

Exploring Spain: Highlights and Travel Tips from Madrid, Seville & Barcelona (Episode 51)

This week's Global Travel Planning Podcast features highlights from our Spain trip

Tracy: If

Tracy: If Spain is a destination you can't wait to explore, this week's episode of the Global Travel Planning Podcast is for you. We're sharing the highlights of our recent trip to Madrid, Seville and Barcelona, including our favorite tours, how we got around where we stayed, and what we'd do differently next time. Hi and welcome to the Global Travel Planning Podcast. I'm, your host, Tracy Collins, who with my expert guests will take you on a weekly journey to destinations around the globe, providing travel inspiration, exciting itinerary ideas, practical tips, and more to help you plan your next travel adventure. Hi everybody and ah, welcome to episode 51 of the Global Travel Planning Podcast. This week Doug and I are here to talk all about our recent time in Spain, but we have again our lovely guest interviewer, Melissa, who is our, ah, resident Aussie every month in the Brit, Aussie and Yank episode that we have, which where we share general travel tips. So Melissa again has agreed to come on and do the interview and as she did for the Morocco episode. So welcome Melissa.

Melissa Kailey: thank you, Tracy and Doug. Well, we're here to talk tonight about your trip to Spain. So how about we start with just a general overview about your trip?

You spent three weeks in Spain, divided up by one week in Portugal

Tracy: Okay. Should I start? Okay, so we, we literally spent three weeks in Spain, divided up actually by one week in Portugal. So we did. We actually flew from Morocco. At the end of our trip from Morocco, we flew from Marrakech to Madrid, spent a couple of days in Madrid, then went down to Seville for 12 days before heading over to Portugal for a week and then flying over to Barcelona for seven days. So basically it was Madrid, Seville and Barcelona that weren't for 21 days.

Tracy: That's right. In total. Yeah. We didn't actually stay in Barcelona itself, but we'll explain that later.

Tracy: Yeah.

Melissa Kailey: Okay, so why did you decide? And you know, Spain's a big place, obviously. Why Madrid? Seville and Barcelona. Like what drew you to those particular cities?

Tracy: Well, Madrid initially because neither of us have been there. And, because we're in Morocco. When we were looking at options to get into Spain, we were, we saw good deals on the flights from, Marrakech to Madrid. So it seemed to tick a few boxes at once. Really.

Tracy: Yeah. And then after that we were trying to decide where else to go. So then we felt we wanted to do a train, a few train trips actually. That was part of also what we wanted to do in Spain. And, neither of us had been to Seville, so we decided to head down to Seville. And then it kind of made sense to go into Portugal. And our original

plans were actually to go to northern Spain after Portugal. where we're gonna go.

Tracy: Well, I wanted to go from Porto in Portugal up to Santiago de Compostia for the to see basically the sites there and then work away around northern Spain to the Basque area and then down into Madrid and then back to Barcelona and then down to Barcelona. That was the initial plan. Unfortunately the renfe. Well the Spanish trains were going to be on strike. So it wasn't just one or two days, it was three or four days in a week. So it was over a few weeks.

Tracy: Yeah, it was just going to be impossible.

Tracy: Yeah, we couldn't make any concrete plans so we decided to bite the bullet and book a flight. But unfortunately within an hour of booking the flight they called the strikes off.

Tracy: And we couldn't believe it. It literally was one of those moments where we sat and went, right, we have to make a decision now because it because we were kind of booking things as we went and so we had that flexibility when we were like, that was the, was to go northern Spain but it was just not going to work because of the strike. So we just went, no, let's, we're just going to have to fly at Barcelona. And I'm not joking, I think it was 10 minutes after we booked the flight, non refundable flight, that they called off the strike and I think we just went, okay, right, we'll just have to call it a day and we're going to go to Barcelona and that's what we're going to do. So we just kind of. Sometimes you have to just have that flexibility and go with it.

Tracy: I mean anyone who knows me knows my love of trains, all things trains. So you can imagine my disappointment. And nothing against flying but I'd rather be on a train.

Tracy: Well, I'd always rather be on a plane as well. On a train rather than a plane I should say. But anyway, so that's what we did. So it ended up being a kind of shortened our time that we wanted to spend in Spain. But it just means that we'll have to go back again.

