can ask them to report that you are stuck in a toilet as your mobile roaming isn't working and you have no internet to search for an airport security number to ring and have them let you out.

I somehow managed to lock myself in unfamiliar toilets twice on the same 3-month trip, I mean how lucky can one be? Or how stupid can one be to not have learned your lesson the first time? The curse of the toilet cubicles is not one you read about in horror stories, but it should be. It's a real thing people and its fucking terrifying. Don't believe me? If a curse unleashed a swarm of zombies you would die, sure, but you would die with some sense of dignity. No-one genuinely expects you to fight off a hoard of supernatural beings outside of a TV show. Now if the curse involves being locked in an airport toilet you are screwed. Your parents or loved ones will report you missing after not hearing from you for a while, an international search will be mounted, people will be wondering if you are the victim of sex trafficking because you are a particularly beautiful boy and it's feasible that some pervert would want to lock you up, so they can have their wicked way with you, you become the subject of several real crime documentaries, after about 10 years the airport will be undergoing long overdue upgrades and when the bulldozers come in they will discover your skeleton perched upon the crapper.

In one horrifying moment your legacy will go from "Tragic mystery" to "Stupid fucker who can't work a door lock". Dying on the toilet is the ultimate shame. Elvis was the king, but his legacy is "the guy who died taking a crap". There are some deaths that are a fate worse than death, and dying trapped in a foreign airport toilet is one of them. The shame would follow you for all eternity.

My first near death toilet experience was in Barcelona, in a horrible fortress of a hostel. Everyone I had met at the hostel had so far been mugged, or was about to be as soon as they left the safety of the hostel. I'm not sure why Barcelona is so notorious for muggings, maybe it's a cultural thing where the nuance is not obvious to outsiders. Maybe mugging people is the Spanish version of Vegemite, an acquired taste. Luckily, I was no dummy (Yeah, because only really smart people get themselves locked in toilets) and being a savvy, seasoned traveler, all I

ever took out with me was 20 euros. I left all my passports and credit cards locked up in my hostel room. I was, however followed by a lady on the train one day when trying to sight-see. I think she had a lady boner for my camera. Like a poorly acted amateur theater production of a James Bond rip-off I even changed platforms and went in opposite directions to see if I was going crazy, or was perhaps suffering from casual racism, but alas I indeed was being followed. Just like James Bond did in Gold member, I managed to shake her by hiding in the men's room then sneaking onto a train (Side note: Apparently the Gold member I saw was not the cinematic release, it was the porn version. Nonetheless it was an excellent film and I personally thought it was better than the original). Now it's fairly unlikely that a traveler is going to steal from a fellow traveler, unless they are a really dodgy prick (Your mental gymnastics are a joy to watch. People don't become noble beings just because they are away from home, anyone who has ever met a backpacker knows that things like hygiene, safe sex and regular morals go out the window as soon as you are away from home. The romantic ideal of the traveler is a Gypsy myth). It's a common social thing, don't harm your fellow traveler. Anyone that has been mugged or been mugged while traveling knows, it really fucking sucks! Like hardcore sucking.

So, one bright hungover morning I needed to take a shit of epic proportions. Most of the crappier hostels have one shared bathroom on a certain level, and it really sucks if you're on level 7 and the bathroom level is on level 3. Quite a trek to make to take your morning shit. So, on this bright and sunny morning I hiked down to level 3 ready to unleash a terrifying turd monster only to discover the bathroom was packed full of half-naked men. Normally this would have elicited squeals of delight from me, but on this particular morning I was on a mission. I quickly ran to the closest cubicle and tried to shut the door. It wasn't closing, how odd. The door lock system was a turn and push thing, where the little thingy comes out and you push that into the door so it clicks in. However, on this particular door, the latch inside was not inserting outwards. Things were getting dire, very dire. My bowels had recognised that I was in the toilet and had started the process before I gave the all clear. I would have sat down right there and then

and put my hand against the door to keep it closed but sadly for me it was too far to reach. What was a gay man to do? I quickly looked at the side of the door and saw a piece of sticky tape was across the latch. What was that doing there? Some practical joke no doubt, so I ripped the tape off, slammed the door and congratulated myself on my macho home handyman skills. I spent a rather pleasant 10 minutes relieving myself.

After I had finished my business, I got up to open the door, but it wasn't opening, the lock was now locked permanently. Great, now not only was I stuck in a shit smelling toilet, I couldn't even get out to see the hot men I was missing in the showers. It was so loud in there from all the grunting and showering and taps and toilets, that I was knocking on the door for ages before some sensible young man asked if I was ok. Trying to convince someone to walk down another 3 floors in the morning and inform the manager that a dumbass had locked himself in a toilet was hard enough. All in all, the experience was proved too much of an early morning mathematical problem and it took them about 30minutes to get me out of the fucking cubicle. If Europe had had bathroom doors like the rest of the world this problem wouldn't exist. Doors that didn't go all the way to the floor and ceiling so there was an escape route so people didn't become trapped.

That day I had planned to do a free walking tour, but after the stress of my toilet ordeal I needed a drink or two to calm me down. Instead of going on my planned walk, I just started drinking with some amazing American girls that filled the other 7 beds in my dorm. I was drawn to one girl who looked exactly like Ella, and had the same fun-loving nature. However, Jessica was not damaged like Ella was. Jessica was just a fun-loving party goer that had dreams that fell on the right side of a mental illness. At least something good from that day had come from getting stuck in a shit stained cubicle.



Those girls became my rocks during my time in Barcelona. We became so close they even invited me to Florence with them. They were on a 6-month sabbatical from America. They even let me sneak into their dorm and sleep on the floor for a few nights before the powers that be/ the hostel manager noticed that, "Jessica's cousin" was also sleeping on the floor, not just eating all the food and getting free bus rides to Venice for Carnival. I got a cute little place down the road which was cheap and still close enough to the girls to go out and drink with them.

It was here, on my way to Florence that I got stuck in my second toilet. On reflection, I blame the Americans. I met them on the day of the Barcelona toilet debacle, something that had never happened to me before, and on my way to visit them in Florence it happened again. It can't be a coincidence. They cursed me in a cruel way. So, thinking the toilet trapping was a one-off fluke, I hopped off the plane in Florence and merrily made my way to the airport toilet. I make a habit of not using airplane toilets where possible. They are cramped and noisy and my craps smell like bioweapons and I don't want to be trapped in a plane with the smell of my turds permeating the recycled air. I also have this weird fear that if I sit on the toilet I will get sucked out of the plane and go down the hole and die with my pants around my ankles. A weird fear, I know, but I swear it's happened to someone before. So, with a few hours on the plane and far too many wines, by the time I reached the airport my bowels were singing their siren song.

So, there I was again. Stuck in a foreign toilet. To be fair something did seem funny about the latch when I ran in, but in my desperation, I fucked it so hard it was now jammed. Dionysus, dear chap, you have done it again. I think at this point I just cried. I had run in knowing my train was going to leave in ten minutes and the likely hood of me getting out of my miserable toilet cubicle prison in ten minutes was less than zero. I sat back down on the toilet lid and wailed and cried and beat my breast like a Jewish Mother who had just discovered her son was sleeping with a gentile. The airport was tiny, and I didn't

remember seeing anyone else entering or leaving the toilet when I had run in. I was doomed to end my days in a shitty airport toilet. Luckily a security guard knew about the dodgy lock and made a habit of patrolling the toilets to check for trapped and crying foreigners. Fuck you maintenance, if security knew about it, so did you, you lazy fuckers. Do your job! I was saved from my fate worse than death by my heroic security guard. I then mustered as much dignity as I could manage under the circumstances and gracefully continued my journey, a little broken and beaten down, but still alive, if only just.

### *New Year's Berlin*

For all you Aussie millennials still floating around my books and sending love, picture this: New year's filled with snow, good-looking Germans, fireworks being shot down the street as you walk by, indulging history as you walk past the Brandenburg Gate to see the midnight fireworks and attend a festival in the freezing cold where the Germans only speak German, but respect you anyway cause you sort of look German.

I met Gemma and Xavier on their 6-month trip around Europe just after I had been fired from the cinema. I arrived at Alexander Platz mid-afternoon via the train from the airport. When the train pulled up at the platform, I was lucky enough to be exactly in line with where Gemma and Xavier had been standing and waiting for my arrival. As I exited the warmth of the seedy vandalised train, the cold air struck me like an ice pick to the chest. My fellow travelers relieved me of my bags, and we walked to our accommodation which wasn't far from the station. We were bunked up in a Uni student dorm. Because the Uni is closed for three months during Winter, some sneaky students rented out their rooms to travelers for a discounted price. The room was tiny, a double bed in one corner, a small kitchenette and just enough room to put your bags on the floor. The bathrooms were shared and located down the corridor quite far from our room. We were the only occupants for the week and damn that place was creepy. I would even go to say as far as it was haunted.

The room was cold, dark and drab. Being winter the sun was only out from 10am to about 2pm. It was horrific. No wonder Europeans get depression during their Winters.

Berlin was full of life and energy was streaming from balcony to balcony as the new year approached. To be honest, we mostly slept through the long nights and tried to make the most of the four-hour days that god had given us. New Year's eventually arrived. We had pre-drinks in our drab room and decided to catch the train over to the Brandenburg gate to see the fireworks. On our way over we had to duck and dive because the Germans were shooting live fireworks at us from their balconies. Apparently, this is a thing. Who would have known, one: they are legal in Berlin, and two: apparently, it's all in good fun to try and hit someone with a firework when walking down the street?

We found our way to the festival. There were vendors selling bratwurst, hot dogs and inedible cold seafood sandwiches. The queues for the toilets were far too long, so Gemma and I found a nice little hiding spot between cars to relieve ourselves on the snowy ground. The steam rose as we pissed our hearts away, relieving ourselves of the litres of beer that we had already inhaled. The night was more than enjoyable and the fireworks were mesmerising. The only upsetting incident from that night was when we were on our way home, some fuckwit decided it would be funny to set off a firework in the train carriage. The train halted to a stop and the driver wouldn't continue on until the perpetrator was found. The guard and driver opened the doors letting the cold air consume the train. It was like a form of torture to see who would crack first and admit to the crime. We all huddled together, shivering and drunk in the icy air. The whole debacle lasted at least 20 minutes. After we had frozen our butts off, someone finally admitted to the crime, and they chucked him off the train onto the

tracks. That's how Europeans work, act like an idiot, and you'll get treated like one too. Something we could definitely instill into the Australian peoples (Editor's note: Says the guy that reminisces about pissing in the street because he didn't want to queue for a toilet).

After Berlin we decided to hire a car and drive up through the Scottish Highlands. My dream was to visit Loch Ness, and Stonehenge while driving through The Highlands. The drive was tough with a hire car that had no tire chains to keep us firmly to the road. But we made do and drove through the glorious hills of Scotland. The Scott's accent was thick as ice. Loch Ness proved to be everything I thought it would be. Who wouldn't be excited by the possibility of a Loch Ness Monster? How adorbs! The museum in the town was very underwhelming, but it excited me beyond belief. We were the only three tourists to be seen for miles, and I made sure I looked at every photo, watched every video and walked the museum at least three times to take it all in.

### *The Curse of Istanbul*

The next part of our trip included a week long getaway to Turkey, specifically Istanbul. Istanbul was lovely, aside from the toilet hygiene of course. We booked a cute little hotel in the heart of Istanbul, about a ten-minute walk to the amazing Grand Bazaar. Gemma and Xavier had the attic room. Attic in the sense it was actually in the attic, the roof sat at a triangular degree, to which you had to be bent half over to walk from one side to the other. Their bathroom was even more disastrous. My room was on the ground floor. It was dark and drab and when I went to open the curtains that concealed a big window, I realised I was situated behind the front desk, not ideal.

On our arrival we were lucky enough to have an airport transfer included. When we were signing in at the hotel, they brought us all some whisky on ice. It was 10am. It would have been rude not to

accept the offer, so we all reluctantly skulled our whisky. I think it was a tactic to smooth us over and make us more docile so when we saw the limitations of our hotel rooms, we would be too tipsy to care. It clearly worked as none of us complained. In a foreign country where hardly, anyone spoke English it was too late and too much effort to go searching for more appropriate accommodation. Plus, the location sealed the deal.

On the first day we decided to walk around and visit the many Mosques in our vicinity. Our first incident occurred on the streets of Istanbul when Gemma left Xavier's side for a quick second to go purchase some water. The day had turned out rather hot and in seconds a group of angry men circled her and started yelling at her. Screaming profanities, and pointing back to Xavier. In English, one of them started to shout, "get back to your man!", "you are not allowed to leave his side, ever!". It shocked the hell out of us. We were in one of the stricter areas of Istanbul, and that's why the incident occurred, but it was still frightening. From then on, Gemma didn't leave my side or Xavier's, just to be safe.

