



CRAZY TRAVEL STORIES

BY LIAM LYNCH
TRAVEL BOOKS PUBLISHING

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Introduction

Travelling is like a magnet for stories. When you leave your comfort zone and enter a new and unknown place, anything can happen.

Often you end up doing things, that you wouldn't have imagined doing in your wildest imagination, in the most ridiculous of circumstances.

“Crazy travel stories” is an honest collection of some of the most unusual events I have personally encountered on my travels, to over 65 countries across the globe.

Imagine yourself in my shoes and think what you would have done, in these situations. Author: Liam Lynch

Thai Mafia – The Islands of Thailand

I took a break from backpacking and decided to stop for a while in one of the quieter Thai Islands, in the Andaman Sea (An island I think it's safer not to name). Thailand from the surface is a little different to the reality. I have a theory that there is always something wrong with paradise and that it in fact, does not exist.

This island was no exception. Think beautiful sunsets on golden sandy beaches. Think blue skies, beautiful food and locals, scooter rides in the jungle and so on. So, what could possibly be wrong in this paradise?

I didn't mean to spend almost a month here, but it sort of just happened, as it does in Thailand.

On one of the first nights, I took a walk down the beach. There was a fire show going on outside one of the bars.

Some guys were sitting on beach chairs drinking and offered me a beer. There was a Belgian and some local Thai guys.

We were talking for a while. Only one of the Thai guys was good at English. The Belgian man was in his mid-30's. He broke up with his fiancé, quit his job and drove from Belgium, through Russia and China to Thailand. Though he planned on taking his car on a boat to South America and driving there too, he liked this island too much and just stayed here. The Belgian told me he bought half the bar with one of the local Thai guys. As it turns out, his Thai business partner had retired from the Mafia because he had a kid and was trying to live in a more honest fashion. I started to go to this bar more often and got to know everyone a bit more, including the Thai guys that did the fire show. One of them was quite old. He wasn't very good anymore, especially compared to a younger Burmese guy who was really fast and did loads of crazy tricks.

Over the course of the month, I learned that the Burmese guy had got himself into trouble in one of the neighboring party islands. He was kind of laying low on our island for a while. The boss liked him, but the older Thai fire guy was jealous of him.

The Thai mafia term is used a lot. Apparently all the bars and businesses on the beach pay the Mafia a fee. The police are pretty corrupt here, so they have a part in it too.

The Belgian was missing for a while. He reappeared after a few days and told me that the head of the Thai mafia (head of all the Thai islands) had visited the bar because she was friends with the Thai owner of the bar. The Belgian said she was flirting with him (even though she was married to an English man, who was abroad at the time). The Belgian wanted nothing to do with her, but he had to drink with her, as it would be disrespectful not to.

He told me the main Mafia Boss came to visit again, but this time she was

also with the Mafia boss of this particular island. They all drank together for a few hours and that was all the Belgian remembered.

He told me that he woke up the following day, to find out that he had been drugged. Luckily the Family of his Thai business partner ensured he was not taken away by the two mafia bosses.

Upon realizing this, the Belgian decided to lay low and go and stay somewhere else for a few days.

During this period the Burmese fire guy was telling me about how dangerous the other island was. He had lived there for over a year with other illegal Burmese immigrants. He told me about some of the murders on the Island. Bar owners, Burmese workers and even Tourists that caused trouble. They would fake suicides to cover the murders. He sounded like he was even scared to go back there, but he did anyway, to work on the fire show for a few days.

I went to the party island for a night with a friend who was passing by. That night, I was talking, drinking and eating with some of the Burmese immigrants on the beach. I was curious about them having visited their country (Myanmar) only months before. I returned the following day to the other island.

I didn't always go to this place, in fact there was a lot more going on in the island during this time, however it was a cool bar and I liked to visit it and the people there, every so often.

Meanwhile the older Thai fire guy was getting even more jealous of the younger Burmese guy. He spoke to me one night, saying things like "Why you no like Thai people? Why you only talk to Burmese people? We know you were over on the other island talking to Burmese. Everybody on these islands knows everything that happens on these islands, from when you arrive on the ferry. You should leave if you don't like Thai people, we don't like the Burmese". He was basically starting to sound kind of threatening, as if he could make bad things happen. He told me there were many people he knew on the other island that wanted this Burmese guy killed. He told me about all the police he knows and then started telling me about all the medals he has from his fire show days and how he bought his parents a house.

