Traveler

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What to Expect When Traveling to Jordan

Written By
Christine Farris

A thundering alarm echoed in the air. My body stirred shaking the blanket off as I rose from the mattress. I blinked adjusting my eyes to the darkness. The deep cry continued like a horn warning the city. What's happening? I thought, but the alarm wasn't coming from inside the apartment. The tone of the alarm changed, and I could hear a male voice amidst the noise. I turned around and heard the call coming from the window. I slowly slid it open towards the right. The neighboring apartments and streets were still. The echo reverberated and the man began to sing a low hymn as if he was mourning. It was like a ghost lamenting in the streets and I was waiting for it to appear. I squinted through the darkness until I saw light waning behind green glass in a faraway tower. I stared at it, listening to the sad man, until the echo ceased into darkness. I called him "the singing man.

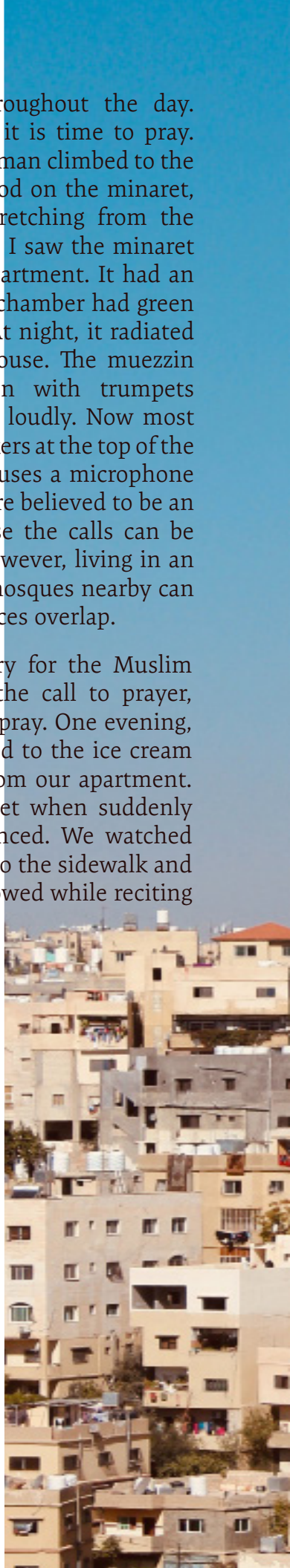
For newcomers, traveling to Jordan in the Middle East is a new experience because the lifestyle and social norms are influenced by Islam, the state religion. In order to adjust easily, it is good to have a general understanding of Muslim customs.

I was 12 years old when I first visited Amman, Jordan. I was asleep in my grandmother's apartment when a voice woke me up. I never could have guessed that the alarm at 5:00 a.m. was a man or that it had a religious connotation. I wanted to discover the mystery behind "the singing man." I asked questions, such as, "Who is that guy?" or "Is he allowed to do that?" The man is allowed to sing and has a very important role for the Muslim community.

In Arabic, the man is called a muezzin. He is a priest appointed at the mosque to recite and chant five times throughout the day. He reminds Muslims that it is time to pray. Historically, the appointed man climbed to the top of the mosque and stood on the minaret, which was a tall spire stretching from the mosque. On my first night, I saw the minaret from the balcony of the apartment. It had an onion-shaped top and the chamber had green glass windows circling it. At night, it radiated a green light like a lighthouse. The muezzin grabbed people's attention with trumpets and he chanted his prayer loudly. Now most mosques contain loudspeakers at the top of the minaret, and the muezzin uses a microphone to sing. The loudspeakers are believed to be an excellent invention because the calls can be heard from miles away. However, living in an area where there are two mosques nearby can be an issue because the voices overlap.

Daily prayers are obligatory for the Muslim people. When they hear the call to prayer, many people exit shops to pray. One evening, my little sister and I walked to the ice cream store around the corner from our apartment. We were crossing the street when suddenly the call of prayer commenced. We watched the shopkeeper emerge onto the sidewalk and kneel on the ground. He bowed while reciting

I wanted to discover the mystery behind "the singing man."



the prayer. He rose occasionally to do the sign of the cross, and then he bowed again. Danielle, my five-year-old sister, looked at me for instructions. A few blocks down, we could see other shopkeepers emerging to pray.

"What do we do?" she whispered, squeezing my hand.

"I don't know!"