Our next disaster occurred when we decided to cross the bridge from Istanbul over to the European side of whatever is on that side. All I know is we crossed a bridge and entered a different state, or was it a different country? I'm not sure. Anywho, that isn't relevant, what is relevant is we got to see the nightlife of Istanbul that didn't exist on the side we were staying due to the stricter nature of the culture. We were dragged into a club by some locals trying to up their customer base and we ordered some drinks. Luckily for us Gemma was not feeling too adventurous and didn't have anything. Xavier and I had one drink each and started to act very weird and we also started to feel very weird. We assumed our drinks had been spiked. Gemma quickly extracted us from the situation. We had walked a few miles to get over the bridge to the party town. We had been warned not to take lifts from unknown drivers so our options for getting home were to walk or to walk. Half way home Xavier and I started to gather items along the

road and became a bit destructive. Shocking I know. Me being a destructive twat while under the influence. Who would have thought it? I'm not sure what they gave us but it had the opposite effect to making us pass out (Editor note: probably just alcohol and your teeny bopper system couldn't cope with anything that wasn't passion pop). It was at this stage Xavier and I lost our memory (Editor note: a regular night out for you then?). When we woke the next morning, Gemma told us what a struggle it was to get us back to the hotel without injury.

I can only put all this bad luck down to the fact that our hotel was haunted. Throughout our stay we had weird experiences, weird dreams, at one stage I even wanted to sleep with my window open so others could keep an eye on me and the ghost killer would stop fucking with us. Maybe we had brought some weird bad juju to Istanbul. We weren't sure. It wasn't just me; Gemma and Xavier had also experienced weird noises. They had even seen a figure in the shadows in their room one night but decided not to exacerbate the situation. I had experienced the same situation. I awoke to someone bending over my bed and watching me, while also having the feeling of someone watching me sleep. We had not told each other about it during our stay as we thought we were all going crazy. On the final day we brought it up during lunch. The only explanation I can find is that on our first night in Istanbul I stole a relic. We were in a restaurant with Venetian blinds over a back door that you passed on the way to the bathroom. I saw an old key that was clearly never used, and was there for effect. I saw no problem stealing something, because I wanted it. I thought it would be awesome to have a traditional relic as a souvenir of my trip.

This key travelled back home with me to Cherrybrook. The bad juju followed me home. I had that key when I moved to Dee Why and the paranormal stuff followed me to Dee Why. Loud bangs that came from nowhere, paintings flying off the wall at 2am, that kind of stuff. Once I got rid of the key, the hauntings stopped. The key was bad juju.

### *Munich – Oktoberfest*

I had been fighting with Christy at the café and decided it was time to book an impromptu trip to Munich and Berlin. For two reasons: 1 to visit Charles on her sabbatical, and 2 to drink way too much fucking beer at Oktoberfest.

Kadin and I had recently reconnected as she had left her boyfriend and decided she wanted to be a slut again. We are talking about a girl who hooked up with 5 different guys in one night within two hours, and still had enough time to hang out with her besties. If nothing else, she was great at time management. She rang me on my lunch break and by the time lunch was over we had two KLM tickets to Munich for the second week of Oktoberfest. We would be staying at some shitty ass hostel, and having a week in Berlin with Charles afterwards. Charles was also going to fly over to Munich for a few days and stay with us in our 18bed dorm while we meet up with Simo and her asshole boyfriend Phuck. Phuck was a tradie, and an entitled fuck. He believed being gay was wrong, and that it was the duty of women to serve him. He never amounted to much. Simo eventually broke up with him, one of the smartest things she ever did.

So, there was the 5 of us. Charles knew German, which helped a-lot. Simo was fun. Phuck was the typical dude traveling with 4 "it girls", me being the honorary girl, and Kadin was out to get some dick. So, all in all, another awkward match of friends. Simo and Phuck were staying a few kms away from the hostel we were staying at. Our hostel was amazingly placed, just 500metres to the entrance of the festival. How we got a booking there at such short notice I will never know. We even got Simo in for a few nights, after Phuck had left to return to Sydney, it was way more fun without him.

The only clear memory I have of Phuck is when we were dancing on a table, and we decided to Prost (or cheers) with each other's huge beer glasses, 1 litre glasses for Oktoberfest. They don't do things in halves those Germans. In any-case, I remember Phuck was being his usual dickhead self. To prove my "masculinity" to him, I smashed his beer glass so hard that it smashed into a million little pieces that fell all over his arm. Being the type of dude that Phuck was, when I said shake it off and ill blow it off, he thought it was some sexual gay innuendo. I was offering to blow on his arm to remove the glass, not blow his knob. So, what did dickhead Phuck do? Using his other meat man hand, he pressed down and tried to rub the shards of glass off his arm. What did you think happened next dear readers? The dumb ass rubbed the shards of glass all down his arm. He was bleeding everywhere. Bleeding after drinking liters of beer for 8 hours isn't a great idea. Simo got upset, then angry, then motherly. I tried to tell her it was his fault because he didn't listen, but she wouldn't have it. We bandaged him up and luckily were allowed to stay for the rest of the night. The night ended with Wake Me Up When it's All Over, by Avicii.

However, young readers apologies for the diversion, this is not meant to be about me glassing a man and then blaming him for it. This story is meant to be about staying in an 18 dorm bed room. Its brilliant, it's disgusting, its everything you think it would be and more. You have no idea what it could turn into. It could turn into a drunken orgy, or it could turn into a gang war, it just depends on the participants and the country. On our first night a guy started bothering Kadin on her top bunk at 3am. He mistakenly believed it was his bunk. Poor intoxicated bloke. I was asleep and had no idea of the near rape situation that was occurring. Wait let's downgrade that, rape was never involved. I awoke to Kadin jumping up and down with her super thighs. Sorry, I forgot to mention she was a ballerina that wasn't suited for the job. Her thighs were bigger than a juicy chicken thigh. Have you ever seen James Bond Goldeneye where that insane chick strangles people with her thighs? I understand that this is a straight man's fantasy, that's what Kadin's thighs were like, big, thick and insane. Those chunky



legs jumping up and down on a wooden floor were enough to wake anyone up. I awoke to her thunderous thigh sounds on the floor and her overly dramatic shrieking.

Kadin: "Someone just shat on my bag, and the floor, he's still shitting!!!"

I was half awake and confused about what was happening. Surely no-one would shit on the floor. Nup, he was actually shitting on the floor.

This guy continued to lose self-control in every way possible. Covered in his own poo, the dude crawled to the toilet that was at the entrance of the room. It was like a Terminator moment where he had been cut in half and had to drag his half machine body forward leaking all sorts of fluids, but in this case, it was poo. He made it to the bathroom where he locked himself in.

Kadin and I decided to grab everyone that was staying in the room's belongings. We hadn't met any of them yet, but we realised they weren't going to be happy about sleeping in a shit filled room with a fucking retard on their return. We grabbed everything, and I went downstairs while Kadin stayed outside the room to guard everyone's belongings. I informed the hostel management about the backpacker and what had happened. We wanted this guy to get help, but we also needed another room. None of us were going to sleep in a shit smeared room, stained with vomit and beer and loneliness. Not to mention the fact the bathroom was now occupied probably for the entire night by our filthy shit stained hero. The male receptionist had a hard time understanding what was happening. Probably because he was German, language barrier and all. When I finally took him upstairs and showed him what had happened, things started to move along much quicker.

Do you know they keep a complete dorm free, not booked, in peak times just in case shit goes down? (pun intended). They had a whole 18 bed dorm room free. It reminded me of the cinemas when we had “house seats”. We had about 10 isle seats that would never be filled for stuff like if someone spilled a drink and didn’t have somewhere to sit, if someone complained, so on and so on. The best part was these seats were known to staff so when we wanted to see a free movie, we sat in them.

Back to Germany. They moved us all to a new room. They sadly decided to kick shit boy out of the hostel and leave him to fend for himself. Normally Germans are cool, besides Hitler. I was happy for him to have the 18-bed shit stained dorm to himself until he sobered up and felt sorry for him. But I wasn’t the one who was going to be cleaning faeces from the walls and floors, so I wasn’t consulted about it.

That wasn’t our only incident during our time at Oktoberfest. To be honest Munich really didn’t do it for me. It was nice, and German, and historical, but I had seen far more interesting cities. Aside from how much they loved their beer, Munich was disappointing. During our one-night stay at the poo hostel as we will forever remember it, we meet two British characters. This was before being gay was cool, so these two guys loving me at the time makes them even more special. Let’s name them Tim and Tam. Not very British I know, but they were two peas in a pod. Tim and Tam were cute, in a British way. They were some better-looking British lads I had met on my travels. Naturally Kadin got her pick of British dick. She wanted some dick, and British dick would do.

Tim and Tam became our "outside friends". Meaning outside from within Oktoberfest. We would pre-drink with Tim and Tam. I can't remember why we never headed into the festival together. One-night Kadin and I had gone home slightly earlier than usual. To our dismay, we awoke to Tim and Tam, they were not ok. Tim was hunched over Tam's shoulders, while Tam tried to drag him inside, despite their best efforts to be as quiet as possible, they managed to wake the entire room. Tam quickly put Tim in the bathroom where he proceeded to throw up for what felt like hours. With only one toilet for the whole 18 bed dorm again, it was slightly inconvenient. I knocked on the door and Tim was trying to push his vomit down the cracks of the pipe in the sink. He did not look well. I cleaned him up a bit and used the facilities. Sadly, for Tim, he remained in the bathroom until morning.

### *Try to Be Prepared*

The bad luck really hit us the night before we flew out to meet Charles in Berlin. Kadin decided to get white gurl drunk, even though she had been pretty sensible the other nights we had hit the festival. Our plan was to be up at 8am and catch a taxi over to the airport, allowing a good 3 hours of spare time in-between if anything went south. Oh, boy did it go south. Kadin was so intoxicated in the morning she could not stand still, let alone pack her bag. I found it endearingly funny, but it really was bad timing. An hour after our 8am wake-up call we had finally got Kadin dressed and ready to go. There was a-lot of her downing water, and me doing most of the work. She couldn't even get her jumper on. I had to put her head and arms through the holes so she stopped getting caught and laughing. We finally checked out and got down onto the street. Since we had lost an hour, we decided that taking the train was going to be too much for our poor dear Kadin. We tried to hail a cab, over and over again, but we had no luck. Those German fuckers just wouldn't pull over for us. With another 45minutes lost things were getting dire.

We headed down to the train station because it was now our only option. We caught two trains and arrived 10 minutes before our flight

was set to take off. We made it to the gate and check in counter. A bitch hostess wouldn't let us board so we had to pay 400 euros each to get on the next flight. The next flight didn't leave for another 4 hours, thanks for that Kadin. We resentfully agreed, paid out 400 euros, only to make it through the check lines and see that our original flight was still boarding. The ordeal was all too much. We sat on our asses and ordered a beer.

### *Splendor in The Grass – Woodfordia*

Splendor in the grass is one of the few remaining successful festivals, that was created in the festival boom of the early 2000s. So many existed, so many popped up, but most failed due to drug issues, bands pulling out last minute, or government interference. Sometimes I wish I could spike the whole senate just to see whether they would be able to handle it.

Splendor had always been held at a site called Woodfordia, but for some reason this was going to be the last year at this site. So, with our crippling FOMO we booked our tickets like crazy rabid dogs desperate to experience it before it disappeared forever. The organisers had secured another site for future Splendors, 20mins up from Bryon Bay. Sure, Splendor would go on, but the future of Splendor in the grass was basically a field. A field that would doubtfully flood every festival season in the coming years. We drove from Sydney to Byron, with a pitstop in Nambucca heads. We had a good crew. There was Gemma & Xavier, we had Tabitha and Raka, the nympho who was always good fun. It was the perfect crew. All fun, loose cunts. We drove up in Gemma and Xavier 1960s orange Combi. It had had its day, but Xavier had fixed it up enough that we could make the 11-hour journey.

A Combi is a festival stereotype for a reason. They are useful and spacious and give you somewhere to sleep reasonably comfortably

when the weather turns shit. Our Combi was functional, but only just. The seats had no spring left and the seatbelts definitely wouldn't have stopped us from suffering serious head damage if we were in a major car accident, but we looked cool, and that's what matters. There was no air conditioner so it was alternately freezing or boiling. But when you are planning to get filthy, dance & drink too much, all that matters is having a dry flat surface to lay your weary head.