The Burmese guy, to be fair, was a bit of a beggar. He “borrowed” about 5 euro from me that he didn’t give back. He had an English girlfriend previously who he was probably leeching off of too.

I was very taken aback by the veiled threats. I reassured him “of course I like Thai people. That’s why I’m staying here so long and that I only knew the Burmese guy from this bar”. I told him how great it was that he was able to buy his parent a house from all the fire shows.

Towards the end of the conversation, the Burmese guy came over asking for a cigarette. The older Thai guy started confronting him saying “when are you going to give it back”. I decided to walk away at this point.

This was pretty shocking to hear. I left the bar and walked back towards the other side of the beach where my cabin was. I was trying to decide if I should just get the hell off the island, or was the guy just venting his jealousy. I resolved to just not go back to that bar again.

I walked into one of the bar/restaurants on the way back. There were many other Thai people on the island that I would meet day to day. They were all pretty pleasant. There was another tourist in there that had stayed on the island for a while the year before. He told me more of the dodgy goings on in the island. Essentially, if a tourist disrespected a Thai person, it was not uncommon for them to call the mafia to teach the tourist a lesson. I even saw the cops collecting money from one of the bars myself one day, as he was doing his rounds to each establishment on the beach.

I decided to be brave and stay on the island for a few more days, nothing happened. I returned to the bar one more time, during the day before leaving. It was quiet. The Belgian had gone to the other side of Thailand for a while. Who knows where they all are now?

Snake in Costa Rica

High up in a Cloud forest in Costa Rica, I was looking forward to seeing an incredibly blue river and waterfall called Rio Celeste. The sky blue colour of

the water was the natural result of a natural phenomenon, where the different minerals of two rivers combined and caused a reaction.

I stayed in a nice hostel in a village about 10km from the national park. There was a sloth up in the trees of the hostel garden. Other than that, it looked like I was the only guest in the hostel. Though it was about 1pm, the lady in the hostel seemed to think that I still had time to go and see the park.

Then the heavens opened when a thunderstorm rolled in. I waited a little while for it to clear. She gave me a little blue umbrella for the journey and advised me to hitch hike to the park. I waked past the village to try and grab a lift to the park. Three cars passed and time was running out, as the park was going to close at 5:30pm.

A loud rumbling truck was slowly creeping around the corner. I thought to myself, no way I'm getting that thing, it would take ages. But beggars can't be choosers, so I stuck my hand out and tried to thumb it.

He stopped, of course he did. It was a very beat up one of those big American Mack trucks. The driver was pretty cool. We conversed in my crappy Spanish over the sound of the roaring engine. The climb was steep and the load of earth in his trailer was very heavy. We crawled past green fields with dairy cows. We passed by lush jungle landscape, high up into the cloud forest. I made it to the park just before they stopped admitting people. It was a very quiet national park. After a short walk, I descended many steps to find the most amazing sight. A stunning blue, powerful waterfall. I had never seen water this colour before. Though swimming wasn't permitted, I met some Canadian girls on the way down who decided to jump in anyway. I joined them.

Wow, it was amazing. Was this place even real? I thought to myself that this is truly a paradise, then I briefly remembered there is no such thing as paradise, I wonder what is wrong with this one. It was amazing. Some rules are well worth ignoring. Had those girls not jumped in, I probably wouldn't have either.

We all ventured deeper into the forest. Some of the girls were barefoot. They turned back after about 40 minutes, to drive to the place where the rivers met

and changed colour. I wanted to walk to the end of the trail, so we parted ways.

Passing little wooden bridges, over pools of immensely blue water, I finally made it to the end. It was here that the rivers actually joined and changed colours, the Canadian girls actually missed it. I briefly spoke to a couple from the United States, as we looked in awe at the river. It was getting pretty late so I decided to quickly head back to the exit.

I briskly walked in to the jungle for 5 minutes. It began to lightly rain so I decided to open the little blue umbrella and started running up some stone steps. Suddenly, halfway up the steps a big snake jumped up in front of my face. Its jaw was wide open and its tongue was sticking out. The snake was hissing at me and slapping its tail on its body with anger.

I froze and the hairs rose up on my arms and neck. Quickly I had to react, Should I go forward and try to pass it or retreat backwards. I retreated backwards, knowing there was no other way past this snake. The steps were on the side of a steep embankment. There was no other way out of the park and I was still about 40 minutes from the exit.

