

Prologue

When your name is Rome London, there's only one career that seems fitting: that of a travel writer. And travel she does...

Current assignment: Port Arthur, Tasmania, Australia.

Logistics/Itinerary: NYC to LAX, economy, 5 hours. Read book on British convicts sent to Australian Colony. LAX to Sydney, Australia, business class upgrade, 14 hours. Sleep, sleep and more sleep. Customs. Sydney to Melbourne, economy, 1 hour. Brush teeth and try to fix hair. Arrive in Melbourne, borrow friend's second car, catch ferry across the Bass Strait to Tasmania.

Dock in Devonport, drive an estimated three hundred and thirty-three kilometers, taking approximately three hours and forty-two minutes (on the wrong side of the road and the wrong side of the car). Arrive in Hobart, check into hotel, sleep. Wake up, drive to Port Arthur, 1.5 hours. Research and write article on Port Arthur, one of the largest and longest running convict settlements in Australia's history.

Remember to breathe!

As Rome stared out the window of the Boeing 777, she fantasized of endless summersaults in the clouds, but quickly dismissed the whimsical thoughts as her attention turned to the crowd-pleasing announcement being broadcast throughout the aircraft. "The flight attendants will be making one last pass through the cabin to collect any remaining garbage."

One might think a travel writer to be footloose and fancy free, a bohemian by nature, but the opposite couldn't be more true of Rome. Logistics, itinerary, deadlines and the ticking of the clock are what motivate her, not only in her profession, but in her personal life as well. Somewhere deep inside, however, a familiar question continues to beg an answer. What would it feel like to be completely unrestrained? A fanciful thought to ponder when one is belted into a seat which can also be used as a floatation device.

Rome has spent the majority of her adult life writing for the magazine, *Trekking the Globe*, a career that has allowed her to walk the same paths that the feet of many have trod for thousands of years. It's not only through the annals of history and the recitations of tour

guides that Rome has learned of otherwise forgotten lives. She also hears them, literally. Not through a psychic or ouiga board or any other type of mystical method, but through the dead's own voices. She's tried to reason it out, to explain it scientifically, physiologically and even existentially, but there's no rational explanation. She merely inherited a gift.

It's only been the last few years that Rome's begun to take her gift seriously. Maybe it's her age. Maybe it's her mood. Or maybe it's the point we all come to in life when our huge stack of questions outweighs that precious but tiny pile of answers we hold so dear to our hearts. That moment of epiphany where things happening on the inside become more fascinating than the events going on around us. Where the meaning of life suddenly becomes more important than the promotion at work, the nicer car, the bigger house or the pictures we post on social media.

Or maybe this time... it's as simple as a persistent voice, impossible to ignore.

So back to logistics and the real reason Rome chose to cover Port Arthur as opposed to other convict sites in Australia: the Isle of the Dead. A small island located just off shore and home to over one thousand graves, mostly prisoners.

This tiny island at the bottom of the world has been calling to her from thousands of miles away and she can only imagine the whisperings awaiting her down under.