I was about to turn around and return to the apartment, but we did not want to draw attention. We could not go inside the shop because it was rude to interrupt the shopkeeper's prayer. I hesitantly bent my knees and tugged my sister down too. We did not pray, but we sat on our knees to show respect for the people around us. When the shopkeeper finished praying and rose, he nodded in our direction and welcomed us inside his shop. Still, I was curious about what muezzin was saying that moved people spiritually.

The muezzin's prayer is called the adhan, and it comes from the Arabic word adhina, which means "to listen." The adhan is a call to prayer where the muezzin acts like a church bell, letting the people know it is time to come to the mosque and pray. When I woke up during my first night, the only word I could comprehend was Allah, meaning "God." The following morning, my mother told me the man was saying Allahu Akbar, meaning "God is greater" or "God is the greatest." Here is the prayer and the translation for the adhan:

Allahu Akbar	God is the greatest.
Ash-hadu an-la ilaha illa llah	I bear witness that there is no deity except God.
Ash-hadu anna Muħammadan-Rasulullah	I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.
Hayya 'alas-salāh	Come to pray.
Hayya 'alal-falāh	Come to success.
Allāhu akbar	God is the greatest.
Lā ilāha illallāh	There is no deity except for God.

The lyrics for the call to prayer are short, but the prayer lasts 15 minutes because each line is sung at least twice. The first time hearing the call to prayer is surprising and different, especially to any foreigner or non-Muslim. Like any tourist, I eventually became accustomed to it.

Besides the Muslim call to prayer, there are also different holidays that affect the lifestyle as well. In the United States and other parts of the world, many businesses and schools close on Saturday and Sunday. However, Jordan's weekend consists of Friday and Sunday. These are important prayer days for the Muslim and Christian community, so people do not work. There are also certain Muslim holidays where almost all places are closed. One of the largest holidays for the Muslim community is Ramadan.

Ramadan begins on the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The holiday lasts for approximately 29 to 30 days, depending on the cycle of the moon. The Muslims are required to fast from sunrise to sunset. During this month, Amman's lifestyle temporarily changes. The streets and markets are closed from the morning until sunset. When the moon appears, the streets are filled with cars and many shops stay open until sunrise. There are also specific customs people must follow in daylight, such as no eating, smoking, or swearing.

I recalled my father smoking outside on the balcony. We had our aunts, uncles, and cousins visiting us at our grandmother's apartment. One of the neighbors saw my father smoking outside.

"Do you have any idea how disrespectful you are?" he yelled at my father in Arabic.

My dad was lost, as the man began to lecture him about fasting. Mom and my uncle apologized to the man and brought my father inside. Even if we are not Muslim, we must respect the culture and the social customs. During Ramadan, our parents never took us anywhere until the middle of the night. It is a wonderful and different experience because it the only time in the year where the streets are lively and busy all night.

The call to prayer and the holidays weren't the only part of the country's lifestyle I needed to adapt to, but also the implicit dress code. The Middle East is like a huge desert, and the temperature exceeds 100 degrees every day. During my stay, I dressed like any common American girl in shorts and a tank top. When I walked downtown with my cousins, I noticed people glancing at me. I'd walk past the markets, and both men and women stopped what they were doing to watch me. Some men whistled or nodded their heads, while others shook their heads. The women were expressionless; it was difficult to make out what they were thinking. I nudged my cousin.

"Why is everyone looking at me?"

"You are from America, where it is common to dress in this way," she gestured at my apparel, "but here it is not."

I scanned the crowd and noticed many women wore veils to cover up their face even in the scorching heat. The veil is called a hijab, which

Remember, modesty is the key.

means "a curtain," and it covers a woman's hair and chest. The common stereotype for the Arabic culture is that all women wear these veils. In high school, I had a Russian friend who always teased me saying, "You're Arabic right? So like… where's your hijab?" However, the veil isn't part of the Arabic culture at all. It comes from the Islamic laws, and symbolizes modesty. The Quran emphasizes that Muslim women should dress conservatively covering up their chest and face. Men must always lower their gaze when talking to women as well. Remember, modesty is the key.

The only way I could stop drawing attention to myself is by dressing modestly. I never wore the hijab because it wasn't a mandatory for women, but I avoided wearing shirts that exposed my shoulders or chest. If I did expose my chest, I compensated by wearing a jacket over it. I wore skinny jeans and a T-shirt, but if I wore shorts, I complemented it with a long-sleeve shirt. No matter the temperature, I kept skin exposure to a minimum. It wasn't until my family and I toured Petra, that I managed to wear a tank top again. My outfit was socially acceptable because many tourists also dressed less conservative.

