

Packing it in!

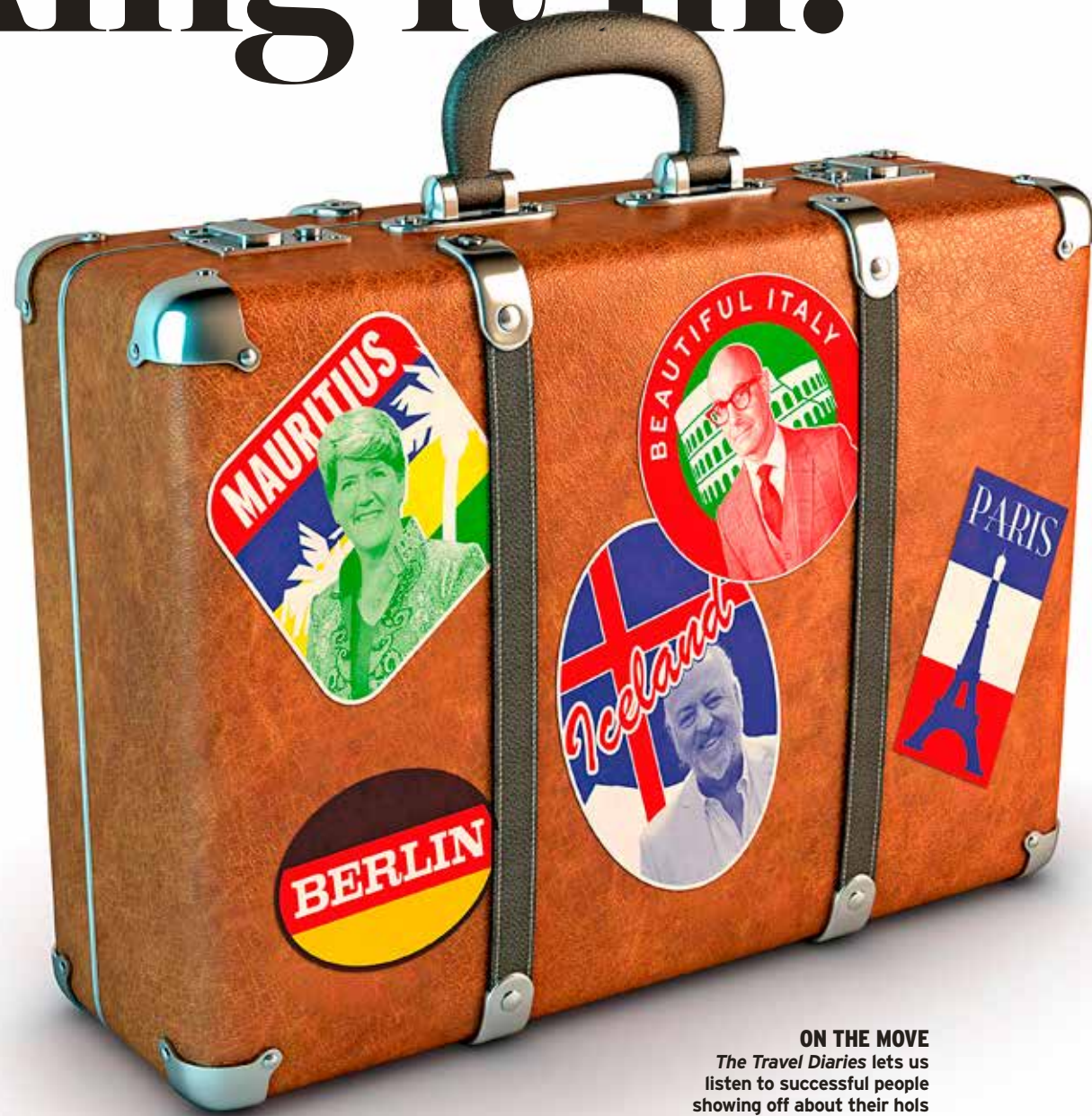
The celebrity-laden podcast that opens a world of foreign adventure

IT IS, AS Frank Sinatra observed, so nice to go trav'ling – but it's also perfectly possible to derive almost as much pleasure from *thinking* about where you might go if only your budget was bigger, you had a more adventurous nature and you weren't chained to a desk. In *The Travel Diaries* journalist Holly Rubenstein talks to people who do so much zipping around they could be forgiven for being somewhat blasé about even the most exotic locations.

Her guests have included Bill Bailey, who enthused about Iceland and Indonesia; Clare Balding, who did Mauritius and Costa Rica; Jeremy Vine, who had fond recollections of both Siberia and the Channel Islands; India Hicks was in the Bahamas; New Zealanders Rose Matafeo and Richie McCaw talked up their native land; Italian chef Gennaro Contaldo did the same for his; author Raven Smith described both the Pyramids of Egypt and the nightclubs of New York; and nature photographer Chris Burkard offered a guide to the extreme environments where he does lots of his work.

Rubenstein belongs to that branch of the podcasting trade where it's considered basic politeness to treat your guest as though they have done us all a great favour by deigning to tell us about their hols. It's an "honour" to speak to Stanley Tucci. Even to get the chance to hear from the founder of Airbnb, Brian Chesky, is "a real honour". Of course, the great unspoken truth about 90 per cent of guests on podcasts of all kinds is that they're doing it because they enjoy it. In fact, we the audience are providing a vital service by listening. If they weren't telling us about their holi-

ALL IN THE MIND
Armchair traveller
Holly Rubenstein



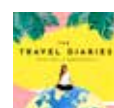
ON THE MOVE
The Travel Diaries lets us listen to successful people showing off about their hols

days, they would be telling somebody else.

