



Vietnam Travelling Diary 🇻🇳 [992] Full Transcript

Hello listeners, welcome back to Luke's English Podcast. How are you doing today? I hope you're doing fine. I am absolutely boiling.

It's extremely hot here. We're in the middle of a weird heatwave. I'm recording this episode right at the end of May 2026 and we're experiencing a sort of mad heatwave.

The hottest temperatures ever for May in this part of the world. It's something like 35 degrees today or something. 35 degrees feels like 37, 38.

I've never really understood that whole feels like temperature. If it, for me, if it feels like 38, it's 38 as far as I'm concerned. But anyway, nevermind that.

It's not going to stop me from recording this brand new episode here for you today. And I'm going to start reading from my PDF notes that I've prepared. I'm going to start doing that right now so we can get into it.

Here we go. So this is going to be a long and rambling monologue about a backpacking trip I did in Vietnam 16 years ago in another life. I hope you enjoy listening to it and spending some time immersed in English while I talk to you.

I'll probably explain bits of English as I go. But the main thing with this, like with most of my podcast episodes, is that you simply listen to a lot of spoken English, which I think is an important part of the learning process. In the opening part of this episode, I'm reading from notes I wrote earlier.

But for the rest of the episode, I'll be reading from my old paper notebook where I wrote my travelling diary all those years ago. I'll probably take moments to ramble about this and that as we go on this trip down memory lane. So years ago, I went backpacking around Vietnam, which is a popular backpacking destination, certainly for people in my country.

Shout out to you if you've also been travelling in Vietnam. Have you ever travelled around Vietnam? If you have, then a special shout out for you. And of course, a very extra special shout out if you are actually from Vietnam.

Hello. I would greet every single Vietnamese person listening to this in Vietnamese, but I'm afraid I'm not really capable of doing that. I tried to find out what it was and it was beyond me.

But anyway, I want to say hello to all the people of Vietnam who happen to be listening to this episode. Get in the comment section if you are Vietnamese. So backpacking.

Yes, I went backpacking around Vietnam. Now, backpacking, just in case you don't know, is when you travel around a country with a backpack on your back carrying all your stuff. And unlike a normal holiday when you might stay in the same place more or less for the whole time or rent a car, perhaps backpacking is a form of travelling which is cheaper, less planned in advance, and involves a lot of moving around and having adventures, meeting people as you go, travelling anywhere you can on buses, hitching rides with people, riding on crowded trains and generally making it all up as you go along.

So that's backpacking, right? Have you ever gone backpacking? Is that a thing that a lot of people do where you are from? And have you ever been backpacking in Vietnam? So the episode today will include details of my trip, where I went, what I saw, what I did, but also various introspective tangents about what was in my head at that particular time in my life, as well as digressions into these things, some mini lessons about the English that we use in presentations, the English that we use while travelling, various bits of stand-up comedy material I was writing at the time which found their way into my diary, a couple of mini movie reviews, because I watched a few movies during my trip and wrote little reviews of

them, and various other bits and pieces. So I'll be reading from one of my old diaries, but there will probably be other bits of spontaneous speaking as things occur to me as I go. You can get a PDF transcript of the entire thing, you'll find a link in the description, okay? So check the description, you'll find a PDF link with a transcript for this entire episode.

So at the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010, I went travelling in Vietnam. I was supposed to go with my usual travelling companion, my cousin Ollie, but he couldn't go. Long-term listeners, you've heard Ollie on the podcast a few times, and these days he lives in the United States, he lives in Los Angeles, but back in the old days, Ollie and I both lived in London, and we used to go on these sort of wintertime holidays.

We would travel to some place to try and get some sunshine and to have adventures. And we went to India a couple of times, and also we went to Cambodia, Laos, where else have we been to? We travelled across Canada one summer, so we've done a lot of travelling together. And Ollie was supposed to be my travelling companion for this trip to Vietnam, but he couldn't go, and that is because he was sick at the time.

He was recovering from a mad tropical disease he'd picked up in Africa somewhere. I couldn't remember while I was writing this where he was and what the details were, but I've just texted him, and in fact he was in Malawi playing at a music festival called Lake of Stars, which is very cool, isn't it? How many of you can say that you've played guitar at a music festival in Malawi? Well, that's what my cousin Oliver was doing when he picked up this thing. So, music festival called Lake of Stars in Malawi, very cool, but what's

not so cool was getting drunk and swimming in a nearby lake, a lake in which snails contaminated by a nasty bacteria known as bilharzia were living.

Did you get that? So my cousin went swimming in a freshwater lake in Malawi, and in that lake there were contaminated snails, which sounds like something out of some sort of bizarre horror movie. Let me tell you about this thing called bilharzia that my was dealing with at the time. This is why he couldn't travel to Vietnam with me, because he was sick recovering from this thing.

So, bilharzia, that is a disease caused by parasitic worms that live inside aquatic snails. Yuck. Now, of course, at this point, of course you want to know more about how my cousin got a parasitic worm disease right at the start of the episode.

Right, you do want to know that, of course you do, so here we go. Right, now, actually this could be very important information. If you ever find yourself in Malawi, and you spot a lovely looking freshwater lake, and you fancy taking a dip in that lake, well, think twice.

More than 200 million people worldwide are infected by bilharzia. I think this is every year. It is the second most parasitic disease after malaria.

So, everyone knows about malaria, but the second one in the list is bilharzia. Right, so the parasites that cause it live in certain types of freshwater snails. The way it works is that someone who is infected with bilharzia, let's call him Bill, right, so Bill who is infected with bilharzia, he has a parasitic worm living inside him.

Lovely, lucky Bill. And its eggs find their way into his wee, that's his urine, and his poo, and somehow those eggs find their way into that lovely looking lake that is right there next to that music festival that you've been performing at. Now, maybe Bill did a pee in that lake, or whatever, who knows.

Bill peed in a lake. Anyway, the eggs from that nasty worm in Bill's body and urine are released into the water of the lake, and the worms that hatch from those eggs then find their way to the freshwater snails that live in that lake, and they crawl inside them and live in them. It's mental, isn't it? So, from humans to snails, of all things, and then back to humans again, because, yes, so humans to snails, back to humans, and at this point the snails must be thinking, why are we even involved in this? Humans, snails, back to humans, why are the snails involved, these innocent victims? Anyway, after the worms find their way inside those snails, the infectious form of the parasite called cercariae, I think, comes out of the snail and into the water, and you can become infected with it if your skin comes in contact with this water.

This is like something from a horror film, isn't it? Don't go in the water! So, the worm then finds its way into your body through any means necessary. I think it can just get through the pores in your skin, these are the little holes in your skin where sweat comes out, I think they can get in the pores of your skin, or perhaps through one of the other entry points in your body, and then it enters your blood vessels, that's your veins and your arteries and stuff, and actually travels through your body, laying eggs which end up in your bloodstream, and then your liver, your intestine, and then your bladder. Yes, and you're thinking to yourself, Luke, why are you

talking about these weird snail worms? I thought you were going to talk about your holiday in Vietnam.

I will get to that, you'll see, this is a long episode with every detail included, I'm just explaining why my cousin couldn't join me and why I went on my own, and why I then spent a lot of time writing what was going on in this diary. So, yes, my poor cousin was a victim of this nasty, infectious, parasitic disease. So, once the thing gets into someone's body, it lays eggs which go in the blood, they end up in your organs, your liver, your intestine, your bladder, and I think the worm itself also eventually finds its way into your liver where it stays if the disease is not treated.

All of this because Bill took a piss in a lake. Thanks a lot, Bill. Now, if you're infected with this, it gives you nasty flu-like symptoms, flu-like symptoms like the symptoms of flu, so that's like you get aches and pains, you get a headache, you feel terrible, you get cold chills, you get night sweats, all sorts of nasty stuff.

So, flu-like symptoms, and you can also develop chronic, that means long-term, symptoms if you don't treat the infection. The eggs cause inflammation or scarring, that's basically they damage the body when they travel through it, when they make their way down to the intestine, the liver, or bladder. So, Ollie had this and felt terrible and had to rest and recover from that, and so no travelling to Vietnam with me, and as a result, I had to decide if I wanted to cancel the trip or travel alone, and after some thought, I chose the second option.

And while I was there, I wrote a diary. I wrote in it a lot and recorded a lot of the things I did, saw, felt through, and thought

throughout the trip. Let me just say that sentence again, I wrote in it a lot and recorded a lot of the things I did, saw, felt, and thought throughout the trip.

Okay, now my cousin Ollie has just texted me again with a little bit more about his lovely Worm Lake experience. So, he says, they took forever to diagnose me and kept testing me for malaria until I went to the hospital for tropical diseases on the Tottenham Court Road in London, and they immediately said, oh, you went swimming in the lake then, eye roll. Well, you have to wait a month and then take this massive zinc pill.

See you later. So, they just gave him this massive zinc pill which he took and that eventually, I think, washed all of the eggs and the worm and the rest of it out of him, but he was not very well for quite a long time. So, there you go.

That's the context. So, it was a slightly weird experience travelling alone. It wasn't bad, but a little bit lonely.

I don't know if you've ever travelled alone in a foreign country. It has its good and bad points. I wasn't alone all of the time.

Part of the trip, I was with a friend and his housemates and colleagues, and sometimes I hooked up with other people, but probably 75% of the time, I was a solo traveller. Now, I'm generally okay with spending time alone, but there were some moments in my trip that became rather surreal and crazy because I had nobody to share them with. So, I wrote a lot of things in this diary which kept me company.

Writing a diary is great. I've said it before. I'll say it again.

Writing a diary is great, and I highly recommend it to anyone. It's good for your mental health. I think it's a million times better than scrolling short form content on your phone.

It gives you a record of your mind at a certain period in your life, as well as just a record of what happened, and it helps you to develop communication and writing skills. Also, if you do it in English, it's a good way to develop your productive fluency and to find your voice. If you write every day, it's a great way to just develop your voice in English.

Just write about what you do, think and feel every day in English, even if you just write a few sentences. It's a very good idea, so I would like to encourage you to write a diary in English. I used to write diaries all the time.

I don't really do it so much these days. More or less since I started doing the podcast, I stopped writing a diary. I found another creative outlet in this podcast.

So, I rediscovered this particular diary the other day and found it interesting to read my own thoughts from over 16 years ago. I can't believe it is 16 years now. Time flies.

Another reason to write in a diary. You can save a moment in time. So, I'm going to open this diary and start reading from it very soon.

Let's go back in time and share the company of my younger self. I think it should be a good episode and I hope you enjoy it. Now,

when I wrote this diary, I never intended for it to be published as a podcast episode.

So, it's full of some very personal thoughts and reflections. That includes some thoughts about where I was in my life at the time and I think these days, 16 years later, I'm in a totally different place in my life compared to where I was when I wrote this. I was single.

I hadn't met my wife at this point, no girlfriend. I had started this podcast a few months earlier, but it hadn't really taken off and become successful at that point. So, I actually went on the trip.

I left England at the end of 2009, came back in January 2010 and I started this podcast in April 2009, just to give you a bit of context. So, at that time, yes, I was single. I hadn't met my wife, no girlfriend.

I'd only recently started the podcast and it hadn't really taken off at that point. I didn't really have a big audience. I'd done, I think, less than 50 episodes at that point.

I was probably more into doing stand-up comedy during that period and you can see from the diary that I was thinking about it a lot. My professional teaching career wasn't very well developed. I had done my diploma, I'd done my Delta qualification, but I don't think my career was very well developed, even though I was in my thirties at the time.

So, despite being unmarried, single, no kids, not really much going on in my career, I was in my early thirties, but, you know, I was always a slow starter in life. So, as you'll see, I'll talk about the

things I saw and did, including some very memorable and brilliant moments, but my writing also includes some of the frustrating things I experienced while I was in the country. Any Vietnamese people listening, I do want to say a special hello to you again.

I want to say that you have a fantastic, beautiful and vibrant country with very hard-working, energetic and friendly people. That is definitely the impression I got from visiting 16 years ago. But my experiences were not always completely positive, probably because I was having a fairly low-budget tourist experience.

I was definitely trying to do it all on the cheap. I was backpacking. Now, overall, it was great and definitely a positive experience, as you will see at the end.

But I did have some frustrating moments, and you'll hear me describe them at various points. Those frustrating experiences were probably mostly my fault, and also just what happens when you do a lot of travelling in a country that you don't know well. As a tourist, I probably didn't get a full or deep experience in Vietnam.

I was there for just a couple of weeks, travelling to the typical tourist destinations, spending time on cheap tourist buses in tourist hotels and hostels, experiencing everything via those situations, people and places. I'm sure that if someone visited England in the same kind of way for just a couple of weeks, they wouldn't get a fully rounded view of the place and might be met with some less than perfect situations, right? So any tourist experience can be a little bit one-sided, maybe a little bit shallow, right? I should also say that I did an episode of Luke's English Podcast back in 2010 after my Vietnam trip, and you can see the notes I wrote for it in

this diary. I think there were two episodes that I made which were inspired by this trip, one about the language we use while travelling, and another, more generally, talking about my trip.

So there's episode 47, which is called Travelling in Vietnam, and in that one, English Robot 3000, if you remember that, an early, early predecessor to today's chatbots. English Robot 3000 interviews me about my time spent travelling in Vietnam, so that's just about my trip, just a few weeks after I got back from it, and episode 48 was called Useful Expressions for Travelling with Claudia, and that's for travelling, you know, on your, you don't have to travel with Claudia, it's not just expressions for travelling with Claudia, I mean the episode was recorded with, you get the idea. So it was a conversation with Claudia, my colleague and friend at the school I was working in at the time, conversation with Claudia about travelling and backpacking, with plenty of useful vocabulary for talking about this subject.

This is super useful for people who like travelling and want to use English on their trip to meet people and make friends. I'll go through some of that language later on in this episode when they arrive in my diary. Now since I did those episodes in the early days of Luke's English Podcast, my podcasting style has changed a bit, and I'm a bit more willing to be introspective and personal and to reveal what I was truly feeling while travelling, which is what you're going to get in this episode.

Let me give you a quick overview of Vietnam and my route. Okay, now actually I'm going to do a little quiz for you, I'm going to give you a little quiz. Okay, a few quiz questions about Vietnam, let's check your general knowledge about Vietnam.

So first question is this, bordering countries, what three countries border Vietnam? What three countries border Vietnam? So Vietnam shares a border with three other countries, what are they? Well in the north it is China, then we have to the west we have Laos, and then in the southwest there is Cambodia. So China, Laos and Cambodia are the bordering countries. Question number two, what is the capital city of Vietnam? And watch out because there's the old name and then there's the newer name.

So the capital city of Vietnam is Ho Chi Minh City, used to be called Saigon, but these days it's known as Ho Chi Minh City. What is the second largest city? So Ho Chi Minh City is in the south of the country, then there's the second city which is in the north, that is Hanoi. Another question about geography, what sea is on the coastline of Vietnam? What sea is pretty much the entire eastern coastline of Vietnam and a bit on the south as well, what sea is that? That is the South China Sea.

What's the currency that they use in Vietnam? The currency, it's the Vietnamese Dong. Here's a difficult one, what's the language that they speak in Vietnam? What language do they speak? Yes of course they speak Vietnamese. What about Vietnam's colonial history? Now this is not the most, you know it's not the only thing to know about Vietnam of course, but in terms of its modern history these are some important details.

Colonial history of Vietnam, well Vietnam is a fully independent nation with a strong culture and national identity, but its modern history is heavily influenced by colonialism. It was the French who arrived in the mid-19th century that largely transformed the

landscape of Vietnam into a source of raw materials like rubber and coffee. So the French came in, they seized land from the locals and then started to mine that land and source raw materials from that land, coffee, rubber, typical European colonialism.

Then during World War II, Japan of course occupied Vietnam even though it was still a French colony. Then World War II ended of course in 1945, the Japanese left and there was in fact the First Indochina War in the immediate post-war, post-World War II era, the First Indochina War which saw Vietnam aligned with the communist bloc and also at the time combined with Cambodia and Laos. Vietnam fought back against the French colonists and won, but the country was divided between North and South.

Also Cambodia and Laos were established or perhaps re-established as separate nations. And then this led to the famous US involvement, the Vietnam War, basically mid-1950s to mid-1970s. The US came in in order to protect the South from the communists in the North and generally to try to stop the spread of communism in the region.

And as we all know, this was a failure in many ways and also just a horrendous moment in modern history. The country has been united and has been communist since then, since the mid-1970s, but that's just a sort of modern military history of the country. Vietnam is a lot more than that of course.

