

How Travelling Adventures Inspire my Books

By Paul Westmoreland

When I was a kid, our family holidays were always the same. Every summer, we'd go to the same place and do the same things. About the only things that changed were the weather and the films in the cinema.

I was twenty before I flew on a plane!

So when I was old enough, I decided to see the world.

I wanted stamps in my passport written in Arabic, Hebrew, hieroglyphs and pictograms—the kind you just don't get from popping across the channel!

I didn't just want to visit other countries either. I wanted to feel like I was in another world. I wanted to see extraordinary things and feel totally out of place, like I was actually in the kind of places you only visit through books and movies.

My first big trip was a two-week tour of Egypt, which was inspired by my old school projects, *The English Patient* and *Death on the Nile*.

Two weeks before I set off, I met up with a friend I hadn't seen in a while. As we caught up, I told him about my trip. His response changed everything. He said, 'That sounds amazing! I've just won a thousand pounds on the horses. Can I come along too?'

I said, 'Of course! That'd be brilliant.' And it was.

We rode camels through the streets of Cairo, and raced them across the desert by the pyramids.

We bribed tour guides to let us explore tombs that are off the tourist track where scorpions crawled the walls. And when we were inside, the tour guides we bribed demanded double the money to let us out again!

And waded in Lake Nasser, which is home to man-eating crocodiles. I know this is true because they had a crocodile skull on a spike at the water's edge to dissuade us. It didn't. In fact it encouraged me to go in!

It was all a lot of fun!

So much fun in fact, we decided to go away again. And again and again...

Over the next few years, we covered half the world together. We trekked across Morocco, Mongolia, China, Vietnam and Cuba, visited Malta, Sicily, and Tanzania and climbed Mount Kilimanjaro.

We swam in rivers and mountain streams, jumped off a waterfall, visited Ernest Hemingway's house, slept on sand dunes in the Sarah, walked the Great Wall of China, fired rifles in the Vietnam jungle, explored tombs and pyramids, repaired a flat tyre by packing it with grass, watched the sun rise above the clouds, hallucinated with altitude sickness, got on the wrong plane and once tried to check in at the wrong airport!

While we never broke any laws or got in any real trouble, I came home older and wiser—I'm not sure I'll splash about in any crocodile-infested lakes any time soon! I also have a huge box full of stunning photographs to show for it. As well as more stories of people and places, scams and bits of luck than I could ever have imagined.

I also learned that, no matter what happens or whatever goes wrong—and a lot did—you can always find a solution if you think hard enough, work quickly enough and stay together. And other times you just have to run for it!

Whether I mean to or not, I put a lot of these experiences, misadventures and lessons into my stories. I can't help it and I couldn't write the way I do about Rudy and his adventures if I hadn't gone out into the world and had some adventures of my own.

Experience is everything for a writer. It's invaluable because it gives your writing an integrity and an authenticity that the reader can feel and believe in. So even when I'm writing about a werewolf boy and his friends exploring a fantasy forest on the very edge of town, the unbreakable friendship I have from travelling the world with one of my best friends is in there too, informing the story and how it feels, and the reader can feel it too, even though I'm not explicitly talking about it.

But the biggest lesson I learned was, There's always another adventure waiting around the corner, you just don't know what it'll bring with it.

This article was written in 2022

*Paul Westmoreland is the author of the Rudy series for children aged 6-8,
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