

Welcome to update number five.

The first four weeks of this leg were a breeze. Travelling in an English speaking country was a nice break from the “what the hell is going on” feeling I’d grown so accustomed to.

While getting around was easier in the U.K., the lack of challenges took a bit of the excitement out of travel. No longer did I spend the first hour of a train ride wondering if I boarded the correct train because I could clearly

understand all the timetables, signs and announcements.

Well, that was until I went to France and Spain, where I promptly decided I should learn a language or two before my next big trip (which I’ve

already started planning).

I hope you enjoy update number five; given that I’ll be back in Australia in 18 days, it’s probably the second last one on the adventure.

Emma



ENGLAND I U.K. (PART ONE)

With a grandfather who grew up in the burrows of London, I have oodles of British relatives who I knew nothing about. Including some I've never met. Part one of my England visit was to rectify this.

Upon my arrival in the U.K. I stayed with my mother's cousin, Stephen, and his wife, Dinah; two of the most generous people I know. They

showed me all around the sights of Norwich, Ely and Cambridge, and organised for me to meet Stephen's father (my grandfather's brother), Ray, for the first time.

Though they've been living on different sides of the world for decades, the similarities between Ray and my ol' Pop are uncanny.

He has Pop's chatty and chirpy personality, his cheeky sense of

humour, even the same little gap between his front teeth.

After not seeing my grandfather in person for six months, it was a very comforting experience.

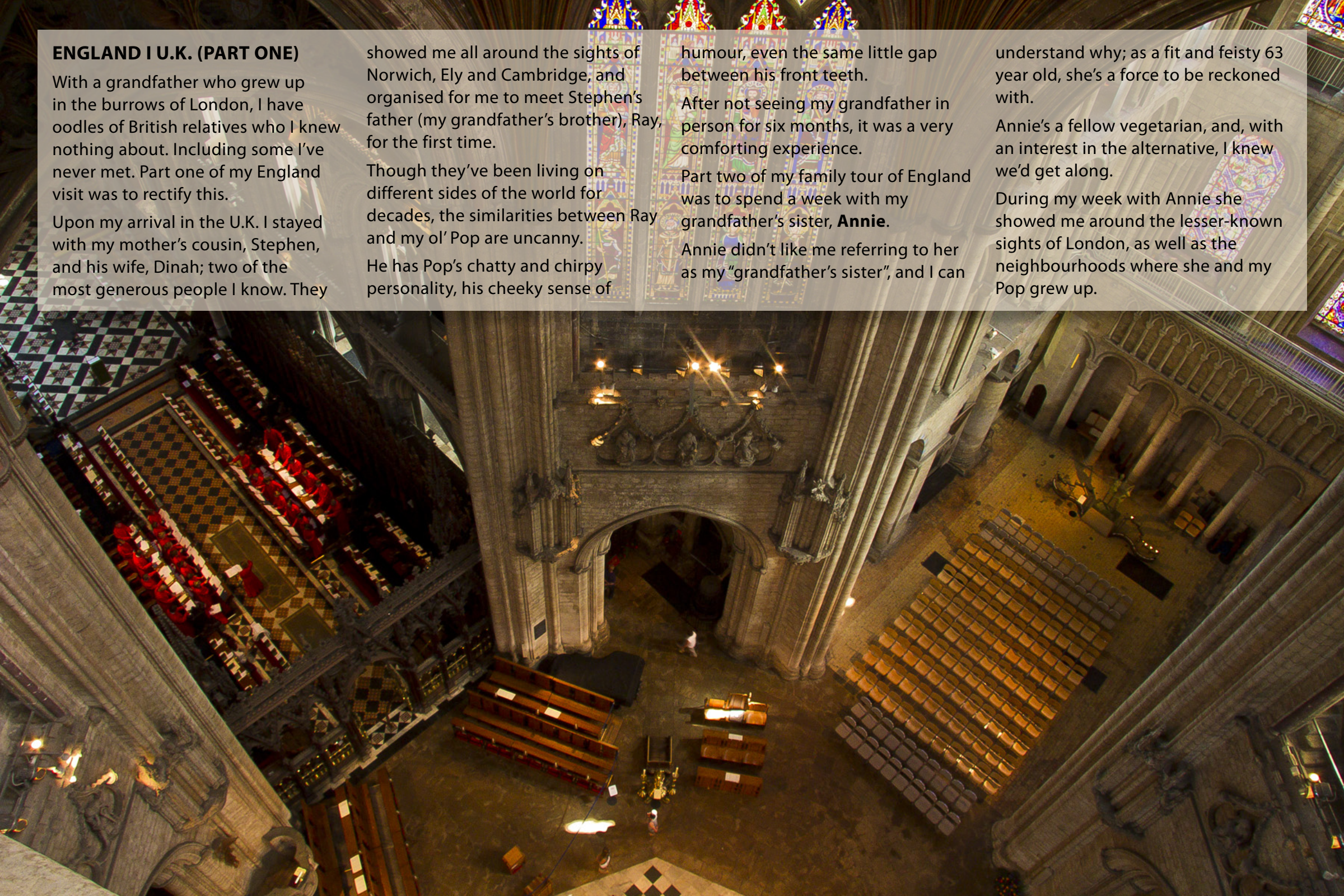
Part two of my family tour of England was to spend a week with my grandfather's sister, **Annie**.