There are plenty of other things to say about the place and its culture. Vietnam is known for its great food like pho, I think it's called pho, which is like a noodle, soup noodle dish, banh mi, amazing landscapes like Ha Long Bay, which is a UNESCO World

Heritage site featuring thousands of limestone, mini limestone islands rising out of emerald green waters. There are beaches, there are ancient towns and Buddhist temples, rivers, rice paddies and fields and swamps with floating markets, French colonial architecture, millions of motorbikes and scooters, textiles and craftsmanship, the exports of nuts, pepper and electronics, a bustling and entrepreneurial place loved by tourists and backpackers, including Europeans and especially Australians because it's not massively far away from Australia, and of course home to many friendly, smiley and hard-working people.

So that's an overview of Vietnam. Let me tell you about my trip then. So I flew in to Ho Chi Minh City in the south and I didn't know what I was going to do.

I actually hadn't planned things in advance. I just booked my tickets in and out. My flights were into Ho Chi Minh and out of Ho Chi Minh after about two and a half weeks, I think it was.

So I flew into Ho Chi Minh City and arrived there and sort of made plans and stuff and my plan slowly came together. After spending some days in Ho Chi Minh City, I flew north. There's a lot of flying in the first half of my holiday, not great for my carbon footprint, but there it is.

So I flew to Hanoi and spent some time there with a friend. While I was there, I visited Ha Long Bay, which is just on the coast near Hanoi. And from there, I took one more flight to Hue, which is a sort of traditional place right in the centre of the country on the coast.

From there, I took, I think, Koch, was it, to Da Nang, to Hoi An, which is a town near Da Nang, another large city on the coast. And from there, a train down to Nha Trang, a sort of seaside area, a seaside resort town with a lot of day trips you can do out into the sea and a lot of fun to be had. And then another coach back to Ho Chi Minh City where I ended my trip.

So at this point, I'm finally going to start reading from my diary. I'll remind you that there is a PDF transcript for this whole episode. But now let me read from the diary.

How long is this going to be, this episode? The diary is not that, it's not that thin. I wrote a lot of words during this trip. So let's just dig into the diary and we'll start right away.

So this begins on the 27th of December. And in fact, I spent that Christmas with my family, not in the family home, but my parents booked a little house next to the beach, actually, on the east coast of England, on the Suffolk coast. Actually, if you look at a map of Suffolk, it doesn't look all that different to a map of Vietnam, funnily enough.

Anyway, where is Old Borough? So we stayed in this little town called Old Borough, right next to the sea. A lovely place, typical English seaside town, just next to the seaside, trying to find pictures. There are windmills, there are beaches, there's a lovely little town centre, nice little, nice little streets.

Where's the beach? Trying to find pictures of the beach. It's a nice place to go to get away from things, get some fresh air. So I was in Old Borough with my family.

So let me read now from the diary. In Old Borough with family, feeling quite quiet with the family, perhaps a little antisocial. Anyway, lovely place near the sea in Suffolk, very peaceful and posh.

Nice walks with mum, dad and James along the beach towards the art installation of a big stainless steel shell. That is an interesting thing you can see in Old Borough actually. There's an interesting bit of modern art which you can see.

It's called the Scallop. Barry Wainwright is the artist and there's this massive metal shell. It's a big metal artistic installation on the beach.

It's called the Scallop and it says, written on the side of it, it says, I hear those voices that will not be drowned. Anyway, so that's just an interesting thing about Old Borough. That's where I was spending Christmas with my family.

Okay, back to the diary. So lovely walks along the beach towards the art installation. Lovely Christmas actually.

My parents are great. I feel a bit bad that I'm not trying to have more of a good time with dad or that I snap at him sometimes. So I seem to have been feeling guilty about the way I perhaps behaved with my father.

That sometimes I felt like I wasn't just enjoying his company enough and that sometimes I would snap at him. I mean, isn't this the way it always goes with your parents? You think I'd love to, you

think I need to spend some quality time with my dad. And then when you actually spend the time with them, you tend to get irritated by them and maybe even snap at them.

If you snap at someone, it means you kind of get frustrated with someone and you have a quick, maybe slightly rude word to say to them, but I know, or, you know, stop it or something like that. So apparently that was what was happening there. I felt a bit bad that I wasn't having more of a good time and that I was maybe being a bit sort of irritable anyway.

Nevertheless, lovely time. On the phone to Ollie in Woodbridge, that's where he was. He's recovering from the bilharzia finally, which is a relief, but he can't come to Vietnam with me because he needs time to recover.

Mixed feelings about this. Mixed feelings. If you say you're having mixed feelings, it means there are some, basically some negative feelings involved in the way you feel about something.

That's mixed feelings. Mixed. If you ever say mixed, for example, mixed reviews, the film is receiving mixed reviews.

Mixed just means that there's some negative reviews in there. Okay. That's not all positive.

In fact, it's kind of a bit negative, in fact. So I was having mixed feelings about the fact that I would have to travel alone. So I wasn't feeling great about it.

Travelling with Ollie is great. We get on really well. We're on the same wavelength.

We talk a lot the whole time. Lots of nonsense, banter and meaningful chat too. Travelling is always a laugh with him because we make fun of everything and develop everything into a long running series of themes, catchphrases and characters.

It's true. Trips that we've done in the past, we end up speaking this kind of like shorthand of quotes from films and TV shows, talking in accents all the time, and lots and lots of long running jokes and things. It always becomes absolutely hilarious.

And when we end up meeting up with other people, if we would make friends with other people, they would always be like entertained by our nonsense talking. I'm going to miss him so much on this trip because without him, I could be a lonely schmuck with no one to share thoughts and stupid moments with. Plenty of people travel alone though, so it's not bad.

Just a pity not to have someone to share this with. Slightly nervous about going on my own. This reaches a kind of peak when I get back to London and pack my stuff in my freezing flat with just a couple of hours to go before travelling to Heathrow.

So then there's a time shift here and I think I continued writing this particular entry after I'd flown to Vietnam and it says now I'm in a little restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City. Just finished what feels like a pepper noodles dish. I wasn't even sure what it was I'd eaten.

Pretty good and less than two quid. Quid means pounds. So this noodles dish I'd had was really cheap.

I'm full but I suspect that much of that is pepper and salt too. Not bad for a first time in a random spot in Backpacker Central in Ho Chi Minh City. Quite a strong beer too, plus jet lag and I'm in the twilight zone.

Meaning I was feeling a bit sort disoriented, maybe a little bit jet lagged, slightly drunk and I was just feeling a little bit sort of spaced out in the twilight zone. American I think girl next to me also alone. I should make conversation but I'm just in London mode for my first night.

Just want to be alone to sit here and recover and acclimatise. Just get used to things. Then from tomorrow I'm Mr Sociable Backpacker making friends with all around me.

Now I had good intentions to be sociable and make lots of friends on my trip. I'm not sure I entirely followed up those intentions but we'll see. Again talking about this American girl who I think was sitting next to me.

I said she looks wrapped up in her blackberry. If someone's wrapped up in something it means they're fully involved in something. So she was on her blackberry, looked like she was very wrapped up in it, meaning she was like focused on her blackberry, just concentrating on her blackberry.

A blackberry if you don't know is a form of mobile phone from 16 years ago. They were very very common. The good thing about blackberries is that they had a full QWERTY keyboard right.

These days it's all touchscreen which is not that much fun. I don't really like typing on a touchscreen phone but blackberries had actual buttons like a full keyboard made of proper buttons that you could feel and click and they were brilliant for typing. I used to be able to type out full emails without even looking at the keyboard because you could just feel where all the keys were.

So anyway those were the good old days with blackberries. Then I've written the place is pretty stiff with white backpackers. If the place is stiff with something it means that it's full of those people.

So this place is pretty stiff with white backpackers. Shouldn't be too hard to meet English-speaking buddies while I'm here. On the table across the room there are four blondes.

They sound German. Happy days. It's hot here about 28 degrees and it's 9.30pm, a bit like the Japanese summer.

The flights here were pretty uncomfortable but okay. I think I flew maybe I flew into somewhere like Doha and then flew to Vietnam or maybe I flew to Singapore and then into Vietnam. I can't remember but it was like a two flight trip.

I watched two movies on the way. Public Enemies. Do you remember Public Enemies? Starring Johnny Depp and what's his name? Yes Johnny Depp and Christian Bale.

It's a sort of a gangster police like cops and robbers movie starring Johnny Depp and Marion Cotillard and it's like the police trying to catch these bank robbers in America in like the 1920s I think it is. So I watched Public Enemies and I said the angle of the screen wasn't too good so I couldn't appreciate the visuals properly. So I was watching on like a little screen on the plane.

Basically a good film for these reasons. Johnny Depp. This is when Johnny Depp was still handsome and still cool.

So good film for these reasons. Johnny Depp. Machine gun sound effects.

I do remember the machine gun sounds were particularly well done. So Johnny Depp. Machine gun sound effects.

Johnny Depp. Well directed. Cool clothes.

Johnny Depp. Good character acting. Really cute French actress.

Johnny Depp. Did I mention the good sound effects? Then I've written beer number two and I feel like I feel wobbly. I feel wobbly and I must have some sleep.

Beatles playing. So in the restaurant they were playing the Beatles. Beatles playing in this place.

German girl taps her foot excitedly. I'd like to think it's because she's into the music. Must be part of it.

Their voices are special. That's the Beatles. Not the German girls.

But maybe the German girls too in that particular moment after two beers. Their voices are special. Could also be because she's on holiday in a beautiful country with her beautiful friends.

My brains are just spilling out onto the page here. I think about stand up. How sweet it would be to be able to take people away just with my words.

Humour and laughter. Mysterious art. I read a book by Frank Skinner on the plane.

Frank Skinner is a famous British comedian. Not sure I really like him but he's interesting and insightful though. The comic, that's the comedian, can't really enjoy his work except during the moment it happens.

Outside of that he's lost. He doesn't know if it was any good. So I'm trying to explain that a stand up comedian is only able to appreciate his work in the moment that it's happening.

On stage when it's being validated by the laughter of the audience. But outside those moments the comedian's never entirely sure if his work is actually any good. He's lost.

He doesn't know if he was any good or not. It only works. It only means anything while the laugh actually takes place.

Outside of that it's just words with no value. I mean stand-up comedy is like that. It's really life or death.

Survival or death. And the only times you survive, the only times you don't die is when the audience are laughing. And that's what it really means to be a stand-up comedian.

You go up there on stage and you live or die based on the audience's laughter. It's a very kind of egotistical thing to do really. The comedian must be willing to just let go and live with that uncertainty.

It's the price paid for moments of pure ecstasy on stage. The freedom to define everything you do. The adoration and ego of it all.

It's quite sickening. Or maybe that's just him. Maybe that's just the feeling I got from the Frank Skinner book.

By the way these days I've reappraised what I think of Frank Skinner. I think the guy's a bit of a genius. One of the best comedians in the country.

Now without Ollie here, without Oliver here, I'm just going mad in my own head. That's okay though. I think it's just jet lag.

Also the other film I watched on the plane was District 9. Do you know District 9? It's a South African film. Niel Blomkamp, is that his name? It's about aliens. It's kind of a social commentary about apartheid, I think, or maybe social inequalities in South Africa.

But it's all about aliens who live on a camp in a ghetto somewhere in South Africa. I think they're called cockroaches in the film.

There's a social uprising with the aliens fighting against the corrupt police.

It's a good film. It's a really good film but it's quite sort of disgusting in many ways. So anyway I watched District 9. It made me feel unwell.

The alien stuff, the distress and the loneliness of the sweet-natured guy who gets caught up in it all. The high-tech weapons, the disgusting corruption and inhumanity, the death and the killing and the shaky camera. The alien language and disgusting bodies.

So it made me feel a bit sick on the plane but it was good but disturbing but good. Okay so I transferred in Doha on the way in. So I ended up in Doha in Qatar as my transit point.

Transferred in Doha, random Middle Eastern desert city in Qatar. Views I got were of a sunrise across a runway surrounded by the desert from a shuttle bus. It was unreal.

I remember that looking out. I was on a bus going to, travelling through the airport and looking out the window across the runway and then out across the desert and seeing the sunrise. That was pretty special.

One of those weird airport moments where you're kind of in some timeless place. There's a hippie looking guy, there's a hippie looking guy, a guy who looked like a hippie a few tables away with a gorgeous girlfriend. Well I say gorgeous, she's nice.

I hate him. Stupid comment because I could get a girl like her if I tried. So here now we have the typical Luke's Diary stuff about how I don't have a girlfriend.

Sometimes I worry that I don't want to, meaning I don't want to get into a relationship. That I'm cold, unemotional and incapable of love or loving. Yes, now this is my appeal to the audience.

So this time, well I was younger of course as I said before I was single, not married, hadn't met my wife. And that's the sort of thing that the perpetually single person does think. Now I just want to say hello to you if you've ever thought that.

If you've ever been single for quite a long time. And I was single for quite a long time at that period without a girlfriend. Maybe because I didn't really want to be in a serious relationship.

I didn't really want that kind of commitment. I was quite happy just living my life, being free and doing whatever I wanted to do whenever I wanted to do it. I wasn't quite ready to commit to another person in the serious way that I always thought that I should as a grown up person, right.

But there were times when I felt like there was something wrong with me, you know. First of all, I never really felt justified in that decision of saying to myself, well I don't really want to be with someone. I just want to be on my own.

I want to do whatever I want to do. I might hook up with people sometimes, but mainly I just want to be my own person at this time in my life. I never really owned that feeling.

I never felt like I had the right to just do that. I always felt there was some pressure that I should be in a relationship, that I should have a serious girlfriend and all this stuff. But also I always felt like maybe there's something wrong with me too.

Why am I single? Maybe I'm unemotional. Maybe I'm incapable of love and loving. And I think that's actually a very common thought.

I think a lot of people who are single will tell themselves these things and it's not true. Okay, it's not true. It's probably just because you're quite happy living a single life or you just haven't met the right person yet.

It really is as simple as that. You just haven't met the right person. Maybe you've met some people who have been bad.

You might have met and spent time with people who were not the right person and they have sort of spoiled things for you a little bit. Made you defensive. I would just say in my experience things happened when I was ready for them to happen.

And as soon as I was ready to meet someone I was willing and I'd got some heartbreak out of the way and I'd lived some single years then I was then I actually got into a relationship and found love and so on. Right, let me continue. So these are some of my worst thoughts and the last of them on this holiday.

No negative introspection here. It's so self-indulgent. The self-indulgence I'm starting now is sensory.

Sights, sounds, smells, feelings, tastes. If I see something I want I take it. So that was like a promise to myself that I wouldn't just go around in miserable self-indulgent introspection.

That I was there to have a good time and that I was there to soak up the sights, the sounds, the smells and experiences of this trip. And then I've written stand-up material. So this is where I started to write down some ideas for stand-up material.

And this bit of material I think I write this a few times in this diary. You'll see how I develop it as I go. So stand-up material idea.

Why do we have to switch off our iPods during take-off and landing? Apparently it's because it interferes with the plane's navigation system. So what actually happens? Do they suddenly start picking up my music playlist in the cockpit of the aeroplane? And then at this point I have to name a song riff on it. Like you know the pilots are about to take off and suddenly they can hear some piece of music.

I'd never really worked out what that piece of music could be. Why do iPods have so much power over planes? Is it just planes? I think it's a lie. So that I think that the pilot just wants us all to concentrate on his landing.

So we'll be impressed. As if he's saying so sorry no iPads on the plane. Watch this.

You never hear news reports do you about plane crashes caused by mp3 players. There was a horrific crash at the Heathrow

Terminal 4 this evening. A 747 is said to have skidded off the runway, exploded in a massive fireball.

Inspection of the black box recorder showed the cause of the accident to be a combination of a Game Boy DS and an iPod Nano, both of which were in use during the landing. This is the seventh Nintendo related plane crash in the last year. I did develop that.

I did develop that material. Ended up doing it on stage quite a few times and it was good. It worked.

That was some good material. There'll be more of that coming. Lots of backpackers around here seem younger than me.

I guess I'm getting on. If you're getting on it means you're getting old. At 32 though I reckon I'm still in my prime.

In my body I'm not but in my head I'm still there. As if as if I would have lost my marbles at 32. I've got a few good young years ahead of me.

Well bollocks I'm writing a load of crap now and I'm knackered, meaning very tired, so it's time to stop. I'm going to get the bill and go home to plan the next few days. Gotta get a camera.