Tracy: Yeah, basically.

Melissa Kailey: Absolutely.

How did you choose where to stay when traveling in Spain

And what about like where did you stay in each city? and how did you choose where you stayed?

Tracy: I think Madrid. We just stayed in a hotel for a couple of nights. we flew in and just got a transfer and stayed in a hotel kind of in a central part of Madrid. Yeah.

Tracy: Not far from the palace.

Tracy: Yeah. So. Cuz we knew we were going to do a couple of Tours. So that was going to be the easiest place to stay. but Madrid was actually very short. We're only there for a couple of nights. and then because we had quite a lot of things like washing to do. And also when you're traveling long term, you have to think about expense. And staying in hotels means that you have to

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Tracy: paying out for food all the time, restaurants. So we decided that we'd book apartments. So in Seville. We actually were only going to go to Seville for a week, but we really liked Seville, so we loved it, didn't we? We loved Seville so much that we extended it by another five days. So we. Unfortunately, the accommodation that we had, which was a huge apartment, in a home, it was a lovely part of Seville as well. We had to move from that closer to the bus station because we're actually catching a bus to, Lisbon. So we had to move accommodation then that was a part hotel. And then in, Barcelona.

Tracy: Yep.

Tracy: We actually stayed south of the city. We stayed in a town called Sidges. And again, we had another apartment with a washing machine because again, just trying to keep on top of things like washing. And also we could have our own breakfast, take things a little bit easier, you know, when you stay in a hotel, hotels are lovely, but you have a certain time for breakfast. Whereas, you know, if you're in your apartment, you get up, you kind of do. Eat what you want. Do what you want. But things like just the practicalities of keeping on top of washing things.

Tracy: That's right. And, some days, because of the weather, there were work days as well. And we also looked at feedback on the strength, the quality of the WI fi as well, which was also, a factor.

Tracy: Yeah, that was actually really important because we. Yeah, because unfortunately, I'm sure we'll get onto it. We've not had the best, best weather and we have to work when we're on the road. It's not just we don't. We loved it just to travel and that, but we have to work. So recording podcasts and doing consults and writing articles

and all, it has to be done. So, yeah, having to make. Making sure we had good WI fi, in the apartments worked. It actually worked pretty well, to be honest. So we're able to do everything that we need to do and, all the places are central. I say Sidges we stayed in, which is south of Barcelona. It was somewhere that Doug. I'd never heard of it. Doug wanted to go there.

Tracy: Yes. It was a place, I, visited frequently with My parents when I was very little and we went you know, consecutive number of years. So I was trying to work out, did I say sort of, sort of 30 odd years since I was last there. So it was a bit of a return to childhood. So holiday location which was really nice to be honest with you. I remembered a few little bits and pieces, didn't I? I actually loved it where the beach was.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah but, but I absolutely loved Sidges. It was actually nice not to be in, in Bar which is crazy even this time of year. It's crazy busy. So it it because it is the most popular destination in, in Spain. Yeah. And it just is crazy, crazy busy. So it was actually nice getting on the train and going out and going south to this and, and staying beside the beach. It was just lovely.

Tracy: It was because we, we. The the accommodation was close to the train station, close to a good supermarket as well. And ah, it gave me an opportunity every time we went into Barcelona to experience the, the local train service there, called Ra which unauthor for us was a bit of a challenge at times but you know that's part of the adventure and I enjoy the railway challenge. but no, it was a nice place. It's a nice place of life in Scissors as well, which was nice.

Tracy: I'll link in the show notes to the four different accommodations that we had in Spain. I will put a link to those. But. Yeah, but pretty good. Yeah, no complaints.

So we've talked a little bit about how you guys got around Spain

Melissa Kailey: So we've talked a little bit about how you guys got around between and within the cities. But did you want to talk about that, expand on that and any tips or insights you've got from traveling around?

Tracy: Well, I like using metros obviously like London, the London Underground. the metro system in Madrid was very good, very identical in a lot of ways with the different colored lines. So the principle was the same. The ticket is slightly different because we could buy one travel card in Madrid which was for the both of us, which is different to London where you have a, an Oyster card each. So we could we loaded it with 10 single journeys and obviously that'll be five each traveling together. And that worked very well in Madrid. And then the as I said in Barcelona, the local services rallies which covers into the city as well. So it's again colored lines and it's like many other metro systems around the world once you got your head around it, the principal lines where you stay in and where you want to get to the main tourist areas. You know, it's, it's pretty straightforward. and easy to use. So besides metros and walking.