Travelling to different country is fun, but it is also different. Every country has their own social norms and customs that affect the lifestyle. The United States and other countries have Christian holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, where schools, markets, and businesses are closed. Jordan celebrates both Christian and Muslim holidays. The call to prayer, modest dress code, greeting, and weekend are the norm for the people. The trick is to know the basics of the customs because it will make the visit easier. Jordan may have a different lifestyle but it is a wonderful place to visit because it is different.

Eating in Lit

Anthony Bourdain said, "Food is everything we are. It's an extension of nationalist feeling, ethnic feeling, your personal history, your province, your region, your tribe, your grandma." Speaking as someone from the Azores islands, nine Portuguese islands in the middle of the Atlantic so tiny that they're specks on a world map if they even show up at all, this rings so true to me. And yet, when my boyfriend James, as American as they come, asked me what Azorean food was like, I couldn't actually reply. It was like asking what air tastes like; there are no words for it because it's always there. You don't have to think about it. It just is. So, I decided to show him what it is, and in the process learn to describe it for myself.

James and I both grew up in San Jose, but we have a little bit of an inverse Uptown Girl dynamic: I grew up in East San Jose, while he's from the more affluent Alameda. Before we started dating, he had one Portuguese friend. Me? I spent my childhood in Little Portugal. James never heard of it before he started dating me.

We leave my side of town and start driving down Alum Rock Avenue. I'm distracted by pointing out where three of the four Portuguese bakeries in San Jose used to be: Five Star Bakery was across the street from Fast Bicycle, Faial Bakery was on Alum Rock and Jose Figueres, and Padaria Açoreana, along with all the other businesses in the building across the street from the Mexican Heritage Plaza, was kicked out for renovations. The newly renovated and repainted building currently stands empty and covered by graffiti.

Eventually we park in Trade Rite Market's lot (I shoot down his suggestion to park on the street; even I've become a little gentrified on the inside) and make our way inside. He wonders if we're in the right place, but I explain to him that Trade Rite Market and Bacalhau Grill are actually the same business. The former is the front of the shop, and its cramped shelves are stuffed with Portuguese, Azorean, and Brazilian imports.

I pause at the refrigerated section and gaze longingly at golden wheels of São Jorge cheese, named after and made exclusively on the island where I'm from. They're labelled with price tags that proclaim that exclusivity to anyone not yet familiar with its creamy sharpness. Generations of my family raised the cows that produced the milk for that cheese. I close my eyes and remember what it was like to go milking the cows with my grandfather, Padrinho Fernandinho: the crisp smell of lush pastures, the tang of sea salt in the air, and even the odor of manure providing an earthy counterpoint.

"Hey, that's got your name on it," James says, breaking me out of my bucolic visions. He holds up a package of Barcelos linguiça.

"Oh yeah," I reply, "My dad's cousins own that company. But even Mãe says that Goulart's is better."

James's ginger-blonde eyebrows furrow together. "Mine?" he asks, but that's not quite what I said. It's just as close as he can come to cutting

ttle Portuga

Written By Emily Barcelos

through my accent. I didn't notice my voice going straight from Californian to Azorean, but he stumbled over it.

"Mãe. It's Portuguese for mom, remember?"

"Oh, right," James says, sheepishly. "I'll remember that." And he probably will, eventually.

We make our way to the back of the shop to the deli counter that serves as the Bacalhau Grill. Like a good boyfriend dating the daughter of an immigrant family, James says he's game to try anything. So, I order him the most Portuguese thing on the menu: the bacalhau plate. Bacalhau is the Portuguese word for codfish, and it's the Portuguese national dish. It used to be that a woman wasn't allowed to get married until she knew how to make bacalhau 365 ways: one for each day of the year. You can't have Portuguese Christmas Eve dinner without bacalhau on the table. However, it's not the fresh cod you're used to having in your fish and chips. Instead, it's preserved in salt and canned. Cod isn't native to Portugal's shores, so this was how it was preserved on the long trip home from the North Atlantic fisheries. All bacalhau preparations start by soaking the fish in water to get some of the salt out, but much still remains.

As for me, I'm looking for something I wouldn't get at home and that reminds me of my summer semester in mainland Portugal. So, I go for the bife a portuguesa: a pounded steak with gravy and a fried egg on top, usually served with fries. Bacalhau Grill's comes with a salad and rice, too. It was my go to last summer because it was usually cheap and filling, perfect for the broke college kid in Europe.