Annie didn't like me referring to her as my "grandfather's sister", and I can

understand why; as a fit and feisty 63 year old, she's a force to be reckoned with.

Annie's a fellow vegetarian, and, with an interest in the alternative, I knew we'd get along.

During my week with Annie she showed me around the lesser-known sights of London, as well as the neighbourhoods where she and my Pop grew up.



ENGLAND I U.K. (PART TWO)

I was lucky enough to experience three big British events during my time in England.

Number one: a five week heat wave. The downside of warm weather in the U.K. is that they never have any therefore aren't prepared for temperatures above "pleasant".

On the plus side, weather discussion is England's number one sport, and the heat wave has given the population enough material for twenty years worth of dinner conversations.

Number two: Andy Murray winning Wimbledon.

I can't think of another sports personality with whom a country has a more extreme love-hate relationship.

Because I share a surname with Andy his win worked out well for me. I managed to score a lot of free drinks by flashing my passport and telling people I was in the U.K. to watch "Cousin Andy" play tennis.

I'm told ladies can get free drinks in the U.K. by flashing other things, too, but thankfully my budget didn't come to that.

Number three: a woman had a baby. Ordinarily,

hearing that a woman had a baby isn't a big deal. It happens all the time. But for some reason if that baby is born to the only functional members of the British Monarchy, its reason for the entire country to flip out.

I caught some TV coverage by one channel that decided to examine the credentials of Kate's gynaecologist, who they enthusiastically reported is also the Queen's gynaecologist.

If you didn't feel physically ill after hearing the phrase "Queen's gynaecologist", I'll just let you sit and think about that for a minute.



WALES I U.K.

My thoughts on Wales before visiting were that it was boggy, boring and full of inbreds (yes, I'm aware many people say the same thing about Tasmania). This couldn't be further from the truth (on both counts).

Wales wasn't in my original plans, but I slipped it in after booking a surf camp in Llangennith - a small town on the south-west coast.

It'd been six months since I surfed, and I could only imagine how bad my fitness was, so I decided to arrive a week early to do some physical preparation for the camp.

I chose the seaside town of Swansea as my training centre due to its long beaches, lack of tourists and famous ice cream.

At the start of my first weekend I woke up early and walked to the beach to do some running and swimming. I got to the bottom of the hill, turned the corner to the main boulevard and looked at the beach to see what seemed like the entire population of Wales occupying the length and breadth of the sand.

After a few enquires I found out that the **Wales National Air Show** was being held in Swansea, and the beach would be teeming with people for the next three days.

I was a little annoyed at myself for not doing more research, but on the plus side the event brought an uncharacteristic party atmosphere to the sleepy town of Swansea, as well as an abundance of men in uniform (ladies).

Despite the disruption, I still managed to get in some good training, and seven days later I left Swansea feeling fit and ready for a week of intense surfing in Llangennith.

Unfortunately, within an hour of arriving in Llangennith, the surf camp was cancelled due to flat conditions. Instead, I spent my week hiking I along the spectacular Welsh coast, which turned out to be a highlight of my time in the U.K.



