

TRAVEL BUG

Hannah Bird, 24, from Burnham-on-Sea, never thought anything would get in the way of ticking off her bucket list travel plans ...

Looking up at the Eiffel Tower, its sparkling lights enchanted me. Booking our trip to Paris, my boyfriend Charlie, 24, and I were ticking off the destinations on our worldwide bucket list. So far, we'd been to 22 countries including America, Australia and Greece. But we decided to revisit Paris in January 2022 after experiencing bad weather on our trip there years earlier. Spending the day going up the Eiffel Tower and sharing a romantic dinner, Charlie insisted we film a video for our travel Instagram account. 'It will be so beautiful, with the Eiffel Tower's lights in the

background,' he said. Spinning around as we filmed, Charlie was down on one knee, holding out a ring. 'Will you marry me?' he asked, eyes wide. Of course, I said yes! Unfortunately, I was dosed up on painkillers with stabbing chest and back pains, but nothing was going to ruin this moment. As the clock struck midnight, we headed to the hotel in new engagement bliss. Only, I felt guilty that my shooting pains and intermittent naps were ruining our special holiday. Although Charlie never said so, it weighed on my mind. Heading home the next day for a five-day layover until we went skiing in the Italian Alps, I visited the doctor, suspecting a lung infection – but they

thought it was my acid reflux, so I trusted them and stuffed my suitcase with painkillers. Charlie and I had spent the New Year together in Prague, with Italy and Amsterdam trips planned in the next two months after Paris. We wanted to see the world! From skydiving in Dubai to swimming with sharks in the Maldives, there was no destination too far or wide on our bucket list. And this ambition to keep adventuring spurred me on through my pain – after all, it's not every day you're skiing down a snowy vista in the Italian Alps! After landing back in the UK and dropping off my luggage, I was driving to Charlie's parents' house when I suddenly felt nauseous. 'You'll have to get me from the car,' I said on the phone to Charlie. 'I feel so ill.'

Charlie tried to help me upstairs, but I couldn't move. Within minutes, Charlie had driven me to A&E at Weston General Hospital. 'My chest feels like it's about to explode,' I cried. Crouched over in pain in the waiting area, it felt like I was waiting a lifetime – but it was only two minutes. But after an ECG scan, the doctors found that my heart was in good condition. Even after an X-ray, the doctors still had no answer – but there was a large shadow on my lung. After a CT scan, I was sent home to wait for the results. And receiving a call from the Bristol Royal Infirmary six days later, I was desperate to find out. 'We need you to come in,' they said. 'Bring someone with you, too.'

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'Well, it's clearly not good news, is it?' I said to Charlie. And as we arrived, my suspicions were correct. 'We think it's blood cancer,' they told me. 'We believe that you have a lung tumour.' Instead of feeling dread, I was relieved to get an answer. But Charlie was frozen in shock, completely speechless. Waiting for another CT scan



From cancer...



To new adventures!



BACK ON THE ROAD

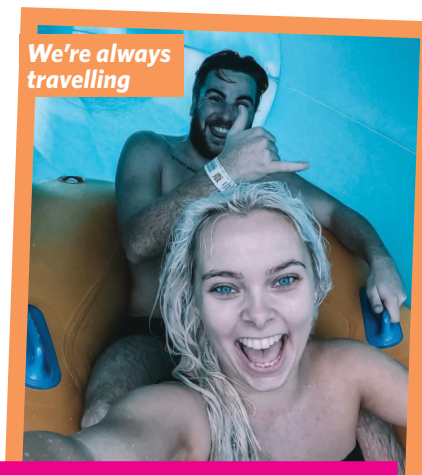
for confirmation, Charlie and I barely said a word. It was too much to take in. I stayed in the hospital to recover for 10 days after the scan to ensure my lung wouldn't collapse. Charlie visited every morning before work, but I spent most of my stay alone. Making a start on wedding plans by organising our finances on spreadsheets and researching available venues, I tried to distract myself. But after being discharged, I waited for five days back home for the results – and on April Fool's Day 2022, I received a phone call from the nurse who had been checking on me. Putting down the mini Prosecco bottles I was packing into my bridesmaid proposal boxes, my heart dropped as I accepted the call. 'Your results have come back,' she said on loudspeaker. 'You have stage four non-Hodgkin lymphoma.' Staring at Charlie, who had paused *The Office* on TV, I was frozen on the spot. 'This is treatable though,' she reassured me. Only, I would have to suffer through chemotherapy and there was no guarantee the