We had bought wine goon bags, drunk the contents and refilled them with bottles of vodka. We removed the insides of the van doors and stacked them with our goon bags. This provided some minimal insulation and helped us smuggle our stash into the festival. The good thing about vodka is it survives all temperatures and still remains pretty drinkable. We also re-bottled cases of water with vodka and snuck in other various goodies all around the car. When we were asked upon entry "do you have any alcohol or drugs?", we all said no, and we were allowed entry. Some people were stopped and searched, the dodgy looking cunts, but we looked cool in our Combi, so they listened to our lies and waved us through. Of course, we had drugs and alcohol. Who goes to Splendor without drugs and alcohol? But we were the sort of druggies and alcoholics they wanted there. The Combi driving pretty kids who fit with the vibe they were going for.

We set up our camp. The grounds were already muddy but we found a dry enough patch and got to it. Nothing would be playing that first night but you could head into the festival for the food carts to get some dinner. We had an early night in preparation for our next day. It was going to be a big night with Cold Play and Kanye West playing the same night. Coldplay went off but I hadn't really listened to their other 15 albums and didn't feel the vibe as much as I did with Kanye. Even though Kanye arrived in a helicopter like a douche that almost caused a stampede, it was all good. Kanye knows how to make an entrance. He also had an interlude of fifteen minutes, because its Kanye. That said, his runaway performance was beyond belief. I'm pretty sure he imported those ballerinas from Russia to dance around him while he

sang douche bag too many times. But enough about Kanye, he's a Trump supporting douche bag. He wasn't a Trump supporter back then though, so I was able to enjoy his performance at the time. But this story isn't about Woodfordia. This story isn't about Kanye and his fabulous antics, no no my eager readers. This story is about Xavier's poor ankle.

The lead up to the stage was on a bit of a hill. There had been some rain and there were massive pot-holes and boulders all over the field in front of the stage. Everyone was there for Kanye, there wasn't a single person there that year that was prepared to miss Kanye. And rightfully so, he had just had the biggest number 1 album that year, he was in the prime of his life and for him to even come to Australia was a bit of a miracle. Xavier's excitement got the best of him and as he was running up the hill to get a better look at Kanye, he stumbled in a crater and his ankle did a 90-degree turn. He cried out in pain. But this was Kanye, so Xavier decided dealing with the ankle would have to wait. After Kanye's set Xavier hobbled over to the first aid tent where they basically told him that it was probably a sprain, but possibly a fracture. This happened on the first night of course. We still had 3 days of party going to go. That and the fact that Xavier was the only one that was confident enough to drive the Combi was a bit of a problem. The Combi was a manual. He had injured his driving foot, not his clutch foot, so it was not the end of the world but it was going to be a hard drive home at the end. We awoke the next day to see Xavier's ankle was the size of his thigh. Xavier has big muscly thighs, so we were concerned.

We suggested he go into town to get it looked at but we were at least 45kms from anywhere, and the car was trapped in until we could leave. So, unless he wanted to hike 4 kms to the main road on his potentially broken ankle, then try to hail a cab or hitch a ride, it wasn't happening. There was no Uber in those days. Xavier didn't want to try to hitch into town with no guarantee he could find a doctor who could fix the problem, and miss a whole day of the festival. He decided to

rest the ankle and then we would leave early on Monday to miss the traffic jam rush home. We fashioned him a makeshift ankle brace from crap we found lying around and he just got on with it. Xavier woke at the crack of dawn the next day and hobbled around cooking us all a gourmet breakfast. He was more worried about his hungover friends than his own wellbeing. This is how he got the nickname DAD.

Sadly, Xavier's ankle wasn't the worst thing that happened on that trip. A far bigger disaster was about to hit that morning. Gemma was already awake as she was used to Xavier's early morning antics. Raka and Tabitha would never be up before 11, they didn't understand what an early morning was, and ten years later still probably don't. I exited the now hot smelling tent to be welcomed by the fresh air of the new day. I sat my ass down in one of the camp chairs and Xavier served me toast with baked beans and eggs and a beer, to cure the hangover from the night before. I sat there with Gemma and Xavier in a somber silence. The partying the night before had drained us of all energy.

I got half way through my breakfast and I needed to fart. No problem, I fart all the time. So much so that I should probably see a doctor about it. So, I farted. It was an oddly wet fart, an oddly smelly fart, and the smell lingered and lingered. I realised I had shat myself. Sitting there in the early morning light eating breakfast made for me by my temporarily disabled friend, I shat myself and didn't realise it for several minutes. I stood slowly. I looked at Gemma, she looked back at me. We both knew what had happened, but neither of us wanted to speak of it. I started to cry. I had only brought one pair of shorts and I had just shat in them. I was fucked. Gemma told me to grab a tissue and dab at my arse to make sure I wasn't mistaken, maybe it really was just a fart. As I turned around, I heard her gasp. There was shit running down my legs.

I had shat myself. For the first time ever since I stopped wearing nappies, I shat my pants. These days I shit my pants far too often, but back in the days on Splendor it wasn't a thing for me. These days my stomach hates me and I hate it. I constantly feed it too much coffee, Red Bull, wine and dairy all of which leads to uncontrolled shitting. I probably shouldn't do that, but continue to because I don't like rules and I never will.

The bathrooms were portaloos. No drop toilets or showers, just portaloos that were already overflowing and no toilet paper. I didn't want to clean myself up in the open. I also didn't want to clean myself in the tent and then have to spend the next couple of days sleeping in the lingering smell of my own shit. I had to do the walk of shame to the portaloos with a shirt wrapped around my ass and Gemma holding my other hand for support. As we walked the 1km to the toilet the shit started to dry on my legs and the feeling was beyond repulsive. I had to wait another 20 minutes for a portaloos to become available. Every minute felt like an hour. I was terrified I was going to shit myself again. Thankfully I didn't, not that it would have really made much difference by then. I did not. I finally got in the cubicle and cleaned myself up as best I could with the wet ones Gemma had given me. I put on some fresh pants that Xavier had lent me and threw my shit stained shorts in an already over-flowing nearby bin. I walked away without looking back. People kept asking me why on earth I was wearing long pants in the middle of summer. My shart story became the stuff of legends amongst fellow festival goers that year. With Xavier looking disabled as fuck on his first aid tent supplied crutches and me wearing long pants in 40-degree weather, we were a memorable combination. When we finally arrived home Xavier's ankle was so swollen, they had to drain it. The doctor told him he had fractured it in 5 places. He had to have 12 weeks off work and then do another 6 weeks of physiotherapy to regain full use of his ankle. Even after a long shower when I got home, I still found dried on shit caked to my pubes for another day or so. To say the least, it was a memorable trip. We learned some life lessons. The less than fabulous parts were not going to put us off though. Next year Splendor would



be at a new site, and we would be there. Splendor #taketwo here we come.

### *Byron Bay*

All up I think we attended Splendor five years in a row. On our last trip we decided to take the first-class route. We were all a little older, all had a little more money, were all a little more well-endowed (those penis enlargement pills from the network work like a charm) and were all a little more fun. We had pre-planned our MDMA, which we smuggled in wrapped up, in chewing-gum wrappers. Our goon sacks were packed into our gumboots. We successfully snuck in our drugs and alcohol. Looking back, we took stupid risks bringing that stuff in. These days I'm happy enough with a pack of cigarettes and 3 bottles of red, but back then we thought we needed to do illegal stuff to have proper fun. Tabitha was the only one from the original crew that joined us this time. She had just broken up with Itch and I bought her the ticket for her birthday. Andrew, Christy, Roberto, and my favourite addition, Ryan, also came. Ryan was hot, pretty nice, generally ungraceful and was a brother of a dude I used to work with at Apizza. Funny how small the world is when you live in The Hills. Ryan and I got to share a room. I can't remember why, but we did. You would have thought Tabitha and I would have shared but I think she was on the couch.

I've got to give it up to Tabitha. The one band I never got to see at Splendor was Boy & Bear. We were about to watch Boy & Bear when Tabitha started to trip her balls off on some acid that some random gave her. She collapsed in the corner, and since I was Tabitha's friend, I was tasked with looking after her. I would have anyway but it still sucked. The funny thing was during the hour and half set she was so uncontrollable that I nearly took her to the ambulance. But once that set had finished, she snapped out of it and was fine. Had Boy & Bear put her in such a trance that she couldn't comprehend what was happening? Or was it just super bad timing? Was the world trying to tell me, once again, not to be friends with Tabitha?

The best part happened when we were leaving the concert one day. I remember it was still light, which was odd because the festival usually went well on into the night. Maybe we had just had enough that day and left early. Andrew was walking in front of us and kept pushing Tabitha to one side as a bit of a joke. We were all still high as fuck at this stage. Tabitha dropped back to walk with me, and she whispered in my ear "I'm gonna tackle that mother fucker". I couldn't stop laughing. Andrews a big dude, at least 120kgs of muscle and as wide as an Ox. We slowed down a little because Tabitha believed she needed a run up. She waited till the muddiest part of the path was coming up and started to charge. Head down, she let out a roar and charged at him like an America high school footballer trying to win the playoffs. She dived for his legs and she tackled with such force she took out the people in front of him as well. They both went flying into the mud. Tabitha had tackled 120 kg Andrew to the ground in magnificent style.

### *Falls Festival*

These were the times of Christy. Christy and her hot straight man friends from the Northern Beaches. This all happened before I moved to the Northern Beaches to join in the fun. There was a group of about ten of us that were heading down to Adelaide over the summer break. We were going to camp on our way down, and join the festival. I was looking forward to the filth, the fun and the ecstasy. After the festival we were going to camp for two weeks as we wandered home at a seasonally appropriate relaxed pace. The festival was a 3-day event and because it was summer and the boys were quintessential Australian beach boys, they brought their surfboards along for the trip.

They planned to catch some waves but some is a fuzzy term. They spent so long catching waves it left no time to find decent camping

spots. We didn't know that over the Christmas period finding a camping spot is about as easy as finding a girl who peaked as a teen as a popular girl in high school who doesn't spend the rest of their life trying to re-live her glory days by organising school reunions. Most places had been booked out for a year, so our only options left were National Parks. National parks that had already been colonised by the unwashed hippies who knew that the caravan parks were going to be insane and were too tight fisted to pay caravan park rates anyway. The shitty thing about National Parks is that you have to drive down dirt roads for bloody kms only to find the 5 camping spots have already been taken, so you have to drive back out and find the next one, again and again and again until you are fucking over it and contemplate shooting the hippies and throwing their shit in a river so you can put up your tent. The Colonial genes are strong in me. When it's hot, and I'm tired, I'm all for violently ejecting the people already occupying the space I want. Usually I love a good non-plan, my European adventures were all about the non-plan, but Aussie's are just too damn organised leaving no space for a free spirit like myself to lay his weary head.

We camped our way down and hit the festival with positive vibes, if for no other reason than we knew at least here we would have space to camp. For 3 days our space was reserved and we wouldn't have to fight fucking hippies for camp space. The only wrinkle in our shirt of joy was that in Lorne, its fucking freezing at night. When the sun goes down it goes from 40 degrees to 0 degrees, and the human body and festival fashion is just not suited to those kinds of temperature changes. One night the wind got so bad the tent poles broke and the tent collapsed inwards. We had no spare tent poles, no spare tent and no fucks left to give.

There was no leaving the festival at any time. You were parked in and at least 15kms walk to any shop where you could buy another tent. But, when your drunk, high and happy it doesn't matter where you end up crashing on the night. A soft surface that is slightly covered, to

temporarily house your dead and beaten body until the next pre drinks at breaky, is all you need. So, things being what they were, I slept in a concave tent for two nights at Falls.

I had gone with Kadin, Christy and her husband-to-be Roberto. Roberto always hated the drama and theatrics of the world that we live in. In other words, he was depressed and hated most things for what they were, and rightfully so. It was New Years on our last night at Falls and we had saved our final tabs of ecstasy so we could farewell the year with a bang. Andrew, who was one of my favourite NB boys kinda ruined it. I saw another side of him that night. We were all happily dancing throughout the day, the light, the warmth, the music it was all fabulous. After a day of hardcore drinking and social butterflying your serotonin levels drop pretty dramatically. It messes with your brain waves.