ISLE OF WIGHT | U.K.

The Isle of Wight is a stunning island off the southern coast of England.

Thanks to the generosity of Sue and Alan Izzard, I was able to stay there for ten days in the peak of summer.

After my Greek Islands experiment, I knew if I spent my ten days on the

beach I'd be bored in three hours.

Instead, I decided to tackle the 105km coastal path that goes all the way around the island.

By the end of my last day I'd successfully circumnavigated the Isle of Wight, walking every foot of the path. Well, all except for one stretch that had been swept away in

a landslide

Luckily where the path ends there's a sign indicating that the "coastal path continues on beach", so, following instructions, that's where I went.

After walking part of the **beach** I realised the sign should probably say "coastal path continues on *nudist*

beach".

I'm not offended by nudity, but I like to know when to expect it, and I don't think I've ever been more self-conscious than I was fully clothed walking along a crowded nudist beach. And, you know, the people at those kinds of beaches are never the ones you want to see naked.





PARIS | FRANCE

The day before leaving London I received a message from my friend Ben asking if I was free to catch up while he was holidaying in Brighton. When I told him I was leaving

for Paris the next day he replied "Okay, I'll just come to Paris then".

Ben and I managed to tick off all the major cheesy tourist activities – **Eiffel Tower**, Arch de Triumph, Notre Dame, the Louvre, and the Sacre Coeur,

as well as gorge ourselves on baguettes, cheese and crepes. Ben even **ate snails**, too.

Paris is one of my favourite cities in the world, and I think it's true what they say; every girl should go there at least once in their life.

BARCELONA | SPAIN

Barcelona has a unique life and colour to it, and I think anyone could easily find something they like there.

With plenty of interesting museums, cathedrals, tapas bars and parks, Barcelona has a variety of ways to have fun, at any time of day.

Not to mention the incredible architecture of Antoni Gaudi, whose designs are so crazy even Salvador Dali was a fan.

I quite often day-dreamed about Gaudi and Dali drinking together; smoking and sipping on whisky as they made jokes about the feeble minded folk. Those guys.

After being warned about Barcelona's crime I was pretty cautious during my visit, but after three days of incident-free sightseeing I let my guard down as I was leaving the city.

My little day pack, containing my computer, camera, wallet and passport, was snatched from right beneath my nose.

This led to a dramatic chase through the streets, followed by an anticlimactic surrender by the culprit. I was almost disappointed when he turned and gave me my bag back.

It's a great story until I get to the end, but I'd rather have all my valuables than an exciting conclusion.



SAN SEBASTIAN I SPAIN

I arrived at San Sebastian train station in a mild state of shock; the four hour ride had given the morning's events time to sink in, and after contemplating how things could've turned out I was left a bit shaken.

Times like these are rough when

you're travelling by yourself, so I went about fixing it the only way I knew how. Alcohol.

After getting settled in my accommodation I set out in search of a tapas bar, and entertained strangers with my bag snatching story while drinking sangria by the jug. I did not wake up well.