Tracy: Yeah. I mean places like Seville are very walkable, Very walkable city anyway. And we did use the fast train though when we went from Madrid down to Seville which was pretty good.

Tracy: That was excellent. Yeah. yeah, took took a few hours and we, we upgraded on that one to the first class as well. I should mention Madrid, Seville and Barcelona have a tram system as well. Light rail system. Obviously the size of the city determines how many lines that they have. Which looks very efficient as well.

Tracy: But Sevilla doesn't really go in this.

Tracy: No, there's only the one line. Yeah.

Tracy: So you don't really see that.

Tracy: But the ones at the back of the, the Palace.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh that's true. Yeah. Just thinking about get mixed up with all these different cities, but. Yes, but pretty easy to get around. I don't think we had many problems actually. The most difficult trip we had was our ah, trip from Siges to Barcelona to that to the airport because

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Tracy: we had to change trains and obviously we've got suitcases with us and none of the escalators were working and there were no lifts. So we both had to carry upstairs like 20kg suitcase up actually long escalator and then back down again as well because it neither gone up or down. So yeah, that was really difficult. I was not in the best of frame of minds by the time we're done.

Tracy: And a bit discouraging. There was no staff around to help or advise either, which is a bit.

Tracy: No. And that would have been a struggle. So anybody you know, it was difficult for us to do and actually it was an elderly couple that were coming down and they, they in Spanish were saying to us like you're gonna have to have some strength like doing

the. Like showing the muscles. Gonna realize because it was a big escalator to carry all the suitcases.

Tracy: But we're looking at alternatives because Siches Siges is pretty close to Barcelona Airport. so on when we arrived we took an Uber.

Tracy: Didn't. Yeah. Normally straightforward. Yeah.

Tracy: And then we thought we're being smart being cuz we're the. The pont was so close to Sid's train station. We thought we're being smart by taking the, the metro.

Tracy: No, obviously. So you can imagine how many times I said this is why I booked the transfer, this is why I book a transfer, this is why I get a taxi. So. And, and yeah, I did say that it's because of Those things you can't plan for. It seemed like the easiest way to do it. It ended up being a nightmare.

Tracy: It did. And the train line to the airport went to the wrong terminal as well.

Tracy: Yeah.

Tracy: So then we had a quite a faff, getting from Terminal 2 to Terminal 1.

Tracy: Yeah. So it was a pain.

Tracy: So when it took us about 30, 40 minutes to get from Barcelona airport to the accommodation, it took over an hour and a half to get back to the airport.

Tracy: Yeah. So my advice honestly is if you decide to stay in Sigils, which I would highly recommend, rather than staying in Barcelona, get, just make sure, just get a transfer, get a taxi to the airport. Do not do what we did. Honestly, we never do that. It's the first time we've done that forever and it was not good.

Tracy: We won't be doing it again.

Marion did food and historical tours in Seville and Madrid

Melissa Kailey: Let's talk about some of the things you did there, like your tours and experiences. I think you said you did a couple of tours, food and historical history sort of tours. So what were your favorites? What were the highlights?

Tracy: Oh, we did, we did quite a few tours. Now I'm going to start off with the three tapas tours that we did. Well, actually we did four, we did three specific tapas, like history of the food, trying the food, tours in, in Seville and Madrid and Barcelona. But in Seville we also did an additional tapas tour, which was a tapas and flamenco tour, which I have to say was one of the best tours. I love food tours anyway, but because you learn about history and you meet the locals and you go to local places where they have the food that you know that the food is like genuine, authentic. but, but Marion, that. That tapestry with the flamenco that we saw, I've never seen anything like that. It was incredible. And we had a Sophie who was a guide, so massive shout out to Sophie because you were amazing. And she's been a 500 or so these shows and she was like, this is one of the best ones she'd ever seen. So I would highly recommend that. That was with Devour. We did all of the food tours with Devour, so thanks very much, Devour, for inviting us onto those tours. I says he four, with Mony in Madrid, which was fantastic.

