From Travel Fatigue to Transformation: Adventure Travel and the People You Meet Transcript

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Introduction to Melissa Rodway

Welcome to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr. Amy Coopersmith, a doctorate prepared nurse practitioner, and this show is about empowering you to live a radiant, healthy, and balanced life.

I'm very excited to introduce today's guest, Melissa Rodway. She is an adventure traveler having visited over 50 countries. She's the author of the bestselling book, The People You Meet.

And she's the host of the Fly Travel podcast, where she interviews other travelers exploring adventure and connection. So welcome. And thank you so much for being here today.

Well, thank you, Dr. Amy. It is awesome to be here. I'm really happy to speak with you. And I always get excited when I get to interview authors because I like to read and I end up getting to read things that I may not have found otherwise.

So I did find your book. It's on Kindle Unlimited, everybody, and you should read it. But it was so fun and I really enjoyed hearing about your adventures in Southeast Asia.

Oh, thank you. That's so kind. I really appreciate that. It's always really lovely when someone who is not your friend or your family member tells you that they enjoy your book.

So thank you. So I have to ask what inspired you to take off from your life for three months or four. Yeah. And travel halfway across the world. Yeah, so I wasn't in love with my work at that point.

I was 35. So this was in 2010, so a while ago. But yes, I didn't really have anything keeping me in Toronto. And I had this amazing partner who was very, very well traveled.

That's how we met. And he was going off on this journey to make connections with people in Southeast Asia in the luxury travel world. So hotels, tour operators, things like that.

Southeast Asia Travel and Leaving Home

And yeah, it was a very easy decision for me to say, do you need a plus one? And here we go. So off we went. And the rest is history in the book, as you know.

So is that something that people do where you're from? Or were your friends and family like, whoa, you're OK. What's wrong? Uh, not in my family. They were not surprised.

I wouldn't, I would say Canadians, not everyone is going to do that, but it's not uncommon as well. And, you know, I was 35. I wasn't, I didn't want kids.

I didn't want the things that everyone else was doing around me. So, um, yeah, I mean, it still wasn't an easy decision because I think you actually feel younger when you feel older when you're younger.

So in my twenties and thirties, I actually felt like I was supposed to do all these things. But I was just like, it's now or never, to be honest, if I'm going to do something like this.

So yeah, but the aftermath is not easy, right? When you leave your work and your life behind, rebuilding is not the fun part, but the fun part is saying, let's get out of here for a while and live a different life.

Yeah. And, you know, that's a part of the world I haven't seen yet, but the way you described it, I feel like somewhat familiar now with some of those countries that you visited.

Yes, a lot of people say that they feel like it's partially my style. I kind of write in a way that makes you feel like you're there with me. And then I really tried to describe all the senses, the smells, the sights, the sounds, all of it.

And a lot of people have said they're thrilled that I did these adventures for them. So now they don't have to because some of them are are a little bit wild.

But yeah, it's a it's a very magical part of the world for sure. And you described very well that sometimes it was uncomfortable physically. No air conditioning or being in a crowded bus.

So how did you find joy in the travel while being uncomfortable? Well, there was not always joy, Amy. I think that travel makes you resilient. It makes you appreciate what you have in your regular life.

So I think there's a bit of that. But I think when you're in a situation where you're there for multiple months, you really you have to either just go for it and adapt to it or you will be miserable.

And towards the end, I got miserable. So that's how I knew it was time to go. But when you're in the beginning in the middle and up until that point, Everything's temporary and you just have to grin and bear it and just find fun in the small moments.

And I think that's part of the fun, right? It's the unknown. That's why people do these things and the unknown can be good and it can be bad. But the unknown is very exciting, but the unknown is not always glamorous.

Do you feel that travel builds resilience or do you have to have that in you before you go? I think it's both. I think it's not for everybody. I think there's sometimes this fantasy about what travel is and some people travel very differently and that's amazing.

Travel Discomfort, Resilience, and Packing Light

Everyone should travel in the way that's comfortable for them. But certainly there are types of travel that are that can pamper you, that can be luxurious, that can be exactly all those things where you don't need to be all that resilient.