This was my only big night in San

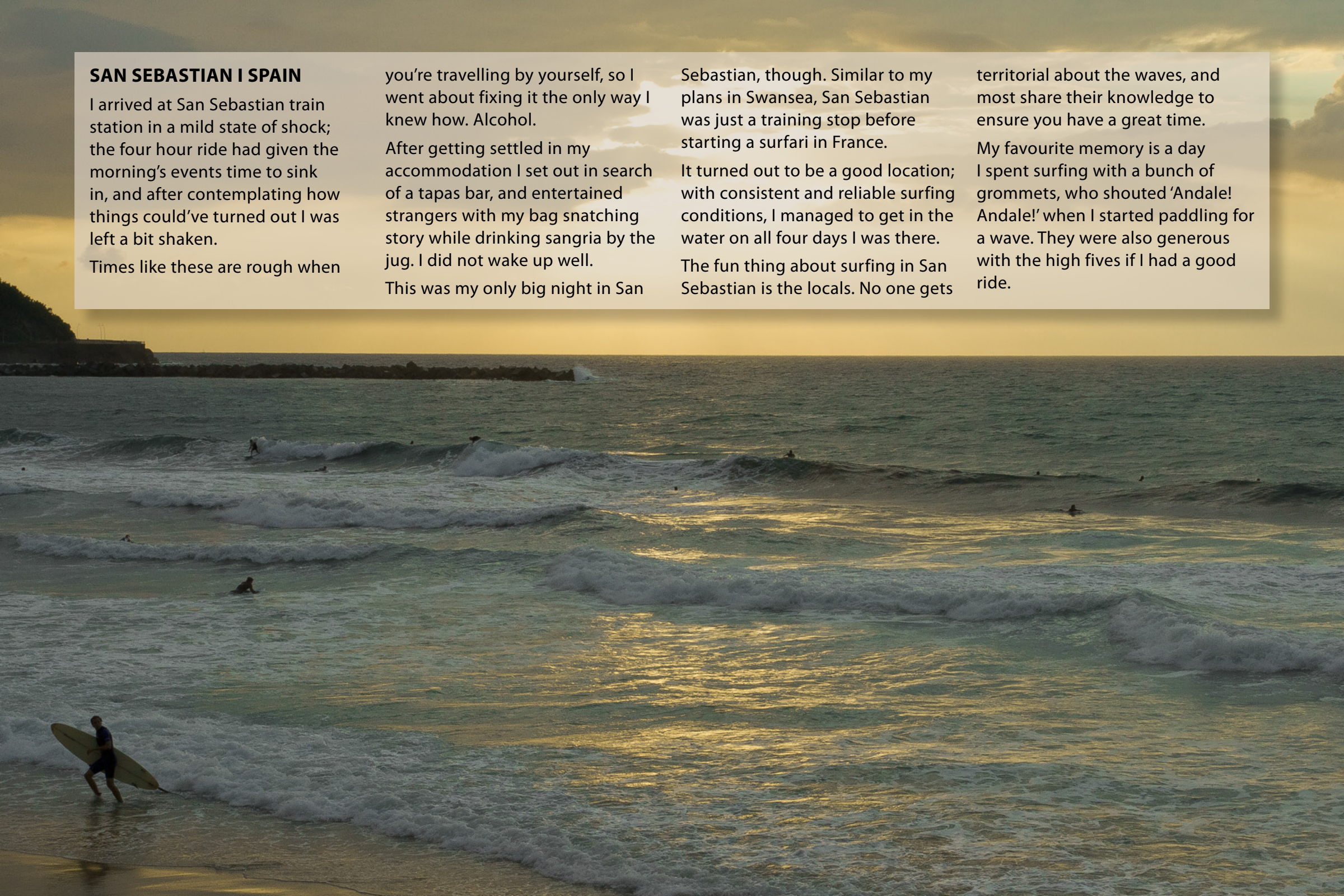
Sebastian, though. Similar to my plans in Swansea, San Sebastian was just a training stop before starting a surfari in France.

It turned out to be a good location; with consistent and reliable surfing conditions, I managed to get in the water on all four days I was there.

The fun thing about surfing in San Sebastian is the locals. No one gets

territorial about the waves, and most share their knowledge to ensure you have a great time.

My favourite memory is a day I spent surfing with a bunch of grommets, who shouted 'Andale! Andale!' when I started paddling for a wave. They were also generous with the high fives if I had a good ride.





BIARRITZ | FRANCE

From San Sebastian I jumped over the French border to Biarritz to start a week of cycling, surfing and camping with a group of unruly Brits. Each day we surfed at the local

break, then threw our boards on our bikes and **cycled** to the next beach.

This all sounds great, and for the most part it was; cycling and surfing along the west coast of France was a special experience I'll never forget.

The camping was unforgettable as well, for different reasons.

With limited space in my pack I didn't have enough room to bring a sleeping bag or mat, so I ended up **sleeping on my wetsuit** for the

week, and wearing ALL my clothes to keep warm.

Surprisingly, it wasn't as uncomfortable as I thought it would be. I experienced worse sleeping arrangements in India.



Click on the links below to view previous updates

- **India**
- **South-east Asia**
- **Turkey and Greece**
- **Rome to Amsterdam**

Photo: punting on the River Cam with Dinah and Ray.