My phone might do. I think I did get a camera in the end. Next entry is from the 29th of December at 6.50am. That's very early in the morning.

This crazy jet lag has stopped me getting any sleep beyond a couple of hours on the flight and a couple of hours from 11 until 2 this morning. I feel fucked. Then the same day in the afternoon.

I got up slowly this morning following an Apocalypse Now style sleepless night in my room. You know the movie Apocalypse Now? Especially the scene where, who is it, Martin Sheen is in the room going mad and he opens up the blinds and looks out and he goes Saigon. Shit.

So it was a bit like that. A lot of lying around trying to shut off my head trying to sleep. I had a super basic breakfast of scrambled eggs which turned up naked on a plate accompanied by a long bun of bread on another plate.

At first I was like huh? See this is culture shock because where I'm from I can't imagine scrambled eggs being served not on bread. They have to be served on toast. But this scrambled eggs breakfast was served to me on a plate with some bread on the side and apparently that was enough to make me go huh? But it was fine.

Such a small complaint from my western head because the eggs weren't served on the bread. Orange juice too. The thing came to less than a pound I think and I thought the Ritz cafe was good value.

The Ritz cafe was a cafe near my apartment which was super cheap in London. Then I tried to plan some stuff. I spoke to a travel agent rep who has a desk in the hotel.

English not bad but her pronunciation is poor. Oh dear. Some amusing banter about learning English.

I was too late for a trip to the tunnels and the temple so I've booked that for tomorrow and I leave at 8am. Hope I'll get some sleep tonight or I will be like a zombie tomorrow. Should go to my room fairly early and just nap until the morning.

Must try to book a room for an extra night here. Then I try to arrange flights to Dalat or Nha Trang but they're all booked up. I considered an 8 hour bus trip to Nha Trang but in the end I managed to call Nick and he says it's cool for me to head straight for Hanoi on New Year's Eve and spend a few days there.

So Nick was a friend of mine who I used to work with and he was living in Hanoi at the time so I arranged to just fly straight to Hanoi and then spend New Year's with him and his flatmates. And then I've written then I can do Halong Bay and travelled down to Hue, Da Nang, Hoi An, finally back to Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City I mean, and out of here. So booked my flight to Hanoi and then headed out on foot into Ho Chi Minh City to check out some of the local sights.

Now people don't generally walk around. Some people walk a in Ho Chi Minh City on a scooter and there I was this western guy sticking out like a sore thumb walking around the boiling hot streets of Ho Chi Minh City. I felt like a bit of an idiot walking around not knowing where I'm going.

A blatant tourist. It was quite a change from London where I'm definitely a local. I got used to it.

The roads are very crowded with masses of scooters and taxis. Crossing the road is tricky because basically you just get an absolute tidal wave of scooters all coming down the road all at the same time. Crossing the road is complicated but I use the tried and tested method of crossing the road right next to a local.

That's where you stand next to a local and as they cross the road you just cross the road right next to them. It's a tried and tested method. It works for kids as well.

Downtown Ho Chi Minh City is noisy, vibrant, energetic, busy, quite dirty, smells of lemongrass, fried food, oil and even urine in some places which is not uncommon for big cities. I mean Paris of course has its moments but those are my sensory first impressions. The people are basically involved in working as far as I can see, selling stuff in their shops, fixing bikes in the street.

A hell of a lot is happening here so it's very busy, bustling. It appears to be modernising pretty fast. Some high-tech looking entertainment in the park area in the middle of the main town centre.

It's like the urban parts of India I've seen. People hassle you less. Hassle, that's where people basically come up to you trying to get your money or come up to you trying to sell you things and they don't leave you alone.

They hassle you and you do get that quite a lot in India but I've noticed that people hassle you less in Vietnam. You get the odd person attracting your attention, trying to sell you stuff or trying to offer their bike. So you get these guys sitting on motorbikes and

they go hey and they slap the back of the bike and they're offering you their services but they don't persist so much.

There's less grift. Now grift is a word that my cousin and I used to describe the level of the manipulative ways that people in India try to get your money or try to sell you things. Normally they're trying to sell you some stuff that you don't want.

Like there's some, I don't know, some textiles or some spices or just some general stuff you don't want and they will go for a very persistent, very hard sales technique where they just don't leave you alone. They'll walk down the road with you or they'll stay and make conversation with you and desperately try and sell you their things even if you don't want them. We call that to be grift.

There's less grift. If this was Mumbai it would be a different story. I love India but I mean I definitely noticed the way that there were a lot of people who would hassle you trying to get money from you trying to sell you things and it was pretty intense in India but slightly less so in Vietnam.

I walked around, I got hot and a bit dizzy. I made my way through the busy streets, got a bit lost but found my way using a blue map that I got from a girl in reception in the hotel. I checked out the Ben Thanh, is it Ben Thanh Market? A large indoor market full of stuff including some nice looking fruit.

Also the Independence Palace. I walked in but couldn't really see it and then on to the War Remnants Museum. So this was a museum with lots of bits and pieces left over from the war against the United States and it was pretty shocking.

The Americans absolutely screwed Vietnam during the war. It was completely illegal and unacceptable. They killed millions of civilians and carpet bombed massive areas.

They also pumped millions of tonnes of chemicals into the land. Just utterly screwed the place and for what? Great way to save a country from communism and it didn't work. Have the Americans ever really apologised for this? Their films tend to focus on how bad it was for the US Army soldiers who fought there.

The Vietnamese don't really get dealt with. As far as I can tell maybe there are some rare exceptions in films but what? And how do Vietnamese people feel about this? I don't know but the photos and the stories that I saw at the War Remnants Museum were absolutely shocking. I walked back to the hotel and I've just had a massive club sandwich and chips for about two pounds which is actually quite expensive.

There's a bunch of pretty American girls who look Vietnamese on a nearby table. They're involved with themselves though and don't seem interested in me. I'm going to go back to the hotel now and call Nick to let him know when I'm arriving.

Also I've got to book that extra room for tomorrow and maybe call Ali and see if he wants a drink. Who's Ali? I've no idea. Otherwise I'm just going to go and rest this evening.

So the question is listeners during this trip will I become romantically involved with someone? Will I actually still be single for the whole trip or will I hook up with some fellow traveller? That's

interesting isn't it? What do you think is going to happen? Here's some more stand-up material that I wrote. This is me. Is this any good? I'm not sure if this is any good.

Hi how's it going? I imagine myself saying to the audience arriving on the stage grabbing the mic. Hi how's it going? Which is normal at the beginning of a stand-up routine that you say something like hi how you doing and the audience is supposed to go like that. Certainly in England.

Hi how's it going? And I say yeah nice response that is the appropriate comedy audience response to that question. In a normal one-to-one situation though it would be weird. How's it going mate? In the same way we wouldn't expect an audience to respond like it was a normal question.

How's it going? Yeah fine thanks I'm a bit under the weather actually. I'm being made redundant but it's okay because I wanted to leave anyway so at the end of the day it's all good. What about you? Let's just try it.

This is what I would imagine saying to the whole audience. Let's just try it. When I ask how's it going I want you to respond with fine thanks.

Ready? How's it going? And the whole audience is supposed to go fine thanks. Hilarious. Now it's just weird isn't it? Let's stick with the homogeneous affirmative response shall we? Yay! Not bad.

And then we've got the iPods crashing planes routine which I developed a little bit and I'm going to go through it again with you.

So I flew abroad recently. Can I start that again? I flew abroad recently.

Have you noticed on the flight they always say you've got to turn off your mp3 player because it might interfere with the navigational systems of the plane? I don't believe them. I just think the pilots want everyone's attention during takeoff and landing because he's showing off. Okay everybody this is your captain speaking.

Can you stop what you're doing now and just check this out because it's going to be amazing. How can an iPod crash a plane? We never hear about it in the news and then the news report again. The British Airways Boeing 747 flipped upside down during takeoff before exploding in a massive ball of flame.

The black box recorder recovered from the wreckage revealed that the horrific accident which killed everyone on board was caused by an iPod Nano. Yeah. How does the iPod have so much power? They don't tell you that when they sell it to you.

Well yeah so this is your iPod Nano. It plays mp3s, wmas, mpeg4 videos.

Podcasts, it displays photos, it can hold up to 80 gigabytes of data, and I want to watch out for it can make aeroplanes explode during takeoff, so watch out for that. So if this is true, why don't Al-Qaeda use iPods? Al-Qaeda were in the news a lot in those days. Remember Al-Qaeda? Of course you do.

Okay, so when this is an Al-Qaeda meeting, this is probably not advisable. Slightly edgy material now. Why don't Al-Qaeda use iPods? Okay, so when plane is taking off, press shuffle all songs.

Plane skids off runway, explodes in massive fireball. Party time. Yes, and then I've got... I'm not sure about that.

Therefore, I reckon the whole switch off your gadgets or the plane will crash thing is a Nevertheless, when one of those strict air hostesses offers to turn mine off, I always obey. I would pretty much do anything they told me to. Okay, so during takeoff, I need you to dislocate your arms and legs and stow them in the cupboard above your head.

Okay, yeah, sure, anything you say. Not for any particular reason, of course, it's just that I find that combination of uniform, bright red lipstick and authority completely disarming. In reality, though, it just doesn't happen.

Yeah, okay, that's not so bad. Some of that material's alright. Anyway, let's move on to the 31st of December, 9.50am in the morning.

I had a pretty good night's sleep last night. Got to bed about 10.30 and slept until 6.30 or 7. So pretty darn good. I feel pretty human now.

Yesterday, I got up early to take the coach to Khao Dai Temple and Kuchi Tunnels. I should have guessed it was going to be a typical tourist coach trip, long time sitting on the coach, driving to the

temple and tunnels with quite unfriendly tourists who were very petty about keeping their seats. The temple was bizarre.

A fairly recent religion, Khao Daiism, is a sort of amalgamation of Buddhism, Catholicism and Confucianism. A pretty large temple which was gaudily decorated pink and yellow and blue, inside big columns with dragons on them and large colourful pictures of the all-seeing eye. I saw their service, mainly old Vietnamese people in white or blue or red robes, kneeling on the floor praying while a group at the back played scratchy, plinky-plonky music on traditional stringed instruments and a group of girls sang some odd chants.

Loads of tourists watched, or should I say, gawped. If you gawp, it's like you stand there with your mouth open and your eyes open wide. You can imagine a big group of tourists gawping at this ceremony from the balcony, mindlessly, brainlessly looking.

Anyway, then back on the bus to the tunnels. So, right, there was a huge tunnel network run by the Viet Cong during the war and you can still visit those tunnels. So our tour guide, Tom or Slim Jim, I think I nicknamed him Slim Jim in my head.

The tour guide was the best thing about the tour. His English was very good. I think he worked quite hard to practise it on the tour and used to be an English teacher.

He told quite a few jokes this is a local Vietnamese guy, right? Told quite a few jokes and filled his speech with Australian and British slang which most of the tourists didn't get. They were

Scandinavian, Spanish, Russian, Singaporean. The tunnels were more interesting than the temple.

The whole Cu Chi area was a Viet Cong stronghold in the south and an important strategical area. The Viet Cong soldiers in the area managed to hold off the US troops by using guerrilla tactics, traps, landmines and a tunnel network which stretched over the whole area. Some tunnels went six to nine metres underground and were too small for Americans to fit inside.

Incredible. The US, of course, bombed the shit out of the whole area but the Viet Cong were pretty safe in the tunnels. Loads of soldiers still died though.

We also saw a shooting range where some tourists fired AK-47s and M-16s. So there was this shooting range behind these bushes and you just hear the incredibly loud sound of AK-47s and M-16 machine guns being fired. I think it's a little, I don't know, it doesn't seem appropriate, does it, to go to Vietnam, explore these museums which describe the horrors of the war and the tunnels and all the history and then you want to go and fire an AK-47, I don't know.

But it was incredibly loud and just made me think war is hell. I crawled through some enlarged tunnels, it was very claustrophobic. God knows how they did it.

OK, got to go and check out of the hotel and then get the taxi to the airport. I'm flying to Hanoi to meet Nick and then I'll travel south along the coast from there. I hope my holiday picks up a bit.

It's good but Ho Chi Minh City is a bit too busy and crowded. I had a nice dinner in the centre with a girl called Maria from Portugal who I met on the tour. Yes, I had a little one-to-one dinner with Maria from Portugal.

We sat in a busy area and ate rice and spring rolls and we chatted and we exchanged emails. But that is as far as it went. Anyway, let's get moving.

Now I'm sitting in my airport transfer taxi. It's a flash Toyota People Carrier with sat-nav etc. I've paid about £6 or £7 for this, which here is a rip-off.

Definitely feels like Ho Chi Minh City is a business town. The people are nice but I feel like just another tourist, which I am. I guess we're all just searching for that authentic local experience on the edge of civilisation but safe as well.

And yet the more we all search for that, the more we reduce the amount of truly untouched local culture. Ho Chi Minh City is pretty mental and as far as I can see another bustling Asian city. I've only been here a couple of days of course and I've only seen the inside of a hotel room and a few inner city streets, so who am I to judge? I'm looking forward to getting away from some of the touristy areas but I guess I won't be able to if I stick to the well-trodden path.

On my own though, I do feel like playing it quite safe. I'm sure the coastal areas will be more interesting, beautiful and relaxing than Ho Chi Minh City. I hope at least to get some half-decent beach time.

The number of scooters and motorbikes in this city is staggering. It's reaching breaking point. Now I don't know if this is true at all but this is how I felt.

I felt like this is too many scooters. It's reaching breaking point. The government aren't really doing anything about it.

But I think there are plans to regulate it somehow. The air is mega polluted here. Apparently there are 10 million motorbikes or scooters in this city.

That's 2 million more than the number of people. It's crazy. All these people could surely ride bicycles instead.

It's not just the West who should feel responsible for their carbon emissions. Felt quite judgy there. Preachy.

Anyway Nick just called. I've got to get an airport taxi which should cost about 250,000 Vietnamese dong. Right let's move on.

A couple of days later, 2nd of January 2010. Picking up the details of the last few days. I flew to Hanoi hoping it wouldn't be too cold.

It was different. I arrived at 2pm. Not too cold but definitely chilly and grey.

Very overcast with almost constant drizzle. A bit disappointed in terms of, a bit of a disappointment in terms of climate. So the weather wasn't very nice.

It was a bit grey and a bit wet. Taxi ride into Hanoi from the airport was an absolute nightmare. A long journey down the a big traffic jam about halfway there.

Crazy Vietnamese gridlock. That's where all the cars are all just like locked. I mean not locked with a key but just all the cars, none of the cars can move.

Just total gridlock with bikes and cars weaving in and out like the way a crowd of people operates. Finally I got to Hanoi. It's also quite, it's also quite dirty and noisy.

Constant traffic and beeping horns. A slightly smaller atmosphere though. I will describe more later.

12 o'clock at night on the 3rd of January on a completely crazy boat in Halong Bay. So at this point I ended up on a boat in Halong Bay. This UNESCO heritage site with the big limestone islands that stick up out of the water.

And at this point I was on a boat. A completely crazy old wooden boat in the middle of Halong Bay with a bunch of euro travellers and a decidedly dodgy tour guide. So this tour guide that none of us trusted.

Although he's more of a sketchy wheeler dealer guy. So like a kind of wheeler dealer. A guy who's doing little deals and a sort of businessman who acted as our tour guide but none of us trusted him.

I was on there with a bunch of other European tourists and we're all, we're all kind of like, I remember we all were put onto this boat. None of us knew what was going on and we all sat down together and we were like, oh have they got your passport? Yeah they've got my passport. Oh no.

I don't know. I hope we get our passports back. Anyway this is crazy isn't it? I'm now lying in a vibrating bed and that's not, it shouldn't have been vibrating.

It was just vibrating because it was above the engine room of the boat. So now lying in a vibrating bed at the back of a mouse ridden wooden junk, that's a type of boat, which is drifting round and round in circles in the middle of the bay. The whole time my bed is vibrating and there's a very loud noise of a Harley-Davidson sounding generator right below me like this.

Imagine someone has just started a Harley-Davidson motorbike and just put it right next to your bed and they're not going anywhere but the engine is still running. That was what it was like for me. Our guide said he'd turn that off in a minute but you can't hold this guy to anything, meaning you can't, you can't be sure, you can't get any certainty from this guy.

You can't hold him to anything. What can I say? This particular experience is a little bit disappointing in terms of its sketchy grab-a-buck nonchalance, meaning all the guide wanted to do is just like get our money and didn't really care about the experience that we were having. Everyone is quite unimpressed by the vaguely unfriendly cash-hungry local guides and the general unorganised total lack of system pervading everything.