They're all in their differing ways absolutely fabulous, and you can't imagine how dog-eared their passports must be. None of them will be strangers to the airline upgrade and they will tend to talk about how impossible their "schedule" is, when the rest of us would just say we were a bit busy – but there is still a great deal to be said for hearing well-off, successful, prominent people talk about the many places they've been and the really terrific meals they had when they got there.

The urge to travel, being somehow an indicator of soulfulness and broadness of mind, is the one area of life that you're still allowed to show off about. As long as that remains the case, there will be travel podcasts.

SHOW OF THE WEEK



The Travel Diaries
Satisfy your wanderlust as travel journalist Holly Rubenstein asks celebrities about the places that shaped them – and what's on their bucket list.

EDITED BY
DAVID HEPWORTH



Not Lost

When Brendan Francis Newnam lost his long-running show on American public radio, he decided to turn adversity into opportunity by travelling to a new place every week. He goes from cities such as Montreal, where you can learn about the riches of the French-Canadian celebrity magazine market, to challenging environments such as Bozeman, Montana, where you need an electric fence to keep out the bears. In each case he's meeting people he's never met before and hoping they'll invite him for dinner.



Indie Travel Podcast

Craig and Linda Martin describe themselves as "full-time travellers". It's thanks to the thoroughness of their travelling and the instalment called Best Places to Drink Beer around the World that I learnt all about the delights of the English Gardens in Munich, where you can drink beer while watching more adventurous souls actually surfing on the Eisbach river.



Alice in Wonderland

Alice Morrison calls herself an adventurer. She's not lying about on a beach, she's hiking in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, trekking through the Jordan Valley or camping high on a ridge overlooking the Dead Sea, with Jerusalem in the distance. She's not afraid to talk about it all and may even include the occasional reference to "intestinal misery".

SOMETHING NEW



Where You From?

This is the question that I often have to restrain myself from asking when meeting a Londoner whose antecedents were probably not from the UK. Doesn't stop me wondering, though, so I'm pleased that LBC Radio's Lillie Almond has decided to put that very question to the likes of David Lammy, Nish Kumar, Nadiya Hussain and White Yardie.

RADIOHEADS

TIM
HARFORD



Who believes in fairies?

How to avoid elementary mistakes

One hundred years ago, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, published a sensational book. Unlike *The Sign of Four* or *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Coming of the Fairies* was a work of non-fiction. Sir Arthur had seen photographs of fairies prancing at the bottom of a garden in Cottingley, near Bradford. And the pictures, taken by two young girls, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, had convinced him to put his own reputation on the line. He wrote: "I have convinced myself that there is overwhelming evidence for the fairies."

I usually deal in facts, not fairies – statistics, not sprites – but the strange case of the Cottingley Fairies fascinates me. My inbox is full of emails from people fretting that they find statistics in the news confusing because they don't have mathematical training. But the Cottingley case reminds us that calm and

'Ask yourself if you've really taken everything in'

curiosity can help anyone understand stories where even experts stumble.

Sir Arthur was an accomplished photographer, but his expertise didn't save him from embarrassing himself. His problem was partly that he was eager to believe. In the years before he wrote about fairies at the bottom of the garden, he had suffered a series of cruel bereavements: his mother, his brother, his wife and his son had all died. He was desperate to find evidence of the spirit world.

Perhaps I have fallen into a similar sin in wanting to believe in the power of radio, but I can't help feeling that the visual medium was part of what led Sir Arthur astray. The cliché tells us "seeing is believing". But of course the camera can lie. Our visual sense is too powerful and perhaps too hasty. Research suggests that we form an impression of visual images within 500ms – that's just half a second. It's not time enough to understand, but it's time enough to leap to an all-too-hasty conclusion.

If only Sir Arthur had slowed down a little, he might have noticed some tell-tale signs that not all was well. One photograph shows a motion-blurred waterfall in the background and pin-sharp dancing fairies in the foreground. Sir Arthur should have concluded that the



fairies were actually motionless objects. Instead, he decided it was impossible for two little girls to perpetrate sophisticated image manipulation.

The joy of a weekly radio show like *More or Less* is that our listeners don't need to leap to conclusions in a flash. We have time to indulge our curiosity and look beneath the surface of a claim. In the case of the Cottingley Fairies, an important part of the back story was that Elsie Wright was not a little girl. She was a teenager who divided her time between art college and a part-time job in a photo processing studio.

If you're trying to make sense of a confusing statistical claim in the news, learn from Sir Arthur's mistakes. First, notice your emotional reaction to the claim. If you're feeling angry, fearful, or desperately eager to believe, then perhaps it's worth taking a second look.

Second, don't be too hasty. It's tempting to leap to a conclusion, especially when presented with visual information. Listen and think; ask yourself if you've really taken everything in.

And third, be curious. Sir Arthur began his book by noting that if the fairies were not real, it would be "the most elaborate and ingenious hoax ever played upon the public". If only he had been more curious about Elsie Wright, he might have understood how capable she was of such ingenious hoaxing.

Tim Harford presents *More or Less* (Wednesday 9am Radio 4) and is the author of *How to Make the World Add Up* (The Bridge Street Press)