So, and that, that was some of the most amazing food. Honestly, it was fantastic. And then obviously in Seville we did, we did two, two tours there, food tours. And then we had the final one in Barcelona, with Ariana on, which was just last week. And Ariana. Excellent, excellent. It was just so good because you don't just learn about the food, you learn about the history. You get to eat in local places. You just learn so much. and also, I mean you do get the food and the drink which is fantastic. so they, they were just, just made it so much in fact so much. When we're in Istanbul at the moment and we're doing a food tour tomorrow. because it's just a wonderful way to learn about ah, a place through the food culture. but honestly I, I have to say one of the absolute highlights. I will never ever forget that Flamenco.

Tracy: No, it was absolutely outstanding. I, I saw it so when I was a little lad and my memory had held fast. It was just as exciting, just as fabulous. M Passionate. It was just unbelievable experience. And of course Andalusia is the home of flamenco.

Tracy: Yeah, that's where it comes from. And you know, it's just fantastic. Honestly, they're so talented. And we also did some walks, tours. We did Seville and a day with Alba who is going to be one of my all time favorite tour guides ever. I absolutely loved Alba. Alba was amazing. We did a real show show in Alba in which you can see on our Instagram. I'm following her on Instagram now. She follows us. Just amazing. She was so lovely, wasn't she?

Tracy: She really was. We went and had lunch with her.

Tracy: Yeah, we had lunch with that afterwards. Because we went on this term it was just me and dog. So we ended up having m. A private school in a date.

Tracy: I know.

Tracy: How lucky were we? It was incredible.

Tracy: So I can say

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Tracy: with all the, the devour and the walks or the guides, they've chosen their staff well because they all demonstrate such passion and a real love for the whole topic.

Tracy: There are storytellers.

Tracy: They are. And they have that right balance between the history of the. The the towns or cities and The food part it is to do seem to have it well planned out.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah, no, it's fantastic. So that's the other devoured ones. And then the, the. The walks to as well. Like saying the guides are just fantastic. You know, Alba was, was amazing. And then in Barcelona we did. We recently did a Gaudi tour as well with, with walks which was amazing. So obviously we went to La Sagrada Familia which I saw 20 years ago and my goodness, how different. It's. It's nearly finished and it just. Oh, it's beautiful. It's. It's absolutely beautiful. And then we went To Park Guell again which I went to 20 years ago and remember but it's the first time you'd been, it was, was. And then we did Casa, Casa Ballo which I'm going to pronounce completely incorrectly, which is another one of G's houses that he designed. And yeah, so that was, that was fantastic. And it's really lovely. I mean it, you know, you associate G, Barcelona and GY kind of go hand in hand. So I think have an appreciation of that

Again. Our guide Oliver was very good. He really same passion exactly. It was excellent.

We did do Granada and Alhambra which we took from Seville

We did do a data to Granada and Alhambra which we took from Seville, which we just booked through another company through, through get your guide. And I think that was probably almost disappointing to actually.

Tracy: Yeah, the weather didn't exactly help for the day either to be truthful. But it was a bit large group. It was a full coach size party.

Tracy: And I mean large. We're talking like maybe 48 something. 48, 50 people, something like that. And you know you can see the difference between that tour and something like if you go walks to us where there's maximum like 15 of you, it's like, it's so different. And it was a little bit no offense to the guide and the heart, it just was a little bit boring. I think it was just a little bit too much information and detail. There's a certain amount. You know what I think the difference is you need to have the stories to go with it because if you just tell people the history it gets a bit, I know I used to be a history teacher. It gets dry and boring everything. Rather than like tell us the stories about the place. The thing I always remember, you know, was just think about the, the fact that the, in Alhambra, the sultan, sultans had red hair. Which I'll always remember that because she was telling the story of that because it's not what you kind of expect. So that was really interesting. But otherwise it was a very, very long day. I think if I did that again I'd stay in Granada.

Tracy: Oh, it was 13 hours. But another thing with the large groups, everyone is less

inclined to ask questions and interact with the group in a sort of, you know, 10, 12, 15. It's easy to mix with other members of the group.