We're warned that the bacalhau takes at least twenty minutes, but James is fine with it and I want to see how he handles being a fish out of water anyway. We take a table in the seating area near the front of the store. Two TVs hanging from the wall each show a different soccer match. The Serie A game is ignored by a table of four older Portuguese men, the only other customers, in favor of Academica vs. Vitoria de Guimarães, two Portuguese teams that are best described as average with the occasional good season. I catch snippets of their conversation: they're talking about the best places to go fishing on Sao Jorge. I smile to myself, but then I have to explain to James why.

While we wait, I sip at my passion fruit soda. While I'm in the Azores I drink at least a can or two a day, but in America I have to ration it. Between customs and shipping, a soda that's maybe a euro in the Azores is $2.50 in California. James is used to seeing me pound down Mexican Cokes, so he's surprised at my restraint.

A couple our age, but both most likely Portuguese, takes a seat at a table nearby. Then, two families come in with their kids. We're no longer the youngest people here, but James is definitely the only non-Portuguese person here. His blue eyes and dirty blonde hair scream American! among the dark gazes and darker heads of hair here. For once, he's the other, but he placidly doesn't seem to notice.

Instead, he's asking me questions about the

soccer game (I like Academica better because they're based in Coimbra, where I wanted to go to grad school), coaxing me into sharing my soda (he prefers his Coke), and just looking around (the work of local artists portraying not so local Azorean scenes hangs from a nearby wall). I can see that he's trying to understand this part of my life that he hears about all the time but is still exotic to him.

Our plates finally arrive. James's fish is smothered in a tomato based sauce with grilled onions and peppers, which he loves, and comes with a side of boiled potatoes that don't seem to impress him as much. "You're going to need those," I say. The saltiness of the bacalhau is usually paired with potatoes or some other bland starch to balance it out.

I'm not sure he heard me, but I start plowing into my steak and eggs. The connection between food and memory is real, but sometimes it can set you up for disappointment. My food was probably started at the same time as James' bacalhau, and so it's started to go cold by the time I get it. Instead of this meal taking me back to my summer in Lisbon, to having dinner outside on the cobblestone squares of the Rossio as the sun went down and cast slanted bars golden light and welcome shadows after a hot day, I'm reminded that Little Portugal is a dying neighborhood. This is the first time I've ever been disappointed with my food here, but I refuse to let it show.

I clean my plate because my mother raised me right and I don't want James to know just how much this upsets me. Not just the food, but the fact that the neighborhood I grew up in is fading away and that some part of me feels guilty for that. "How's your food?" I ask, to distract myself.

I'm reminded that Little Portugal is a dying neighborhood.

"It's pretty good," he replies, but I wonder how much of that is diplomacy. "Pretty salty, though."

"That's what the potatoes are for, remember?" I reply, and I inwardly cringe at how defensive I sound. "Coffee?" I say, and the moment of tension is diffused. Full of lukewarm steak and egg, I think to myself, um café caía bem. A coffee is just what I need after a Portuguese meal, so we head to the aptly named Cafe do Canto (The Corner Cafe) around the corner.

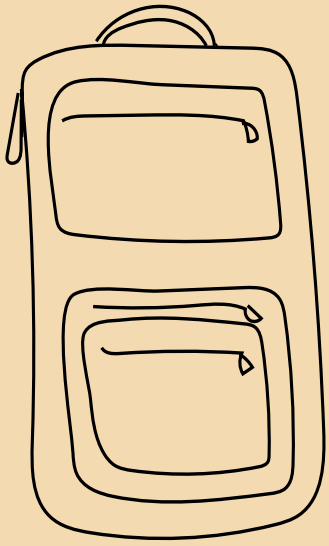
I order what I usually did after summer night dinners in Lisbon; a bica, or a long shot of espresso. "Do they have lattes?" James asks, looking at the half Portuguese, half English menu.

"That's what a galão is," I reply, eyeing the pastry case. "Look, they have queijadas! Want to try some?"

