Travel audiobook scripts

30 practice scripts from VO Journey Academy. Free to record, free to use in your reel. Download the PDF to mark up in the booth, or print it straight from here.

Waking on Rannoch Moor

Train, the sleeper to the Highlands · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

I boarded the sleeper in London after dark, in the rain, and woke at dawn to a different planet. No houses. No roads. Just brown moor to the edge of the sky, and a herd of red deer standing in the mist, watching the train go by as if it were weather.

I pressed my forehead to the cold glass. Nobody had told me Scotland started this early. I had not even found my shoes.

Breakfast on a Blue Stool

Food, pho for breakfast · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

At six in the morning in Hanoi, I am sitting on a blue plastic stool about nine inches high, with my knees up around my elbows.

A woman sets down a bowl of pho without asking what I want. There is no menu. Broth, noodles, beef, a fistful of herbs.

I take one mouthful and understand that I have been eating breakfast wrong my entire life.

The Free Ride

Ferry, across New York Harbor · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

The best boat ride in New York costs nothing. I took the Staten Island Ferry at sunset and stood at the rail with the commuters, who did not look up from their phones.

We slid past the Statue of Liberty, green and small and exactly where they said she would be. A man beside me yawned. I wanted to shake him.

Then I thought, no. Imagine being so lucky you can afford to be bored by that.

Midnight, Still Light

Arrival, Iceland in June · Any · Neutral American · 30 seconds

The plane lands in Iceland a little before midnight, in June, and something is wrong with the sky. It is light. Not dawn, not dusk, just a long silver evening that has decided not to end.

On the bus into Reykjavik I keep waiting for the dark, like a sneeze. At one in the morning a man is mowing his lawn. Nobody stares but me.

I have lost a whole night, and I do not miss it.

Borough Market Before Nine

Market, London before the crowds · Adult (30-45) · Neutral British · 45 seconds

Go to Borough Market before nine, before the crowds, when the traders are still setting out and nobody has the energy to sell you anything.

It sits under the railway arches by London Bridge, and every few minutes a train goes over your head like furniture being moved upstairs. Nobody looks up. A man is stacking cheeses the size of car tyres. Someone is hosing down the cobbles.

I have a list. Bread, tomatoes, something for supper. I am a sensible person on a budget.

Forty minutes later I am standing by Southwark Cathedral holding a wheel of cheese I cannot afford, a bunch of flowers, and no bread at all. I regret nothing. I may have to walk home.

Per Rialto

Getting lost, the back streets of Venice · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

You will get lost in Venice. Decide this now, and save yourself an afternoon of being angry at a map.

The streets are too narrow for the blue dot on your phone, which will place you in a canal. There are yellow signs on the corners. Per Rialto, with an arrow. Per San Marco. Follow one, and you will soon meet another pointing back the way you came.

So put the phone away. Turn left because the alley is pretty. You will come out, an hour later, in a small square with a stone well, a church, and three children kicking a ball against its wall.

It is not on your list. It is what you came for.

A Sea View at the Royal Kittiwake

Hotel, the bad seaside hotel · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 45 seconds

The website for the Royal Kittiwake Hotel promised a sea view, and I want to be fair. There was one.

To get it you stood on the bed and leaned against the wardrobe. Then, between the fire escape and the bins of the chip shop next door, there it was. A strip of grey about the width of a ruler. It might have been sea. It might have been a van.

On the pillow was a single chocolate, which I think had been there some time.

And yet. At breakfast the landlady brought a pot of tea without being asked and said, "Dreadful, isn't it? Forty years I've run it. I'm ever so fond."

So was I, by Tuesday.

Yellow Arrows

Long walk, the Camino de Santiago · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 45 seconds

On the Camino de Santiago, you follow yellow arrows. They are painted on walls, on kerbs, on the trunks of trees, and for five weeks they are the only decisions you do not have to make.

I am sixty-three. I am walking across Spain with a pack that weighs less than my handbag at home. My feet have opinions.

Today, outside a village whose name I never learned, somebody has painted an arrow on a rock and added two words underneath. I do not have much Spanish. I have enough.

Buen Camino. Good road.

A stranger, with a brush, wishing well to whoever came next. I stand there in the wheat for quite a while. Then I follow it.

Cream First

Food, a cream tea in Devon · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 45 seconds

I made one mistake in Devon, and I made it in front of witnesses.

The scone arrived warm, with a pot of strawberry jam and a dish of clotted cream as thick as butter. I am from Leeds. I did what seemed natural. I put the jam on first.