Tracy: Yeah. And also I'm also going to say to be honest, we just been in Morocco so I think everything was held up against the, so I, I, I was a little bit. Or I'm going to get shot down on things by this, I'm sure. But the Alhambra, I guess I was a bit disappointed by it. I just expected it to be, I don't know, to, just to impress me more. Yeah, I just think after Morocco and I did actually say, I think I said I don't mind, stick around on my Instagram stories like don't, don't go when you've just been to Morocco because you're gonna hold up. So.

Tracy: Yeah, didn't help that day to be fair.

Tracy: True, true.

The rain in Spain fell mania on me and Doug, to be honest

Melissa Kailey: Well, talking about weather, let's talk about the weather overall while you were in Spain and you know, what was it like and how did it impact your travel?

Tracy: Well, the, the saying goes, the rain in Spain falls mainly on the plane. But it didn't. The rain in Spain fell mania on me and Doug, to be honest. I think wherever we were in Spain, Spain had like the worst, the worst March I think they've had for, for. I think every single day it rained. I won't even talk about Portugal because Portugal ended up being a complete wash up. Portugal was even worse. We did have some Madrid. It rained every day. Seville, we had, did have some sunshine which thank goodness. So it was more

showers. We did have a couple of days of torrential rain. Barcelona, thank goodness. We, this is ironic that we flew, we flew out from Porto when left, beautiful sunshine and we actually got delayed. In fact we were delayed on the Runway in Porto for an hour or so because we couldn't land in Barcelona because there was such bad weather, thunderstorms. So we had to be delayed. Anyway, we eventually landed in Barcelona, a beautiful sunshine. So I, will not complain because honestly for most of that week in Barcelona, ah, we had beautiful sunshine and lovely weather and we're able to sit on the beach and the times when we weren't going off to Barcelona to do stuff or walking around Sidges, we could just have an hour or so on the beach and relax and enjoying some sunshine, which I have been craving.

Tracy: I actually read a book as well, which is nice.

Doug: Try as far as possible to keep your travel plans flexible

Melissa Kailey: all right, well, let's just talk overall. any tips or recommendations that, you know, anything you learned from your trip and your time in Spain?

Tracy: Well, I've actually just put an article together of 12 tips for anybody

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Tracy: visiting Spain, for the first time. So I'll put a link to that in the show notes. and we've also written, a guide to visiting Seville, and I'm finishing off a guide to visiting Barcelona from our kind of from what we've learned from, from this trip as well, I mean Spain is a, is somewhere that I'd visited many times as a child, many times as I was

growing up. It's very popular with British visitors and Doug had been many, many times before. So it was kind of nice to re all that, but also kind of to just to learn a little bit more about, you know, visiting Spain in 2025 and, and what it looks like. I think for me, I would just say if you plan to visit Spain, read our articles because we've literally just been. So you've got up to date information about, all the places we've visited and getting around and also, some tips if, if it's a first time visit and then I don't know for you, Doug, what would be your one tip?

Tracy: Well, it's a similar advice to our give to visiting the UK is to try as far as possible to keep your travel plans flexible. And new piece of advice as well is we wouldn't have found out about the train strikes if we didn't try and keep, you know, on top of local news as well because we wouldn't have known. Not speaking Spanish, we would not have known. So it's only by chance we did actually find out from the guide in Seville.

Tracy: I think it was.

Tracy: She mentioned it.

Tracy: Yeah.

Tracy: So, yeah, where possible, keep your plans flexible. Not always easy, particularly with families. You know, you did do need that more rigidity in your planning. But as much as possible, you know, keep on top of local news where possible to find out if your plans can be impacted.

Tracy: And let's just have that flexibility. I mean, you know, we weren't expecting to have so many days of rain, but luckily we packed layers, we had raincoats, we just bought

some cheap umbrellas and you just got to go with it. Train strikes happen, the weather can be awful, but you know, at the end of the day it was. We had a wonderful time exploring Spain. We met some fabulous people on our trips, we met some amazing guides, we've tried some wonderful food and again some fantastic experiences. So, yeah, we, we thoroughly enjoyed it. So, you know, if you're considering visiting Spain in 2025, you know, go for it. Absolutely.

Tracy: Most definitely.

What was your favorite thing that you did during your trip to Spain

Melissa Kailey: All right, one last question for each of you. Tracy, just tell us off top of your head, what was your favorite thing that you did?