The weather in Halong Bay is foggy and overcast. Nevertheless it is beautiful and mysterious. There are nice people on the boat despite the potential student-teacher vibe due to my being a native English speaker and everyone else surrounding me on the boat having English as their second language and I noticed that it instantly snapped into the kind of student-teacher vibe where everyone wanted to learn English from me and they were asking me questions about English and all this sort of stuff.

I suddenly felt like I was an English teacher on my holiday. It's all right, that's okay. Kayaking, so we ended up, some of us ended up in little kayaks, canoes, kayaking in the bay around the islands and then racing to get back to the boat before the sun went down and then dinner and then a drunken game of cards and now for a potentially sleepless night again and getting very little sleep out here.

But the, yes, the canoe trip, so we were offered a canoe trip and so some of us were up for it including me. I love canoeing in a kayak, you know, when you have a single paddle that you hold in your hands and you put the ends of the paddle in the water and you can canoe your way around. So a few canoes were brought over and a few of us went into the canoes.

There were no life jackets, so we had no life vests at all, we were just in our normal clothes and we were suddenly kayaking around Halong Bay and kayaking off to this area where there was like a cave and a sort of hidden lake inside this cave and we kayaked around it and then we realised that the sun was going down and we had no lights, so it was a mad rush to kayak back to our boat.

We couldn't quite remember which boat it was, we were kayaking in between these big wooden boats, it was extremely dodgy, no life vests, no idea which boat was ours. I don't know how we managed to finally get back onto our boat, but we did.

But the whole experience was very close, it was very edgy, we were thinking, is this okay? Is this legal? What's going on here? Where are our passports? We didn't know what was going on. 3rd of January, 9.15am, sitting on the top deck of the boat in Halong Bay. It's still misty, but better than yesterday.

Most of the other travellers from the yesterday have disembarked onto an island. Now I've got some Germans or Polish people on board. Halong Bay is awesome, even on an overcast day.

I've taken so many photos I'm a bit photoed out, meaning fed up of taking photos. I slept well last night and I feel sleepy now, but that's partly jet lag still. I'm going to cruise around Halong Bay today a little bit more, I think then I'll be dropped off on the mainland for a bus trip back to Hanoi.

The tour from Hanoi was a bit of a disaster, so that's describing how I got from Hanoi to Halong Bay, and there's other stuff like time I spent with Nick and his friends as well that I haven't described. But the tour from Hanoi to Halong Bay was a disaster. I arrived at the travel agency too early, at 7.30am, and then got completely grifted for 50,000 dong for two tiny bananas and some bread that a woman in the street sold me.

She initially wanted 80,000. I paid 50,000 for two bits of bread and two tiny bananas. And after this transaction, the woman walked off

down the street laughing out loud and saying something in Vietnamese that sounded to me like she was saying, what a sucker.

Anyway, I then waited for an hour and a half for a tour guide to pick me up, and the bus was so full that I didn't have a seat. The bus was overbooked. A child had to sit on someone's lap, and then I had to sit on a very uncomfortable folding chair on the bus, surrounded by bags and people.

So I was trapped with no leg room on this very, very uncomfortable folding kind of deck chair for the entire journey. Three and a half hours. The tour guide didn't really have a seat.

On the way, looking out the window, I could see some sights, and it was, I have to say, less than impressive. It was kind of dirty and drizzly, and lots of little satellite towns and some factories making random stuff like concrete tubes, seat belts, and things. Eventually got to Ha Long Bay, and the badly organised tour continued with everyone standing near the dock waiting to be put on boats.

This was like a huge crowd of tourists, all pushing and shoving and moving about, all crammed into one area. I mean, surely it's not always like that. I don't know, but I think it's probably because I chose the improvised budget backpacker experience that I ended up in this situation.

But imagine a huge crowd of tourists. We all had come from different tours, all with different guides, all crammed into one area. The tour guide, our tour guide, didn't seem to have a clue what was going on.

He was wandering around confused. No one knew where anything was. And then he demanded our passports.

He took our passports from us and kept them, and we weren't very happy about that. Everyone started looking around at each other. We all got very worried, because it was chaos, basically.

Some people had paid loads of money for the tour and were genuinely pissed off and angry. We all talked to each other, and it turned out that there were massive differences in how much money we'd all paid for basically the same experience. Some people are like, how much have you paid for this? How much have you paid? How much have you paid? We're all on the same boat with the same guide having the same experience, but everyone's paid different amounts of money.

Again, I'm sure this is not what tourist experiences are usually like in Vietnam, but I was having the cheap backpacker experience, so you get what you pay for to an extent. Finally got onto a boat, and we set sail into the bay, and we checked out some of the murky views of these islands appearing. Eventually some impressive towering islands were surrounding us with misty tops invisible from us.

It was very atmospheric. We had lunch on the boat, and we got off to visit a pretty impressive cave. Our guide's job was to point out stalactites and stalagmites that looked like animals.

Stalactites are when, you know, inside a cave, as water over thousands of years drips from the ceiling, it leaves these incredible

hanging rock formations that hang from the ceiling. Those are stalactites, and stalagmites are the same things but they're on the floor. So this cave was full of these impressive stalactites and stalagmites that looked like animals, and it was the job of the tour guide to point out the ones that looked like different things.

So he was like, this one looks like a frog, this looks like a dog, this one is an elephant, there's the Virgin Mary, there's a man's penis, you know, that was his job. Good views of the bay, fantastic views, and then we, and then the kayaking experience around some of the islands. Kayaking is great, I love doing it.

I used to do kayaking when I was younger. My brother and I were part of a kayaking club. I should do it more often.

I'm still not bad at it, but we kayaked until it got dark, and it was a bit of a scary race to get back to the kayaking area and our boat, and then we had dinner on the boat, and banter, meaning just like funny conversation with the other people, and beer, and then to bed with the loud generator and the vibrating bed. The guide said he'd turn it off but he didn't, so I told the guide to do it myself. So I got up and told the boat, I guess the captain of the boat, to turn it off, and he actually did, and then we finally got peace and quiet, and I was a hero.

I was the hero of the boat for doing that. I don't know why they would need it. Maybe, I hope that, maybe they needed the generator to, I don't know, to make the TV work so they could watch the football or something.

They probably hated me for making them turn it off. Anyway, so Hanoi then. On the 31st of December, I flew there and got a taxi from the airport.

As I said, a long taxi ride through very intense traffic jam. The driver was getting increasingly stressed and vocal, shouting out of the window, lots of pointless beeping of the horn at lots of non-moving traffic as if it could possibly make a difference, and it's the same thing they do here in Paris if there's a traffic jam. All the drivers start beeping their horn as if the people, as if the cars in front are like, oh, oh, oh sorry, oh yeah, sorry, let's go.

I don't understand the beeping of the horn. Lots of traffic moving across different lanes, mad random traffic. They seemingly have no system here at all.

Got into Hanoi. Nick's street is quite narrow, still loads of scooters constantly droning past and beeping, shops and stuff in the street, a B-52 memorial, loads of broken bits of B-52 bombers, American planes on the floor behind a fence, and then a clean, well-kept Soviet MiG fighter on display as well, lording it over these broken bits of American planes. Waited in a cafe for Nick with the worst coffee ever.

It was brought out with a jug of condensed milk which looked like ectoplasm, like this condensed milk which could have like slowly oozed out of the cup. I think that this is Vietnamese coffee and actually I'm probably being very disrespectful. I think that a lot of people have a taste for Vietnamese coffee and it's a well-known thing, but for me it wasn't what I expected and the condensed milk, this kind of sugary, gloopy milk stuff was not what I wanted.

I found it incredibly sweet and actually disgusting. Disgusting. Sorry everyone.

I sat and waited. The town is drizzly and skanky. The locals pretty much ignore you.

They don't really speak English and it feels to me kind of like at the end of the world. I spot a rat on the floor of the cafe out of the corner of my eye. Sorry Vietnamese listeners if you get the impression I'm painting a negative picture of your city.

Later on in my trip I did have some much better and some genuinely wonderful experiences in Hanoi including sitting under a canopy outside a restaurant, eating noodles in the street, eating fur in the street late at night while the rain patted on the top of the canopy and it was very atmospheric and wonderful, but my first impression wasn't that great. I read some Sherlock Holmes and then Nick arrived. It was great to see a friendly face.

He took me to his place. Four or five floors of quite grand and clean building. Definitely a sort of French colonial style.

In my room I've got a double bed, there's the internet, there's TV. We head out for New Year's Eve. First we drink a few light watery local beers in a beer hoy with Ronan, an Irish guy who works with Nick.

Beer hoy is like a little stand in the street, often just a guy in the street who serves very cheap generic locally brewed beer. It's kind

of like watered down home brew and it costs about 10 to 30 pence a glass. I think this is why Nick loves it so much.

We sit and we banter about stuff. We watch the Vietnamese drink an evil paint stripper vodka. Then we head to a nice curry house and we meet some more friendly expats.

Delicious curry. Then on to an international bar slash club called the Press Club. A weird mixed crowd of Vietnamese and Westerners and some children too.

More booze. Glorified karaoke act on stage. Vietnamese girls who sing like the Pussycat Dolls but terrible music.

Beyoncé in concert video on the big screen with sound turned down. So this band were performing on stage basically doing karaoke but then on the screens there was a Beyoncé concert video with the sound turned down which I never really understood. New Year's Eve rolls in and everyone including um including our drinks get covered in glitter.

So all this glitter exploded everywhere and we all ended up completely covered in glitter and it was all in our drinks and everything. I still have some glitter on me now. Not now 16 years later though I wouldn't be surprised but at the end of the night.

More beer um and we move on through the empty wet streets of Hanoi to a pho place on the corner of Pho Alley. Pho is a I think I'm pronouncing it correctly is a kind of noodle soup with beef served with fried dumplings called Khoi. Khoi I'm not sure how to say it

sorry Vietnamese people but it is a staple Vietnamese food and it's delicious.

Not too rich quite light and tasty and perfect for 2am when you've had a skin full of beer. Then a long walk through the streets to another bar. Hanoi is best at night in these conditions drinking beer hoi or eating fur under a canopy in the street the rain dripping down or walking through wet muddy streets with tall French style buildings hanging over your head balconies corncicing colonial architecture with a far east feel.

In another bar and lose some other people it's just me and Nick and some weirdo bar flies in a place called Half Man Half Noodle. A colleague of Nick's is there an American woman who's been here for years boring she was drunkenly going on and on totally ignored me and was a little bit rude. Eventually we went home after waking up a taxi driver.

Funny argumentative banter between Nick and the driver apparently they argued with each other about something. That night sleep like a log and wake up at 2pm the next day do some sightseeing of sketchy grey communist Hanoi Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum the lake etc and then I think it's more attractive than Ho Chi Minh city but Ho Chi Minh city is more tourist friendly and English speaking. Then at the crack of dawn the next day I go to Ha Long Bay and here I am on the boat.

Tomorrow I go to Hue by plane at 7am. I have to be up at about 4am. Will I get any sleep at all tonight? Where am I going to stay in Hue? We shall see.

Ha ha ha just been asked by another tour guide if we'd like to visit the fisting village. No one wanted to go to the fisting village. I don't know what the fisting village is.

I don't remember that at all. Sitting here outside the generic tourist restaurant waiting for a bus to go back to Hanoi. Vietnam right now feels like a massive tourist trap.

I think that's just because I was a tourist. The hundreds of tourists who just cruise around searching for beautiful untouched pockets of culture and then spread the word causing more and more people to go there. The local culture changes.

The people become keen for cash tasteless tourist trap hotels and resorts spring up. The locals push up prices. Tonnes of tacky stuff is hawked in the streets in markets.

The locals come out in force to hassle the tourists. That's not a very positive assessment but the best of my holiday was yet to come actually and the best times I had on this holiday were not in the big cities. Looking forward to heading down to more promising areas and catching some rays on the beach.

Rays, that's sunlight, sunshine. Also I'm slightly looking forward to my week in London when I get back and I was due to have a week off. Getting a new sofa, watching some movies, doing some comedy and music, cleaning the flat, seeing friends.

I feel like that Beatles song. Without going out of my door I can know all there is to know and see all the world. That's a George Harrison song called The Inner Light.

It's all about basically you don't need to travel the world to reach enlightenment. You don't need to do that. You can do it all from inside your home.

You can travel through meditation, through the astral plane and that you don't actually need to travel. So I think I was a little bit over the whole backpacking experience at this point thinking this is unnecessary. I can just stay at home and I can achieve enlightenment from my own home.

Without going out of my door I can know all there is to know and see all the world. This tourism culture leaves a slightly bad taste but I am sitting at a tourist bus station. I don't know how Nick and the others can live in Hanoi permanently.

It's just so kind of difficult. Lack of English, doctors, insurance. How do they deal with those things? The constant motorbikes, the weather, the dirt in the streets, nice food but you get used to it after a while.

Are they just here because the beer is cheap? I was wondering. Admittedly it does have charm especially the rainy beer hoi or fur stands and the freedom of just going by scooter and being relatively wealthy. Then I wrote down some teaching and learning English ideas which I won't go into now.

It's all stuff I've talked about on the podcast before but I did this diagram which seemed to me to be a sort of summary of the secret to learning and teaching English. That essentially it's a combination of input, practise and feedback. Input teaching the students the

language, practise the students using it in controlled and free ways and then feedback that's the teacher responding directly to the way that the learners are using English.

Then these things all cross over where you can get input and feedback at the same time like for example correction, correcting errors and introducing the correct forms which is a form of input combined with feedback, analysis and remedial language work. Then you can have feedback and practise that's again correction with repetition or error correction by the students and you can have practise and input at the same time. Practise and input that would be drills like pronunciation drills, repeating sentences or doing controlled language practise work but the best English lessons combine all of these three things all at the same time.

Some sort of input, feedback and practise all seamlessly happening together. So I was thinking a lot about English teaching, stand-up comedy and all the other things I was doing while I was there. How are we getting on listeners? I think it's time for a of water after an hour and a half of this.

Will I get through this entire diary in this one session? You know what I don't think I will. I would like to, I really would because there's a few funny moments in here and a few interesting tangents into the world of comedy and movies and things. To be fair it kind of ends there so I'm about halfway through.

There are some pages I'm not going to read from where I talk about some famous comedians. I think that's too much so there will be some I'll skip but I'm about halfway through the diary and I didn't start reading from the diary until about halfway through this

so I think there's probably about an hour's worth of diary reading ahead of me. Now I can't do all of that in this one episode.

I can't do that in this one episode. I mean I can't do that in this one recording session because in about 20 minutes I've got to go out. So you know what I'm going to stop here and I'll continue this tomorrow.

I think that's the plan. Okay but this is going to have to be done in one single episode because as you know I don't like to split my episodes up into parts these days. It just doesn't work for me so let's just have a little break for a second and I'll pause the recording and I'll continue this tomorrow.

So let's carry on tomorrow okay with this and how's this going for you? Are you enjoying going on this trip with me? Are you Vietnamese? How do you feel about me talking about my experience of travelling to your country? There have been a few negative points in there but overall my trip was definitely positive so stick around, listen to the rest of it, find out some of the funny little things that happened to me. Will I find romance on this trip or not? And how is my experience positive ultimately at the end? That's what's coming up in this episode. So I'm going to click my fingers and when I've unclicked them it will be the next day and we'll carry on with this epic episode.

Here we go and we're back and it's the next day and it isn't even 10 a.m yet and it is baking mate. I am absolutely sweltering mate. It's baking Dave.

It's really really hot. I'm wondering if it's as hot if not even hotter than it was in Vietnam when I was backpacking around it 16 years ago. We're about halfway through my trip at this point and I hope you're enjoying this episode.

I obviously have no idea what you're thinking as you listen to this but I really hope that you're enjoying it. It's actually, reading through this diary made me realise that actually it was a very intensive trip. Lots of travelling, lots of late nights and early mornings, a lot of distance covered.

Now I'm in my late 40s I just kind of think oh that would be a bit too much for me now. It sounds exhausting but it was okay at the time. It's very nice.

I have to say it's very nice for me to be able to share this trip with you. I have told some people about the trip obviously I told or just you know explained or described or talked about some of the things I did with some people but I've never been able to share every single moment like this before. It was always something I experienced alone so it's nice to be able to share it with you.

Just a reminder then of where we've got to so far. So landed in Ho Chi Minh City, spent a few days there, very busy streets, loads of scooters, war museum for some really horrific history and then visits to the temple and the tunnels and stuff like that. No romance, one dinner with a Portuguese girl but other than that no other kind of love interest at this stage in proceedings.