"Kay whats?" he asks. "Are those desserts?"
"Yeah, they're custard tarts," I say, looking over the selection and translating them for his benefit: plain custard, orange, almond, spice. I'm disappointed that they don't have pasteis de nata, my favorites, which are custard tarts wrapped in puff pastry.
"Posso ter um de cada?" I ask the barista.
"Ah, a menina fala português!" she replies, and we launch into a conversation about how I'm trying to teach my American boyfriend about Portuguese culture. Meanwhile, the aforementioned American boyfriend shuffles awkwardly beside me, without even a Spanish class in his past (he took German) to help decipher the flood of words he knows are about him.
I eventually realize my faux pas, put in our order, and we take a seat. Two older ladies, who are probably the grandmothers of someone I know, are watching a telenovela. The bright blue and red walls finally start to feel like the Portugal I know. Several blue and white tiles, azulejos, line the walls. Their folk sayings and painted scenes are ubiquitous in Portugal.
I laugh at one of them. A vida e dura para quem e mole. "What's that mean?" James asks.
"Life is hard for when you're soft. My Grandfather Fernandinho had that in his house," I reply. I remember to say Grandfather and not Padrinho, so that James knows what I'm talking about.
Our coffees and pastries arrive. I start cutting the queijadas in half so we can both try them, but my boyfriend the coffee snob immediately goes for his latte. "Wow, this is really good!" he says without prompting.
Tension I didn't even realize was coiling in my stomach is suddenly released. "Well yeah, it's because it's Portuguese coffee!" He laughs at my obvious favoritism, but as I launch into Portuguese teacher mode, I realize that for the first time that one of my lectures is relevant to him. He's not humoring me and sitting through yet another rant about Fernando Pessoa's genius or King Sebastian's madness.
So I start tell him about Portuguese coffee, how it comes from their former African colonies, how it's slow roasted and brewed under higher pressure, how it's way better than Italian coffee but it's a damn shame that no one knows it. It's thicker, richer, almost syrupy. It tastes as good as American coffee smells first thing in the morning before it inevitably disappoints you. "I maybe put a little packet of sugar in it and it's basically like drinking adult hot chocolate."
"Yeah, I can't believe you're drinking your coffee black," he says. I don't blame him. He's used to my usual Starbucks order of a caramel macchiato or some other sugar bomb that only vaguely tastes like coffee.
The pastries are next. I go straight for the orange, but Jim grabs the spice one. His blue eyes light up. "This is like… a snickerdoodle, but a cake!" It's a comparison I would have never thought to have made, but as soon as I hear it, it rings so true. To me, spice queijadas have always tasted like spice queijadas. They're not even called spice-flavored in Portuguese, they're just called queijadas de Sintra, named after the town outside of Lisbon that they originated from.
We linger over our coffee and queijadas, and it's as close as I've felt to being in Lisbon again in the past year. Part of me knows that outside the door lie the remnants of the Little Portugal I knew growing up, but for a few moments I can pretend that the broken streets and incomplete construction on Santa Clara Street are gone, replaced by the rippling black and white cobblestone calçada of the Rossio. For the first time, taking James to Portugal with me someday isn't just idle talk. For those few moments, we're already there.

My Extreme (-ly Embarassing) Muslim Family at the Airport

Written By Xeni Shams



"NO! I want to sit by the w-i-i-n-dooow!"

My six year old brother's wails filled the airplane compartment, words choking out between sobs. He wiggled in his seat, kicking and punching the back of mine. The people sitting in our section were already frazzled, and the plane hadn't even taken off yet.

"Be quiet!" I hissed back at him. We were sitting in the middle aisle, my family of four separated by strangers sitting on either side of us. My mom clutched his arm, whispering in his ear. The death pinch on his arm didn't stifle him. The pilot probably knew of his upset by now.

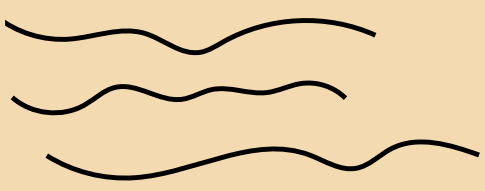
The man sitting next to my mom gave up. "Fine. I'll switch seats."

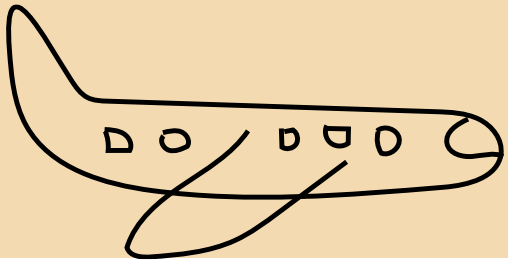
He got up and switched seats with me. Sitting next to my mom, I finally heard what she was whispering to him in Hindi; "Yell louder! Louder!" I flushed with embarrassment and tried calming him down. The airline had messed up our seats, and the people beside us had refused to move, but the rest of the plane didn't deserve this. Eventually, the man on his other side gave up and my father got the other aisle seat, our family reunited. My brother fell into an exhausted sleep, to the collective relief of everyone.