Andrews brain waves went psycho. Andrew was becoming overtly aggressive. A few times we had to stop him from taking out anyone stupid enough to get within arm's reach of him during his atrociously uncoordinated dancing. I decided to try to distract him with shiny things and my good attitude. It didn't work as planned. I'm not sure if it was something I did that caused his reaction, or if it was the inevitable result of too many drugs, too much alcohol, too much sun and not enough sleep. He became violent. Maybe he assumed that because I am a man, I would appreciate some friendly rough housing but in his inebriated state underestimated his own strength. He grabbed my neck and started to choke me. I'm not opposed to some low-key air play but this wasn't particularly low-key or playful. Christy saw what was happening but I winked at her to let her know it would be best just to ride it out. I figured people intervening would only make him angry and make him tighten his grip. After what felt like too long, he wasn't letting go and I started to panic. I started to slap at him lightly in a "Ok, cool it man, nice joke", but yeah you can let go now kind of way. He didn't get the message or loosen his grip, it only got worse. At this stage I was gasping for air and onlookers were starting to worry. Hell,

I started to worry. Erotic asphyxiation has its place in my life, but this didn't feel erotic at all. Christy jumped on him from the back which made us fall backwards. This caused Andrew to lose his grip. Thank-you Christy for your clever thinking. We all stood up and I gave him the look of "WTF man!", and he hugged me and walked off. Sometimes heteros confuse the fuck out of me.

## RESISTANCE -

### *The Wedding*

Travelling in style isn't necessarily my thang, but I'm not going to say no to an opportunity that is handed to me. My good friend Christy had decided to marry Roberto. Roberto is the depressive from my Falls festival story. She had been questioning what she was doing with her life and was planning to leave him. Then she did a 180 and decided to marry him. So naturally she over compensated and planned the destination wedding of the century. She did this to hide the fact that they didn't really love each other, so, naturally they had to put on a great big display of love. Her mum was a Catholic and an over bearing cunt. Her Father a drunk with faux Christian values. Her parents wanted her to have a "church wedding". So naturally Christy got married in Bali. What's the point in having an ill-advised, we should really break-up so instead let's get married wedding if you are not going to flip the bird at your family at the same time?

She chose me to be one of her unofficial brides' men. Because of the whole hypocritical faux religious family thing, I couldn't be an official member of the wedding party. No gay man would ever be allowed to walk down a church aisle unless he is a priest. However, this wedding was taking place in Bali, so even if I had been banned from walking down the grassy aisle in Bali, I was still included in a lot of official wedding stuff. I did the pre-photo's, the pre-drinks and got a bedroom in the massive mansion Christy had booked on the beach-front in Seminyak. The mansion was booked for the week. This allowed us to have a whole list of trendy bullshit wedding events. There was the engagement party drinks night, getting our nails and hair done and 100 other made-up wedding "must-have" Instagram worthy activities. The whole thing was funded by the bank of Mummy and Daddy. This was the first "real" wedding in Christy's family. Christy's older sister had

got knocked up at 16 and because we don't live in kissing cousins married at 12 Alabama there wasn't a wedding. So naturally, Christy's parents needed to live out their unfulfilled ambitions through their daughter. Everything was going to be over the top, and slightly vulgar in the way of "lower middle class with upward aspirations" kind of way. As Christy's bestie at the time, I was privy to the financial debts. All up it cost her folks \$42K to give their daughter a destination pretend white wedding. We were living it up in luxurious style. There was a 100 m by 100 m pool that led onto the beach, a huge grassy area set up for the ceremony and our amazing villas. We had maids, cleaners and guards at our beck and call 24hrs. I was totally into living it up on someone else's dime. Inside of me is a sugar baby just waiting for the right elderly sugar daddy to marry me a month before he dies. I'm basically a gay Anna-Nicole Smith just waiting for my Texan oil billionaire to come along.

### *Bali - The Group On*

I'm not cut out for the group travel, no more, no more. Sing it with me sister. I don't want to travel with other people unless each individual is happy to do their own shit 90% of the time, then meet up for dinner in the evenings. I no-longer want to spend every waking hour with every other person on the trip, experiencing the exact same things as everyone else and doing things I have already done or seen. Nope, I'm over that shit. I have been to Bali too many times to want to re-do all the classical tourist shit every time I go there. For me, Bali is not a group holiday destination.

When Charles decided to organise a Bali holiday with our old school friends, we didn't realise they would all commit to the plan. But \$499 for flights and 7 days accommodation in a hotel in Seminyak was too good a deal for any of us to pass up. The flights were with Air Asia so they weren't great, but no one expects great from cattle class economy airlines. The hotel was in a great location, in-between Seminyak and Kuta, so it was easy to stroll to either without having to hail a cab that would rip you off or kidnap you and harvest your organs. Because it

was a group deal, we all had to share rooms. Luckily, I was sharing with Taylor. I had lived with Taylor before so I knew we could share a room without killing each other. However, it would be remiss of me not to mention the bathroom situation. The bathroom had a window that opened onto the bedroom. A 2x2 window into the bedroom with a light gauzy shade.

It provided only enough privacy to prevent you from counting the hairs on my arse when I was in the shower, while you were in the bedroom. Everything else was pretty clearly visible in a lightly frosted, fuzzy outline, but still clearly distinguishing an arm from a penis kind of way. I would like to say we made it through the week without seeing each other's morning piss penises from the bed, but that wouldn't be true. Keynote, never travel with Teagan and Rubin again. Teagan and Rubin are a couple, I actually introduced them and they are a match made in heaven. They are both faffer's. Faffer's are people who fuck around doing nothing so much that they are automatically 2 hrs late to everything. The more important it is to be on time, the more likely it is they will be late.

Each morning we agreed to meet in the foyer at 9am for breakfast. After that we would return to our rooms to get ready for the day. At 10.30 we would all meet in the foyer again ready for the days adventure. So, each day without fail, 8 of us would arrive at the foyer at the agreed upon time. Then we would wait for Teagan and Rubin, they would wander down at about 11.30 or 12. On the third day I decided I was over this shit and I walked off. I had no intention of spending my holiday waiting in a hotel foyer for people who couldn't get their act together and expected they would wait for them. Everyone was so scandalised, but I was sick of wasting time waiting for people who did not respect other people's time. We were there for 7 days. I wanted to make the most of it. I had been to Bali before, but there were still things I wanted to do and see, and those things didn't include spending hours in a hotel foyer. I was happy to go my way and do my own thing, then meet up with the others at dinner. Except it turned out



dinner was a bitch too. Most nights we ended up at expensive places that cater to the foreigner who doesn't actually want to be in a foreign place. If you are only prepared to eat burgers why the fuck did you go to Bali? We were surrounded with dirt cheap, fabulous Indonesian food options, so why the fuck would I pay \$20 for a mediocre burger? I ended up eating dinner alone too because I couldn't stomach paying that much money to avoid eating Indonesian food when I was in Bali. If I wanted to eat burgers every night I could have stayed at home. Group travel is definitely no longer for me. I get frustrated when people don't want to go new places and try new things. What is the point of travel otherwise?

### *Salazar and Callum*

Bitch please, don't fuck with me, don't try to hustle me. Salazar was my old roomie. She was as loose as me, but she was also a Gemini. She had an alcoholic father with general anger issues, a clueless mother and grandmother, and two brothers who were smart enough to have had distanced themselves from the family. Salazar and I decided we would hit up Bali over New Year's. She invited her two friends Winnie and Stevia. Stevia wasn't his real name obviously, I can't even remember his name, but let's call him Stevia because Stevia is sugar's disappointing loser cousin. Winnie saw his loseriness and decided to marry the fucker, for reasons that will never be apparent to me. Quite frankly, my assessment of her IQ was downgraded by several points because of this.

Salazar and I had been good friends for years, but like all my relationships our volatility of it meant it couldn't last. Callum however, who has not yet been mentioned in my multi-book work in progress biography, was one of the cinema crew. Tall, dorky, skinny, big dicked with an overly passive aggressive mother. Callum decided to join us to mend his broken heart after breaking up with his girlfriend. I had just ended my relationship with Jordan, so a holiday with a group of broken hearted, slutty, drugo losers was exactly what

my self-destructive soul needed. I needed to cut loose and make some shameful memories that I could later regale with you dear reader.

We booked on a whim and ended up with a pretty sweet yet small villa right in the heart of Seminyak. Stevia was great to have around because his default go to position in any situation was to try to get everyone to take drugs. When you are trying to flip the bird at a shitty year, it helps to have someone who insists on taking fun to the next level. Winnie resisted the siren song of illicit substances until one day she didn't. We decided to all take Valium, drink beer and then go shopping. I had never tried Valium but I wanted to after seeing Chelsea Handler talk about uppers and downers and the fact that she loved downers so much. I figured some chill was what I needed and downers might do the trick. Weed has always fucked me over and I have greened out far too many times. Valium offered something new. Taking Valium sober and topping it off with a little drinkie seemed like a solid plan. A day of mellow with no real plans, promises or pressures seemed like just the thing to ease my end of year blues.

Stevia purchased a shit load of Valium from some dudes selling on the street. Bali's drugs are dirt cheap, it cost him \$20 Australian. We sat down at a bar, popped our first pill and had a beer. Whether it was the beer chaser or the Valium kicking in first I don't know but we decided to go shopping. Fuck I was chill. So much so I decided I wanted to buy a flamingo printed safari suit to wear to the New Year's party we would be attending at Potato Head. The flamingo safari suit was a hit. I met a Swedish twin who I fell in love with and had far too much sex with when I was wearing that suit. Swedish twin boy and I continued to meet up over the next few days. So, either I was a good boy toy or he liked me. We kept in contact a few years but slowly lost touch. Some things are just meant to be a holiday romance. I still think fondly about the Swedish twin and my flamingo safari suite.

However, this story is about Callum. I just needed to find a way to slip in a brag about fucking a Swedish twin. Callum had what's called a paradoxical reaction to Valium. Instead of chilling him the fuck out, Valium turned him into a whaling dolphin maniac with far too much energy. After 12 hours of drinking and 13 Valium's each we all retreated to our beds. Not Callum. He hit the pool. He was diving in and out, jumping about like a Cirque Du Soleil acrobat, making dolphin like sounds and ingesting unhealthy amounts of piss tainted pool water. I did briefly worry he would dry drown in his bed when he eventually crashed but decided not to give a fuck about it. I'm sad to say I left him in his hyper state as Salazar and I passed out for 24 hours. Callum made his own fun while we slept, he then slept for a few hours and then continued to annoy us until we finally awoke.

Callum, high on paradoxical reaction to Valium induced bravado decided despite never having ridden a motorbike that now was the time to give it a whirl. Salazar, Winnie and Stevia had all grown up on farms and were used to riding bikes and quad bikes. We planned a day trip that was a 1 1/2hr ride down South to a well-known beach. I went with Callum to find a bike hire place. They asked for his passport and a lot of money as surety for the bike.

Callum, having no previous experience on a bike picked the most souped up Harley I have ever seen. On a scooter he might have been ok, but Callum on Valium wanted a hog. He handed over the cash and his passport, put his leg over the bike and took off like a bat out of hell. Luckily there was a gap in the traffic which is a damn miracle in Bali. He shot out of the bike shop, over-shot the road, hit an uneven foot path of concrete grey tiles, then became air born only to crash through the glass window of a fancy clothes shop. The shop looked like some kind of high-class Witchery like you would see on Rodeo Drive in Hollywood. The imagery was perfect. Skinny, dorky Callum hanging on for dear life as he became airborne on a Harley that would make a Hells Angel nervous. When he crashed back to Earth, his bike dreams were as shattered as the shop window, he somehow managed

to walk away with little more than a scratch. The brunt of the damage done by his Valium induced bikie bravado was borne by the shop window and the traumatised bystanders who had to fling themselves out of the path of an airborne Harley.

The bike shop owners came running across to see if Callum was ok. When they saw the carnage he had wrought, they insisted that he now owed them hundreds of dollars. Instead of running to Callum's aid or checking if he was Ok, I ran back to the bike shop and grabbed his passport off the table so they couldn't refuse to return it. You can't let a 3rd world small business owner have a fair advantage when they are trying to make you pay for the damage you did to their livelihood while high on drugs. We agreed to pay around \$150 Australian dollars for the damage to the bike and fucked off. I'm sure they dealt with dumb shits like this all the time. It's the price of doing business. As you can see, I am very good at mentally justifying fucking over other people. Callum was left with a slight limp, a sore elbow and a bruised ego. The others drove down the coast without him.

### *The Constant Sway of Bali*

Buddy and I sat on the foreshore of Legion Beach in Bali. Shacks lined the water. They are actually built on the sand with a piss poor half road for motor bikes and tourists to walk down. Like everything in Bali.