The tearoom went quiet.

"You'll be thinking of Cornwall," said the woman at the next table, not unkindly. "They do jam first, over the border. Here it's cream, then jam."

"Does it matter?"

She looked at me for some time.

I did the second half her way. I could not taste the slightest difference, and I had the sense to say that it was much better.

Ninety Miles Without a Bend

Road trip, the Nullarbor · Adult (30-45) · Australian · 45 seconds

There is a sign on the Eyre Highway, out on the Nullarbor, that tells you the next ninety miles of road have not got a single bend in them. Australia's longest straight.

For the first ten minutes, I'm impressed. By the half hour I have counted the white posts. I have named a cloud. I have had a full argument with my brother, who is not in the car, and lost.

There is nothing out here. Saltbush, flat ground, a sky you could fall into. And somewhere past the hour, the nothing stops being boring and turns into something else. My shoulders come down. I have not thought about work once.

Then the road bends, and I'm a bit hurt.

Seat E

Train, the bullet train past Mount Fuji · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Before I left for Japan, a colleague gave me one piece of advice. "Tokyo to Kyoto. Sit on the right. Seat E." She would not say why.

So I sat in seat E. The bullet train left on the second, and the city slid by so smoothly that my coffee did not ripple. Across the aisle, a man in a suit took off his shoes, lined them up, and went instantly to sleep.

Forty minutes in, I had begun to think seat E was a joke played on foreigners.

Then the man in the suit woke and leaned across. He did not speak. He pointed past me at the window.

Mount Fuji was simply there. All of it, alone, white at the top, far bigger than any photograph had prepared me for.

He watched me see it. He nodded once, like a host. Then he went back to sleep, and I did not read another word.

The Slow Train to Ella

Train, through Sri Lanka's tea country · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The train from Kandy to Ella takes most of a day to cover a distance a car could do by lunchtime, and nobody on it is in any hurry at all.

The doors are open. People sit in the doorways with their legs hanging out, and after an hour of being horrified, so do I.

We climb. The hills turn to tea, row on row, clipped as neat as corduroy. The air cools. A man comes down the carriage selling hot fried snacks from a basket, and I buy two.

Beside me in the doorway is a schoolteacher going home for a wedding. He asks where I am from, and how long I have.

"Three days in the hills," I say. "Then the coast."

He looks out at the tea for a while. "Three days," he says gently. "You have come all this way to look at your watch."

I change my ticket in Ella. I stay nine.

Pike Place, Second Try

Market, Seattle in the rain · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The first time I went to Pike Place Market, I did it wrong. I went at noon in July, stood in a crowd six deep, watched a man throw a salmon to another man, took the same picture as everybody else, and left.

The second time, I went in February, at eight, in the rain.

The fish were still there, laid out on ice like silverware. But so was everything the crowd had been standing in front of. A woman selling flowers out of buckets. A stall of honey with a hand-lettered sign. Down a ramp I had never noticed, a whole lower floor of tiny shops, comics and magic tricks and old maps.

"First visit?" asked the flower seller.

"Second. I'm doing it over."

"Good." She wrapped a bunch in newspaper. "Most people only come the once. They see the fish fly and think that's the market. That's just the doorbell."

Seven Moles

Market, tasting mole in Oaxaca · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

In the market in Oaxaca, a woman is trying to explain mole to me, and I am trying to deserve it.

There are seven, she says, and holds up fingers. She has them in great glossy mounds behind her, pastes the color of brick and chocolate and tar. I had thought mole was one sauce.

She gives me a taste of the black one on a scrap of tortilla. It is smoke, and fruit, and something bitter, and about nine other things that arrive one at a time, like guests.

"How long does it take to make?"

She laughs. "Two days. If my mother is watching, three."

Further in, a girl offers me a paper cone of chapulines, grasshoppers toasted with chili and lime. But I have just been wrong about mole for forty-four years, and it seems like a morning for finding things out.

They are crunchy, and salty, and sour. They taste like a good decision.

Two Hundred Exits

Getting lost, Shinjuku Station · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Shinjuku Station in Tokyo has more than two hundred exits, and on my first night in Japan I believe I tried most of them.

All I needed was the west side. I came up the first staircase into a department store. I came up the second into a different department store. The third brought me out beside a bus terminal, in the rain.

I had been awake for twenty-six hours. I went back down and stood in the middle of the concourse while the evening crowd parted around me like water round a post.