treatment would work. The nurse set up all my specialist appointments and recommended I get to Bristol Royal Infirmary, an hour's drive away, as soon as possible. There, the clinical team approached me about a new trial of chemotherapy and immunotherapy, too. With an amazing success rate in America, the year-long trial meant I wouldn't have to undergo radiotherapy. I filled out the form that day! Only, we had six holidays already booked that summer... including our dream holiday to Cappadocia, Turkey, and a five-week trip around Southeast Asia. Cancelling all of them made my heart break. 'Who knows when my next holiday will be?' I thought. Driving back and forth to the hospital for my weekly chemo sessions, I dreamt of far-off locations. My first chemotherapy session was over 12 hours long as my body instantly reacted to the drug infusions, causing extreme vomiting and nausea. Instead of the infusion taking the expected half an hour, it took three. And by the end of it, I was

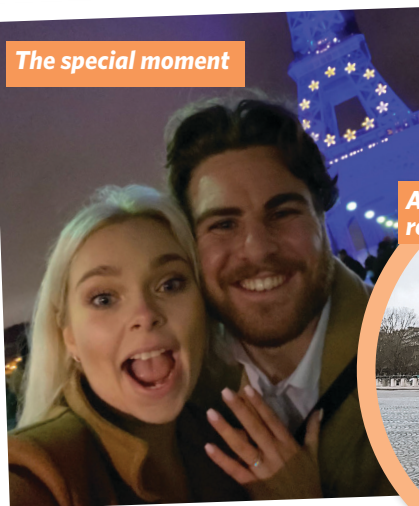
completely drained. But to take my mind off the pain as I plowed on with chemo, Charlie and I passed the time waiting between sessions in the hospital café, planning our next adventures. 'We still have to go here,' I said, showing him pictures of Cappadocia on my phone. To keep my mind off the long road ahead, we added to our bucket list. 'How about you have three holiday wishes?' Charlie said. 'How generous! Most people only get one,' I replied. After every successful round of treatment, we perused Skyscanner for flight deals. While we only made loose plans, including roughly when we wanted to go, we were too reluctant to book. As we knew all too well, anything could happen. Thinking of where we'd go next always got me through. Before I started chemo, I decided to cut off 12 inches of my hair to donate to The Little Princess Trust – I knew I'd lose it anyway, so I wanted to donate it to a good cause. Throughout my treatment, extreme fatigue and joint pain were the killers, often leaving me unable to move. I pushed myself to get out of the house, though, visiting our wedding venue with Charlie on day trips to Devon. Finishing my last two weeks of chemotherapy in September 2022, my doctor said we could finally travel. I was nervous they would turn down my request as I was still infection prone. 'Unless I'm dying, I'm going,' I insisted. But they accepted, as long as I didn't go for longer than a week. And within a few days, we were boarding a plane to Cappadocia. 'I can't believe we finally get to go!' I exclaimed to Charlie. Spending the week hot air ballooning and quad biking, it was like the horror of my life back home didn't exist. I felt like myself again. Recording our travel memories, I uploaded

an Instagram reel. Sharing my cancer journey, from undergoing chemo to flying above the Cappadocia canyons in a hot air balloon, we received almost two million likes and my followers leapt up to a whopping 85k. But I still had to get through my remaining treatment – the last immunotherapy rounds. Taking huge tablets and injecting myself with blood-thinners and white blood cells, I knew the end was in sight. And once I officially entered remission in November 2022, we were jetting off again! We took to the French Alps and even dared the world's highest zipline. Getting my cancer-free card in January this year, booking our dream holiday to Lapland to go skiing in the Arctic Circle was like ringing the bell. Since then, we've been everywhere – from Florida to Poland and with the Maldives next up on our list, we've made our mark on the map! But my favourite adventure was in Jordan this year, scaling cliffs and rockslides. Our latest adventure though was our wedding, on 16 September in Devon. We even incorporated our love for travel into our special day, too. We replaced the table name placements with destinations and even made a quiz about our holidays. How many countries have we been to? Well, I couldn't tell you... it's been one hell of a journey.

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A holiday to remember

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