Buddy and I, had had a big night the night before and decided to walk the 200 meters from the Villa to get some food. We needed to be able to say that we hadn't spent all day watching sad movies or tanning by the pool when the sun was clearly nowhere to be seen. Naturally we ordered cocktails. You don't start the day half arsed in Bali, you start it with pineapple, coconut and rum. Clearly you do this to suppress any niggling worries from last night and to ensure your blood alcohol never drops below legally drunk for the duration of your stay. We took a seat on the bench seats which were attached to the table bench top that led around the outside of the wooden shack that we sat on. I ordered raw tuna sushi, something you should never do in Bali, but I

had been so many times before and never received Bali belly. I was pretty sure it wasn't going to happen now, no matter what I ate or drank. Earthquakes had been hitting Bali and Lombok, but they had started to cool off. There were no more major quakes but the aftershocks were still happening.

At first Buddy and I thought we were rocking naturally on the building stilts. But then the liquid in our cocktail's started to sway like that scene from the original Jurassic Park, but instead of just an initial vibration outward, ours was flying from one side of the cup to the other. The two girls that sat in front of us on bean bags on the sand were oblivious to what was happening. The world was swaying around us, the bench that surrounded the outside of the shack restaurant was going from left to right. Buddy and I quickly looked at the other restaurant goers and realised that we were now experiencing an aftershock. We looked to the water to make sure that the water was not receding, no-one wants a front row seat to a tsunami. I was not in the mood to be taken out by a natural disaster. Unsure about how accurate our wave receding judgment was, we decided to seek higher ground. We walked briskly back to the villa which wasn't far from the beach and prayed we would survive the night. We did but this is still a story I thought needed to be told. My imaginary brush with death, a clear tale.

### *Some Easy Tips - How to Pack Your Suitcase*

Tip number one, don't do it when you're drunk, or the night before you leave. Packing while you are inebriated or in a rush makes it easier to get confused. You don't want to pack a suitcase full of summer clothes because the sun is shining in Australia when you are heading to Canada for the ski season. Your best bikini is not gonna cut it on the ski fields for anything other than the requisite look at me in a bikini in the snow selfie for Instagram. You're really going to need your fucking winter woolies.

**PACK AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE!** You want to have the essentials, and yes, extra underpants are essential. Pack like you plan to shit your pants twice a day for the duration. On the other hand, for outerwear, less is more. You are going to need room in your suitcase for all the random shit you collect along your travels. This includes the stuff you buy, and the stuff you steal. Remember folks, that German beer stein you are going to steal from that cute little pub will take up a lot of luggage space and weigh about 1kg. For international trips you want to minimise the weight wherever possible because excess baggage charges are highway robbery. International shipping to get your stuff home is not much cheaper and takes about 6 fucking months to arrive.

So, unless you plan to have an international base where you can dump stuff until you are ready to post it home, then wait ½ a year for it to arrive, work on the less is more principle. Less baggage means less packing, you can change your plans quicker, and travel further without the extra weight both literal and metaphorical. It's a financial thing and a mindset thing. Just trust me, don't weigh yourself down when traveling. When you are travelling you end up wearing the same thing every day anyway, especially if you're on a Contiki tour. Embrace the fact that once you are away from the social pressures at home that are pushing you to behave like a civilised human being, you will find you are a lazy filthy bitch who is happy to wear the same Billabong singlet for weeks at a time.

Winter travel is a bit of a bitch. You need the layers and layers take up space and are often heavy. For winter travel invest in quality gear. Kathmandu does some pretty good winter clothes that keep you warm but don't weigh you down. I recommend two pairs of pants. 1 on, 1 off, hopefully in the wash, but after the first week of travel washing your pants in hostel sinks you probably won't bother. Accept it. That's why the extra undies matter, they will be the only thing that stands between you and a pair of pants so dirty they can stand up on their own.

You then only need two tops, one comfy ass warm jacket, plus your underpants and you are all set. You don't need to take your heels or your 8 different pairs of shoes. Wear your Nikes, they go with everything. Everything being the two outfits you have.

Europeans are practical, the basics are what matter. And even if you do stand out as badly dressed and obviously a tourist, that's great! The locals love hooking up with travelers. So, to refresh; one pair of Nike sneakers, as much underwear as you like, this takes up little space and the comfort of knowing you have clean undies cannot be underestimated. 2 pairs of pants if in winter. Also, two shirts to alternate, definitely two and not one as you'll wanna swap it up occasionally. And finally, one mighty versatile reversible jacket. Reversible means it's like you have two but you only really have one, cause you a smart bitch.

Mike drop.

### *Auckland to San Fran*

Flight NZ8 had a few little luxuries including the cute air hostess man. Not sure what you call a male air hostess/trolley dolly. Not only was he easy on the eye, he was a genuinely a sweet person. Some stereotypes are just true. Canadians are polite, footballers are dumb, lesbians are scary, and New Zealander's are sweet and humble. Emma's dinner arrived first. She had pre-ordered a gluten free meal a fucking month prior for our flight as she was going through a wanky diet phase. If an Insta model claimed a particular diet gave her glowing skin and a Kardashian booty, Emma was all over that diet for at least a week until she moved on to the next crock of shit. She did gluten free,

diary-free, vegan, paleo and others I can't even remember. Gay guys tend to be more vulnerable to miracle pill Insta trends than hetero guys, but females take it to a whole other level. Her meal was chicken, veggies, bean salad and a roll. The truly fucked up part happened when she put her broccoli on the bread roll. I had to sit there while a person I thought I knew and respected ate a fucking broccoli sandwich. How low does your self-respect need to be to eat a broccoli sandwich? Travel teaches you things about yourself and your travel companions that you wouldn't otherwise know. I learned that I had some standards, and Emma had none.

### *San Fran*

While travelling, you always have a mental list of touristy things you know you want to do, but are too embarrassed to admit to. You have to pretend to do them ironically so you can tick them off your list and get your selfie without hating yourself for not being #unique enough. You can't travel to San Francisco for example and not see Lombard Street on Russian hill, or not walk over the San Francisco Bridge. And you definitely can't go to San Francisco without taking a guided tour of Alcatraz. I know there isn't a #WorldTraveler or #HopelessWanderer out there who hasn't already taken a selfie of themselves doing those things, but damn it you can't miss out on seeing awesome touristy things just because it might make you look like one of the masses.

Alcatraz is one of history's most interesting jails. However, the unfortunate thing about these tourist sites is that everyone wants to go there, so they are always busy, inevitably expensive and involve a lot of waiting and queues. An unfortunate downside to travelling to interesting places. I have found travelling in the off season mitigates this a bit, but it's still always painful lining up behind scads of fucking tourists.



San Francisco airport definitely had the worst customs of any airport I have ever been in. Third world countries have been more efficient. In San Francisco not only do you have to deal with the annoying American accent, you had to endure erratic air-conditioning that cycles through extremely warm and freezing patches. The queue of people exceeded 3000, and at the end of that queue sat two custom officers. Two customs officers to process over 3000 people. It was a Sunday when we arrived in San Francisco, so maybe they were having a rest on a Jesus day, but progress was just slow and beyond stupid. They filed us into a small community lane which looped around the room, roped off by cinema pylons. If only we were lining up to see a new movie, like Avenger's Endgame or something that would make all the queuing worthwhile. I guess the end result would be me being in San Francisco so the waiting was somewhat worth it, but it was still fucking annoying. Sadly, as a society we have become used to waiting. Waiting for our Uber Eats to arrive, waiting for the ride at Disneyland, waiting for the next pay check, waiting to explore, waiting to see history, always waiting and lining up, like a pack of school children.

We had our prefilled custom forms on the plane. We were then filed into a computer zone that looked like individual ATMs. They were lined up around the sectioned off square area that led into more pylon queues. The computers were numbered 1-30, so 30 Machines to a group of 3000. Each computer had a short questionnaire of about 15 questions detailing your visa or visitor status and what goods you were bringing into the country. I took about 2 minutes at a fast pace to complete the questionnaire, to which another printout was added to the material you would give to the customs Officer. We joined the queue on the other side and slowly filed through over a period of 2 hours. I'm not exaggerating. It took 2hrs of being surrounded by irritated, sweaty, tired people just to clear customs. There was simply nothing to do but wait. A few people read books they had on hand, others chatted amongst themselves to try and pass the time. How have we as a society not fixed this yet? Queues are oppressive, unnecessary and egotistical. I fucking hate having to wait.

### *San Francisco, LA and New Orleans*

Before Emma and I had had our "non-fight", our "disagreement about nothing", our "love spat that turned into a silence of 2 months", we had planned a trip to America. Well, more like Emma had planned a 6-week trek around America and I had invited myself along. I had drunkenly bought a ticket one morning as flights were on sale for \$999 return from San Francisco via Air New Zealand. We would fly over together and have two full weeks. We would start off with a few days in San Francisco, then drive down to Venice Beach in LA and finish up in New Orleans. It was odd because Emma had started to ignore me a few weeks before we were due to fly out. The trip was only a few weeks away. I tried to talk to her about anything, but I kept being ignored. I looked into the possibility of cancelling or transferring my flights in case the silent treatment continued. I came to the final decision that even if we weren't talking by the time, we were due to leave, I would just tough it out. We could just travel around together in silence. We could do our own thing and just bunk down together in our pre-booked accommodation. My holiday wasn't going to be ruined by someone that had serious communication issues.

San Francisco was the city of wonders. It's a lot like Sydney in both layout and looks. It felt oddly familiar walking around the streets of a city I had never visited before and being welcomed with open arms by the community. There was a large LGBTQ presence as well as a very hippie/weed vibe going around. Pot had just been legalised in surrounding states including San Francisco. I mean if anyone was going to legalise it first San Francisco was always going to be near the top of the list. Plus, there is so many great places to smoke weed in public in San Francisco. For instance, under the San Francisco bridge (Editor's note: Sounds glamorous. Smoking weed under a fucking bridge like a homeless person or a 14-year-old while people throw themselves to their death off the bridge above you). We stayed in a very quaint old hotel that wasn't situated near anything. Luckily it was close to an electric bike shop which was probably the best decision Emma and I had ever made in our lives.

The hotel room was small. We shared a double bed and everything done in the bathroom could be overheard. Since Emma and I were already roommates she had already heard me take a dump before. I definitely recommend travelling with your roommate if you're on good terms, or even just civil towards each other. If you don't want to travel alone it really takes the awkwardness out of a lot of travel situations if you're travelling companion has already seen you at your worst and has had to use the bathroom after you have taken a dump in it before.

We hired the electric bikes from a place down the street. It cost about \$120 for the day and it was worth every fucking penny (Note: if Katie had to get on a bike, or anything basically other than in a car to go further than 50 meters down the street, she would not leave the house. Same goes for Buddy). I am also very lazy, but I am younger than them and smoke less than them, so I do still engage in some physical activity to look like I am a normal human being. I also take regular judgmental pot-shots at people I see as my friends. There's nothing quite like talking shit about people you are meant to like. For those of you who are wondering, I'm not autistic, I understand social niceties, I'm just a dickhead. Unlike Buddy, Katie and I, Emma loves physical activity. Whether it be pole dancing, long hard walks that you have to register for online, or going to the gym. It's actually just a bloody disgrace, but I won't go there, each to their own (Editor's note: Why not? When have you ever not gone there?).

So, we jumped on the bikes and rode 12kms over the San Francisco Bridge, via the zigzag roads that are famous from the violent GTA games where you could run people over and smash people in the head with dildos. One of the best games ever invented. It was 12kms to the bridge. The bikes are electric, they have a certain amount of battery that, in a sense, pedals for you. It's like an extra boost (Editor's note: So, it's like riding a bike where you only put in half the effort of riding a bike? Don't go bragging about your superiority for engaging in

physical activity when the bike does the work for you, you twat). To put it simply if you had a line of cocaine you can go go go some more, and then if you start to tire out you can go go go again. However, the best part about this drug, or cycling system is that if you actually pedal. It uses that energy generated to charge the battery. It's all automated by a little pager system that sits on one of your handle bars.

The ride, hee hee, was amazing. You couldn't fault it. Yes, it was long, yes it was tiring, yes, I nearly died going up some of those San Francisco hills you see in Charmed, but I survived! I conquered! And damn it felt fucking great for doing it (Editor's note: You're a regular Lance Armstrong. It must have been exhausting sitting on a bike you only have to pedal every now and again. You and Lance would have so much to talk about over a cup of tea and some banned substances). I'm glad Emma pushed me to do something I probably wouldn't have expected to do. If Emma was on 40 per cent use of her electric battery, I was on 75 per cent use. I will admit Emma is fitter than me, but she also doesn't drink, smoke or have as much fun as I do. My superior lifestyle choices may have made me more reliant on the electrical aspect of the bike than Emma was, but I'm still better than her.

