

FLUFFY TOWEL

Memorable travel experiences

Happy New Year!



Welcome to 2026! I know, it's been a while since I've sent you a newsletter. I could give you all kinds of reasons for the delay, but I won't bore you. It seems

2025 was been a big year for everyone, myself included. I've had so many incredible experiences, with highs and lows on a scale as grand as the Dolomites, which I didn't conquer when I visited in October. I did have plenty of other indulges, as pictured above in Cortina.

Travel writing is a privilege, and a rewarding one at that. I'd never be granted access to so many places without it, and in fact, I wouldn't even know about

the existence of certain events and people without the opportunities that travel writing presents.

On the flip side, there's an awful lot that goes into producing a blog post, a photo, an article, a social media post or anecdote, and if I'm doing my job well, you'll never be aware of what goes on behind the scenes. Travel writers tread a very fine line between presenting the truth versus reality. It's not that we're not telling the truth, but I believe it's our job to inspire, not deter, others to visit those destinations and create their own versions of what we're posting all over social media.

But sometimes things go wrong. Other times, we're not feeling it or so far out of our comfort zone that we're unable to process what's happening before us. Logistical challenges are all part of the norm, as is burnout, illness, fatigue and the yearning to wake up in your own bed regardless of the thread count.

Like me, you've probably received a plethora of newsletters about incredible travels over the past year and where you should be planning to go in 2026. But I'm going to get real with you and share some of my misadventures from 2025. On a positive note, the fact that I'm still excited about writing about my travels shouldn't put you off from your own potential misadventures, but instead inspire you to keep on exploring the world. And besides, those mishaps often make the best stories that you'll rarely see published in mainstream media.

So, without further delay, I present you with some of 2025's travel misadventures.

Please subscribe to my newsletter here

No coffee for you!

I'm a cruising novice, and until recently, I hadn't been to Belgium, but I thought experiencing the country from a canal barge would be a unique way to delve into the culture. So on the first morning of a seven-day cruise through Belgium's canals, and after passing the coffee machine on the way to breakfast, I ordered an espresso. As I wasn't yet caffeinated, I couldn't comprehend the server's response when she told me, "No! You can't have an espresso until 10 am when we turn on the coffee machine; otherwise, everyone will want one with their breakfast."



My devastated expression said it all as she explained that she was training someone while handling breakfast on her own, not to mention that this was the 30th and final cruise in the season. I decided she had probably endured enough and, from then on, obediently accepted the pre-brewed coffee. However, when the conversation turned to Prunella Scales, the actress who had played Sybil in Fawlty Towers, who had passed away. My mind wandered

back to the coffee incident and to the Seinfeld episode when the Soup Nazi screamed at Elaine, “No soup for you!”

