

Take three best mates, a year-long holiday, add alcohol and mix: that's Channel [V]'s recipe for Backpackers, a rollicking boys' adventure

It all started in a bar. (Where else?). Tired of the everyday, three friends from the Victorian town of Colac came up with a crazy plan to skip the country and record their year-long odyssey with the vague idea it might end up on TV. With no previous experience in backpacking, or appearing in front of a camera for that matter, the trio set about their project. Mick Middleton took on the dual role of backpacker and series producer, his career in television production and the right personality traits qualifying the motivated 24 year old for the job. "I'm headstrong and a bit controlling, which is a pretty bad habit to have... but it's good when you need to get stuff done," he explains. As far as reality television goes, the show is on par with the likes of the notorious *Jackass* in terms of its no-holds-barred depiction of loutish behaviour. But it's so much more than

that: this could be the most honest portrayal of the ups and downs of travelling to date. Viewers are taken on a wild and often hilarious ride with the boys as they drink, romance, work and fight their way through the UK and Europe, putting their friendships to the test and learning much about themselves along the way. "The way it unfolds [in the series] is the way that it happened," says Mick, who is adamant that we won't be spared the travellers' more challenging moments. "There's a hell of a lot in there that you usually wouldn't see on television."

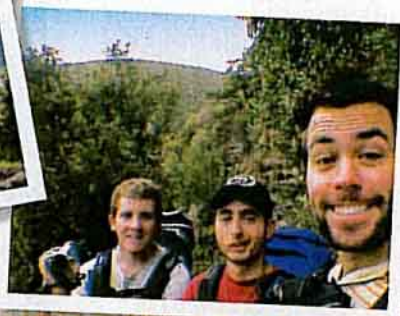
One such moment occurs in the very first episode, when a horribly drunk Mick accidentally knocks his mate's tooth out, resulting in a number of expensive visits to the dentist and an extended stay in London. This was to be the first of many sticky situations that included theft, money issues, trouble with their bomb of a camper van and a huge amount of brawling between Mick and co-star Lee.

The success of the series is largely the result of the distinct personalities of its hosts. Joining the headstrong Mick is 'go-for-it' guy Lee, a Jack of all trades and the most daring of the three. It's Lee who can be seen nude modelling, speed dating and ending up in the first aid tent at Oktoberfest. Then there's Jag, the "innocent one". Arguably the most endearing of the fellas, Jag had never travelled prior to the show - he hadn't even been on a plane. Not surprisingly, he's the one who goes through the most dramatic transformation over the course of the year.

For those of us who have never done it, *Backpackers* is a definite eye-opener to the world of international travelling on the cheap and nasty. It's a life-changing experience and one that Mick, Lee and Jag have made into a hugely entertaining, if not inspirational, ride. Take it from Mick: "It's a good old-fashioned adventure. It may not be politically correct and at times it must seem a bit mundane, but we had a great time."

AMBER McCULLOCH

■ PREMIERES MONDAY 13 @ 7.00PM
ON CHANNEL [V] CH 23, D801



The bunch of saucy Aussie lads hit Spain's annual La Tomatina festival. (L-R) Jag, Mick and Lee

Men behaving badly