Since the terrorist attacks committed around the world by "Muslim" extremists, Islamophobia is a daily reality to many Muslims around the world. "Flying while Muslim" is a phrase that exists, created because of how common profiling is. Most Muslim's airport-experiences have been shaded with Islamophobia. A couple days after the terrorist attacks in Paris, a Muslim family was escorted off of the plane (along with a random Middle Eastern person sitting near them) because one member was reported for checking the news on his phone. An act as innocuous as checking the news or speaking in your native language can be enough to expose Muslims to harassment and delay their journey, if not send them to jail.

That fear is unfounded. The Muslim family juggling three small children and several bags is not a threat to your safety, and this is a recounting of a typical day at the airport for my family.

My family is funny and strange, and to be honest, embarrassing. Combine that with growing up Muslim in the Post 9-11 US, getting onto an airplane is a uniquely harrowing experience for us. The Shah family approach to travel is unique. What follows is a typical adventure through the airport, as paraphrased from my youth.





Part One: Leaving Home

7:00 AM I wake up to the tinny sound of an alarm, faintly remembering that we need to get to the airport at some point today. I take the cue from my snoring family and go back to sleep.

8:32 AM "Zufishan! What are you doing? Wake up! We're late!" My mom is shaking my shoulders. She yells at me to get ready. "We're late! Go help your father!"

I shuffle to the garage. There's an open bag on the floor of the garage, clothes shoved to the side. My father is standing, a scale next to his feet. A broad shouldered man of average height, his beard is colored the deep orange of henna, which he uses to dye his hair. He's positioned a steel stool perfectly on top, guaranteeing the most accurate weight. We can't be even a few pounds off, or they'll make us remove the overweight bag.

"Come here," My father gestures at me to pick up the other side of the bag. "Grasp the side – no, the other side, and the bottom, firmly, firmly. Are you ready? One, two, three!"

We lift it up and place it precariously on the stool. It wobbles, and my dad "tsks" at the weight. He needs to take out a couple pounds. I wonder why this wasn't finished last night. I refrain from voicing that thought. Instead, I spot the cat and say, "I'm going to feed the cat and fill up his food!" and escape, cooing as I take the cat outside.

My family doesn't do ridiculously overpriced pet hotels or cat-sitters. Our cat is perfectly capable of taking care of himself in the suburbs for a month. I review this logic as I fill his gravity feeder with dry cat food. Leaving him inside is impossible – he needs the vast outdoor toilet. Leaving the door open is asking for robbery, and he isn't a guard cat. Locking him to one room with a cat door is the only, logical, reasonable way of dealing with him. My cousins will check in on him every once in a while. The cat has seen the bags, and is sulking. Something in the twitch of his tail asks, Again? You're leaving me again?

I kiss the top of his head before filling up a small bucket with water and leaving it next to his food. I go back up the stairs to change, but my big brother has snatched the bathroom. I slam on the door. "Hurry up!"

My mother is echoing the cry as she drags my six year old brother out of the blanket mountain he has made for himself.

9:00 AM We told my uncle to be here at nine, so we can reach the airport at 10, a reasonable three hours before our plane departs. Uncle stands in the doorway, flabbergasted by the chaos.

"What are all these bags for? Are you moving to Saudi Arabia?" He asks, nearly tripping over the bags. "What on earth do you need a box for?"

My mother's family are more punctual than my cat's demands for food. My mom had a bit of a shock when she entered my father's way of doing things.

My older brother tapped down the stairs, greeting Uncle and saying dryly, "It's for the pots and pans."

International flights allow two bags and a handbag per person. My family of six has managed to stuff twelve bags to the brim. The kitchen box, my grandmother had explained to me the night before as she filled Ziploc bags with uncooked rice and lentils, was so that we wouldn't waste unnecessary money on

9:00 AM food. My dad had been innovative and gotten a portable stove, which meant we could cook even without a kitchen. The others were filled with clothes (because who would want to be underdressed in a desert?) and gifts for our family members in India and Canada. My grandmother wouldn't be visiting Canada for at least another six months after going to India, but it pays to be prepared.

Grandmother is in the kitchen. A woman short enough that my twelve year old self has outgrown her, she looks up. She is very determinedly shifting a packet of kebab into the side of her "purse." It is a behemoth of a leather bag, nearly the size of my little brother curled up on his side, and a magical bag at that. It contains all the wonders of the universe, food being one of those. When we're bored on the plane, she might remove a game for me and brothers to play, or tell us a story.