Then a woman in an office uniform stopped. She looked at my phone. She turned around, against the whole tide of her own commute, and walked me there. Eight minutes, two escalators and a tunnel. At the foot of the right stairs she was gone before I had the word for thank you.

I learned it that night. I used it forty times a day.

Down Is the River

Getting lost, the Alfama in Lisbon · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

My guidebook had a walking route through the Alfama, the old quarter of Lisbon, with numbered stops. I lost it at stop two.

The lanes there go up, as stairs, and then they become somebody's front step with washing overhead. I passed the same tiled doorway three times. On the third pass, the old man sitting in it lifted his hand, as you would to a neighbor.

I was hot and cross and sixty-eight, and I sat down on a wall.

A yellow tram squealed by at the bottom of the lane. Somebody was grilling sardines.

The old man called something. I spread my hands. No Portuguese. So he pointed downhill, and then made a flat wide shape in the air. The river. Down is always the river.

It is the only direction I have ever been given that I still use. When in doubt, in any city, I go down to the water and start again.

The Ice Room

Hotel, a night in the ice hotel · Adult (30-45) · Australian · 1 minute

I have paid a great deal of money to sleep in a room that is kept at minus five, and the woman at the desk is explaining how not to do it badly.

"No cotton," she says. "Thermal layer, hat, into the sleeping bag."

This is the ice hotel at Jukkasjärvi, in the north of Sweden. They build it every winter from blocks cut out of the river, and every spring it melts and goes back. My bed is ice, with reindeer hides on it. There is no door, only a curtain.

I lie down at eleven like a man in a museum case. It is so quiet I can hear my own eyelashes.

And then it is morning, and somebody is at the curtain with a cup of hot lingonberry juice, and I have had the deepest sleep of my adult life.

"Everybody says that," she tells me. "It's the silence. People don't know they've been missing it."

Boots Stay at the Door

Hotel, a mountain hut in the Dolomites · Adult (25-40) · Neutral British · 1 minute

The hut was at the top of a four-hour climb in the Dolomites, and I arrived soaked, sunburned and sure I had made a serious mistake with my holiday.

I had booked a bed. What I got was a bunk in a room of twelve, a blanket, and a pair of borrowed slippers, because boots stay at the door. There was a rule about lights, too. Out at ten.

I am a person who likes a hotel with a robe.

Then came supper. Long wooden tables, strangers elbow to elbow, and bowls of dumplings in broth. Nobody had a phone signal. A man of about eighty had come up the same path I had, and was not even pink.

At ten the lights went out, as promised. I went outside in my slippers.

No robe. No minibar. Just every star there is, and the mountains gone silver under them.

I have not booked a proper hotel since.

A Sandwich at the Milecastle

Long walk, Hadrian's Wall in the rain · Adult (40–55) · Neutral British · 1 minute

On the third day of the Hadrian's Wall path it rained sideways from breakfast, and I stopped pretending to enjoy myself.

Eighty-four miles, coast to coast, along the edge of the Roman Empire. I had pictured striding. What I was doing was trudging, with water running in at my collar and out at my boots.

At a ruined milecastle I gave up and crouched behind the stones to eat a sandwich. They were barely waist high. But they cut the wind dead.

And it struck me, with a wet cheese roll in my hand, that I was not the first man to do exactly this. Some soldier, nineteen hundred years ago, hunched in this same corner, eating something disappointing and wondering what he had done to deserve Northumberland.

I laughed out loud. A sheep looked round.

I walked the rest in a better temper. I had company, after that. He never complained once, which made one of us.

One Half of One Percent

Long walk, a day on the Appalachian Trail · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 1 minute

I walked eleven miles of the Appalachian Trail, which is about one half of one percent of it, and I'd thank you not to laugh.

The whole thing runs better than two thousand miles, Georgia to Maine. My nephew did it end to end. I am sixty-six, with one good knee. I told him I'd do a day.

You follow white paint. A stripe on a tree about the size of a dollar bill, and then, just when you've lost it, another one. That's the whole secret of two thousand miles.

At noon a young woman came up behind me with a pack as big as she was. She'd been walking north since March.

"How far you going?"

"Just to the road. Eleven miles."

She didn't laugh. She put out her fist for me to bump. "Then we're on the same trail," she said. "Mine's just got more of yours in it."

I've thought about that most days since.

Two Continents Before Lunch

Ferry, across the Bosphorus · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The ferry from Europe to Asia costs about as much as a cup of coffee and takes twenty minutes, and the people of Istanbul ride it the way I ride the bus.