Road tripping gone wrong

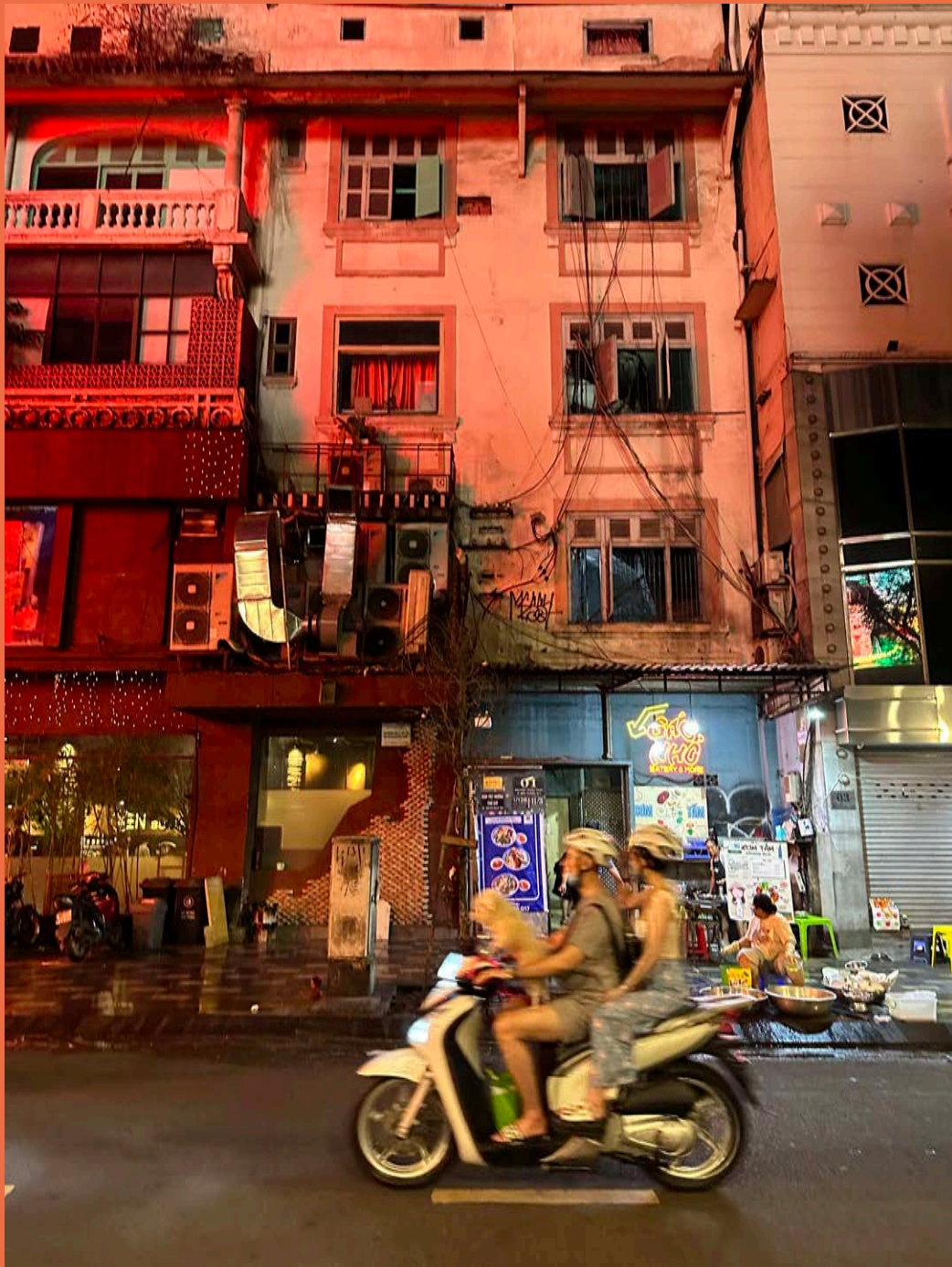


With such vastness, Western Australia is the ultimate road tripping destination. I love nothing more than jumping in my car and hitting the open road for an adventure. I was on my way to the Great Southern Region for a luxurious stay in Heyscape's new two-bedroom off-grid cabins just outside of Denmark. About 20 kilometres south of Kojonup, with still three hours to go before I would reach my colleagues for lunch in Denmark, my car suddenly died.

The only warning was the sound of my engine straining as I overtook, which prompted me to immediately return to the left-hand lane so I could pull over, and, thankfully, there was a wide shoulder available. Luckily, there was a mechanic available in Kojonup at Harris' Garage (life savers). Turns out my radiator was cracked.

The third blessing was that, coincidentally, the manager of Heyscape happened to be driving past and whisked me down to Denmark for the ultimate retreat. My car eventually got sorted, but if there was ever any doubt about the existence of guardian angels, this might even challenge the biggest of sceptics.

Security Check



While en route to Danang in central Vietnam with my daughter, we transited through Ho Chi Minh City's airport. After a long wait in immigration and much confusion about how to get between the international and domestic terminals, we had already used up most of the five-hour layover. So after settling in for a quick bowl of pho, it was time to board the short flight to Danang. Our excitement for the upcoming adventure was short-lived as security approached and demanded that I escort them back to security ASAP.