"Dadiammi," I ask, calling her by the traditional Indian name for my father's mother. "Uncle is here. Should I take your bag to the car?"

"No, no, beta," she says, waving me off. "Go help your mom."

10:00 AM Marvelously, half of the bags are in Uncle's car by now. My father isn't weighing them anymore; instead, he has decided that now is the perfect time to set up the home security system.

"We can watch Butters using these cameras!" He explains to my mother.

"We are going to miss the plane!" My mom tries dragging him out the door.

Despite being the one who has actually missed flights, my father moves as though he has not a care in the world. I leave them, and double check that my book and diary are in my backpack. Our carry-ons are stuffed with personal things that our bags should hold. My little brother has filled his black and white pack with all of his precious toy cars. My older brother has his PSP and a book that I plan on stealing from him to read later.

"Where's the cat?" My dad calls after me. "Put him out!"

The thought of my cat being stuck inside for a full month without food or water terrifies me, and I find him to hug him goodbye and kick him out of the house.

10:40 AM Uncle has managed to get us all in the car. He is remarking on our culture of lateness as we speed to the airport. My dad is explaining the finer points of camera installation. They are too busy talking and we miss the exit ramp to the airport.

Part Two: The Airport

11:03 AM We unload our bags from the car, each of us instructed to take two each. There's no way we're paying for the overpriced carts outside the terminal. There are free carts inside, and we all, thankfully, have functioning arms. We wave bye to Uncle and drag practically eighteen bags (including carry-on luggage) into the airport, finding a seat to the side for Grandma.

This is where a different kind ordeal begins. Over the years, my mom has noticed something about our entrance to the airport. She tells me to listen, just as a woman announces over loudspeaker that the airport's security level has "changed to Red," before asking everyone to watch out for "suspicious individuals."

My mom is wearing a niqab (face veil), and my dad's beard reaches the top of his chest. My brothers are lanky and brown, and I'm wearing a headscarf. We are suspicious individuals.

11:10 AM My father, in the haste with which my mom ushered him out the door, has been unable to complete the Shah family patented bag seal. We sit on benches to the side, not checking in yet because this is imperative. Our bags are going on a 24 hour trip too! We can't lose them!

"I'll go stand in line," I say, heading over, but my grandmother stops me. She waves me over and hands me several brightly colored rags to tie around the handles of each bag.

"Tie them tightly!" she says. I sigh, and begin.

To accomplish the Shah family seal, have several rolls of tape, a metal hanger, pliers, ropes, rags, and a sharpie handy. Tie the rags, then take the metal hanger. Using the pliers, wedge pieces of the metal hanger in between the holes of the zippers of each bag, twisting them firmly, and almost irrevocably closed. After that, tape over and around the bag, tightly and multiple times, with no regard for the environment and the plastic used. From there, smack the paper tape onto the bag and write your last name in bright, bold sharpie. As a final step, wrap your bag in rope. This makes absolutely certain that it will not be seen as suspicious in any possible way.

My dad sits on the chairs in the middle of the airport with tape and scissors between his feet. My dad later stuffs the pliers into the front pockets of one of the carry-ons, a time consuming mistake if he had left them there.

My siblings and I go on a hunt for carts for the bags, trying our best to pretend that we don't know our own family. If we could have vanished, that would have been perfect. Our invisibility act is disrupted by our father asking us why we "aren't helping."

11:20 AM We finally check in. Our penchant for having something wrong with our visas or our passports fresh in our minds, we wait, heart in throat, for something to go wrong. Last year, my family got stuck in Germany for three days. The year before that, my little brother nearly couldn't come along.

We are lucky. Thank god, there is no problem now. We weigh our bags, worried that they will be too heavy. My dad's calculations and my grandmother's shifting between bags has worked, however. Our bags go through. We ask for a wheelchair for my grandmother.

11:34 AM Her wheelchair arrives, at long last. Boarding passes in hand, we go through security. My family opts for the pat down, rather than the huge machine that can see you "completely naked!", as my mom had told me. We are checked over thoroughly, and we pick up our bags and our shoes on the other side.

My father and brother take a bit longer coming to us, and I sit down with my mother, wearing my shoes. We are used to waiting. I ask my brother what is wrong, when he arrives.

My father's paan (chewing tobacco) has come into question. The TSA is puzzling over it like it's a sticky, betel leaf-wrapped bomb. My dad explains that it is for eating.