I am the only one at the rail. A man comes round with a tray of tea in tulip-shaped glasses, and I take one because everyone does. Gulls follow us in a white mob. A boy throws them bits of a sesame bread ring, and they catch it in the air.

Behind us, the domes and minarets of the old city. Ahead, another continent, and a woman beside me doing a crossword.

I want to say something to her. Do you know what this is?

She looks up. She follows my eyes back to the skyline, gold now, ridiculous, and she smiles as if I had complimented her garden.

"Yes," she says. "Every day. I still look." And she puts down her pen until we dock.

The Boat to Mull

Ferry, Oban to the Isle of Mull · Mature (55+) · Scottish · 1 minute

I had not been back to Mull in thirty years, and I spent the whole crossing from Oban telling myself it would be smaller.

It is only about three quarters of an hour. The tourists were out on deck in the wrong coats. I stayed in the lounge like a local, which I was not, any more. I had a house in Glasgow and a return ticket.

But you cannot help yourself. Past the lighthouse I went out. And there was Duart Castle on its point of rock, and the hills behind it, the exact shape I had been drawing in the margins of things for three decades without knowing.

It was not smaller.

A wee lad beside me asked his mother if that was where the dragons lived. She said she expected so.

I threw the return ticket in the bin at Craignure. Well. I put it in my wallet. But I thought about the bin.

Butcher Paper

Food, barbecue in Lockhart, Texas · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 1 minute

Lockhart, Texas, calls itself the barbecue capital of the state, and the legislature went and made it official. So I drove four hours to argue.

I am from Tennessee. We have opinions.

The place I picked was called Dubose and Sons, with a line out the door. Inside, a man with forearms like fence posts cut brisket to order and slapped it down on a sheet of pink butcher paper. No plate. White bread, pickles, an onion.

"Sauce?" I said.

He looked at me the way my mother looks at people who put sugar in cornbread.

I carried my paper to a long table and sat down with strangers. I took one bite. The bark was black and peppery, and under it the meat just gave up.

The woman beside me had been watching. "Where you from, hon?"

"Tennessee."

"And?"

"I'm going to need you not to tell anybody back home," I said, "what my face just did."

A Tractor on the Conor Pass

Road trip, the Dingle Peninsula · Adult (30-45) · Irish · 1 minute

I am from Dublin, and I had never been to Dingle, which my mother considers a personal failing. So I hired a car in May and drove over the Conor Pass.

It is one of the highest mountain roads in Ireland, and near the top it narrows to a single lane cut into the rock, with a great deal of nothing on one side.

I met a tractor at the worst possible place.

I am a city driver. I could not reverse round a bend with a drop beside me, and I sat there, close to tears.

The farmer climbed down. He looked at me, and at the hire sticker, and without a word he got into my car, backed it into a passing place the width of a bath mat, and got out again.

"Kerry or the views?" he said.

"Both."

"Grand. Look at them, so. You'll not see a thing with your eyes shut."

The Castle Is Just There

Arrival, Edinburgh by train · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The train pulls into Waverley, which sits down in a valley between the two halves of Edinburgh, and I drag my suitcase off with no idea of that. All I know is that everything is up. I climb stairs. A wind I have not been introduced to comes down them and takes my hat.

Then I am out on Princes Street, and I stop so suddenly that a man walks into my bag.

There is a castle. An actual castle, on an actual black cliff, right there above the shops, as if somebody had left it out. People are checking their phones.

"Sorry," I say to the man. "Is that just there? All the time?"

He looks up at it, honestly, as though checking.

"Aye," he says. "We've tried moving it."

I am twenty-two. It is my first hour in another country. I stand on the sidewalk and laugh until I go and find my hat.

Walk Slowly

Arrival, the altitude in Cusco · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The first thing they tell you in Cusco is to walk slowly. I did not listen, because I run marathons.

The city sits at more than eleven thousand feet. Then I picked up my bag at the hotel door, took the stairs at my usual pace, and had to sit down on the landing. My heart was going like a moth in a jar. Fourteen steps.

The owner, a small, unhurried woman named Señora Quispe, came up after me with a cup of coca tea. I suspect that landing has seen a lot of marathon runners.

"Slowly," she said. "Today you do nothing. You sit. You look."

"I only have four days."

"Then you have three, and one for the mountain. The mountain always takes one." She set the cup down beside me. "It is not a punishment. It is how it says hello."