But if you are going on an adventurous trip, I think even signing up for it shows some resilience and then I think the more you do it, the more resilient you become because you kind of realize what is stressful and what isn't.

And it just, you know, things are going to constantly go awry and you have to just roll with it. And if that's not for you, then you just abort the plan and you go home or you go to a nice hotel.

But so I think there's a bit of both at play. So you mentioned your partner was investigating different aspects of luxury travel. So you did get to have a little bit of luxury.

Absolutely. So I would say 90% of this trip was backpacking, 10% was luxury. And this trip wasn't the first time I had experienced that. So we had been together for about four years or four years prior to us even doing this.

And he'd always worked in that world, but he was very, very well versed in backpacking. So we would go on these amazing trips and then we'd have little like splashes of luxury here or there.

And on this trip, it was, yeah, we were usually maybe one night a week, two nights a week in a luxury hotel and the rest was guest houses and cheap hotels and not too many hostels until we got to China.

There was certainly a huge variation in the accommodations, what we were saying. And so how do you pack for something like that? Yeah, this is very difficult.

We made sure to have one or two really, really nice outfits for the hotels. I mean, we would show up there looking like backpackers. You know, we were sweaty.

We had our hiking boots on, t-shirts. We looked awful and we had big backpacks. We weren't like traveling with rolly bags. So as soon as we showed up at the hotel, we did not fit in.

So we tried very quickly to always get out of the lobby. Not that anyone really cared. I mean, in the grand scheme of things, nobody really cares about anyone but themselves.

We all know this. But I think it's still you have this moment where you see other guests arriving and they're in their crisp, beautiful linen outfits.

And we did not look like that. And the hotel staff, they were always very kind and gracious to us, because actually, when you're with somebody who's in that industry, They do treat you very very well because they're trying to make future sales and future connections but yeah, we made sure we had like an outfit to wear at breakfast that wasn't backpacker like and and all that kind of jazz, but Mostly we were wearing backpacking clothing and and the climate was mainly hot But there were a few areas we were in that were colder more long sleeves, but yeah, I mean really it was pretty bare bones in the old what was in my bag situation.

So it wasn't a bougie kind of. No, no. And my like two fancy outfits were not fancy at all. Well, I can imagine they'd have to be able to withstand being in a backpack for all that time.

Totally. And I think I picked up the odd sundress here and there that you could wear at a luxury hotel. So in that part of the world, there are clothes everywhere.

There's tons of night markets. And yeah, so it wasn't too stressful that way. It was just more how we showed up wasn't very appealing. So you mentioned the title of your book, The People You Meet.

So how did the people influence your journey? It's always about the people. So I think anyone that travels a lot, you can go to countries that you love and you feel instantly at home and they're magical.

The People Who Shaped the Journey

But I would say the reason for that usually is the people that come across your path. And this can be fellow travelers. This can be a group of local people.

This can be someone you meet in a restaurant. It can be everyone and anyone. And so I would say on this particular trip, when you are with a partner, it's very different.

You're in a different sort of social world where you do have somebody. So people treat you a little bit differently versus being alone. And I've done both.

But on this trip, there was one person that really stood out for me and her. Well, there are two. One of them, I'm sure you're aware of her name is Elle and she was wild and wonderful.

She was in her seventies and had been traveling alone through multiple countries, China, India, Southeast Asia. And she had a very wild personality. So she is someone I will never forget.

But the person who impacted me most was the woman in the book named B. And B was in her 50s. And B taught me the part of travel ego when it's time to go home.

So we were together waiting to get tickets to get on a boat to go somewhere. And she saw these two young women that were probably in their 20s, they were backpacking.

And she started watching them for a bit. And then she just looked at me and she said, it's time they need to go

home. So we had this amazing conversation about travel ego and when the trip is done and recognizing when you've had enough.

And that's a message that has stayed with me for my future travel since then about knowing when the party's over. And I think it's a really good message that I learned from her.