My mind drifted back to earlier that morning when I discovered my daughter's suitcase had a big crack in it just as we were heading to the airport. My mind began to race as I concocted all kinds of

sinister scenarios. I might also add that I was recovering from a chest infection, and the airport's soupy humidity and heat didn't help when I was told to run to security. So, with my daughter in tow, we ran like the wind (if only there had been any wind), where I was accused of having a battery pack in my suitcase. At first, I was extremely relieved that this was the issue, especially as I didn't have a battery pack. But the aggression directed at me was uncalled for; the yelling was relentless as I was commanded to empty my suitcase as though I was a drug mule.

When I opened my suitcase, to their surprise, it resembled a game of Tetris. I had meticulously packed every item into packing cubes, and I easily pulled out a cube full of electronics and cables, showing that there was no sign of a battery pack. There was no apology, only more yelling to run back to the plane. So after frantically trying to shove everything back into my suitcase, they then took great pleasure in making me go through security again. The conveyor belt moved my luggage along at a glacial speed, all the while being further berated for taking too long, until I was commanded once again to run.

It was all too much for this weary traveller, and I defiantly walked, causing the security staff to rudely comment on my inadequate running abilities. I finally made it onto the plane, sweating profusely, and collapsed in my seat. It took another 20 minutes to be airborne, as I wasn't the only one wrongly accused of smuggling a battery in their suitcase.



From that point on, our trip went swimmingly, and you might enjoy reading about my time in [Danang Unloaded: Your guide to the dynamic city in central Vietnam](#) (Onya Magazine) and the wonderful time I had with my daughter in [A mother-daughter adventure revisits the charms of Vietnam](#) (Travel+Leisure Southeast Asia)

The time I didn't conquer the Dolomites



I didn't discover my fear of heights until I was in my late 20s, while clinging to the side of Switzerland's Mt Pilatus on an epic Contiki tour. Decades later, my fear has only heightened, pun intended. I can't tell you how many times I've tried to overcome it, so I should have known better when our guide took us through the Dolomites in Cortina d'Ámpezzo and suggested we follow "nature's path." I should have listened to my husband when he suggested I sit this one out after seeing the vertical drop. As I had already bailed on the vertical 3,000-metre ascent up a mountain path, as glamorous locals meandered past me as though they were on a casual stroll, I allowed my ego to make a poor decision for me.

The further we descended and then climbed out of the depths of the gorge, the higher my anxiety became. With shaky legs, I followed our mountain goat of a guide up and down the ladders, stairs and ropes known as *via ferratas* (iron paths), grabbing onto anything that looked sturdy, including his leg at one point, much to his amusement. In his melodic Italian accent, he finally asked me if I suffer from vertigo. "YES," I declared. He shared that he, too, suffers from the same condition, and there is no cure for it. I asked how he copes, and he demonstrated techniques for staying upright to

maintain a steady centre of gravity. I finally started to relax a bit, taking his advice to admire the gorgeous scenery. I only just resisted kissing the ground when we reached the top.



Although this is behind a paywall, perhaps you're a subscriber to the New Zealand Herald and here's an article about another town I visited in the Dolomites in [Livigno, Italy ski town prepares for Milano Cortina 2025 Olympic Winter Games](#). You might enjoy listening to [Italians shrug at the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics as tourists set to flood in](#) (Travel Writers Radio).

Thank you for your continued support – it means the world to me. If you are looking for some affordable destinations in 2026, you might like to read *Why the Philippines is an affordable travel destination (Fluffy Towel)* and *Vietnam: Luxury travel for less (Stuff)*.



I have loads of adventures coming up in 2026, including Cambodia and Vietnam in February. If you haven't already subscribed to my newsletter, then please do so [here](#).

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