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For all the ease with which the term is bandied about, wanderlust — genuine, all-consuming wanderlust — is actually quite a rare phenomenon. Faye Day certainly has it. Just two years short of her 80th birthday, the great-grandmother is still backpacking her way around the globe with the zeal of a person a quarter of her age. This year will see her grab her trusty steel mesh-encased rucksack and head off in the direction of Iran, Sudan, Pakistan and Lebanon. But in terms of finding new destinations, she's fast running out of options.

"It's easier to say where I haven't been than where I have," Faye says, speaking from her home in Perth, Western Australia. "I've seen most of the countries in the world, with the exception of Afghanistan and Iraq, and travelled extensively within them — 40 Greek islands, for example. Friends have a competition trying to find a place I haven't been. They find it very difficult."

Faye still stays at hostels whenever possible (albeit in a private room, rather than a dorm). She enjoys exchanging tales and tips with the younger travellers — and no doubt causes quite a stir. The age gap certainly doesn't bother her. "When you're travelling, you don't really consider that people are a different age," she says. "Age is just a number. You've all got the same interest."

Faye, who started her globetrotting exploits in 1976 after running a holiday tour company, has cut down from four months of travel a year to two. But other than the odd concession, such as private rooms and booking the first night of accommodation on a trip, she still travels in much the same way she has always done. She researches an area thoroughly, identifies what she wants to see, then "plays it by ear".

She says: "I'm there to see and experience as much as I can. I maximise my time. I'm not a party person. A lot of young people go away and treat it like a big party — you could do that at home."

To fund her travels, she lives frugally throughout the year, saving up her pension for flights. Backpacking keeps costs down in situ, and she uses local buses, trains and any other means of cheap transport to get around. "I've travelled on everything from camels and bullock carts to canoes and rafts. I experienced a great



Ross Swanborough, Jean-Philippe Tournut/Getty

The scenic route Norway is a favourite destination for Faye, below

I've still got it. I treasure such things. People who don't have much often give the most."

Faye confesses that her memory is beginning to fade, which is partly why she writes (she has just published the first of five books) and assiduously documents places she visits with her video camera. "My films are very, very valuable to me," she says. "When I can't travel any more, I intend to sit down and relive everything."

So, anywhere still on her bucket list? "I've got a yearning to go to Yemen, but that's one place it really is impossible to visit currently, due to travel advisories."

But I am going to try to get to Socotra, a Yemeni island 400 miles off the coast, in November."

If Faye has one wish, it's that others might embrace something of her adventurous spirit. She speaks with sadness of those who travel only in an "artificial" way — taxi, plane, hotel — rather than immersing themselves in a culture. Ad she bemoans the cautious approach of many travellers. "People have been horrified at what I'm contemplating even this year. There's always bad publicity about anywhere. The good news doesn't make the news."

She adds: "Travel has taken over my life to the exclusion of other things. I've been very privileged, and I don't take it for granted. It's a wonderful world — and there are some wonderful things out there."

● *Every Nook and Cranny: A World Travel Guide by Faye Day is out now (£26; fayeday.com)*

78 and still on the trail

She's been backpacking for four decades and visited more countries than she can count — but great-grandmother Faye Day isn't done yet, she tells **Duncan Craig**

deal of Vietnam from the back of a motorcycle for £3 a day."

Faye's family, two children and two grandchildren — not forgetting her two-month-old great-grandson — are not big travellers, and there are few friends who could keep up with her appetite for adventure. Her favourite travelling companion is, in fact, herself. "I prefer to be independent because you can

cover a lot more territory that way. You don't have to consider what other people want to do. It sounds selfish, and I suppose it is."

Travelling solo has opened just as many doors as her age, she thinks. "I find people are more inclined to talk to you. If you're in a group, you tend to interact with each other, then you just mean money to the local people. But if you're on your own, and you take the time to stop and talk, then they become interested in you."

Over the years, her insatiable globetrotting has placed her in harm's way more than once. Faye has endured five muggings, including one by armed men in Guatemala City. But the 5ft-tall, eight-stone septuagenarian is no pushover. She chased after her attackers in Guatemala ("The police said I was lucky I wasn't shot") and fought off a band of thugs trying to steal her camera bag at a Spanish castle.

"I'm pretty streetwise, but you can always get caught," Faye says. "There is always a new scam. But that certainly hasn't deterred me from travelling — I'm not going to let people like that defeat me."

Keeping safe on the trail is mostly a question of common sense, she explains. Not

engaging touts in eye contact, dressing in a respectable way and having a backpack — such as her steel-mesh one — that can be locked to the overhead luggage bars on trains are all among her tips. "Also, I never wear jewellery. I used to wear a wedding ring to deter people, but, you know, at my age, I don't

she visited a small town where a woman she'd asked to photograph invited her in for hospitality. "We went up to the single room in which she lived. She didn't speak any English. She took an embroidered scarf from a trunk and tied it on my head. When I came to leave, she wouldn't let me take it off."

Faye's no pushover. She chased after armed muggers in Guatemala

get bothered by advances much any more."

Picking favourite destinations is a task she shies away from: "Everywhere has something to offer." Still, Norway, Canada and New Zealand stand out for their scenery — as does Palmyra, in Syria, which she saw on a 15-week trip through the Middle East in 1995. "It's tragic to see what is happening there. I remember an amazing country, full of warm, friendly people."

Indeed, it's the people as much as the destinations that Faye remembers fondly; the little interactions and random acts of kindness. While backpacking through Turkey,



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