



CINQUE TERRE

MY NAKED TRUTH
 Caught in a naturalist's paradise, Escape writer Lindy Alexander learned to go with the flow
 LINDY ALEXANDER

The inviting waters off Vernazza, one of the five towns that make up Cinque Terre; the writer in Banff, Canada, which holds a special place in her heart; the amphitheatre at Bryce Canyon in southern Utah, US.

PICTURES: ISTOCK, SUPPLIED

My earliest memory is of travelling to Fiji with my family when I was four years old. I remember the white glossy flowers tucked behind locals' ears and our beachfront bungalow that overlooked the shimmering blue ocean.

I returned to Fiji last year. When I arrived at Castaway Island the manager hugged me saying, "Welcome home". That's what travel is for me – the feeling of at once being at home but also experiencing something totally new.

My parents took me to the UK, Germany, France, Switzerland and Hong Kong when I was 15. I cringe when I think back to that time – I was a grumpy teenager who was generally ungrateful and moody. I refused to get out of the car in the Cotswolds and huffed my way around Stonehenge. I'm impressed at how tolerant my parents were.

One of my best friends is half Italian and she took me to the Cinque

Terre years before it was a tourist hot spot. She led me on a long hike under the scorching sun with the promise of a beautiful beach between two of the villages. We stepped on to the beach only to realise she had misread the Italian guidebook. Rather than it being a naturalist's paradise, it was a naturalist's paradise. We were so hot and bothered that we just stripped off all our clothes and skinny dipped with the locals.

I lived in Uganda in my mid-20s as a part of a volunteer health program that placed volunteers in rural villages for eight months. My village was remote and didn't have running water or electricity. There wasn't much food and I remember being incredibly hungry. The villagers were so kind. They would bring us eggs and buy us warm, bubbly soft drinks when we went to visit them. I started writing a book about my time there – one day I'll finish it!

A year after returning from Africa I was in an ambulance speeding to the emergency room of a Melbourne hospital. After weeks of migraines,

fever and malaise, I was diagnosed with malaria. I'd had it several times in Uganda, but the doctors there are so familiar with it they could treat it quickly and easily. Here it took two visits to the ER, a lumbar puncture and multiple GP visits before they found out what was wrong.

I met my partner in the mountains of Canada. He's from the UK and we both had working holiday visas. It was magical; we saw the Northern Lights in Jasper and snowboarded every chance we could. I returned to Canada this year and did it in style on the *Rocky Mountaineer*. Pulling into Banff, where I first met Pete, was incredibly emotional.

For me, the appeal of the United States is the national parks. I've camped amid the hot desert winds of Joshua Tree, California, hiked among the hoodoos in Bryce Canyon and sat underneath enormous stone arcs at Arches, Utah, but my favourite has been Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado. I would have loved to spend more time exploring and learning about the ancient ancestral Puebloan



Indian cliff dwellings.

I'm the ultimate landlubber. I know Antarctica is on lots of people's bucket lists but it's usually people, culture and food that make me want to travel somewhere. That said, there is something hauntingly beautiful about the abandoned buildings on South Georgia near Antarctica.

If I could make it there without stepping foot on a boat, I'd be there in a flash. Reading female adventurers such as Freya Stark made me want to explore the world. I have a long list of places I'd love to go including Iran, Jordan, Oman, Mexico, Tahiti and Papua New Guinea.

I once took a five-hour bus trip through the mountains of Rwanda. As we passed little stone houses, empty since the genocide in 1994, all the passengers began to sing beautiful traditional songs to honour those who had been killed. I had goosebumps the whole time.

Food is one of the great joys of travelling but being a vegetarian has made it tricky at times. I've been on boat journeys where everyone is tucking into fresh seafood and I've been given an egg. I've found being a bit flexible with food (a tiny bit of fish sauce isn't going to kill me) is the way to enjoy travelling.

I recently took my seven-year-old son on a work trip to Phuket in Thailand. We visited a gibbon rehabilitation centre and swam

beneath a thundering waterfall in the middle of virgin rainforest, but taking part in a beach clean-up had the biggest impact. We came home determined to reduce single-use plastic in our life.

The strangest bus journey I've ever been on was in India. I was travelling to a beach in Goa and rather than seats, it had bunks, and the passengers had to lay down the entire way. I didn't look at what time the bus arrived, so it was a shock when we arrived at a dusty, dark crossroad at 3am. The taxi drivers were clued in

and charged a premium to find me a hotel room for a few hours. I woke to the Arabian Sea just metres away and wondered if it was all a bad dream.

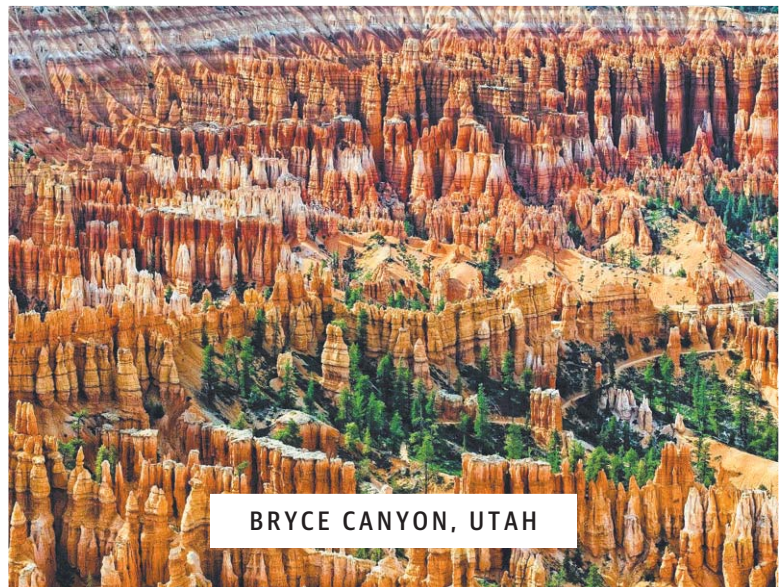
Each year my family goes to Far North Queensland for a couple of weeks to escape the Victorian winter. We stay in Port Douglas and live simply – reading, walking, eating and swimming. I love the Sunday markets (Duke's Doughnuts stall is a must) and watching the sun set over the marina. We say we'll stop going when we run out of things to do, but so far it has been seven years, and counting.

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