Then on to Hanoi to meet my friend Nick and hang out with his colleagues and his flatmates. New Year's Eve party, rainy

atmospheric streets in Hanoi with scooters going round and round the lake in the middle of the city. That was how a lot of people spent New Year's Eve on their scooters riding round and round and round this lake like a big party all on scooters just everyone just constantly riding round and round the lake.

And then on to Halong Bay, this sort of this UNESCO heritage site with these incredible atmospheric looking little islands rising up out of the water. Amazing place but a terrible tour, horrible boat, quite a worrying kayaking trip, mouse ridden boat with an engine constantly running. I did get my passport back eventually, found my way back to found my way back to Hanoi and then I think even the next day, is it the very next day that I flew to my next destination? Anyway that's where we ended in sort of part one of the this, we're roughly halfway through my trip.

Let's carry on then, 4th of January 2010, 4th of January 2010. At this point I was in a little guest house or hotel place in this lovely coastal town called Hue which is I think a very traditional place, lots of temples there, not a big city, a bit more rural on the coast, a different climate, much hotter, much sunnier. So I went down to this historical place called Hue and that's where I was when I was writing this.

So just taking some respite from the outside world for a couple of hours by staying in my room and making sure I know my plans properly for the next few days. Now I'm in Hue after a ridiculously early start this morning. I was up at 3.30am to get a taxi at about 4.45am from outside Nick's place in Hanoi.

I was worried the taxi wouldn't come. I remember standing there in this dark kind of slightly rainy street with almost no one about, the occasional scooter whizzing by at the end of the road but just waiting in the darkness thinking is my taxi actually going to come? Am I going to miss my flight? It did come eventually, I got to the airport in good time and then slept the entirety of the one hour flight. I didn't even experience the take off.

I sat down in my seat and bam, I was out like a light. I was fast asleep. Landed in Hue at about 8am.

It's a much nicer place than everywhere else I've seen so far. Quieter, more chilled out, warmer, interesting old imperial city. I was picked up by a motorbike guy who kind of blagged his way into touring me around Hue tomorrow from 9.30am. So I think I've found a place to stay and outside this place there was this guy on a motorbike and as I said before I talked about grifting.

There wasn't quite as much grifting as you would get in India but there was a bit and there were some motorbike guys who would kind of give you quite a hard sell trying to sell themselves as the ultimate tour guide and that they would ride you around on a motorbike all day and I got kind of persuaded by one of these guys to be toured around by him. I mean admittedly it's not really that much money considering the exchange rate and the fact that you're going to be basically motorbiked around by a local bloke. So he picked me up at the airport it seems.

He took me to a nice little hotel where I am now. I checked in and booked my next few moves. A bus and then train tickets with a helpful girl called Anne.

I've got a busy 7 days of moving from place to place ahead of me but hopefully these will be the good spots in this Vietnam trip. Rented a crappy bicycle and cruised around mainly inside the citadel. So the citadel is this ancient imperial city with like a walled city full of quite old looking relics.

Lovely warm and relaxed town atmosphere. Parked the bike and strolled around the remains of the imperial city. Really just another ruined set of temple style buildings but very pleasant.

Absolutely knackered meaning very tired because of such an early start slash jet lag slash beers with Nick yesterday evening after I finally got back from my crazy Halong Bay trip. We watched the end of Man United versus Leeds. Somehow we ended up watching a premiership football game.

Everyone in Vietnam supports Manchester United. Leeds won 1-0. Then after the imperial city I had lunch in a tourist friendly place.

Got a bit of grift from a guy who adamantly told me to cancel my Hoi An bus trip and go with him on his motorbike just as I am sure Huw, that's my other motorbike guy, yeah his name was Huw, um like what like Huw Grant? I don't know. Is that a Vietnamese name? It sounds like a very English name to me. Anyway I expected that Huw would also try to grift me into letting him drive me down to Hoi An.

He had a notebook, this is this other motorbike guy, he had a notebook with tourist testimonials inside going on about how great it was and how his trip was just like Top Gear. I think there must be

an episode of Top Gear where they go to Vietnam. It's probably true but I've booked my coach.

I have to lie to Huw tomorrow about my bus trip and say that I have to be back at the hotel for 12.30 to meet some friends otherwise he'll get pissed off with Ann. So there was like a bit of complicated politics between the motorbike guys and the people running the hotels and um the motorbike guys expect the girls in reception at the hotel to kind of go along with their grift and she didn't so I had to lie to him. It was all a bit complicated.

Now I'm so sleepy and just hiding in my room. Anyone who's ever travelled to another place, anyone who's ever been travelling in a completely different place will understand that feeling of sometimes just wanting to hide in your room. I remember the first time I went to Japan.

Did I ever tell you that I lived in Japan? The first time I went to Japan and I like the first week I was there I was so culture shocked and so jet lagged that I just had this desire to just hide in my room and also the first time I came to France when I first lived here. I remember at the beginning of that I was a little bit reluctant to go outside. These days it seems crazy that I would be intimidated by going out and walking around in Paris and doing things like going to a place for lunch and stuff like that but I used to be very nervous about it and I just often wanted to just stay at home.

Um I'm about to get up and try and find the beach. It should be fun. My legs got all bitten during lunch today by mosquitoes.

I'm trying to ignore that now. Okay I'm off. So at this point it was 6 40 p.m and I've written this.

Christ this holiday just goes from this holiday just goes from bizarre to bizarre. So yeah I was having at this point I was starting to have some strange experiences because when you go on holiday or travelling with a friend or with friends you just have adventures. You just go off on adventures and um but when you're on your own those same experiences end up feeling like random misadventures because you feel a little bit unsure of yourself.

You don't know quite what's going to happen. You're a little bit more nervous and when you're on your own you don't have anyone to sort of share the experience with and so you're just in your own head and it feels very strange. So yes this holiday just goes from bizarre to bizarre.

After my last entry I thought I'd cycle to the beach. It turns out it's 15 kilometres away. So I get on the back of a motorbike with a motorbike guy and for 180 000 Vietnamese Dong probably far too much he rides me off towards the coast.

We ride through mini villages over bridges across paddy fields and dusty roads. I'm on the back of this motorbike the only foreigner around and I'm thinking what the hell am I doing and finally we reach the beach and it's like the end of the world or something that's how it felt. The motorcyclist is nice though and he agrees to wait an hour or two.

So, I've just been delivered to this—this completely deserted beach. It feels—it felt very kind of Mad Max, and the motorcyclist basically agreed to wait for an hour or two, sort of at the back of the beach, while I just, I guess, did what I did. And there was a woman who owned a little shack, like a tiny little wooden building, and she led me to an old, broken plastic deck chair out on the beach, not that far from the water.

And I sat there and just stared out into the distance across the South China Sea. And I've continued—it's more like a beach in a Mad Max movie. The woman does speak a little bit of English and basically asks me these things. She said, "Are you alone? No friends? No girl?" I try to explain that my cousin Ollie is sick, etc., and try and tell her the whole story. Do you know about Bill Hartzia? Have you heard of Bill? And I had to try to explain that my normal travelling companion is sick and, yes, no girl. But the woman doesn't really understand. She probably thinks it's very strange that this person has chosen to travel from across the other side of the world to sit on this broken plastic chair and look out across this—this beach, which has admittedly got a lot of litter and rubbish on it, and then the—the water.

So I sit there at the edge of the world, staring out across the South China Sea, which is a bit muddy, and I just think to myself: what am I doing here without a girl or, at least, another person? I felt pretty lonely, but it wasn't too bad, you know, because after all, I was sitting on a beach in the sunshine. Eventually, I head back on the motorbike with the sun going down.

I think I spent some time reading a book there, which is actually, now come to think of it, it just sounds like absolute heaven that I often fantasise about—just being allowed to sit in a chair in the

middle of nowhere just so I could just read a book on my own for a while. I head back on the motorbike with the sun going down—beautiful scenes, actually, if you can imagine riding across the Vietnamese countryside in this lovely, warm evening with the sun going down on a motorbike. It was actually very, very beautiful.

Back to the hotel and relax by watching a film called *Michael Clayton* on TV. Do you know *Michael Clayton*? This is a film starring George Clooney as a lawyer who kind of uncovers some sort of corporate wrongdoing, some kind of evil corporate plot, and it's very serious, but it's very good. So I watched *Michael Clayton* in the hotel room, which is a pretty good film, if a bit serious and dark, and then head out for dinner.

So I just went out, not knowing where I would go in this fairly small town, fairly quiet town, thinking, "I'll—I expect I'll find a place, maybe some noodles or something like that." It's a bit humid, but it's nice. Quite a dearth of restaurants—meaning not very many in which I will stand half a chance of ordering food in. Mainly just corner stalls with little plastic chairs in the street. I can't find anywhere, so I settle for a Western-looking place with a menu outside.

I go in, and it's like a super cheesy nightclub with a DJ playing Vietnamese pop music—ballads, really loud. And then I've written—and I was writing this in the restaurant, and I said—and now they've just put on a fucking laser, which is streaming around the place like a green strobe light. This is ridiculous! I can't help but laugh at my situation. It sucks being alone, but this is just mad. It would be hilarious with someone else. So imagine me sitting there—I didn't really realise it at the time I sat—went in and sat down, but it was basically a kind of weird nightclub with incredibly

loud Vietnamese pop music and lasers and strobe lights, and I just wanted to have something to eat. I ordered a Cajun chicken sandwich and fries, so I will scoff that and then get the hell out of this place and go back to the hotel, watch a movie, and hit the hay—meaning go to bed. Now I'm just going to have to sit here like a lemon and just wait for my food. Ah, here it is!

Then I've written some notes: English for nightclubs. Because, you know, you have English for different situations. English for—English for meetings, English for presentations, English for the oil and gas industry, English for doctors, English for nightclubs. Here's some useful English that you can use in a nightclub. So the first thing is: "What? What? It's—it's loud, isn't it? Yeah, sorry, I can't hear you! Can you say that again? It's too..." There you go, English for nightclubs.

Next day, 5th of January 2010 at 12.03 pm. Yesterday's Ruby debacle—that was the name of the place I went to—was pretty ridiculous. I quickly split from there, meaning left. It was expensive, too: 99,000 dong for the sandwich and the beer. The—the way version of one of those ridiculous nightclubs in town that charges ridiculous amounts and attracts rich idiots who go there just to show how rich they are, yes. And then I go off on a bit of a rant. Are you ready?

The flaunting of money just to show that they have it proves that they have no class. Money itself doesn't have real value; it's the other stuff. And then I've continued—I started this statement with really—a really clear vision that it was going to be great, but I lost my thought train. Always happens to me. I can't write as fast as I think, and I can't remember. So I have an idea while writing, but by the time I get to write it, I've forgotten it, and then it's lost into the

ether. So I had some righteous indignation about rich people flaunting their money, and then while I was writing it, I just forgot what the point was. Not the greatest political commentator in the world.

So I got home to the hotel—more like a guest house—and watched TV, hoping to see something good. I watched the end of *Bad Boys II*, Will Smith film, pretty rubbish. Then I watched Bear Grylls. You know Bear Grylls? He's a sort of—he's a British survivalist, although he's a bit controversial because he's been criticised as not really—he makes these TV shows where he goes off into the wilderness and survives, but the criticism is that a lot of it's fake, and that he's not really sleeping in some like, um, handmade, um, like a bivouac that he's made out of leaves or something. That, in fact, he just makes it, and then he goes off and stays in a hotel, and it's all fake. But Bear Grylls, he's a very famous person.

So I ended up watching Bear Grylls in the Panama jungle. This guy has no real kudos at all. His methods are shit. He doesn't really survive out there; he cheats all over the place, builds appalling shelters and hardly even lies in them, and just does sensational stuff like eating locusts, scrambling up muddy banks, risking his life unnecessarily, and he fails to catch fish with his shirt. He's not Ray Mears.

Ray Mears is—I've got Ray Mears's book here. Ray Mears is the real deal. If you want like a really good, um, survivalist who's made some excellent television programmes, you've got to check out Ray Mears. I think you can probably find some Ray Mears videos on YouTube, but this guy's like, you know, the real deal—an excellent survivalist, is that the right word? He does bushcraft, you know, like, um, very ancient, uh, knowledge about doing things like

starting fires and gathering food when you are in the forest and stuff like that. Um, the guy's brilliant, and he's much better than Bear Grylls, even though Bear Grylls does make some pretty entertaining TV, but he's not a really decent, um, he's not a really decent, um, professional though, I think.

Um, had a good night's sleep last night. I still feel pretty screwed up, though—too much sun today. I need to avoid the sun if I can, well, avoid it a bit. Motorbike guy came to pick me up at 9:30. I think that's Hugh—no, not Hugh, another bloke—and told me to tell him a lie about going to Hoi An by bus, or he'd get angry. It's pretty competitive around here finding tourists and booking them on tours. Lots of motorbike guys carry notepads with handwritten testimonials by English-speaking tourists saying how you won't regret taking the guy. It's probably real. Nevertheless, I'd rather not take my chances. Now I kind of think to myself, maybe I should have done that. I think I probably would have had a better chance, but then again, when you're on your own, you kind of think, "I don't really want to be sort of stuck with one person like that." Um, I think I'd rather take the safe option and go on the—the coach, which is probably cheaper as well.

My motorbike guy's main topic of conversation was what me and my two made-up friends were going to be doing later. No doubt he was scheming on riding us around. Fair enough. I said no, though, and weaved a web-like tapestry of lies around him, sending him off on a number of mental wild goose chases, ultimately leaving him flummoxed, and so he gave up the line of questioning.

Did you catch that? So basically, I weaved a web-like tapestry of lies, which just means I told a lot of lies. I weaved a web of lies, um, and sent him off on a number of mental wild goose chases. A

wild goose chase is where you go off trying to find something, and it often involves going from here to here to here trying to find something and ultimately not being able to find it—going off on a wild goose chase. It's like when you go into town because you need to buy, I don't know, a certain type of screwdriver, and you go from one shop to another shop, and that shop sends you to that shop, and they say, "We haven't got any here, but you might find it in that shop," and you go over there, and you're on a wild goose chase trying to find this screwdriver, and eventually you don't even get it.

So I was sending this motorbike guy off on a different—a number of mental wild goose chases, saying, "Oh, I'm going to meet my friends here, and then we're going to do this," and he's kind of like trying to plan how he's going to find his way into our plans so that we end up paying him loads of money for driving us around. But I was like, you know, weaving this web-like tapestry of lies, leading him off on lots of wild goose chases, ultimately leaving him flummoxed. So if you're flummoxed, it means you're sort of confused and you don't know what to think. So, uh, "don't really understand," that's flummoxed. And so he gave up the line of questioning. Key phrases for doing this are basically—key phrases for not being very specific and not committing to anything in this situation: "Oh, I'll think about it," and saying, "No, no, on foot, on foot," saying I'd be doing a lot of things on foot, and just simply saying no.

I paid him quite handsomely at the end of our trip—that's a nice collocation, isn't it? Isn't it? To pay someone handsomely, meaning to pay them a good amount of money. Uh, and he was pleased. He took me out to a couple of very nice spots: a Buddhist temple with

a bunch of young monks praying, typical Buddhist monk stuff, then on to a tomb in a lovely pine forest—a tomb for an emperor-type guy. Now it's a bit broken, but still very atmospheric and impressive. I took the standard photos, none of them particularly outstanding, I expect, because of my crappy camera phone.

I stopped at a little cafe and had a Coke with the driver and a sweet woman who owned the place. I remember one of them pointing out to me that I had big ears, which is quite a random sort of, uh, conversation starter: "Ah, you have—you have big ears." But it was a compliment because he said in Vietnam this is very—this is very good luck. So that—so I've got that going for me. Um, I showed these two pictures of London and chatted in a kind of pidgin English and made them laugh with comments on the differences between CNN and BBC—good banter. What would I have been saying? You know—you know, "You're watching CNN... you're watching the BBC..." I was probably doing all that sort of thing.

Back to Hue now, and I'm waiting to get the bus to Hoi An. Still isn't here. It's going to be long, potentially a hot bus ride. I hope I get a decent seat on the left side of the coach to check out the views, because we would be going down the coast, so I wanted to be—I want to be on the left side of the coach so I could see the views of the—of the seaside. Then I'll need to find a place in Hoi An and go to the beach. I might go for a ride to some scenic areas tomorrow.