I sat. I looked. It was the best day of the four.

Broadway, All of It

Long walk, the length of Manhattan · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Broadway runs the whole length of Manhattan, about thirteen miles, and one Saturday in October I decided to walk it top to bottom, mostly because a man at work said nobody does.

I started at the northern tip a little after seven. Up there it is hills and old apartment buildings, and a bakery where the woman called me "mi amor" and would not let me leave with only one pastry. I had lived in this city nine years. I had never been north of the park.

That set the pattern. Every twenty blocks, a different town. Then the theaters, where I had to walk in the gutter because the sidewalk was full of people looking up. I ate a slice of pizza standing, and a pretzel sitting on a fire hydrant, which I do not recommend.

By mile ten my feet had stopped speaking to me.

Farther down, the buildings went iron-fronted and expensive, then tall and glassy and silent. And then, quite suddenly, there was no more street. Just a little park, and a railing, and the harbor wide open in front of me with the light going orange.

I held on to the railing. Thirteen miles. I had gone to work underneath all of it, twice a day, for nine years, with my eyes on my phone.

I thought about the man at work.

He was right. Nobody does. I can't think why.

Fifty Hours West

Train, Chicago to California · Mature (55+) · Midwestern US · 90 seconds

You can fly from Chicago to San Francisco in under five hours. I took the train, which takes a little over two days, and my son thought I had lost my mind.

"Dad. Fifty hours."

"I'm retired, Mark. What am I saving it for?"

The first afternoon was Illinois, then Iowa, corn and soybeans and grain elevators, country I have looked at my whole life. I will be honest. I did a crossword. We crossed the Mississippi and I nearly missed it.

I woke the next morning in Colorado and did not do another crossword for the rest of the trip.

West of Denver the train climbs into the Rockies, through one tunnel after another, and then for hours it follows the Colorado River down through canyons where there is no road at all. Red walls. Green water. People in rafts, who waved.

In the lounge car I sat beside a woman from Nebraska who was going to meet a grandchild. We did not talk much. We just kept saying "Look," and pointing.

That night it was the Utah desert under a moon. The morning after, snow on the Sierra Nevada.

I called Mark from the station in California.

"Well? How was it? Long?"

"Son," I said, "I have flown over this country forty times. I had no idea there was anything in it."

Five Minutes on the Center Line

Road trip, Highway 50 across Nevada · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Highway 50 across Nevada is known as the Loneliest Road in America, and you can get a little passport stamped in the towns along it, to prove you survived. Then I drove it.

It is not flat. It goes up over a mountain range, and down into a valley so wide and empty you can see the road ahead for twenty minutes before you get to it, and then up over the next range. Sagebrush. Sky. Once in an hour, a truck.

I had left a job in Sacramento that week. Not well. I had the radio off and a great deal to go over.

Somewhere past the third range I pulled onto the gravel and turned the engine off, just to hear it.

Nothing. I mean that precisely. No wind, no insects, no hum. I stood on the center line of a United States highway for a full five minutes, and nothing came from either direction.

I had thought lonely would feel like being left. It did not. It felt like being let alone, which is another thing altogether, and one I had not had in years.

In the next town, a woman at the gas station stamped my passport.

"I stopped in the middle," I said. "I stood on the road."

"Everybody does." She pressed down hard on the stamp. "First time it's quiet enough to hear yourself, people generally find they've got something to say."

The Longest Queue

Food, a Singapore hawker center · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The hawker center is the size of an aircraft hangar, open at the sides, and it holds perhaps a hundred stalls. Each one makes a single thing. I have been in Singapore for six hours, and I have never been so hungry or so lost.

There is a system. I can see there is a system. People are leaving packets of tissues on the tables. I assume this is litter until a woman explains, kindly, that I am sitting in her seat. The tissues are how you hold a table.

"First time?" she says.

"Is it obvious?"

"You are reading the signs." She laughs. "Don't read. Look for the queue. The longest one. Then stand in it."

"What will I get?"

"Something good. That is what the queue is for."

The longest queue is for a stall no wider than a closet, where an old man is doing something violent to noodles over a flame. It takes twenty minutes. Flat noodles, dark and smoky, with cockles and bean sprouts, on a plastic plate. It costs less than the bottle of water I bought at the airport.

I carry it back. My new friend has kept my seat with a packet of tissues. She watches the first mouthful go in.

I do not say anything. I cannot. I just point at the plate with my fork.

"Yes," she says. "Now go and stand in the second longest."

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