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IPA's 2019 Great Holiday Travel Podcast Playlist



It's that time of year, when we help you survive upcoming travel delays, or surreptitiously listen to something else on your discreet bluetooth earbud while nodding along with Uncle Pete explaining to you things you didn't know about reinsurance (actually, that might be interesting to our crowd).

One thing to look for, especially in academic interview podcasts: I've been talking to some podcast hosts, and some ask general questions ("How'd you get interested in that?"), while others ask really in-depth questions that also educate the listener on the background so you can understand a much more in-depth answer ("Given that most people always thought X, but your new measure shows Y, has everybody been wrong all this time, or does your study get at something they can't?"). Learning the area well enough to ask the second kind of question takes a good 5-10 hours of prep time so if you realize your host has been doing the

work, drop them a line and thank them (and review it on your podcasting app).

[And remember what Milton Friedman said, there's no such thing as a free podcast recommendation, please consider making a [tax-deductable donation](#), which will also be matched dollar-for-dollar by December 5th!]

OK, on to the shows! We'll mix it up with a few different areas, and have a couple bonuses at the end for the reading-types:

- [Zip Code Economies \(Apple\)](#) hosted by Mary Daly, President and CEO of the San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank, tells the story of one place, often one that's had struggles, economic or other, and the uplifting people working to improve their neighborhoods. An impressive accomplishment is that it manages to tell a story of an economy without ever mentioning data, and paints a much more human portrait of economics.
 - You'll understand a lot more about her perspective and how a top economist managed to make a data-less podcast about economics, if you listen to this great [Freakonomics interview \(Apple\)](#) with her. One thing she's grown to understand over her career is the limitations of data:

My whole ethos is about quantitative measurement, trying to figure things out. But if you do that — and I think there are many economists who reach this point in their career — if you do that, you eventually run into the wall that is, the data aren't the answers. They're part of the answer, but they're not the complete picture.

- Also, the episode of the [St. Louis Fed Women In Economics Podcast \(Apple\)](#) where Daly explains how she went from high school dropout to where she is today is really good. That whole podcast has a ton of great episodes with really interesting economists talking about how they got interested in the field, and it's a great way to get cross-cutting exposure of interesting areas of work across economics.
- NPR Planet Money's 9-minute show [The Indicator \(Apple\)](#), has a good episode on the fascinating life of economist Edith Penrose. She helped colleagues escape the Nazis in Europe, and later ended up in Baghdad studying the oil industry. Penrose's understanding of firms as dynamic creative organizations advanced how economists think about how businesses grow. (Read more in [Tyler Cowen's review of her biography](#).)
- The Indicator also did more recently a two-parter the puzzle of why Lancaster County, PA, is thriving economically while similar post-industrial areas are in downward spirals: [Part 1 \(Apple\)](#) & [Part 2 \(Apple\)](#).
- Planet Money did a [great three-parter](#) (I know, sounds like a commitment, but it's good), on anti-trust law, how it started and why nothing gets enforced anymore (hint, it has to

do with one guy who took a class in Chicago in the '60s).

- [NPR's Rough Translation \(Apple\)](#) is one of my favorites, some episodes that stuck with me: [The Man Who Sedated Eichmann \(Apple\)](#), was great, as was the one about [The Congo We Listen To \(Apple\)](#), and [Mom in Translation \(Apple\)](#), about the mom and son who found a better culture for him. For researchers, I'm biased because I was involved with it, but I think the one about [early childhood education in Ghana \(Apple\)](#) is a great model for how to tell compelling stories about research.
- On development: Alice Evans' [Rocking our Priors \(Apple\)](#), is always so fast-paced and information-dense that it's one of the few I can't listen to sped-up. One of my favorites of all time is on behavioral development economics with [Gautam Rao \(Apple\)](#). Some dev-specific episodes include Suresh Naidu, Nathan Lane, Gabi Kruks-Wisner, Daron Acemoglu, and Branko Milanovic.
- I put the audio of Dave Evans's live interview with new Nobel laureate Michael Kremer up on [Chris Blattman's Blog](#) (original video [here](#)).
- [Probable Causation \(Apple\)](#), hosted by crime economist Jennifer Doleac, is always really interesting. Some highlights for me include [Aaron Chafin](#) on RCTs, [Mica Sviatschi](#) on gang governance in El Salvador, and [Manisha Shah](#) on criminalizing sex work.