So, 7:45 the same day p.m. in Hoi An. Oh my god, I arrived in Hoi An about an hour and 45 minutes ago. Lovely bus ride—a sleeper bus, which I'd never seen before. You basically lie on reclining chairs, so these are chairs that—that kind of go all the way back,

and you can pretty much lie down if you want. It's a pity it was only a four-hour journey. I resisted urges to fall asleep because I'd heard that there were some great views. The views were good, but not unbelievable. It wasn't New Zealand or Mount Fuji or Scotland, for that matter, but certainly some beautiful, classic Vietnamese scenes. No helicopters like in the movies. I listened to a host of tunes on my MP3 player—remember MP3 players? I had a little sort of pen drive MP3 player loaded up with different songs. It was a bit crap, though, because it—it kept turning off.

When it thinks the battery is dead it just switches itself off and in fact the battery isn't dead and then when you turn it you know when you when it turns itself off you can't continue from where you left off. So a very basic mp3 player but it must have been nice to be on that lovely comfortable coach for a change. Most of the bus rides were unbelievably uncomfortable and long.

I remember one bus drive, I don't remember where I was, but I was at the back of the bus sitting next to this local Vietnamese girl who at some point fell asleep and put a head on my shoulder so I had this I had like this kind of um surprisingly cosy cuddly little coach ride with this Vietnamese girl basically sleeping on on my shoulder. Anyway I arrived in Hoi An after some banter with some Aussie lads. So I met some Australian lads, quite good banter but a bit laddish for me.

If something's a bit laddish they're probably a bit I don't know a bit sort of rude, maybe some sexual stuff. I expect. Got a taxi with a 50 something traveller so a traveller in his 50s who I think wanted to be left alone so I split, meaning I left, and strolled into town.

Easily found a basic place to stay called the Hoi Pho Hotel. Good name recalls the Hanoi delights of beer hoi and late night pho on a rainy street corner. Strolled into town with a semi-intention to purchase a suit because one of the things you can do there is because they have this fabric trade, textile trade, and also they make a lot of bespoke tailored suits in some parts of the country.

I think it's the same in Thailand as well and what people say is that you can go into these places and they will cut a suit for you and you can pick it up the next day. So that was one of the things I was considering doing. I walk straight into a recommended tailor and immediately I'm treated to a great sales pitch by the owner, a woman with plenty of get up and go and a good location.

The product sells itself too. I treated myself to two tailored suits, one of them black with a dark blue lining and grey trim. So that's the, it was black, inside the lining was dark blue with grey trim.

I mean I don't know if that is a very, I don't know if I designed it well at all, those colours. But anyway, I got one black suit and the other one is white. I don't know why I chose it, actually I do know why I chose a white suit, but I mean what a ridiculous thing, I never ever wore it.

But yeah, I bought myself a white suit because I had this idea that I would perform stand-up comedy in a white suit, a bit like Steve Martin did in the 70s. A white suit with light grey lining and black trim, also two shirts, I'm going to look top class I thought to myself. Two hundred dollars for the lot, which is about 130 pounds.

Good value considering any suit in London is off the shelf rubbish. I can't argue with 65 pounds for a nice tailored suit. The suits were okay but I remember when I finally got together with my wife and I showed her the suit, she was like not sure about that suit and it wasn't that great.

Anyway, I just hope I can carry these shirts and suits in my bag. I may have to rearrange some stuff by filling side pockets with worn t-shirts, socks and pants etc. I do have room.

Then after what turned out to be a very pleasant shopping experience, I chatted to the owner about her business for a bit, I've just strolled down to the river to get dinner. And wow, this place is lovely, really nice, warm with a breeze, quiet and atmospheric. It's laid back and the shops are good quality, loads of really nice restaurants and gift shops.

It's the most expensive place I've been to so far but the quality is good. So Hoi An, highly recommended, lovely little spot with I guess it's a canal or a river, I think it's a river that runs through it, it's near the coast and yes, kind of a bit more upmarket, lots of these tailors where you can go and get your clothes cut for you and lots of nice restaurants on the waterfront and a lovely atmosphere in the centre of town. I recommend it a lot.

Last night when I started writing this, I strolled from my hotel which I found easily, quite basic but everything I need with shower, air conditioning, TV with football, HBO, movies etc. and strolled into town in order to get some food. I wandered into a tailor's that had been recommended, I think I wrote about this yesterday.

Anyway, that was a buzz. Then I strolled towards the river and wow, it's nice, classy place with loads of great restaurants lining the river with lights and boats moored at the riverside, gently drifting around. These are boats that were sort of moored but drifting around and lights hung up.

Some traditional live music being played, not too much grift, generally pleasant. Found a restaurant and was lucky enough to get seated. More expensive than I'd been paying, that I'd been paying but what the hell, I'm on holiday and I'm treating myself.

Besides, it's only about five pounds for delicious tiger prawns in garlic sauce, chips, bread and two beers. I sat there not believing my luck because the rest of my experience here has been a little poor by comparison. After dinner, I think the cook was Polish, the chef came out to check my food was okay and what a life he has, running a kitchen in this place.

Perfect really, a steady stream of punters, that's paying customers, fresh ingredients and a lovely location. I said goodbye to the chef and strolled down the river, bought a beer and sat on a bench absorbing the atmosphere. Then I strolled some more over a bridge to the other side for a bit more atmosphere and sat by the river listening to Bob Dylan coming from a bar behind me.

So I sat in front of a bar and they were blasting out Like a Rolling Stone by Bob Dylan, which was a nice atmospheric moment, a special moment. Then I wandered home and chillaxed, that's a combination of relaxed and chilled out. I chillaxed in my room.

Now it's 9.45 and I've just eaten a big breakfast of omelette, bread, milkshake, cappuccino and now I'm about to stroll around town checking out the basic sights. At 12 o'clock I've got to go to the tailors again and then return at 4pm. This afternoon I will endeavour to find the beach.

I might try to rent a bicycle, I'll definitely get very hot because it must be in the high 20s and also humid. I have plenty of water and I've also applied sunblock so here we go. Right, continuing, it's now 6pm on the 6th of January.

Now I'm having a tiger beer on the riverside again as the sun goes down beyond the river. I'm saying no subconsciously to sellers, people coming by trying to sell me things. Grift is too strong a term for this as they don't really implore and beg or deceive like they do in some other places.

And I'm now committing some more thoughts to paper. I'm starting to resent the western couples who populate Hoi An. So to resent someone is to hold bad feelings against them.

So obviously I was on my own but I was surrounded by a lot of other people and a lot of couples especially in this romantic spot. I was surrounded by western couples, so couples from, I don't know, western countries and I started to resent them. And I've written, they lazily stroll the streets or sit in each other's arms.

They probably make love in the evenings or the mornings and lie together talking about their trip. On the other hand, I talk to mosquitoes in a Robert De Niro voice in my hotel room. My life feels funny and ridiculous.

This is true. I did do quite a lot of that. When I'm on my own, I start talking in different weird voices and I would hunt mosquitoes in my room going, where are you? I'm going to find you.

I'm going to find you. I'm going to hunt you down. Where are you mosquito? You son of a bitch, you.

I remember doing that quite a lot and then in the restaurant I was thinking, this is how I spend my time, talking to mosquitoes in a Robert De Niro voice. While all these people are living their best lives, having sex with each other all the time, my life feels funny and ridiculous. I see that as something I have over most people.

So I actually felt like that was something that was an advantage for me, bizarrely, that I lived this ridiculous life. I mean, do you ever feel like that? Do you ever think to yourself, my life is somehow absurd and ridiculous and this is actually a strength somehow. I live some sort of weird, different, my life is different to other people's lives because I have these strange, bizarre and absurd moments.

I felt like that a lot. I think that's largely why comedy was so appealing to me because it gives you a chance to take that absurdity and sort of control it. I must have a sense of the absurd because I feel it every day.

If I can just channel that through my comedy, how do I do it? I just have to try, to listen, to persevere, to be confident, to experiment and to enjoy it. Time plus perseverance. I could do it but I worry

about it being a long and unhappy business, being a stand-up comedian.

Punctuated by moments of sublime joy when people laugh. Yeah, punctuated by sublime joy when people laugh. Is it a good ratio though? I was thinking about the life of a stand-up comedian.

A lot of it's quite hard and punishing but then that's balanced by the amazing experiences you get on stage when people laugh but is it a good ratio? There's a large percentage of struggle, strain, brain-taxing work and effort to think about material, to hone it. Being thick-skinned yet open on stage, being tough and responsive to a crowd, learning to rely on their laughter but not be bothered when they are silent or worse when they disagree, hate and heckle you. But the rewards are when it works and people laugh and love you and you're a star.

Does the fact that I want that adoration make me wrong or broken as a person? Does that make me messed up? No, it doesn't. What makes people messed up is when their personal greed and ego makes them amoral and makes them destroy the lives of others. Oh, getting very deep here.

Um, yes. And then I started writing with a new pen. I've got so much to write this evening, including what I did today, all the business English I thought of earlier on, so I had a big brainstorming session about business English, top comedians I like and what I think of them, the likelihood that this pen will run out in the next 15 minutes.

Okay, just got a menu. The food here is good, apparently. So this is then a report of what I did that day.

So today I strolled around town and checked out little tourist sites dotted around. Not bad, including a Japanese covered bridge. Wow.

And a bunch of temple style buildings which remember important geezers from the past. Some places in Hue had large structures which were built to eulogise dead geezers, dead people, but they're disintegrating already. You can't live forever.

I wonder if this experience on my own is changing me. I suppose we always change whatever we do. Nothing stays the same.

The universe is moving and every atom is ageing. Is it? I'm not sure that's true. We're all made of space dust.

Everything is anyway. A nice spot was an old house which has been home to the same family for generations, a bit touristy. They tried to sell me some vaguely cheesy silk embroidery, but it was nice to sit and have tea with my guide, a member of the family.

I asked questions about the culture in Hoi An and about how she and they feel about tourists. I wonder if I made any kind of an impression on her, like this guy is different from the normal tourists. That probably means I am exactly the same as all the other tourists that she meets.

Then I went back to the suit shop and tried on my suits and shirts. Crikey, pretty nice. Particularly the white one, which is a kind of

extravagant treat to myself and I'll probably never wear it, perhaps only in stand up, though I'm not sure I'll be able to work it into my routine.

Anyway, they required a bit of changing. So back at 4pm, they weren't a perfect fit by any means, but certainly good considering they were cut in about 15 hours. I mean, this is coming from a guy who has no clue about what makes a good suit.

I rented a bike from one of the girls in the shop for 20,000 dong and made my way to the beach in the sunshine. I am surrounded by Australians. Seriously, there's like three Aussie couples and me in this place.

What gives? I feel like I'm committed to a life of being surrounded by Antipodean duos who are just right for each other, which means conveniently suitable. Anyway, I made my way to the beach via some beautiful Vietnamese paddy fields and got to the beach. Nice.

Had lunch, some pho and lounged in the semi-shade for a couple of hours, reading Oliver's book, which is proving to be really good. The book is called Cavalier and Clay by Michael Chabon. I recommend it.

Just lovely to chill on the beach, nicer than India due to the lack of grift. An Aussie couple behind me are playing blackjack. That's a card game.

If I had a girlfriend, we would play cards. This is a sad statement. Right, I'm going to leave the restaurant and freaking stroll like a mofo.

This is a weird one. I've written, I'd quite like to have breakfast with Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Melly Mel, Doonbug, Rahim, Flash and me.

We'd eat jam and lots of fresh juices. Talk about zodiac signs, how hard it is living in New York City. Uh-huh.

Yeah. Okay. Random thought.

Vietnam podcast ideas. So here are some of the ideas that I wrote down for those two podcasts I made, episode 47 and 48. How many modes of transport I've used? How many miles? My carbon footprint.

It's impossible to travel to developing countries without thinking of the economic and cultural issues. For example, my currency is worth more. My economy and infrastructure are more developed.

What is the effect of my travelling to this country? What is the importance of tourism for Vietnam's economy? How does tourism affect the economy? What about the destruction of the local culture? What about inflation? There's always a sense of guilt for paying too less. Maybe I'm paying, I'm not paying enough money for these things, or maybe I'm paying too much. The Disney-ization of things.

The sort of tourist-ization of everything. The positives are for the locals is that they earn, they learn about other things because they get to meet people from around the world. And generally standards probably go up.

I could talk about why I came to Vietnam, where I went, what I did, who I met, the role of English. And then I've written some notes about English for travelling. There are basically two types of contacts.

I think these are some of the things I expanded on in episode 47 or 48. Two types of contact in which you will need to use English. One with locals and two with other tourists.

With the locals, it's usually best to be very basic just because the level of English is usually quite low and you're using English to be transactional, right? It's for pretty basic, practical, transactional purposes. So the most basic, simple way is best. Like, hello, how much, where, how long, and things like that.

I don't understand, can you repeat, how much time, et cetera. How much time is normally better than how long because people don't understand that how long refers to time. So you end up saying things like how much time, how much, when, what time, things like that.

Then secondly, with tourists, here are some of the standard things that you will find yourself saying when you are chatting to tourists that you're meeting while you're travelling. Hi, how's it going? Where are you from? Where in Australia are you from? How long have you been here? How long have you been here? Oh, we've

been here for about a week. How long are you staying? We're staying for two weeks in total.

Where have you been? We've been here, we've been there, we've done this, we've done that. Where are you going to go next? Well, next we're going to go down to Nha Trang. Where are you planning to go next? We're going to go to Nha Trang.

Have you been to Hoi An? Are you going to Hoi An? Did you find, how did you find, how did you find the, how did you find the tunnels, right? How did you find the tunnels? Oh, I thought they were great. How have you found, you know, how have you found the coaches? How have you, how did you find your tourist experience? Is it worth seeing? Is it worth seeing the temple? Oh yeah, the temple is definitely worth seeing, it's really good. Is it worth visiting the temple? Yeah, it's definitely worth visiting.

What was it like? Oh, it was fascinating, it was beautiful. How is it compared to, like, how is it compared to Thailand? Oh, it's, you know, much better. Oh, it's about the same.

Have you travelled much before? Oh yeah, I've been to lots of places, I've been here, I've done this, I've done that. Do you know any places to stay around here? Do you know any places to stay? Is there an ATM nearby? An ATM, that's a machine, where you get cash. Is there an ATM nearby? Do you know the way to the beach? So what do you do back in Australia? Oh, you're a teacher, oh me too.

Have you been here long? Yeah, I've been here for three weeks. Are you staying here long? No idea. Have you tried the fur? And

then, oh, I've been here about seven days now, I'm here until next week, I'm staying until next week, I've got three days left, I've been to this place, this place, and this place.

I flew into Ho Chi Minh City, then I flew up to Hanoi, then I took a bus down to Hoi An, I took a taxi here, I took a train there, I'm going down to Nha Trang later, I passed through Dalat, I'm going up to, um, I'm going up to Hanoi, I'm going into this place, I'm going to stick around, I'm going to stay here. Yeah, I've been there, no, I haven't been there, I didn't manage to go there, I didn't end up going there. How to describe the place? What was Ho Chi Minh City like? Oh, it was frenetic, it was busy, it was loud, it was friendly, it was quiet, it was hot, it was humid, it was sunny, it was expensive, it was difficult, it was easy to find places to stay, it was big, it was small, it has a lot of good places to eat, there's a lot, there's loads of accommodation, there's lots of sightseeing, so, you know, things for, sort of tourist things to see, you can go sightseeing, you can see the sights, it's a bit chilly, it's a bit grey, it's a bit cold, it's a bit wet, it's a bit unfriendly, the people are lovely, friendly, nice, helpful, unfriendly, unhelpful, they speak good or bad English, they don't speak English at all, it's worth seeing, it's great, it's impressive, it's cool, it's interesting, it's amazing, it's not worth seeing, it's a bit of a let down, meaning it's disappointing, it's an anti-climax, that's where you expect it to be great, but it's actually not, it's not as busy, it's not as crazy as Ho Chi Minh City, it's a bit colder, I've been to this place, I've done my fair share of travelling in my life, I haven't been to many places, there are lots of places in the backpacker area, there's an ATM on the corner, there's an ATM at the end of the road, there's an ATM opposite the information office, I'm a teacher, I'm on holiday, I'm on a year off, I'm a bit tempted out, if you are tempted out it means

that you've seen too many temples and you're a bit fed up with them.