There was something invigorating about that cold crisp San Francisco air. Going 60km/ph up and down the wonky streets of San Francisco made my soul happy and I felt free. I guess comfortable is a weird term to use when describing your bike ride through a different country. I mean bikes are not comfortable things, cyclists wear fucking crotch padded shorts to minimise the damage to their genitals from sitting on those stupid bike seats. You can't describe something as comfortable if you are required to pad your balls before going near it. But biking through the city connected me with the place in a way I had not connected with a place before.

Alcatraz was another highlight. Anyone that hasn't seen 'Escape from the Rock' or, 'The Rock', with either Clint Eastwood, or Sean Connery you're missing out. Missing out on some really poor historical representations of a historically important place. But you should watch them both because afterwards when you see Alcatraz for real it's so much better than in the movies. I mean, if I had ever been imprisoned and vibing my prison break vibes from Wentworth Miller #gayhottie, I would want to be locked up in Alcatraz back in the day. Less technology, more trust, and I'm sure I would have been a great criminal mastermind like they had never seen before. That however, would be the only benefit to that story. Making criminal history. Otherwise the place was freezing, dark, drab, horrible and harsh. I could go on. At least you had a great view when you were outside doing the various tasks assigned to you as a prisoner. The island is small in size, no more than a few hundred meters in length and width. But the history that was made on that little rock will never cease to amaze me. You could easily spend a whole day listening to the free tour guides talk about the many escape attempts and history of the island.

The drive from San Francisco to LA was long and tiring. Especially since Emma was a driving hog. The two play lists we had both downloaded consisted of basically the same music. At least mine still had a few 70s and 80s hits, Emma's consisted exclusively of Avril Lavigne and anything that was slightly emo back in the 2000s. But at that stage we were desperate to listen to something different and American radio really didn't offer much when you were travelling the highways between states. It was just one never ending long strip of flat highway with spotty radio reception. The drive all up took us about 9 hours. We stopped at a diner along the way to have a lunch/ late breaky which didn't make us feel any better. We arrived in LA just in time to join the peak hour traffic heading back down the mysterious hills of Los Angeles. At least it was something different. The entrance to LA was pretty amazing and we got to drive past all the theme parks. We were not going to be visiting any of them but we saw them through the car window. We slowly made our way down the hill and into downtown LA, then headed over to Venice Beach where our hostel

was situated. We were right on the beach front and being off season, even though we had a 4-bed dorm, no one else joined us for the three nights we stayed there. Arriving late afternoon, we checked in, dumped our gear and decided to walk along the famous pathway up to the Saint Bernard theme park.

It was still sunny, warm and beautiful. We took the opportunity to look around and get the lay of the land. We returned to our room and showered, then went to the hostel diner to get some food and drinks as it seemed the best and cheapest option around. We did all the highlights. We did the Hollywood walk of fame, where I made sure I walked the whole way and took photos of any golden queens I saw fit to have a picture of on my phone. We went to the Griffith observatory. All in all, Venice Beach and LA was more than a pleasant time. But it was also pretty boring. Mostly because I was travelling with Emma. She brought nothing new or exciting to the party, even the thought of having others in our room left her nervous. I was craving at least one drunken or hilarious night and Venice Beach seemed like the right place for it. We left Venice Beach the same way we arrived, slow and mellow. We drove back up towards San Francisco where we would be flying out to New Orleans.

New Orleans did not disappoint. We took the red eye from San Francisco and arrived early morning in New Orleans. It was hot, muggy and full of the character that had been missing from the trip thus far. New Orleans having been occupied by the Americans, the British, the Spanish, the French and then the American's again had a colourful history. This history, culture and colour permeated everything.

It was smaller than you would think. Only a few kms across, and a few kms wide, easily walked from one end to the other in less than an hour. But in that hour, there was so much to take in. We rented a cute little Air BNB just out of town. It was long and each room you entered led into the next and so on. Like a long corridor all the way from the front

of the house to the back. If your bedroom is in the middle, it's a little inconvenient. But the style is still cute and creates this sense of openness. It was apparently designed this way because the city was so hot and this design allowed the air to flow 'all the way through creating a better draft. The houses reminded me of those in Annandale and Chippendale in Sydney's Inner West, but they usually had a little hallway that lead into each separate room.

The houses in the French Quarter were very French, in the sense they had a courtyard, were usually white, balconies drawn around them and consisted of two levels. They were a little bit upper class than the draft houses along Bourbon Street, but just as beautiful and traditional. Emma and I decided to go on a drunken ghost tour one night, to meet some people and get a bit of the lay of the land before we started to wander around ourselves. I'm sure our tour guide was already drunk on arrival. He was more than a little eccentric and was training an emo side-kick who seemed like he could scare off any sacrificial witches that were looming around. The rest of the group consisted of other Americans that had come from interstate. Luckily none of them were Trump supporters. Our first stop was the Spanish civil park in the main square, right near the Mississippi River. Apparently ghosts hang around there quite often and have been known to cause the deaths of local drunks and lost souls late at night (Editor's note: Yeah, it's the ghosts killing the drunks, not the alcohol). However, it all went downhill when we went to the Absinthe Pirate Bar. Pirates used to visit back in the day, and the upstairs accommodation had had a resident lady ghost. To be fair, she could have been real, but she also could have been the result of Absinthe hallucinations.

In the spirit of participation, we bought the hardest of hardcore Absinthe to properly immerse ourselves in the experience. A little Absinthe goes a long way. The last hour of the tour is completely missing from my memory. We ended the night in a gay karaoke bar.

Emma agreed to do a duet with me and we sang Shallow by Lady Gaga. After the drinking, shouting and inappropriate joke making I had been doing all evening, my voice was not at its best. But New Orleans being New Orleans, you are never too drunk to be kicked out of anywhere. Drunken fools wander out in their own time, to sleep their excesses off in the gutter. The Police walk by unbothered, as if nothing is out of order. New Orleans is definitely my kind of place.

### *The Hunt*

It was the year of the 30ths. Gemma was a little older than the rest of our group and so was her amazing now husband, Xavier. By a little older, I mean only one year, but when you're all still 29 and your friends are turning 30, they are considered considerably older. It's just the way of the land people. Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but you gotta roll with it. So, to celebrate the first of our group hitting their 30s, Callum surprisingly made a Facebook Messenger group and suggested we pay for a Hunter valley getaway for Gemma to celebrate her 30th in style. Obviously, the rest of us were coming too, but we would pay for her.

I will give it to Callum here, credit where it is due, it was a brilliant plan. The sort of fabulous plan I could normally be relied upon to have but I was experiencing a bit of financial hardship. My friends are useless at ponying up the dosh without being repeatedly harassed, so there was no-way I was planning something that would mean putting up a \$2000 bond. My already stressed and maxed out credit cards couldn't stretch to fronting up for a \$2000 bond for the place we wanted to stay in Pobelkin in the Hunter Valley. Luckily Callum had a high paying job.

I was happy for Callum. With him having a passive aggressive Mother and a gambling addiction, it was nice for him to have the status and



stability of a high paying job being handed to him on a platter. Callum still lived at home despite the fact he was nearly 30 and earning great money. I was thankful that we had him around, and that he could be relied upon to pay for stuff. When we worked together at the cinemas, Callum used to be the podium boy; the boy that stands on the podium and rips the tickets of the incoming movie goers. Callum liked this job, mostly because he got to stand there and basically do nothing. He was able to gamble on his phone or text girls' inappropriate messages while getting paid. Callum had been at the cinemas for at least 4 years and had never been promoted to supervisor due to his sheer laziness. I had become supervisor in 3 months, but he didn't hold it against me when we became friends. We loved Callum's laziness and appreciated him for who he was because of his good nature and entertainment values. One day when we were still at the cinema Callum had a massive spat with his Mother Maureen.

Callum had been sneaking out at midnight and going to the Castle Hill RSL to gamble. He would sneak out because his Mother didn't approve and he was living under her roof. What Maureen said, Callum had to obey. I was never sure why he ever put up with her shit. He could have moved out any time. He had heaps of money squirreled away, even with his gambling issues. He seemed to come out on top with the gambling most of the time. His money was his own, he earned it. He wasn't dwindling away the family inheritance, or having debt collectors show up at the house, so Maureen should have just minded her own fucking business.

Back in the day when bank statements and mail was actually delivered to the home address, Callum's Mother would intercept his bank statements and illegally open them. They were addressed to him; she had no legal right to open them. His bank statements were basically, Castle Hill RSL, Castle Hill RSL, Castle Hill RSL and Castle Hill RSL. Amounts ranging from a few hundred dollars to a couple of thousand a night. Maureen got in her very fancy car, drove around the corner to the cinemas where we worked, and stormed in ready to fight.

She was a stay at home Mother with untidy hair wearing mangy house clothes on a self-righteous rampage. She stormed into the cinema with such anger it looked like a suicide bomber was headed our way. Callum was at the podium and had spotted her from a mile away. In his despair he tried to leave, but realised he couldn't. He was the podium boy; you can't just leave the podium unattended. Callum was screwed.

Maureen, hands held high, waving the bank statement above her head, shook it so violently it started to tear. Onlookers and coworkers knew this was going to be a massive scene, and a scene it was. Callum was beside himself, embarrassed beyond belief. It was a scene I will never forget. Sorry for getting side tracked dear reader, that was just a little anecdote about Callum and I. Indulge me one more side story, just so you get the whole picture before we dive into the hunter valley.

We had all just met from the cinema and I had been off the drink for a good year as I had an unrelatable experience with tequila. I had decided to pick Callum up and drive him that night, so he could get drunk and I would deal with the fallout. If only I had known ahead of time just how much fallout there would be. Callum had recently broken up with his on again off again frigid bitch of a girlfriend. She wouldn't put out, so naturally Callum had enough of that shit and slapped her across the face and called her a whore at a Halloween party. This had happened the week prior, so naturally tensions were going to be high, but we all had to attend the 21st. Callum was fine for a while, but then when "The Ex " had ignored him for too long he decided to drink straight Bacardi out of a left over bottle I had brought just in case. Since Callum's weight was about 60kgs and he was nearly 6 foot, the Bacardi hit him hard. Callum went missing for a while until then we heard screams coming from the bathroom. The bathroom looked like a bloody murder scene. If any of you have ever seen V for Vendetta, it was like the scene where Hugo Weaving poisons his torturers, and they throw up this chunky vomit that has bits of blood, pieces of brain matter and what looked like froth from a seizure. When

I flung open the door Callum was sitting on the toilet, pants down, and there was shit and vomit everywhere including on his hands.

Naturally, for some reason there was a police trainee at the party. The baby cop cleaned him up. The strange fucker had brought his cop gloves to the party. Look, everyone likes a guy in uniform, but it's a bit desperate to whip out your cop gloves at a party. Baby cop obviously liked taking control of situations, but I will never understand why he wanted to clean up shit stained Callum (Editor's note: He probably really didn't want to, but being a decent human being also didn't want to leave someone like that. I know people go in for the 'Fuck the Police' thing, but most people who become police officers genuinely want to help people. They may burn out and become jaded after years of being treated like shit by the public, but the vast majority of them are 'Want to help' kind of people). Callum's pants were unsalvageable, so he had to abandon them and make do with just his boxers. We finally dragged him into my car after apologising profusely to the parents of the house and decided that there was no other choice but to take him home. I rang ahead as I knew Maureen was a crazy bitch, letting them know that Callum had no keys. I couldn't just leave him on the balcony and drive off, I wanted to, but I also wanted to do the responsible thing here. Maureen however would not allow that to happen. She had to manipulate and control everything. I rang the house phone 3 times before I received an answer. Luckily Daddy had answered. I told him that I was dropping Callum off and to expect him to be quite intoxicated. I didn't explain much more than that. I just needed help to get him home safely and into bed. I thought I would be received with welcome arms, a responsible adult who had the courage to help his intoxicated friend to find his way home.

We pulled up at Callum's and the lights were blaring into the front room. This was Callum's Mum's & Dads' room. I bet she picked that room so she could always hear Callum entering or leaving, so she could fucking spy on him. As soon as I had turned the engine off the

front door flew open. Maureen dramatically pushed the husband and daughter out of the way and came billowing out like a naked giraffe. They all saw the state that Callum was in. He didn't respond, even when slapped. He had just fucked himself over and was now passed-out. He had also wet himself on the car ride home and now had a semi boner. To say the least, it was not Callum finest moment. Maureen screamed at me, "what drugs did you give him?".