"Do you want to try?" He asks the official, laughing. The man steps away as though my dad shoved it at his mouth. They remove every single thing from my father's bag, asking him what each item is. Eventually, an Indian official who knows what paan is, vouches for its veracity. The paan, freshly bought and wrapped by my father only the night before, is thrown away. We are finally moving again.

12:45 AM We have arrived at the appropriate terminal, thankfully. Even the man pushing my grandmother's wheelchair seems worn out. We sit down and wait for the boarding call. It comes five minutes later.

Part Three: The Airplane

12:50 AM My grandma's wheelchair means we are at the head of the pack getting onto the plane. My grandma shuffles into her seat. With much squinting and yelling, we find our seats and shove our bags into the overhead compartments. The people around us in the plane shift uncomfortably.

My little brother has gotten his much-coveted window seat this time, thank goodness, and is pressing his nose to the window with wide-eyed anticipation. I hand him a stick of gum and turn on the personal computer on the back of the seat in front of me.

A flight attendant comes by, and leans over to ask, "Is this the Hindu Vegetarian meal?"

My mom, beside me, nods, and gestures to us and the three seats in front holding my older brother, Grandma, and my dad. "Yes, all of us."

Muslims have dietary restrictions. We can't eat meat unless it is slaughtered a certain way, so we just stick to vegetarian meals on flights. I wince in memory of awful meals, and hope that it will be edible this time.

5:30 PM (PST) It's not. They've steamed vegetables and tossed it in uncooked turmeric powder and called it Indian cuisine. It's as unpalatable as raw steak.

My grandmother's never-ending purse comes into handy at this time. A veritable meal in tandoori chicken, meat patties, and fish fry emerges. Those sitting next to us with cooked steak look on in envy as we dig in. It's embarrassing, to be eating from a plastic baggie passed back and forth… but worth it.

Someone compliments my headscarf.

1:30 AM (A day later, in Saudi Arabia)

After changing over in Frankfurt, we've arrived. We dismount into a stuffy, muggy night.

Part Four: Coming Back

3:00 PM (SFO, One Month Later)

We step down into the airport, worn out and happy to be back home. We left my grandmother on a plane to India. We call my aunt the second we touch down, so that she knows to come pick us up. We expect to be out of the airport in the 35 minutes it takes her to drive up from Cupertino. It's been a long trip, and we grab our bags from the merry-go-round that is luggage pick up. My little brother and I are sick, coughing and feverish. My mother is impatient to get home. Each of us pushing a cart, we come to security.

"Hello," The TSA official says. My dad greets him, and I come to my father's side. To the side, another official is guiding us to put our bags through screening.

In my sickly blur, I can barely understand the sudden complication, but my aunt is here and calling us and we haven't exited the airport. The official opens our bags, and I see him paw through my bag with my underwear and turn red. I can't say anything, though.

"He has a fever," My mother says, gesturing to my little brother. "He needs medicine."

They refuse to let us go, and call a doctor instead. They can't give us medicine, and say we're fine. My aunt has been waiting for an hour. She leaves.

I sit on the table with the bags, and I wake up sliding sideways. I catch myself before I fall off the table, and they give us a room with chairs for the rest of the interrogation.

At last, we are let go. We take Bart down to San Jose, and my aunt picks us up there. At home, I whistle for my cat. His meow is faint, and he comes leaping to me. He is demanding wet food instantly, a repayment for the trauma we've put him through, leaving him behind.

Epilogue

I don't usually think of my family as normal, especially not at the airport. My mother is anxious, my father is methodical, my siblings fight, and grandmother's carry-on weighs more than my little brother. We are abnormal in the way that each person is unique, but we aren't a threat. The slights that have happened to us, the endless screening, stares, and profiling, those are all unfair.

My parents don't like me talking about these things. She thinks I'm stuck in the past. "Stop being obsessed with morbidity," she says. "It does not do you any good to dwell on bad things."

I think that when discrimination becomes commonplace, it's a problem that shouldn't be ignored. Like my mother, grasping my little brother's hand and urging him to "Yell louder!", I want to yell and scream until someone gives in. It's embarrassing, and rude, but sometimes it's necessary. If you never make a sound, it's easy for people to step on you without even flinching.

But I'd rather not.

So next time you see a Muslim at the airport, spare us a kind thought. We're tired, we're human, and we are just trying to get from one place to another, just like you. We're unique, but we aren't dangerous. Doubtless, your family is just as dysfunctional as mine!