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Why Southerners Shouldn't Travel in Winter Storms

Imagine taking an animal of some kind out of its natural habitat and placing it in a completely different environment far away from its home. This animal will experience new settings and surroundings it has never bared witness too, and ones that offer up new challenges and encounters. Imagine that you *are* that animal; you're lost, and unaware of your surroundings. It's a weird feeling, one of almost helplessness and vulnerability, but also one of intrigue and excitement. These emotions are what drive a variety of people to travel to new places... a sense of wonder with the thrill of the unknown. This autobiography details how things can go awry when tourists get thrown into situations they're not accustomed to and/or not prepared for... especially when it comes to South Carolinians and snow.

While my dad and I did not travel to some far away land across the globe, having spent my entire life in a pretty rural area in upstate South Carolina resulted in a completely new experience when we decided to fly out to Denver right in the days leading up to Christmas. Not only was this a new experience for us (big city, cold weather, a northern culture), but our trip just so happened to take place in one of the largest winter storms this country has seen. Being two guys who live in an area where 40 degree weather calls for school delays and grocery-store raids, we were not remotely prepared for what "real" cold weather had in store. After we finally land in Denver, we see the snow falling and on the ground, and are mostly just blown away at the sight of it all. As we're waiting on our luggage, we start to talk about grabbing a bite to eat on the way to our hotel, not thinking about the snow or the conditions at all. We realize it's a lot colder than back home, and snowing, but we expected that; it was nothing out of the ordinary. However,

back home, we would be lucky to get a couple inches of snow, which can be easily dealt with. This Denver storm was not so simple.

As my dad and I saw the snow and heard about the weather walking through the airport, we did not think much of it. We were going to grab our rental, drive to the hotel, and maybe stop at a Wendy's or something on the way, as we were both on the brink of starvation. Once we arrived at the rental car station, the severity of what we had just landed in hit us like a truck.

After waiting in line for our rental on empty stomachs that were in the same conditions as if we had been days without food, it was finally our turn to grab our keys and head out, no strings attached. The man behind the counter asks if we want tire chains, in order to help with the grip while driving on the icy roads. Without even giving it much thought, we brush off the idea. Why pay extra for something we don't need?

As we stepped outside, it was as if we had teleported inside of a snow globe that had some sort of unknown "extreme" setting underneath its base. It was the modern Ice Age; cars stuck in snow reaching halfway up their side doors, lights flickering, and wind as if God himself were blowing down upon us. What was even more eerie, however, was the sound (or lack thereof). It was silence, other than the occasional crunching the snow made as we sunk into its depths on the perilous trek out to the rental. Lifting my head up too far resulted in the full wrath of Mother Nature and her -15 degree winter storm, blinding me from seeing where our car was or where I was walking. As we finally arrive at our rental, the heat is turned on full blast as we, not the car, begin to defrost. We look in the backseat to find a handheld ice-scraper. Imagine a dam breaks, and the immediate reaction is to put a band-aid over the hole; that analogy perfectly illustrates what that ice-scraper accomplished in clearing off our car. Similar to Medusa, for every inch we scraped off, two more took the same place.

We manage to begin to pull out of the parking lot, passing the other rentals that are slowly getting more and more entrenched by the downpour of snow. We pull up to the gate, where a girl seemingly in her 20's is bundled up inside the small room that contains the key to our escape. We both felt bad for her, not understanding the process of deciding who gets to go outside in this weather in order to check the cars for their correct papers. It had to have been a Hunger Games-esque sequence of events, and this poor girl was the tribute. After getting out to validate our registration found within the car, she lets us through.

“Maybe the roads aren't as bad. Surely snow plows have been driving all around the outskirts of downtown Denver.” Ha.

The majority of the roads were in line with the severity of the parking lot we just came from. The 8-10 inches of snow were heavily prominent, which was abundantly clear as we drove farther and farther away from civilization. After driving at a dangerous 15 mph for a few minutes, we discover that our windshield wipers have actually frozen, rendering them completely useless. As the snow and the ice begin to creep over the windshield, I'm tasked with finding the small and rare pockets that were transparent to the road in front of us.

As we approach the outskirts of downtown Denver, not terribly far from the hotel, the roads get worse. There is no way our Corolla makes it out of this, as my dad is basically driving blindfolded and I'm his eyes and ears. There was an obvious lack of snow plow presence, and it felt as if we were driving through a Christmas-themed episode of The Walking Dead. Buildings and roads are completely vacant, minus the cars that have been abandoned on the side of the road. Tow trucks had fallen victim to the storm, when they were the only help anyone was going to receive on that night. After driving blind, running up onto downtown sidewalks, and almost

dying of starvation, we made it to our hotel. Our dinner consisted of canned soda, Swedish fish, Snickers, and Doritos from the hotel lobby, but it felt like Christmas dinner.

Obviously, we had no idea what a “winter storm” was truly like. 1-2 inches of snow where I grew up was enough to be classified as such. While my dad and I only went a few states North, our trip really illustrates just how vastly distinctive different parts of the world can truly be. We only had a 5-6 hour flight that’s destination ended still within the United States, yet the experiences we brought back with us were so unique and memorable. Imagine how different cultures and settings could impact a trip around the world. We were the animals that had been dropped into a new environment, vulnerable and unaware. Two guys from South Carolina had no idea what they were getting themselves into when the term “winter storm” was thrown out, because what we were used to back at home was absolutely nothing compared to what we hit flying into Denver. However, southerners traveling in winter storms is just simply a representation for a much larger idea. No matter where you are from, or where you are going, a different setting than one that you’re used to can result in some pretty major culture shock... ours just happened to involve a representation for what it would look like if hell actually froze over.