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A WEBSITE SERVING AS AN ARCHIVE OF MY
DIFFERENT ADVENTURES ON PLANET EARTH...



BY JOHN AHERN

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The E-Travel Myth

Nine hundred thousand wildebeest stampeded across the Serengeti in high pixel definition on our TV screen. David Attenborough explained the event in his soothing tone. 'It is the world's greatest animal migration.' I instantly added it to my travel bucket list, blurting 'I have to see that,' to my 12 year old daughter Jaimie who was snap-chatting from the lounge room's adjacent chair.

'You can Daddy. You can watch it on YouTube.'

I waited to see her wry joke-face but it never arrived.

'I meant....be there, silly....in a jeep, feeling the Earth shake as they thunder past.'

This suggestion prised her eyes up from the screen. 'Oh, no way. That looks dangerous! Anyway, X-Factor's starting, Daddy. If you want to see those wildy-beast things, you better go to your iPad.'

I trudged off somewhat bemused. What sort of child had I raised that reckoned E-travel via the digital medium could possibly be a remote substitute for the real thing? She probably also thought that social networking did not require meeting people in the flesh.

I found my wife reading a book; a paper one, not on a kindle. 'Albert Einstein was right!' I announced. 'I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots.'

I decided to never give up on witnessing the running of the wildebeest, but till then, I whirled around and went to watch X-Factor with my daughter. After all, in stereo-surround it was so much better than the real thing.

In Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

Chasing The Hanoi Train. The Suckiest Adventure Ever!

My wife and two kids were eagerly looking forward to a luxurious night rocking along in a sleeper cabin on the train to Hanoi. But a truck rollover on the mountain pass from the mist-shrouded village of Sapa in North-West Vietnam soon threatened that treat. As the 40 minute journey became three hours, our driver refused to be defeated by the blocked roads, squeezing the bus down the mountain in a terrifying series of suicidal cliff-edge manoeuvres.

We eventually careened into Lao Cai just as the train was chugging away. My family slumped to the ground in one desolate teary cluster. We had no food, accommodation or solutions, but I had to lift them. 'This is real travel,' I declared. 'Think of it as though we're on a great adventure.'

A solution did suddenly present itself in the form of an odd little man yelling 'Chase the train! We chase the train!'

We were soon surging through the night again, 26 passengers wedged into his mini-van's 16 seats. My son was sobbing uncontrollably, my daughter declaring her own torture; she hadn't brushed her hair in hours.

The van later arrived at an unlit unmanned rail siding. When the train steamed in for its ninety second stop, we ran along the parallel rail line to find our carriage, throwing ourselves in before it took off again.

Nine hours after leaving Sapa we collapsed into our cabin, my son whimpering, 'Daddy... if this is your idea of a travel adventure; it's is the suckiest one ever!'

In Vietnam

I Hate Backtracking

The merest thought of backtracking makes me twitch at the lack of new adventure. My travel companions were about to learn that I would do anything to avoid it.

Crammed on a bus crawling high into the Ecuador Andes, my amigos were ignoring my backtrack rant. 'There must be another way back!' I insisted, trawling through guides and maps. Hours later I presented my thesis.

'You're kidding,' they spat. 'It's madness!'

Then as though cued, the bus slid and suspended us momentarily out over the mountain edge, staring down into a chasm of bus skeletons. Terrified they screamed 'OK! Anything. No backtracking!'

On the first leg of my plan, a bullet ridden body blocked the jungle path of our bus. Bandits charged on, sticking guns in our faces, taking our cigarettes and underwear.

Determined not to backtrack, we crept at dawn into Bogota airport days later. Carlos our contact, shoved us into the hold of an old war plane, hissing 'Ssshh!....you stowaways'. The pilot fired the props, glugged scotch and took off as we clung to onion sacks to avoid toppling into the tail.

After recovering in a jungle village we sailed down the Amazon. The boat was a leaky box, but included free food, which we discovered was monkey and piranha. The 'cruise' was delayed nightly as the knife-wielding Capitano traded contraband. 'You gringos.....good cover,' he would smile.

We eventually returned to Lima. Robbed; dead bodies; eaten monkey; stowaways and smuggler cover. But we didn't backtrack!

In South America

About Author

John Ahern

John Ahern is the author of 'On The Road With Kids. One Family. 30 Countries. No Turning Back.' Published by Pan Macmillan. He has travelled through >85 countries, converting adventures to stories.

Why is the website called bytestories.com?

This is a place for "byte-sized" stories and there is a 1500 character (about 250 words) limit for two main reasons. Firstly, we want you to know that "War and Peace" isn't required to leave your mark. Secondly, it takes about 2 minutes to read each story meaning you can head here whenever you want a quick (and entertaining) read.

If you would like to share a story or create your own eBook, simply head to bytestories.com, Register an account and click on the "Share a Story" button.