Was there pressure on you to stay a certain amount of time or to complete a certain amount of the journey? No, I had always imagined I would go for at least three months and then I would know.

And I also went to a psychic who also told me that I would know. So I was trusting both my gut and my psychic. But I think I just knew, you know, my partner was going for the long haul.

He was out there for nine months in total. But I knew I would never last that long because we were on the move like almost every two days and that's exhausting.

That's a very exhausting pace to keep up for months and months and months. You're in a new bed almost every night. You're on long haul buses and trains.

and it gets really really tiring and for me I got to a point where it became like a job and I wasn't really seeing things anymore I was just kind of more angry and and when we were in those luxury hotels in the beginning We just used them as a place to sleep and go to the pool or whatever.

But more towards the end of my time, we were hiding in those hotels just because we were exhausted. And so I just knew that it didn't matter what I saw or did anymore.

It was no longer impacting me in a positive way. And I knew it was time to go. So that was a huge lesson for me and one that I have carried with me in the time since, for sure.

Absolutely. So traveling with your partner in those conditions, did that put stress on your relationship? Absolutely, Dr. Amy. I mean, we were very lucky because we had traveled a lot together already.

So we knew We knew each other's inner workings and our styles, but I think that what we didn't ever think about was that when you have one person who has a true reason for being there and a goal and a purpose, and that is to create a future business.

So all of this research and these itineraries and these contacts, are of value to them.

Knowing When to End the Trip

And the other person is there going, isn't this fun, la di da. That's two very different experiences. And he did include me in that. I mean, I did lots of hotel site visits with him.

I sat in on many meetings because we had been living like this for several years. So this wasn't foreign to me, but it's still not the same. And so that's how this book actually happened, was that after three or four weeks, I started to realize that I needed something for me.

I needed more than just kind of following him around. So on these long buses and trains, I started creating these stories in my head about the places we were going, how I was feeling, the people we were meeting, the food, the scenery, all of it.

And then once a week, I would go to these internet cafes because it was 2010. That's how the world worked. And I would send out an email once a week and they were very long emails and they just took on a life of their own.

So long story short, those emails became this book 15 years later. But in that moment, that was like my task every week was to send out this amazing story and update about where we were.

And that saved me and probably saved our relationship as well, because Yeah, it's really, really tough. And you're with somebody 24 hours a day and someone, you know, he was more in control making decisions.

And I'm a very independent person. And so that becomes challenging after a while as well when you're on someone else's agenda. But more or less, we did very well.

But thank goodness, I discovered writing on this trip. And that was that was my savior. We definitely all need purpose, whatever that is. Did you know that you were going to make this into a book when you were doing it?

I didn't know, but at the time, everyone I sent it to was the response was just so positive and they couldn't wait for the next installment. And then I heard that they were sending these emails to their friends and family.

So I kind of knew it had legs and it was really fun. It was, you know, it can be very lonely traveling even when you're with a partner. Sometimes it's more lonely with a partner because your social situation is more isolated.

So that was a really good way for me to be connected. But I did have a moment when I left the trip thinking I have enough material for a book. I can go now.

But who knew? I didn't know at the time. Perfect. Well, I'm going to have you hold that thought. We're going to pause for a break from our sponsor. You're listening to Energize and Revitalize with Dr.

Amy. Don't go anywhere. We'll be right back. Welcome back to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr. Amy Cooper-Smith, and my guest today is Melissa Rodway, adventure traveler, author, and podcast host.

Before the break, we were talking about your book, The People You Meet, and your adventures in Southeast Asia and how you spent three to four months. there and met all kinds of amazing people and you mentioned some highlights from that trip.

So when you got back home, how did you re-assimilate into your normal life? Yeah, that's the hard part. So you come back and to be honest, nobody really cares about your story.

So they pretend to care for about 30 seconds and then life goes back to normal. But when you don't have a normal anymore, that's the hard part. So long story short, I ended up going back to university because in my 20s I had dropped out for silly and wild and wonderful reasons and that it always bothered me.

So when I got home I decided to go finish school and I was like 36 at this point and then I stumbled upon the community radio station at the University of Toronto.