Maureen, I didn't even know what a fucking drug was back then, let alone have any to share around, you stupid woman. Anyway, she continued to attack me and say that it was my fault he was in this state. She accused me of intoxicating Callum with nefarious intent. Callum's sister joined in the attack. Callum's Dad stayed out of it.

The three of them then lifted Callum out of the car. The worry on their faces was hilarious. I found out later that Maureen had never even tried a drink, that was the kind of cunt she was. She now thought that Callum was going to die because he was so intoxicated. He had a boner, if his penis was working, so was his brain, pretty sure he was going be alright. But no no no Mother Maureen is always right, so she called the ambulance, not only to waste their time, but also waste their resources. Someone else probably died of a serious car accident while that ambulance was dealing with drunk Callum. Maureen told me to leave but I decided to stay and see the ambulance arrive just in case the Ambo's were hot and so I could gloat when they told Maureen that Callum just needed to sleep it off. He would wake up hung-over feeling a little worse for wear and very sorry for himself, but he would get over it. The ambulance arrived fairly quickly as Maureen had stated that Callum wasn't breathing. She had convinced herself he was at deaths door. Oh Maureen, the drama of it all must have given you a lady boner. The paramedics arrived and told Maureen Callum would be fine, he just needed to sleep it off.

Fast-forward ten years later. Callum is booking the Hunter Valley house and organising a wine tour with a bus to drive us all around. The trip was uneventful for Callum. He had matured in more ways than one, he didn't even do the cocaine that was on tap that Rubin had thoughtfully supplied.

The house looked down a massive valley and you could see the surrounding area for miles. To the right of the house was a pool. Sadly, it rained the whole time we were there so the pool was wasted. The house had 4 double bedrooms and a side house that was attached, all made of wood. Quaint in size and surroundings. It featured a bed lodge and a little kitchenette. We arrived late Friday night around 9pm and had a few drinks before we hit the sack. We had a 9am pick-up the next morning for a full day of winery tours. We had a gracious and splendid day. Lots of wine was purchased and some of it even made its way back to the house where we continued our drinking and partying. The cocaine helped sober us up so we could continue drinking like we hadn't even had started yet. By 9pm everyone had gone to bed exhausted by their attempts to hold on to their youth. Rubin and I continued to party on. He had his footy nights with the boys still and I had my gay boys. Partying was probably the only thing Rubin and I had in common.

We continued to drink and smoke and do everything we shouldn't while trying not to disturb the others asleep inside. We moved the music outside under the porch which only just kept us dry from the rain that was pelting down. When the bitterness of the cold started to get to us, we sat next to each other on the couch for warmth and huddled under the one blanket we had. I had introduced Rubin to Teagan several years prior, and they are now happily married.

The day we left The Hunter Rubin and I were worse for wear, so I helped the others clean up the mess. We headed back home over the

mountains. We were a convoy of cars, 4 in total as we had all come from different areas of Sydney. As we trailed down the other side hungover and with cocaine probably still in our systems the car in front of us swerved suddenly and plunged into a huge oak tree that was outside the winery. There had been a concert there the night before and people were starting to hit the road to go home. Bystanders ran down from the winery and our convoy pulled over. Smoke started to pour from the car. The impact had hit exactly into the driver's side car door. His bloody head was resting on the car door where the glass had shattered. Taylor being a nurse jumped out first and ran over to help. Two RN's who happened to be at the winery joined her. Another guy started to scream for a fire extinguisher. The car had sprung a petrol leak. Luckily, I had two extinguishers in the back of my car, I'm not sure why but they had been too heavy to remove. But suddenly my laziness was a bonus and they came in handy. He extinguished the fire and the girls continued to stabilise the patient. By this point the ambulance crew started to arrive and took over. We decided to take off before any police arrived. We were in no fit state to be interviewed or drug tested. The idea of death hit us like a rock from a slingshot. Taylor had said that the kid's eyes were not responsive and that his whole face was basically caved in. We found out later that night they had air lifted him to Westmead Hospital, where he later died of his injuries.

## LEGACIES -

### *Travel Essentials for The Modern Gay*

Condoms and lube for sure!

It's hard enough trying to get the right ones in your own country let alone trying to find the European equivalent, especially if another language is involved. That's all I could think of. So, I googled travel essentials for the gay man. I sat there with my trusty bottle of white, the results I google returned were an abomination. This is what I found, prepare yourself because it is beyond disturbing and the worst fucking advice I have ever read. It's also hilarious, so I will save you the Google search and list the best bits here. The travel essentials a fabulous queen need are:

A smart phone. Yes, that's right boys. How could you possibly live without having Grindr at your fingertips while you are on a summer vacay? You just fucking couldn't, so make sure that's packed, tick.

Our next item, wait for it, wait for it, this one is definitely an essential, a cool bum bag/ fanny pack. I'm pretty sure there is no such thing as a cool bum bag, and people who use the word fanny pack just creep me out. They did feature a yellow leather one in the article, but if you don't feel like forking out 200 dollars for a yellow bum bag that will make you look like special needs, I would recommend a Kathmandu body strap. They are much cheaper, more practical and slow the pick-pocketing Gypsies near The Louvre down by a couple of seconds when they are trying to rob you.

Number three: hot swimsuits. Well ok, but if I was going to Alaska do I need a hot swim suit? Guess maybe they have hot springs. Alright I'll let that one slide. I mean they don't have to be HAWT per se, just practical. Quick dry would be good, especially if you're moving around often.

Number four is even more illogical and impractical: Festival clothes. An absolute must have for attending that banking conference in Berlin, or swanning around Mosques in Istanbul. Yep, you definitely will always need a leopard print onesie and a replica American Indian warbonnet on your travels. Actually, scrap that sarcasm, you definitely need a leopard print onesie and a replica American Indian warbonnet during your travels. As gays, we need to bring glorious colour wherever we go.

Number five has finally hit the spot. Probably should have been higher up the list. Here we have comfortable shoes. Well done guys. I really hope a gay man didn't write this article.

Essential number six: earplugs. Also, not a bad idea. Nothing to criticise here. Great for sleeping on planes, shared accommodation etc. Sleep is essential, you can't take in the sites you travelled half way across the world to see if your vision is blurring from lack of sleep. Touché.

Number seven has me conflicted. A portable speaker. I can see the benefits, but earphones take up less space and annoy fewer people.



Number 8: A mini collection of toiletries, whatever the fuck that is. Just pack what you need, and buy stuff when you get there. This obviously doesn't apply to medications; you don't want to skimp on that and have to try to find a pharmacist who speaks English. But toiletries? Just find a supermarket when you get there and buy some fucking shampoo. Look, if you can't live without your signature aftershave and it comes in a mini, then go for it. But don't be so fucking precious that you have to bring your hairdressers house brand shampoo with you on a week to Bali.

Nine: a notebook. Meh. Unless you want to write a journal or lounge around coffee shops pretentiously trying to be mistaken for an author, just use the notes app on your phone.

Number ten blows my mind. It makes everything about this article perfect. It sums up the moronic stupidity of gay culture and its misguided fixation on trying to look cool: inflatables. Enough said.

So, there you have it. As a gay man, if you want to do travel right, you need:

Your phone, so you can still Grindr, A fanny pack, a hot swimsuit, festival clothes, a portable speaker, bespoke mini toiletries, a notebook so you can do the hipster author thing and an inflatable flamingo.

### *Sleep Apnea*

One of my pet hates is dreaming. I know that sounds weird, but I just hate dreams. They make me feel like I haven't slept properly and that I

have lived out an entire day while asleep. I then feel even more exhausted than I was before I went to sleep. Now this isn't as bullshit as it sounds. If you are in very light REM sleep your body can remember your dreams and you are not getting as much restorative sleep as you need. Your body is overworking your mind and it can physically and mentally affect you.

I started to find myself falling asleep at 3pm in the afternoons. At work I would take a good 20-minute power nap, usually hungover, but also because I was dead exhausted. I drank so much so that I wouldn't remember my dreams. The system worked for me, until it didn't. My snoring started to become more aggressive than it had previously had been. My roommates had had enough, hell I had had enough. Sometimes I snored so loudly that I woke myself up. Even through two sets of walls my flat mates could still hear me snoring. It was time to visit Dr Alice to see what could be done about my night-time fog horn. Dr Alice said that I had enlarged tonsils, but that wasn't news to me. I had repeated tonsillitis as a kid and the Dr's had discussed removing my tonsils. It didn't end up happening. I was so scared about the prospect of surgery that I stopped telling my Mother when my throat hurt. Looking back, I wish I had just had the surgery and fixed the problem when I was a kid.

Dr Alice said that my horrible sleep patterns could have contributed towards my depression and anxiety. Apparently long-term sleep deprivation isn't great for your mental health. She arranged for me to undergo a sleep study. I was worried that I would have to go to one of those mental ward type looking places, get strapped down and have electrodes all over me while I had 5 people watch me sleep. There was no way I was going to agree to that. Luckily for me there is a home version of the test. You still have to be covered in electrodes and wires, but it happens at home and in your own bed. I smoked a shit load of cigarettes, had a shit load of wine and trotted off to bed to see what would happen. It was God Damn awful. I had electrodes all over my head and chest, I had a thing on my finger and the machine was

bulky. With all that crap on you sleeping on your back was clearly going to be the only option. The night was pretty horrific, but I got a good 8 hours on the record so they could analyse why I was so fucked up at sleeping.

Honestly, I thought the ass cyst was bad, but getting anxiety and depression because you can't sleep properly is a whole other level. Having a cyst cut out of your arse a couple of times is far less traumatic and gruelling than long term psychotherapy. Luckily for me, my brain is capable of anything. I can do anything I put my mind to. From writing a bestselling book, to writing a second book that's bound to be a best seller. I mean honestly, I'm totally going to be the next J. K Rowling, but instead of writing about a boy wizard, I write about a magnificent homo wizard.

When the results came back, they were more serious than I thought. The report showed that I had severe sleep apnea. Not slight, not mild, we are talking severe. Like I said, I don't do things by halves. No half arsing my sleep apnea, I'm going to go the whole hog, how have you not died in your sleep already severe. I always have to be the best at everything I do. The report showed that my oxygen levels were at 74 per cent. Most normal people have an oxygen level of 94 percent. My REM cycle was 44 per hour, the normal cycle is 4 times per hour. I scored 3 out of 3 for being completely and utterly useless at sleeping. I had limited treatment options. Limited, as in 1 option. I had to get a C pap machine and wear it for the rest of my life. How the fuck was I ever going to have a sex life ever again if I had to wear an elephant trunk over my nose to sleep every night? Bye bye sleepovers. From now on I was going to have to pump them and dump them, kick them out before the wet spot had dried so I could put on my S&M looking sleep mask and catch some shut-eye.

Guess how much a C pap machine costs? My current machine, which I'm paying off on a monthly plan is \$3,700. Yep with just 100+ monthly payments for the low low price of \$79.95 you too can sleep

without choking to death on your tonsils overnight. And if you call in the next 10 minutes you get a free nose pouch. Can you really put a price on sleep? Apparently so. I just wish it wasn't called a c-pap. I hate having to explain to people that I am not giving myself pap smears every night to get myself to sleep.

Now you're probably wondering what any of this has to do with traveling. I have now become one of those high maintenance travelers. Always needing a room with a compatible power outlet and fresh running water to run my c-pap machine. It has changed the way I travel and I don't like it.

### *What Kind of Trip*

Before you even pick your destination, whether you are travelling with friends, a partner, or travelling alone, you need to ask yourself some questions. What is it you want from your travels?

Travel can be broken down into four broad categories:

1. Self Growth.
2. Bonding
3. Choice
4. Obligation.

Although these categories may seem fairly vague, they give you a jumping off point for asking yourself questions about what it is you want from your adventure. The following paragraphs will briefly outline what each of these four types of travel entail. Hopefully after reading them, you will have a better understanding of what sort of travel you want to do, and who you want to travel with. A self help guide on how to be the best you, and bring out the best of you in travel.