Now the next few pages I'm going to skip, I could read through them but I think I'm going to skip them because this is where I decided to write mini essays about my favourite stand-up comedians, I could come back to this at another time, but these were my comedy heroes and you can see how much I was thinking about stand-up comedy at the time, so I wrote about Steve Martin, a little history of Steve Martin, Dimitri Martin, history of his comedy, Bill Hicks, you should check out these comedians, they're all very good, Bill Hicks, Bill Bailey, I did a podcast episode about him once, does a lot of musical comedy, Eddie Murphy, absolute legend of stand-up, obviously became an actor, Eddie Izzard, who of course I met once after this, I didn't expect I'd ever actually meet him but I did meet him and of course I feel like I made a fool of myself by going, you're in my head now, Richard Pryor, one of the greatest stand-up comedians ever. Okay, let's continue then, the 7th of January now, 1.15. Okay, after my comedian splurge on the last few pages, I was sitting in Da Nang station waiting for my train to Nha Trang, I've got onto my train, so at this point I was on a train travelling again further down the coast for a few hours, it was quite a long journey, was it a late, was it an all-night journey? It might have been, down to this place called Nha Trang, which is a sort of a beach resort-y place, a sort of large town or is it a city next to the coast with a long beach and also various places to visit and boat trips out into the sea. I think there might have been a few islands to visit.

So I've got onto my train, similar to an Indian sleeper but with four bed cabins, so each cabin had four beds in it. I'm sharing with two

Vietnamese people, a guy lying on the bunk above me and a woman sitting on the bunk opposite. Just out of a sense of vague awkwardness, I am writing.

It's going to be a nearly nine-hour journey. Two Australian girls in the next carriage with ridiculous supplies of crisps and chocolate with them. If I sleep on the way, I won't sleep tonight but what the hell, I will lie back, relax and listen to music, read etc.

I should make some chat with the woman but I've already said a nice hello. I will chat a little bit more later. So I chatted to her a bit.

I said Saigon, Nha Trang, how long etc. Enough to justify sitting in a cabin together for the next eight hours. Thankfully we're not obliged to make small talk because of the language barrier.

Great views out of the windows. Again, I can't get the images of Vietnam movies out of my head but that's what it looks like. It's actually beautiful.

I went for a stroll a while ago down the train, hoping to find food or something. There are some disgusting toilets and a couple of women pushing trolleys around. I had some food from one of them which I shouldn't have done.

These pretty grotty looking trolleys being pushed up and down this pretty grotty train and I chose to have some food from one of them but I was hungry. So I had a carton of rice with some random meat. I didn't even know what it was.

It was just generic meat and some fish shavings. The rice was all weird looking and slightly see-through. It looked like really old rice and the meat was just really gnarly bits of chicken bone.

I think it was chicken anyway. Mainly just gristle and cartilage without a lot of meat. So I opted for rice and fish shavings.

I ate some of the meat but then left it. I also had a beer. I feel like having another one now.

I had a little snooze until my roommate started loudly talking on her mobile and I was worried that the noise from my headphones would disturb her but she apparently wasn't worried about making noise on the train. I'm wondering what Nha Trang will be like. I'm thinking resorty.

Could be good though. Could be a bit shite. If it's too Ibiza-ish, meaning a bit like Ibiza, meaning full of sort of westerners getting drunk and partying, it might be pants.

If something is pants it means it's not very good. Still, I might meet people and girls. Will I become romantically entangled on this trip? My roommate is applying yet more foundation to her face.

That's makeup. I'm listening to random music on the iPod. It wasn't an iPod.

Some of the best stuff is the Kings of Convenience. They're brilliant. I don't know if you know the Kings of Convenience but I highly recommend them.

Norwegian folk music duo. Excellent. 7pm.

Still on this darn train. Cockroaches on the walls. Nice.

I remember lying there in the bed and noticing something out of the corner of my eye and there was a cockroach climbing up the wall just next to my foot. Plenty of that sanitising hand wash being used. I just had a few beers with the two Australian girls in the next cabin.

We were in the food carriage before it got filled with locals who were eating what appeared to be nasty looking food. Not dissimilar to the rank stuff I had earlier which I regret eating now. Hopefully it won't do something wrong to my insides.

I feel okay but later on who knows. Three hours left on this journey. I'm going to chill out and read for a bit I reckon.

Having a good experience here on my own but I'm kind of looking forward to going back to the UK. I've got quite a busy life back there. I have a few resolutions for 2010 as follows.

These were my new year's resolutions. Keep trying my hand at the comedy. Do my best.

Try to make people laugh. Learn from mistakes and have fun. Do the podcast but only if it's enjoyable.

Get my kitchen and bathroom done. It's time I got that sorted. Would be nice to have the whole place fixed up nice.

Meet more girls. Keep building my teaching and looking forward to building a decent set of materials for business English. So I was intending to write loads of business English materials which I never really did although I've got a massive library of lesson materials that I've written over the course of my very long career.

A combo of practical English for presentations, negotiations, meetings and some good topic based vocabulary stuff. I'm just enjoying and yes the other resolution is just enjoy the heck out of my life and get more girls on the scene. Yeah that's pretty much it.

Life. We live each day and we get old. What's it all for? We have pain and discomfort of old age ahead of us.

We do what we can. I hope that Nha Trang is good. I want to rent a scooter one day and see the local sights.

Oh I've got some stuff about presentation language. Other notes for English teaching. English for presentations.

Introduce yourself at the beginning. Hello. Good morning.

Good afternoon. My name is Luke Thompson and I'm the marketing manager of Pens Incorporated. Then you introduce the topic of your presentation.

Today I'd like to give you an overview of our new product range. Explain the content of your presentation. I'll begin by outlining a few details of our company.

Notice that I will begin by doing something. I'll begin by outlining a few details of our company, our main operations and history. Then I'll go on to explain the details of our new range of pens.

Finally I'll look into some predictions for our market in the future. Then I've written boring thinking. Some of the other stand-up comedians are plugging away at the same old routines which are not all that good and doing them again and again and again just pushing for longer slots.

I'm not doing that many gigs but I'm casually building material. Who is right? I need to do a gig a week and work on my material. I just I don't have to do jokes.

I just need to be myself but use fewer words. Don't repeat. Be more physical.

Use more voices. Don't be scared to wear the jacket. I had a white jacket which I thought was going to be hilarious.

Take bad gigs in your stride. Be prepared to cull material or modify. The audience decides.

Don't be afraid to evaluate audiences. Right. More stand-up material.

Are you ready for this? So this was designed to be performed at a show that I used to run with some friends in Piccadilly Circus surrounded by the bright lights of Piccadilly Circus in a little room upstairs, a pub. So we're in the centre of London. Piccadilly Circus is just around the corner.

Every day millions of tourists come here attracted by the lights. Some have travelled thousands of miles to see those lights. Apparently we're still fascinated by electricity.

Since when was electricity so impressive? Hundreds of years after the first light bulb was turned on by Edison, was it? They're still drawing a crowd. You'd have thought we'd have stopped being so impressed by electricity by now. You know what makes me laugh is that I talk about doing stand-up in these serious terms and then the actual stuff I was doing on stage was this kind of nonsense.

We're not that developed as a species are we? We're still fascinated by bright lights, especially when they're all in one place. We'll pay hundreds of pounds to have a few extra LEDs or backlit displays on our gadgets. We just love pixels.

Take a crappy old building, it's shit. Cover it in lights, it's a world-renowned tourist attraction. What would Las Vegas be without its lights? Dark, quite dark probably.

I'm no different. I find electricity fascinating because I don't really understand it. That's what's fascinating about it, the mystery.

There's always some guy who'll try and explain it. Well, it's when positively charged and negatively charged ions collide in a... Wait, don't spoil it. It's magic, okay? It's made by wizards in a room.

It's basically lightning controlled by wizards which could be harnessed for evil. It's like that bit in Star Wars where the Emperor kills Luke Skywalker. Spoiler alert.

That's electricity for me. It's just basically magic, maybe slightly evil magic. That's why I'm wary of the fantastical display of electricity.

It could be used for evil purposes. I never actually performed that material on stage so I've no idea how it would have gone down. Some of it's all right.

The bit about electricity being evil magic, classic stuff. 8th of January, so here I am in Nha Trang, reclining on a sun lounger in the shade on the beach. Nha Trang is slightly disappointing compared to Hoi An which I thought was lovely.

This is just a slightly unremarkable town with a beach on its doorstep. Apologies if any of you listening to this live in Nha Trang and absolutely love the city. Sure, it's a nice beach.

It's a long bay with hills and islands and fishing boats on the horizon, golden sand, blue sky, palm trees, but also you've got motorbike guys. I was accosted by a particularly insistent and fast-talking guy called Bang as soon as I hit the beachfront, hawkers etc. Also the beach is a bit dirty except for the specific areas near bars where the sand is raked clean of litter.

I've been lying here for about an hour watching the occasional bikini-clad lady walking along and ignoring sellers. I'm right next to a Russian family. Brackets, I quite need a poo.

Interesting detail. So I've been, yeah, I'm right next to a Russian family and I need a poo. Just sharing the details of my life.

I've been trying to write stand-up, mainly just daydreaming and then writing it down. Maybe that was all that stuff about electricity. I'm looking forward to going home and practising actually.

I'll be busy when I get back. My right forearm, that's the sort of lower part of my right arm, is getting a suntan. The only part of my body that was actually in the sun.

Later on I think I'll hire a scooter and try and ride up to the local temple and check it out. But for now I'm quite content to just lie here by the sea and let my mind wander. I keep thinking of either stand-up material or TEFL teaching stuff.

I had a difficult chat with my dad over Easter about my possible setup of a TEFL school or online TEFL stuff. So I remember this, there was a period where I was, I didn't know what I was doing with my career and my dad was trying to sort of encourage me to take steps to develop things, suggesting I could set up my own school, which is definitely not what I want to do. I've never wanted to do that.

I've never wanted to be basically the manager of a school who has to tell teachers that he's adding yet another student into their already full classroom. I've never wanted to run a school. I enjoy teaching but I don't enjoy the management side of running a school.

It's not for me. But my dad was trying to encourage me to do something else, to try to build my career. Fair enough.

And I wrote, he wants me to earn more money. I do too. I don't know how to do it though.

For the podcast I will add a message saying that I need money to cover my costs and to consider a donation. It could be like this. Luke's English podcast is free but I have to pay Podomatic to host my site.

Those were the days when I paid Podomatic more money. The more downloads I got, the more money I had to pay. It was a ridiculous business model for Podomatic.

No wonder they basically went out of business, I think. If you download my podcast, please make a small donation via PayPal to help me cover my costs. I'm doing this because I enjoy teaching and sharing but I don't want to lose money.

Something like that. I'm unlikely to make more than a few dollars a month but what the hell, I expect that most people will think, oh someone else will probably pay. That worked for a while, it wasn't until later when the podcasting industry actually developed that I was able to actually earn any money from doing this.

I've always found career choices to be the most irritating of decisions. I have a lot of skills though. My best skill is my ability to teach in class.

School management is another thing altogether and it's about squeezing resources and cutting corners. Do I want to do that? You've got to choose the lifestyle you want, not just go for the

money but I will need money later in life. I should be wise and save my money now.

If I had kids, how could I do the same? How could I look after them? I'd be bringing them into a competitive world and if I'm married, what are the chances of marrying a woman richer than me? Or at least being attractive to a woman when I'm not earning a lot of money. I'm on a track which points towards being single at 40. I'm so used to being alone, I just want to meet a girl that I click with.

That's all I want, please. Yeah, that's quite profound. Like I mentioned earlier, when you're single for any long time, you just start to feel like this is my destiny, I'm always going to be single and I can't be with anyone.

So I just wrote, I just want to meet a girl I click with. If you click with someone, you just get on with them. There's chemistry between you and it just sort of works.

That's what you always want, isn't it? That's what you hope for, to just meet a girl who you are attracted to and who you click with, where you just instantly get a good rapport, you get a rhythm together. So I wrote this January, when? Just in the first week of January, 2020, 10. I was worried that I was going to end up being single for the rest of my life.

I was worried that I wouldn't be able to be attractive to any girls, that I wouldn't be able to look after kids if I had them. All I want is to meet a girl I click with. Well, approximately five weeks after I wrote that, I met my wife.

It's funny, isn't it? And she's definitely someone that I click with. It's funny the way things go. Yeah, I met my wife in London, and well, the rest is history.

We're still together after all this time. Two kids. So I continue.

So later, I'll try and scooter to the temple. Tomorrow, I'll probably do an organised boat tour around the islands. I don't like tours, but the other option is just to lie on the beach all day again.

Oh God, more stand up material. Possible Vietnam stand up stuff. MSG in food.

Do you know what MSG is? It's a sort of chemical flavouring enhancer that is added to a lot of food, especially if you buy food in sort of cheaper places. You know, if you buy like cheap noodles, super noodles in the supermarket, there's the noodles and they come with a sachet of like stuff that makes a soup. It's a dried stuff and that often has MSG in it.

And you can tell it's got MSG because the food almost glows. It's got like a luminous quality. Maybe that's the cumin or something, but also MSG seems to make food a certain kind of bright colour and enhances the flavour as well.

So MSG in food, it has a glow in the dark fluorescent colour. I've eaten so much, I don't need to turn on the light when I go to the toilet. It's just like a yellow lightsabre in the dark.

Number two is about haggling. This is where you have to negotiate the price of something, right? So you're in a market and you say, how much is this? And they say, how much would you want to pay? And I'll say, how about a hundred? And they go a hundred. Don't be ridiculous.

This is worth at least 400. All right. 200.

You know, that's haggling, haggling. Your instincts kick in when you negotiate a street seller from 80,000 dong to 20,000 dong. Even though you're basically talking about seven P difference and the guy has no choice but to sell the stuff in order to survive.

Nevertheless, you feel like an expert negotiator. You start negotiating everything. Even vending machines have a haggle button.

I got back to the UK and I was still negotiating. I went into Boots. That's a popular store in England.

I went into Boots for some Imodium Plus. That is medicine that you need to take if you have diarrhoea. Got to the counter.

How much is this? £2.19 please. £2.19? No way. I'll pay 50p.

Sorry, sir. The price is £2.19. Well then I'm going to Superdrug over the road. And it worked.

It's difficult to communicate. You need to grade your English to make it simpler. Some tourists don't know how to do this.

In fact, they think you have to get more detailed and more formal and this makes it clearer. For example, you could say, what time does the tour start? But some tourists will go, at what hour of the clock is the boat tour scheduled to commence? Some people bring their little kids with them. I wonder if it has a bad effect on their language development to listen to their parents speaking broken English the entire time.

Okay, 8th of January, 7.10pm. I must have got quite a lot of sun today because I feel pretty fried sitting here in the cyclo cafe. I just copped out and ordered a cheeseburger and fries. I'm a bit Vietnamese foodied out.

So I said before, templed out, where you've had enough of temples. If you're Vietnamese foodied out, it means that you've kind of had enough of Vietnamese food. Nha Trang is pretty exhausting.

That's a pity, isn't it? The touristy restauranty area is a 10 minute walk away from my hotel. I strolled along the beachfront and stopped for a beer. Most of the tourists here actually are Vietnamese.

Plenty of Westerners in this area though. Lots of families and couples. I watched some people exercising.

Like in Hanoi. In Hanoi, I saw tonnes of people around the lake and on the bridge exercising in the morning. Their exercising is pretty hilarious.

So this is coming from this Westerner looking at the way that the local Vietnamese people did their morning exercise. I found it hilarious. But this is coming from a guy who does no exercise.

I have no morning exercise routine other than taking my son up the road to creche and walking back down again and climbing up stairs and back and forth. So I really have no right to laugh at the exercise routine of the local Vietnamese people because I'm obviously in no position to criticise. But anyway, what I found funny about it was that it basically involves standing in one position and flapping the arms backwards and forwards.

So just standing there, just flapping your arms back and forwards. A bit like they are birds trying to take off. Maybe stepping forward and back with one leg.

So flapping your arms forward and back and taking a step forward and then taking a step back just with one leg. I couldn't help finding it funny. I was sitting there waiting for my bus in Hanoi and suddenly in the park were just all these people.

Some of them standing on the bridge, some of them standing on the grass, some of them standing on the path and everyone was just like flapping their arms and stepping forward and back with one leg at a time. And I thought it was ridiculous. I said you exercise more just walking to the lake.

But of course they all ride scooters. The scooters have replaced feet. No one walks.

It's like walking is so 20th century or something. If you walk down the street, loads of cyclo guys and scooter guys will accost you and try and persuade you to get on the back of their bikes. My cheeseburger is here.

It's not bad. Some brummy guy on another table, that's a guy with a Birmingham accent, is going on in a very boring way about retail management. There are two couples on the table opposite.