Tracy: Saw, experienced, that it's going to have to be the, flamenco. I just couldn't. And I know Duke's probably going to want to say the same, but I just. I cannot tell you just how fantastic the whole experience is. It really just carries you away. We went, to off the top there, and I can't remember the place in Seville. It just reopened again. and I know that the guy that he really wants the kind of like the authentic, experience for anybody who goes there. And, I think that while they say who's going to be on that night, it may change even up to an hour or so before. And generally, the performers will not have met each other. They will never perform again together. So they just arrive, they decide on the style they're going to do, and then they just go for it. So it's really improvised. It's, So that is what's incredible. You kind of know that they haven't practiced this night after night after night. They just turn up, they talk to each other about whichever style they're going to do, and then they just go for it. I mean, like, it's. It's incredible. Oh, yeah.

Melissa Kailey: Choreographed.

Tracy: No, no, they just go for it. And, Yeah, so that was fantastic. And obviously the food, but the. Yeah, the flamenco, I'll never forget that. It really was so amazing. And I have put some videos on Instagram and we're going to do YouTube videos. Well, and we have got. Because you can't take video or photos during the actual performance. Performance, but they do let you. They do like a little mini performance at the end where you can, Because you don't want to during it because you're so immersed in it.

Tracy: I'll just say that. Yeah. Because that'll be my experience as well. The standout. Because you cannot help not to be moved by the flamenco. You can see everybody.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tracy: Just the rise are just fixed on it from the m. First minute to the last minute. You just cannot take your eyes off it. So, you know, it's a. Whether, say you can't take photos and videos is actually in your favor.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tracy: Because you would miss it. And, you know, the. So said beforehand, you know, don't just watch the. The performers, but watch the. The guitarist, the musician, because they lead. You know, watch the live movements, the little flickers.

Tracy: You know, they're looking at each other all the time that they're literally looking at each other, watching each other, and then that. That will kind of motivate them to whatever they do next. It's incre. Such a. Like the relationship between all those

performances. And actually they might never have met and may never ever perform together again.

Tracy: But the professionals.

Tracy: It's incredible. Absolutely incredible.

Tracy: And my other one really was to return to Sigis after all those years was special, because, you know, you're not sure your memories of a 5 to 6, 7 year old are actually real ones or

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Tracy: not or just, you know, manufactured in my head. But there's little bits and pieces that just came back to me and I said, we can go down that road there, we can turn up there. are you sure I went well? Yeah, I think so, yeah.

Tracy: Yeah, you were.

Tracy: Don't know how, I don't know how, but that was pretty special. Yeah.

Tracy: Yeah. So that was really good. And when he said it was 30 years since he's been there and if the last time you were there was seven, it's certainly longer than 30 years.

Melissa Kailey: You're not 37.

Tracy: I think he wishes.

Melissa gave us a great overview of Spain in this episode

Melissa Kailey: Well, you've given us a great overview of Spain. you know, it took me back. I was in Spain last year myself and I love, I love Spain so much. So, yeah, I definitely say just go to Spain, it's so much fun. but anyway, thank you so much for giving us that overview and letting me interview you again.

Tracy: Well, I'm gonna say, Melissa, thank you so much for coming on and agreeing to do it. it's great. I'm probably going to be asking you to do exactly the same thing about Istanbul in a few weeks time as well. You kind of are a resident. Ah, resident interviewer. So if you just want to remind our listeners exactly where they can find you as well. Because obviously, if you're listening every month, you're on. But yeah, yeah, sure.

Melissa Kailey: Thank you, Tracy. yes, well, you can find me on Thrifty Family Travels, where I have my family travel. Or, pages are the Queensland Travel Guide and Brisbane Travel Guide.

Tracy: Perfect. So you can find, a link to Melissa's website and, the show note and all the places we talked about and, the articles in the show notes for this episode, which will be at globaltravelplanning.com/forward/episode51.

This is the final episode of the Global Travel Planning podcast

But that just leaves all of us to say, until next week's episode. Happy Global Travel Planning. Thank you for joining us on this episode of the Global Travel Planning

podcast. For more details and links to everything we discussed today, check out the show notes@global travelplanning.com Remember, if you enjoyed the show, please consider leaving us a review on your favorite podcast app. because your feedback helps us reach more travel enthusiasts just like you. Anyway, that leaves me to say, as always, happy global travel planning.

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