## Self-Growth

When it comes to self-growth, people often think about achieving short-term goals, but self-growth is a lifelong process that never ends. The more you know, the better you become. The core principles of self-growth are obtaining knowledge, improving your skills and stepping out of your comfort zone. It can feel like a hard path to take, but in the long run it pays off. You learn about your weaknesses and strengths. You learn how to better exploit your strengths and minimise your weaknesses. Once you know yourself, truly know yourself, you can compare the "you" you are today with the "you" you wish to be. Then you can make informed plans for becoming the person you want to be. If life was a movie, a self-growth trip would be you as Reese Witherspoon on her journey across brutal mountains. It took her six months and it took her from the desert to the top of the icy cliffs. It's a journey of endurance, self-loathing and self-discovery. In the end you are stronger, more independent and have a greater appreciation for life. A self-growth journey doesn't have to be trekking the Himalayas. It's about stepping outside YOUR comfort zone. It could be a bike riding trip, staying in hostels and living each day as it comes. If you are an organised type with a thing for luxury, this would be a way of stepping out of your comfort zone. Living each day with the possibility of being killed by Ivan Millat, contracting rabies from being in contact with animals, and risking a cockroach climbing up your urethra and giving you a testicle infection because you are sleeping in places that don't value hygiene, that kind of travel always ends in self-growth. You become a better, stronger and more resilient person after surviving that shit.

## Bonding Travel

Bonding travel is where you travel with friends and loved ones, and well, bond. It's in the name really. Bonding trips can be about renewing and reviving the love between you, reconnecting and discovering the world with the people you love. For some groups it becomes a tradition. Every year we spend a week re-connecting in an

exotic place etc., or every Christmas our family heads to Byron together etc. It's a group thing. It makes for an easy experience; you are travelling with people you know and love. It can also be fucking horrific. You can discover things about people that you never knew and never wanted to know. Your "has their shit together at home" friend might be the type who cries and sulks when things don't go their way in unfamiliar environments. Your laid-back buddy might be delightful at home, but a near liability when you are travelling places that have the death penalty for drug crimes. I love me a little external mood regulation, but I don't want to bond with an old Uni mate in and Indonesian prison where we are facing the death penalty for having a "wild holiday/technically dealer quantity" of coke in our possession. Bonding travel is about emotions. It's about trying to meet everyone's needs and expectations. It's not about the individual, it's about everyone puts their own needs aside and doing what is best for the group. Some people can do it, and some people can't. It has a 50/50 success rate. Things can either go horribly wrong or fabulously right. It all depends on having the right combination of people, and each person's expectations of the trip. The bonding trip isn't just about you and what you want to do. You are only half the picture, or one quarter, or one tenth, depending on the size of the group. You get the picture. It's give and take. When all parties do their share of give and take, and everyone has reasonable expectations, it can be the best kind of travel. When it goes wrong, you might find yourself in an Indonesian prison. Pick your bonding travel companions carefully.

## Choices

The choices trip is about your dreams. It's about doing what you have always wanted to do. It might be visiting the slums of India, or living it up 5 star in the UAE. It could be trekking through South America with a backpack, or breaking the bank in Monte Carlo. It's about living out your dreams and not having to take anyone else's into account. It's about making your dreams come true. It's your plan and will always exceed your expectations no matter what. You might have a pre-existing idea of what the destination will be like and even if it doesn't match this, the fact you have chased the dream will make it worthwhile. This trip is about you. Others may join you, but this won't

alter your plans. This is your path, they may be companions along the way but it's still your journey. Unlike an independent trip, choice travel is not necessarily about growth. It's about dreams, wonder and soothing the soul.

### Obligation

Obligation travel is the worst kind of travel. It normally involves a wedding or some other event you are socially obliged to attend. Its normally family related, and you know it's going to be a disappointment, but to avoid family banishment, you reluctantly oblige. An obligation trip doesn't have to be bad, it can sometime be positive, but mostly it's not. An obligation trip is the antitheses of a choice trip. It's all about what someone else wants and you will face significant social pressure to comply. Obligation trips can be work related, overseas destination weddings, family reunion type trips and any other circumstance where you are forced to travel out of a sense of obligation.

### *Cambodia to Vietnam*

After I had crossed Santorini off my dream destination list, I travelled around with no real rhyme or reason. I just visited places to tick them off the list. Shortly after I had discovered most of Europe (Editor's note: Oh my God! What was it like? Did you name it after yourself? I fucking hate when people say they discovered a place. The entire planet is heavily mapped and there is no more than 10kms between McDonald's in any direction. You didn't discover shit. Also, unless you risked your life running into a burning building, you don't get to say you 'rescued' a dog. You bought a second hand dog from the RSPCA you twat). I started to get my yellow fever. Asia is so close to Australia, so accessible to our white privileged Australian arse's when we want to buy cheap stuff (Editor's note: So much #woke so little self-awareness). Joseph and I had grown closer in nature and understanding, and traveling to Cambodia and then flying over to Vietnam for my 29th Birthday felt like a good way to spend some quality bonding time together. We had two weeks all up, plenty of

time to discover what we needed to discover (Editor's note: Again, with the 'discover' shit).

Our first stop in Cambodia was Siam Reap. It was more than wonderful. As boys who grew up playing Tomb Raider, watching Angelina Jolie's big boobies bouncing around the ancient sites of the ruins of Angkor Wat, even though we are both massive homo's and proud of it, felt like we were visiting a place of importance to video game history. To be there in real life, touching the same ancient ruins that Jolie had touched, was slightly orgasmic. It really enhanced my video game woodies, knowing I had touched what she touched, it was like we were now linked. We had planned 5 days in Cambodia. Joseph thought we would need at least 4 full days at the temples, but we got a driver one ridiculously hot day and did the whole site in under 6 hours. I mean it was a full-on day, but once you've seen one temple in Angkor Wat, you've seen em all. More importantly, once you had seen the ruins where Jolie had been, and got your selfie, nothing else really mattered did it?

Like New Orleans, Cambodia had a street down the main strip, called Pub Street. Substantially smaller than a New Orleans main street, it was only a few hundred meters long. However, it was just as exciting and welcoming. There were stalls with fried crispy scorpions and huge spiders, you could drink anywhere in the street or off the side of the balconies that lined the two-story streets of bars and power lines. Our next few days were spent getting cheap massages, drinking too much and experiencing what the city had to offer. On my birthday, which falls on Halloween there was a street festival. It lined the streets that entered into all the bars. It was like one big neighborhood street party celebrating me. Joseph and I decided to get our faces painted, to get into the spirit of things. I got a really messed up joker face, like Heath Ledger in The Dark Knight. But instead of red lips mine were pink with my black saturated eyes and smudged white skin covering the rest. That night was one of the best birthday nights I have ever had.



The company, the place and the general party aura that surrounded us.

We soon flew out to Vietnam where we landed in Hoi-ann. Hoi-ann was flat, spread out, tropical and very calm. It felt safe to go anywhere at night and the locals were beyond friendly. Most of the top eating spots were so trendy it reminded me of being in Newtown, but at a ¼ of the cost and twice as amazing. Newtown with water front views, an atmosphere to die for, and change from a \$20 for a solid night out. Hoi-ann is known for its leather goods and making cheap suits. You can get boots, handbags and anything else you could think of made to your specifications. The markets were extensive and took up most of our time. When we weren't shopping, we were lounging in the infinity pool that looked out over the rice fields for miles. It was the place to ponder and discover oneself. A little peace and quiet on the outskirts of the city, yet not too far away from the hustle and bustle of town. Town was magical, you could find any cuisine you could imagine, not to mention the Vietnamese coffee. Damn gurl, I had been off coffee for two years at that stage. When I was working at the café, I was up to 8 shots of coffee a day, so I slowly weened myself off it. Vietnam reversed my progress, but still, today I am half the coffee addict I was back in my heyday.

From here we decided to go to Halong bay. We arrived at the ferry terminal with no pre purchased tickets and bumped into some Americans who were travelling together. We shared a speed boat that got us to the island in ten minutes, instead of having to spend an hour on the ferry. It cost us 2 dollars more each way than taking the ferry, but time is money bitch. We arrived at the opposite side of the island. It was easily a 20-minute ride into town through the hills. The speed boat had scammed us. He dropped us off at a pier where his mate was waiting with a van. This isn't an organ harvesting story though. It's a story about being dropped to the wrong destination and then forced to barter with the only person in miles who has a car. We had to use the treacherous speed boat drivers' friends van or sleep on the pier. That

or walk, and that wasn't going to happen. After much haggling, he drove us into town. Again, time is money, and I didn't have the time to trek 20kms into town carrying my luggage. The driver demanded an upfront payment before he would let us in his dinky 10-seater van. The van was snug, and felt cloying and overly close due to the heat. Joseph was annoying me at this point, so I was quite blunt towards him and our new-found friends. It was the Scorpio coming out in me once again. Being a Scorpio, I don't know how to communicate in a way that doesn't come across as cunt. We survived the trip and dropped the poor American's at their run-down hostel. Joseph and I were driven up to the mountain peak where our beach front villa was waiting for us. We had paid \$45 per person a night for our beach front villa, and it was definitely worth it. The hostel was \$13 a night for a shared room. Sure, the hostel was in town, but our villa was only a 10-minute walk from town, it was worth the walk.

That night we decided to all meet up at the hostel and go out for some dinner and drinks with our new-found friends. Honestly, fuck group dinners. "I don't eat this, I don't like this, I don't smoke". Fuck you, you shit head, you're travelling, shut up, deal with it, and fucking move on.

You can't be a vivid traveler and still be a vegan and ultra-naturalist. You'll end up like the guy in *Into the Wild*. Even though I love that movie, and he was just mentally ill and disturbed by the culture he was born into, it was still damn sad. If you want to make your trip memorable and remarkable, you sometimes have to give up some of the luxuries you are used to, and some of the morals you pretend to have. After dinner, we ended up at a so called "club" in the heart of Halong bay. It was just a second story restaurant. I only spent 170 dollars that night, and was probably the most wasted I have ever been in my life. How you can spend 170 dollars in one night in Vietnam when most food costs about \$2 Australian and most drinks or cocktails a tad less than that? It takes dedication, commitment and a liver of

steel. Plus, I was buying cocktails for most of the group. Overall, between the 7 of us we had 140 cocktails. Or so the bill stated.

Joseph reminded me only recently during a phone call, about what white trash looks like when travelling in foreign countries. On our way home we walked past a local lady selling popcorn of all things. I was craving a kebab but #travelling, had to deal with what the world was offering me at this point. With breakfast being a good few hours away I needed something to absorb the alcohol I had ingested up until that point. I reluctantly bought the popcorn for probably 100 times the price of what it was worth. I had a few bites, and decided spinning around like the drunken fairy I am and watching the popcorn fall all over me like a celebration from the Greek gods. Joseph was a little disgusted with my wanton wastefulness, and so was the woman I had purchased the popcorn from. Now this would be the part where I defend my actions, but I can't. I'm a twat, simple as that.

### *The Comedown*

Travel never really hits its peak significance until you arrive home. You can love your house, your home, your life, and your job, but post travel depression is a thing. Realising that you are no-longer going to be exploring the world, hits you when you hit the home tarmac. Your days of vagabonding, exploring and freedom are over. It's back to the boring old grind of everyday life. Sleep, eat, work, repeat. Day in and day out. Everyday life is boring.

Post- travel depression is worse if your trip has been a long one. It won't necessarily cripple you if the trip was less than 3 months. It's there, but not so bad. A six-month trip will leave you crippled with depression and regret for your miserable normal boring home existence. You have seen how life can be out there exploring the

world, but now your time in that alternate universe is over. You have to return to the same old boring grind of work and responsibility.

Realise the come down is real and necessary. Unless you are rich enough to become a full-time vagabond, coming home is part of the process. If you can keep your privates properly sheathed during all sexual encounters, then do it. We don't need any more people in this world. There are enough people out there already who are not willing to learn, explore and be conscious. Don't add to their number. Life is pretty simple. We are overwhelmed, over populated, and burning the very world we live in. I say that in the lightest possible way. I don't believe in a higher being. I believe we have been given a chance to live here, and we should do everything we can to keep it sustainable. That means not ruining everything we have. Life is very simple in my eyes. We grow up, believe we have been raised right, try to enjoy the family we have been given and make a life of our own. Any circumstances in between those points, we try to do the best we can. Enjoyment of life can be pretty simple. It comes down to a few simple words: I love you; I love everyone, I love everything. Simple to say, but hard to implement.

To re-integrate into everyday life after the rhythm and flow of travel, will be hard. After everything, you have seen and everything you have done, everyday life will feel like it lacks colour.

The depression will eventually lift when you get back into the rhythm of your normal life. It can take a month or two, but don't worry, it will happen. You will find a new purpose, probably planning your next trip, and you will once again have something to look forward to.

If you never go to the wine regions of Italy, how can you learn to truly appreciate and love cheap red wine?

If you don't go to Greece, how can you learn to enjoy public transport? Being told by aggressive old Greek women that you have booked the wrong ferry is an experience every person deserves. There are so many things to learn, do and appreciate out there in the world.

So go forth and wander!