Moving slightly more general:

- Vox and the International Rescue Committee's [Displaced \(Apple\)](#) was great, the hosts really put a lot of effort into their background research and it showed.
- Vox's [Future Perfect \(Apple\)](#), a critical look at different philanthropic thinking, is thoughtful and well-produced. (If you like that, try the interviews on [TinySpark](#), [\(Apple\)](#))
- [80,000 Hours \(Apple\)](#), from the org devoted to thinking about how to have a meaningful career, gets lots of thoughtful guests doing interesting work improving the world.

General Interest:

- [NPR's Life Kit \(Apple\)](#) is designed to be useful and fun to listen to. They have three-ish episode arcs on a particular topic in life and how to do it better like better sleep, talking to kids about difficult topics, healthier eating, and travel. It's hosted, but each arc is done in cooperation with a specialty reporter who covers that beat (like health/science). I haven't listened to them all, but ones that really stuck with me were how [men can have better friendships \(Apple\)](#), and [talking to kids about death \(Apple\)](#), which was done in cooperation with Sesame Street. They also helpfully recap the main things to remember from each ep. You can also subscribe to individual feeds for just the topics you're interested in (health, personal finance, etc.)
- Tim "Undercover Economist" Harford has a new podcast in conjunction with Malcolm Gladwell's production house, called [Cautionary Tales \(Apple\)](#). Using pretty high production values (including actors doing audio reenactments), each goes through an interesting historical event where something went wrong and tries to draw a behavioral science lesson. It does have that Gladwellian "just-so story" quality, but Tim does it well enough that I'm on board.
- Similarly, Michael Lewis' [Against the Rules \(Apple\)](#), explored different rule-deciders in society, and how and why we've set it up that way—the ideas that judges are impartial,

pressure on sports referees, and the like. All well-told, as you'd expect from Lewis. The interview with victim compensation fund guru Kenneth Feinberg was really thoughtful.

- If you have trouble sleeping, I like [Sleep With Me \(Apple\)](#), which is very popular—the host is a savant at telling really boring stories (he recommends some other sleep podcasts [here](#)).
- Radiolab has two spinoffs: one, [More Perfect \(Apple\)](#), about landmark Supreme Court decisions, is *fantastic*. I've also heard great things about [Dolly Parton's America \(Apple\)](#).
- Author John Greene's [The Anthropocene Reviewed \(Apple\)](#) is hard to explain, but I'm amazed and how he does it, check out the one about the [history of the supermarket \(Apple\)](#).
- My colleague Nessa recommends this season of Gimlet's [Heavyweight](#). Rohit recommended the episode of the history podcast Backstory about [Sesame Street around the world \(Apple\)](#), which I loved (and might have teared up a bit in the supermarket at one part).
- The [Bello Collective](#) recommends other good podcasts and has a newsletter.

BONUS - Traveling with kids?

- Try [Story Pirates \(Apple\)](#) (well-produced whimsical radio plays and songs based on silly story ideas sent in by kids), and [Wow in The World \(Apple\)](#) about science.
- [Songs to Sing at Children](#) is a fun album for younger children (maybe 3-7?) also funny enough for parents.
- Don't forget that many public libraries offer free e-books and audiobooks for your mobile devices (you might have to download a few apps they subscribe to, and enter your library card info, so set it up before you go, or take your library card with you).

BONUS - Not a listening type?

- Two good reads from the New York Times: In [The Jungle Prince of Delhi](#), journalist Ellen Barry looks into the last of a Shiite Muslim dynasty living a reclusive life in a run-down mansion in the forest outside Delhi. It takes a lot of crazy twists and is hard to put down, and you end up learning a lot. I also admired the way [Taffy Brodesser-Akner](#) took another "Tom Hanks is a nice guy" profile assignment and made it about much more.
- Dave Evans has a thread on [popular econ books from this year](#), and see [his reviews of books by African authors](#).

November 25, 2019