So it's a campus station and I'd always wanted to do what you're doing. I wanted to have a show, I wanted to be on radio and so I ended up creating an adventure travel show called Fly Travel Radio.

Writing, Rebuilding, and Starting a Travel Show

So that was a show that was on for about six years and then it morphed into a podcast. So I couldn't really go anywhere when I got home. I had no money and I was rebuilding and that was my way of traveling through other people and making connections and building a travel community.

And so that's what I did. That was my next adventure in many, many ways. Yeah, being a relatively new podcast host, it is, it's learning something new.

Totally new. Taking your knowledge from other areas and trying to apply it in a way that's interesting. And so it's a lot of fun, but scary too. It's totally scary and unless you have done it nobody gets it so I'm with you and yeah you just you're kind of thrown into the fire right and learning how to interview people and get the best out of them in a certain amount of time and you have to do research and yeah there's a lot to it so I loved my time doing that it was an amazing journey but it's certainly Yeah, just like being thrown into the fire.

But I think when you do things like that, it starts taking you down other avenues and new journeys. And that's the reason we have to challenge ourselves with things like that.

Absolutely. So did you find it fulfilling to hear about other people's adventures? Or did you get wanderlust and need to get back on the road yourself?

Well, I have permanent wanderlust, but for a few years I couldn't go anywhere. And you know what, that wasn't terrible because I think what happens in those situations is it forces you to find adventures in your own backyard.

You find things that are free and cheaper to do. And sometimes it's okay to just take a pause and take stock of what's around you and what you're doing.

But certainly having that show was a really, really incredible way of feeling like I was out there. And I don't remember ever. I think sometimes, yes, I felt annoyed that I wasn't doing the things that other people were doing.

But in other ways, it actually really helped me to rebuild how I wanted to travel down the road and how I saw adventure. And I also made amazing connections.

Like a couple of my guests have become really good friends. One of my guests, I never met them in person and we ended up hiking along the coast of Turkey together for a week.

So a lot of really cool things came out of that for me. So I think I was at the right place at the right time. When you go on adventures now, do you do things differently than when you were younger?

Yes. So it's really interesting when you brought up traveling with purpose or finding purpose, because that's what I learned on that trip. And that was the writing part for me that I needed more than I needed more than just going to hang out.

I mean, that's a big part of backpacking sometimes. And I don't mean just hanging out, doing nothing. But I just think that my younger self, you are just like, just going from place to place to place and doing whatever, you know, came your way.

Whereas now my trips are all focused around being active, so hiking, cycling, that kind of stuff because I, like many of us, sit a lot now in my life and I hate it and I'm an active person.

So I really do these trips to be outside as long as I can every day and just sort of on a mission to travel by my own steam. And I also like that camaraderie with people on hiking and cycling trips where you're in this together on kind of this major, you know, voyage.

It's very, very exciting. So that's how I travel now. It's more geared towards that kind of lifestyle than drinking excessively and getting up to trouble.

Active Travel, Group Trips, and Getting Started

It hurts more when we get older too. Oh my God. Can't recover from that hangover. No. So do you feel like these trips need planning and you know, like you need to have an itinerary or do you kind of just kind of see what happens?

It depends. So I took a year off in 2023, which I mean, the years are going faster and faster. So three years ago now. And that was a series of trips that went anywhere from I think the shortest was like two or three weeks and the longest was eight weeks.

And so it depends, you know, I like variety. So on an eight week trip, I was doing a couple of group trips, like on my own, but with strangers. And then I'd have a week or two on my own doing my own thing.

And some of that would be structured and some of that would be spontaneous. So I think it depends on the time that you have. If I don't have a lot of time, I'd rather go with a tour company that's like has 10 to 15 people in the group that you've never met before.

And your hiking, cycling, paddling, doing something like that. And I don't really want to organize that, to be honest. But if I have more time, I like the variety of both.

I love being with people for a bit and then sort of doing my own thing for for a week or two and then maybe meeting up with some more people. I think I think variety is really nice with travel and it shows you different sides of yourself and other people.