A cute girl in her early 20s who looks very bored and I think she's checking me out. So this is the girlfriend or the female companion of some other guy and she was in her 20s. She looked very bored with the guy she was with and I think she's checking me out.

That's where someone looks at you. This is my life story. I always attract attached women.

I've written women are strange. When they're single, they're very sketchy and guarded and cautious. So that's how it feels anyway.

But the ones who are attached, meaning the ones who are in relationships, always seem comfortable, more self-assured. They talk a bit more. They talk a bit more easily and they're often quite interested in me.

Yes, that seemed to be the way it was for me. That I would seem to be... It was the girls who were in relationships who seemed to flirt with me, who seemed to be attracted to me and who would talk to me. The ones who were single, they were much more difficult to talk to and they were much more defensive.

I felt like that's the story of my life. Anyway, I lay on the beach listening to music for an hour or two and then back to the hotel and I cooled down. Then at about 4pm... By the way, I don't know if this is too much information but remember that weird meat that I ate on the train? Yeah, that was a mistake.

That's all I'll say. So there was some drama relating to that but it was okay in the end. I rented a scooter downstairs and decided to check out a couple of sites on the edge of town.

I remember renting this scooter. I actually ended up... So in the hotel guest house, they said, oh you can rent scooters. So I said, oh I'd like to rent a scooter please.

It turned out I was renting the scooter owned by one of the girls who worked at the hotel and while she was working at the hotel, her scooter was parked outside and I basically was given her scooter. They said, here are the keys and I was standing in front of her and the woman who ran the hotel and just standing right in front of them, I got on the scooter and started it up and went to ride off. The scooter lurched forward really quickly and I almost crashed into all these other parked scooters.

It was a very sketchy moment and so awkward because they were like, here are the keys to my scooter and I almost instantly crashed it into loads of other scooters but then it was okay and I started scooting down the street. It's by no means as mental as Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City but the streets here are pretty insane on a scooter. There seems to be no rules, no highway code as far as I can see except for a vague tendency to drive on the right.

I made it to the first place which was an old big thing. A bunch of towers with I think Buddhas in them. Actually fascinating.

I don't mean to be dismissive about the local culture. It was fascinating and mysterious. These towers made out of a local red stone and inside there were Buddhas statues.

There were some people inside praying, burning incense. It was great and some fantastic views of Nha Trang from the hilltop. Then a sketchy ride to try and find another temple but it was so busy and crazy on the roads that I gave up.

I remember I was surrounded by other scooters and cars and sometimes huge lorries and buses would come surging through all of the scooters and we'd all have to try and get out of the way. It felt very crazy and I gave up. Gorgeous sunset from the bridge as I rode over.

Absolutely fantastic. Two blokes, two men at another table appear to be just sitting, chewing and looking at each other. Cow-like.

So I was observing two other tourists who were sitting there, not talking, just sitting opposite each other, eating their food and just staring with blank eyes at each other, just chewing. Like two cows. Sun-scorched, empty-head, cud-chomping tourist disease, aka SSEHCCTD.

Possibly, possibly. What the hell? Tomorrow I'm going to go on a tour. Boat ride, snorkelling, drink in a water bar and all that stuff.

No doubt I will be sharing with Aussie girls and Russian couples or Aussie basic lads. Who knows, I might even get some lovely, intelligent chicks as well. Chicks, that means girls.

I don't think I'll have ice cream. Exciting decisions. Just putting every thought into ink now.

I think my legs are being bitten. Mosquitoes can go and have sex with a duck though. I'm a bit bored.

Sitting here in this restaurant, looking at the colourful, lit-up street, the cool air from a fan, friendly staff, Nha Trang is a nice place. Yes. Had a great day today.

This is 9th of January now, 7pm. Had a great day today, although perhaps a bit too much sun and a lot of irritating pacing up and down the streets of Nha Trang trying to find an ATM that would give me money. I remember this day, I had a nightmare in the morning trying to get cash because my bank decided to block my card because it finally realised that it was being used in a different country and the bank was like, oh I suppose we should block the card.

Should have told them I was on holiday. But I don't know how many ATMs and cash machines I had to visit and it was boiling hot and I was just on this wild goose chase trying to get cash from cash machines and it really left me very irritable and pissed off with all the micro bullshit that gets on your nerves. Namely, the language barrier, the constant hassling and offering, the annoying happy hour deals on drinks which means I don't get a beer when I sit down in the restaurant.

Anyway, the day was a good one despite the early start and the pacing around for an ATM. I booked myself onto a boat tour, despite some reservations about going on tours. It turned out to be great fun.

I was picked up from the hotel and promptly put on a boat. Half friendly foreigners, sorry not half friendly but half friendly foreigners and half friendly Vietnamese people. No mixing, so it was like the Vietnamese people stayed together and the foreigners all stayed together.

The foreigners were all good value, some British people, some Australians, some Germans, some Canadians, a young crowd. First we went to a fairly rubbish-ish aquarium inside a weird concrete ship on an island out in the sea and the best part of that was that they had these sea turtles in this open area. That was quite cool.

Then we went on to another island where we were given snorkelling gear. Snorkelling, that's where you swim around and you have a face mask on and you have a pipe that comes out of your mouth and that the pipe allows you to breathe while you swim on the surface looking down at the fish and things like that. That's snorkelling.

We were given snorkelling gear and we swam around looking at coral and fish. I felt like a kid again. The people on the boat were friendly, two nice English girls who I chatted and flirted with, an Australian girl as well.

Big lunch with loads of stuff, then a hilarious musical performance by our guides. They pulled out a drum kit made of a bamboo frame and plastic buckets turned upside down, a kick drum pedal, a broken cymbal and a geezer on a red Fender guitar. Two vocalists, so it was basically guitar and drums, this guy playing this plastic drum kit and they did some favourites like Yellow Submarine but really Vietnamese pronunciation.

It was hilarious. At one point I got up and played the drums as well. They let me play and I played along with the guitarist for a while and then some cheesy Vietnamese house music was played and they chucked a bunch of rubber rings into the sea and set up a floating bar where we all drank some awful wine and dived and bombed off the roof of the boat then off to a little beach for some sunbathing and some conversation.

Good times. Cruised back at about 3.30pm and was dropped off at the hotel where I chilled out. Tried to get ATM cash.

Irritating nightmare continued. I couldn't call my bank. The phone was refused.

I was at my wits end. If you're at your wits end, it's just like I can't take this anymore. I managed to pay the hotel with my card somehow, then the hotel girl took me on her scooter to another ATM which actually worked.

Happy days. I got cash in my hand. I found my way to this overpriced restaurant, ate a very nice and very hot chicken chilli dish and wrote in my diary.

Up early tomorrow to get the bus to Dalat. So this is near the end of the trip. Just a few pages left.

So I was going to get the bus to Dalat which was where I would stay for one night before going to Ho Chi Minh City where I was then due to fly home finally. I'll get to Dalat, this town, this city between Nha Trang and Ho Chi Minh City. I'll get there at about 2 or 3pm.

I should try to get a hotel booked. Also I must confirm my coach ticket to Saigon. I'll try to get a sleeper coach which is unlikely.

Then the taxi to the airport and ciao Vietnam. I hope my plane can land at Gatwick Airport in London. Apparently it's frozen there.

So it was all covered in snow. Then get back home and get back to normal life. Prepare for FCE.

I was about to teach an FCE course. Comedy stuff. Clean up my flat.

I am knackered. Some people from the boat. A meeting in a bar around the corner in a couple of hours.

Can I stay out until then? I need sleep. I feel at sea slightly. You know when you've been on a boat all day and in the evening you're back on dry land but you still feel like you're moving? That's how I felt.

But I wanted to meet up with the people I'd met on the boat. Some of those other tourists. What can I say about Vietnam? It's actually very touristy.

Hot. Busy. A bit dirty but fun.

Beautiful in places. Cheap. Extremely friendly and wonderful people.

It's been a good laugh if a slightly odd to be on holiday alone like this. If I come back I'll know that I should pretty much avoid the touristy spots. Do the east coast.

Then visit Laos and Cambodia probably which I did actually do with my cousin Oliver a couple of years ago. The next year we went to Cambodia and Laos. Thailand is probably great too even though it's probably even more touristy.

Images of the place. Here are some images of Thailand. This is not Thailand.

Vietnam. Sorry. This is one of the things I like to write in diaries.

Just a list of images. A list of things that you can see just to really help you get back to that moment. I've done these sorts of lists many times in many stages of my life and reading them back really allows you to revisit that moment in your life.

Here are some images of Vietnam. Pavements which are often blocked with parked scooters, food stalls etc. Curbs slanted for scooter access.

Waves of scooters on the streets and constant beeping. Grubby motorbike guys who sit on their seat and slap the seat or who follow you with standard questions like where are you from man? Where you want to go? How long are you here? Before presenting you with the notebook of glorious testimonials. Having to say no and shaking your head a lot.

Streetside fur and beer stands with tiny children's garden furniture to sit on. The tiny plastic chairs in the street. Playing cards, you know cards for playing games.

Playing cards strewn all over the floor. I would always see cards littered on the floor. Yellow painted walls with large blue stamped phone numbers on them.

The national flag red with a yellow star. The government flag red with yellow hammer and sickle. The apparent lack of communism going on.

Rampant developments being built along the coast. These slim but long terraced buildings. Sitting on the back of a scooter being transported somewhere.

The hot and humid dusty air. The bottles of chilli and tomato sauce. All the tourist t-shirts that say same same but different.

The lovely old wrinkled women who offer you boat rides in Hoi An but smile sweetly when you say no. The rolling paddy fields with figures in blue or white clothes with conical hats on. Iconic conical hats.

The palm trees with the sun going down. The forest covered hills. The masses of tangled telephone wires that follow the streets around.

The little dogs that yawn and scratch. The cute and short girls who work in hotels. The colourful face masks worn by scooter riders.

The smell of barbecuing fish and seafood. The Vietnamese soap operas on TV full of people sitting down standing up riding scooters through doorways. The little bathrooms with shower on the wall.

The barbers in the street with a chair and a mirror on the wall. The lines of stalls selling stuff to tourists. The sunburned tourists.

The blonde Aussie girls. The nice looking middle-class British couples. The blue road signs all with the words Trang, Na, Lin, Le, etc.

The gnarled trees with long vines. The communist council buildings blank and imposing. The restaurants with a menu and blagger outside.

That's a guy in the street holding a menu trying to persuade you to come into their restaurant. The families squeezed onto one scooter. The lacquered wooden furniture in small hotel lobbies.

The English TV channels. The premiership football games on TV. The vague feeling you're being ripped off.

But also the guilt that you're paying too little for things. Wondering if I should make the staff think I work for Lonely Planet. The little sparrows and bats in the streets.

The have a nice time see you again slogan on exits of everything. The brightly lit basically furnished beer hoi places where big groups of Vietnamese people get drunk after work. The pronunciation with no consonant clusters and no consonants at the ends of words.

The weirdly sweet coffee. The nicely presented omelette and fresh bread roll. The list goes on and on and I'm running out of paper.

Sunday the 10th of January 642 now I am in Dalat sitting in a French style restaurant surrounded utterly surrounded by middle aged middle class groups of Australians. Grey haired and very polite. Vietnam is full of Australians and every single one I've met has been lovely.

Quite an annoying wasted day today up at the crack of dawn to be picked up by the coach. While waiting I helped the hotel family put up a couple of big lit up signs on the front of their building. They're very sweet and they rewarded me with a big bottle of water.

The coach trip was broken up by the coach having problems. I'm not sure what the matter was but it would have trouble starting and we also had to stop for a while to let the brakes cool down. Lots of hill driving and it was hot.

The brakes were smoking they were so hot. Remember we were going up and down hills climbing up hills and then going down the hills the driver had to keep braking and the brake discs I think were

red hot and smoke was coming out of them. I thought the coach was on fire.

We had to stop and let the brakes cool down. We could all we could all smell this strong smell of what smelt like burning metal. Dalat.

There's quite a nice lake in the middle of the town and a pleasant lack of grift. Haven't been grifted once yet. In fact I asked a couple of scooter guys for directions and they just gave them to me.

Didn't even offer to drive me or get me a prostitute or some cocaine. I'm even mildly disappointed. I had an annoying time finding Han Cafe to confirm my bus trip to Saigon tomorrow morning.

I'm hoping to I'm hoping to hell that there are no problems and I can get to the airport on time. I was worried about that. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to get to the airport on time because I had a lot of traffic between me and the airport.

The bus should get in at three or four o'clock. The flight departs at eight o'clock. I will need two hours for check-in.

That's a two hour fuck-up window. Could be a bit of an arse clencher. That's where you hold your bum cheeks together because you're nervous.

My hotel is not that good but was literally where I was dropped off. I thought what the hell I'm booked in there for ten dollars. There's a pond next to my room so the room smells a bit musty.

Vietnamese TV is doing my head in. Three channels all full of the same stuff with the odd gem of a movie thrown in and some premiership games which is nice. This entry is boring but Dalat is a bit boring so apparently there's there's that's the way it is.

Apparently there's loads of snow in London and my flight may be delayed. Good times. 13th of January.

I'm now back in London sitting on my sofa about to have a cup of tea. The heating is on full blast and I have an incense stick burning. I finally got back yesterday morning after a punishing 32 hours of travelling from Dalat to Saigon to the airport to Doha to Gatwick and then to Hammersmith.

I stayed up late as late as I could yesterday to combat the jet lag but I crashed out at about 10pm. Not bad. I slept until 10am.

I feel fine today but jet lag might return later. Yesterday I had that just back from travelling feeling in which everything feels special. I love that feeling.

I went and met James in Clapham in the afternoon and had a couple of pints. It was great to see him and I realised that the holiday had done me a lot of good. My spirits are up and I really want them to stay that way.

I really want 2010 to be a good year for me. All the travelling was a bit of a pain particularly the long coach journey from Dalat. Dalat was a bit dull and more time there would have been nice to help me get a flavour of it.

I'm glad to be back in comfort. It's freezing and snowing outside though and work approaches in a few days. I've got about three stand-up gigs this month and must hone some material for that.

So that is it. I've just run out of paper. On reflection I had an amazing time out there on my own and I'm so glad I did it.

I would go back again and see that with another person. Perhaps I could venture into Laos and Cambodia this time. I'm glad I kept this record of my trip.

I can come back to this and use it to remember exactly what it was like. Vietnam. A busy, crazy, beautiful, funny and vibrant place.

And that is the end of my Vietnamese travelling diary. Well, it's been a long one. I think it's probably best to just end here.

But let me know how that was for you. Yeah, no romantic entanglements. A bit of a lonely trip in many ways.

I did hook up with other people. Yes, but I didn't find romance on that trip. But as I said, four or five weeks later, I did actually end up meeting my wife.

So that's nice. Yeah. Okay.

Thanks for listening to this. I hope that it's been interesting. Let me know your thoughts.

Have you ever travelled to Vietnam? Did you go to some of the same places as me? Are you Vietnamese? In which case, I hope you don't mind some of the, let's say, more negative things I described. But as I said at the beginning, I think that I was only scratching the surface, you know, I had just a typical tourist experience, didn't spend that long in each place. I think surely if I'd spent more time there, I would have got a much deeper sense of what the place was really like.

But I had a fantastic time. And it's one of those experiences that I will remember for the rest of my life. So Vietnamese, thank you for hosting me in your country for that sort of two week period.

Yeah, I did go back to the region. I went to Cambodia and Laos with Oliver, went to Thailand with my wife and did a podcast episode about that. That's in the archive.

Also went to Indonesia with my wife too. There's a podcast episode about that as well. So you can check the archive for those.

Maybe one day I can have a conversation with Oliver about our time in Cambodia and Laos. That could be good for the podcast. Yes, but I'll look forward to reading your comments in the comments section with anything that has occurred to you during this long, long episode.

But I'm now going to stop. So thank you so much for listening. Thank you for watching.

Speak to you again next time. But for now, it's just time to say that you should check the PDF. There's a full transcript for everything I've said in this episode.

So if there are certain things you want to check out, you could check them out or even read all of that for a bit of consolidation of the English that you've heard. A bit of bedtime reading, that could be an idea. That's what you can do with the PDFs.

Just read through them and pick out bits of vocab. And just to kind of reinforce the stuff that you've heard, you can do the same thing, but with the written version. That would be interesting.

Okay, right. This really is the end now. Thank you for listening.

And I'll speak to you next time. But for now, it's time to say goodbye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.