Do you have specific groups that that you feel are safe for these sort of things or do you find different different groups? I have been pretty loyal to G Adventures.

They're a company from Canada and I discovered them in my late 20s and they do trips all over the world and now they do every type of trip. So active adventure, wellness, family trips like they have everything and anything.

There's another company that's similar called Intrepid. I've used them for a sailing trip I did in Montenegro. And then there's another company I use called Exodus.

They're also very good for hiking and cycling. And another one is called U-Trox and I've used U-Trox to do independent trips where they will organize like an apartment for you to stay and someone there in like a village that you can connect with if you need them.

But more or less, you're on your own. It's self-guided. You do what you have to do. But they are still kind of aware that you're there for anything that you might need.

So they're also very good. You know, my husband is going to hate that you're giving me ideas. Most husbands hate me. We have different senses of adventure.

So while he's doing some, you know, low mileage hiking with me, he doesn't necessarily want to see these other countries. Well, you don't have to do that with him.

Yeah, go solo or girl. Yeah, you know, like I have a partner and we do one trip together every year because he's an awesome traveler, but he doesn't want to do any of the things I want to do.

But we have a common ground with some things we want to do together. So we do one trip together and one trip apart. It's amazing. Yeah, that's a great idea.

Yeah, totally. So if we have listeners that maybe are fearful or they don't know how to get started, where would you recommend they start on their adventure journey?

I think that it's easy now. I mean, and I am a big advocate for do what speaks to you and your journey in adventure does not need to look like anyone else's.

So I think there's a lot of intimidation out there, especially on social media. I'm a pretty normal person. I'm normal looking. I'm not perfect. I'm not a model.

I have a very normal life. I've just managed to find adventure around that. So I think you should find what speaks to you. And if you're just starting out, I mean, do something that's close by if you want to.

There are so many parts of our own backyards that we haven't seen yet. Go away for a weekend somewhere. And if you're on your own, it's never been easier.

There are a million things you can sign up for. I was in Mexico by myself for a couple of weeks in 2023 in Oaxaca.

You can fill your days with walking tours, food tours, beer and taco trips, paint nights.

It is now built for solo people to meet other people for like a few hours or a full day or whatever it is.

Where to Find Melissa and Closing Remarks

So wherever you want to go, just get on those sites like tour radar and there's a whole bunch of them and you're going to meet people and figure it out or go on a group trip if you are trying to get your legs and you learn how to travel through those companies as well, the ones I just listed.

So I think it's actually really really easy But just take small steps one thing at a time and don't overthink it and don't think the big picture Like I actually hate now going to the airport.

I hate packing I hate all of it and sometimes I'm like, why am I doing this? But if it's like even that I have to break down like, okay I'm gonna do my laundry that I'm gonna pack like it's like one little thing at a time will get you to the bigger the bigger part But it can be overwhelming So small steps and do what feels right for your soul.

Totally. Yep. Don't compare yourself to anyone else. That's good. So we're almost out of time, but where can our listeners learn more about you and find your book?

Yeah. So the book is on Amazon and it is called The People You Meet and look for my name, Melissa Rodway, because what I realized is I do not have the only The People You Meet title, but I have an awesome subtitle title, which is Luxury Leaches Love and Lau Lau, the host of interesting characters in Southeast Asia.

So there you go. So go there. It's e-reader or paperback. My social media on Instagram is fly underscore travel underscore media. That's the best place to learn more about me.

And I have a website flyrodway.com. Wonderful. Well, I really want to thank you for sharing your story and both here and through your book. And I do recommend our listeners check it out.

Well, thank you so much. I'm so glad to hear that you enjoyed it and thank you for sharing it with your listeners. Dr. Amy is awesome. Thank you. And thanks for our listeners for tuning in to Energize and Revitalize with Dr.

Amy. Are there insights you got from this episode or more topics you want to hear about? Send me an email at radiantpodcast2025 at gmail.com. Check out past episodes on our YouTube channel.

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I'll be back next Saturday morning at 730. insights and practical strategies to help you live your best life. Until then, here's to your best life.