I thought about throwing something at the snake, but it seemed like a stupid idea. I'm from Ireland, we don't have any snakes or even know much about them. The couple from the US would be coming this way soon, so I figured they might know more about how to handle this situation.

I waited for them for about 5 minutes. In the meantime the snake stayed where it was just at the side of the stone steps. The couple came and I told them the situation.

"Do you know much about snakes?" I asked. "No" they replied.

The guy attempted to pass, though the snake didn't jump up this time, it was furiously hissing and slapping its tail. The American (US) guy retreated and said he didn't want to mess with a snake that was that angry.

We knew that there was 3 more people left in the park, that had to pass this way. They were Latin American and hopefully they may know how to handle this situation. I realized that if we did not pass the snake we would be here for

the night, with all the other venomous and dangerous snakes, spiders and animals that probably inhabit this “paradise”.

We waited a further 10 minutes when the 3 Latin Americans came. As it turns out, they had no idea what to do either and were also too cautious or scared to pass.

So there we were, 6 people stuck in the cloud forest, with the daylight disappearing fast. Suddenly, out of nowhere, two young women appeared behind us, dressed from top to toe like real adventurers. They had machetes and big backpacks with all sorts of camping regalia.

“Do you know anything about snakes?” I asked.

“No” they replied.

“Oh crap” I thought, almost laughing at this ridiculous situation, of 8 people being stuck in the forest behind a big angry snake.

They women were bird researchers from the United States. They were not on the trail when we were all down there. They must have been pretty far off the beaten track, but they said they didn’t come across any snakes yet.

They had a very large roll of clear plastic tarp. We decide to roll out this plastic, as a sort of barrier between us and the snake so we could sneak past it. They rolled it out slowly, past the snake and held it while we passed. The snake was going crazy but stayed in the same spot. The plastic would have been an absolutely useless barrier, from an attack by this snake.

It worked. I took a picture of plastic and the snake from the top of the steps. We scurried back to the exit. The Couple from the US gave me a lift to the hostel.

When I arrived back, I spoke to the woman who runs the hostel and gave her back the umbrella. She was with her friend. I told her about the snake and she started freaking out. She was asking me to describe it. It was brown and big, with triangle shapes on its skin. It was slapping its tail loudly of its body. I showed her the picture and she started freaking out even more. “Terciopelo! Terciopelo” “They bite you and after 20 minutes you can’t see and in 2 hours you are dead”

My jaw dropped when I heard that. I would have been screwed, deep in the forest in the middle of nowhere. I wondered did the umbrella scare the snake, or stop him from striking me. Later that night she asked me to show the picture to her husband and son. They confirmed it was the Terciopelo. I was very lucky.

Ignorance is bliss, I was perfectly happy in the forests of Costa Rica before this. Happily I got over this fear a few days later, after going into another national park. Finally I looked up the snake on the internet. It is the most aggressive, unpredictable and dangerous snake in Central America. It is responsible for most snake deaths. That time of year was the breeding season for these snakes, making them even more aggressive and territorial. I read stories from survivors, about the plastic surgery they had to get from bites as the venom kills your cells, making it easier for the snake to digest its prey.

Ireland was looking very appealing at this point. Would I have been bitten, if I didn't retreat backwards when it was confronting me? Probably.

There's always something wrong with paradise.
It was an amazing place though.

Myanmar Scooter Adventure - To find an ATM

Myanmar (Formerly Burma) is a big tropical country next to Thailand. It opened its doors to tourism in the last few years, having been cut off from the world since the 1960's. I went here in 2015. Having visited the many temples, I decided to go to a beach area to chill out. I went to a beach area that locals go to, as opposed to the rich fancy areas, where rich tourists or rich Myanmar officials usually go to.

Myanmar is not very developed, especially for tourists. The place I went to was called Chaung Thar, it was in the middle of nowhere on the west coast. First I got a bus from the capital (Yangon) to a little town to wait for another bus to the beach. While waiting in the hot sun, I decided to get a haircut. I found a place, that for all the world looked like a filthy, greasy garage and got a haircut for 40 cents. It was one of those, "point and speak with body language" interactions.

The bus finally came, it was an absolute heap of crap. A falling apart,

wooden bus,
absolutely packed with people. I took a seat next to a Buddhist monk. People were sitting in the aisle on drums of oil and little plastic chairs. The journey took over 2 hours in the sweaty heat.

We passed little villages, climbed over a small mountain and bobbed up and down valleys through the jungle. People would hop out at their wooden houses and take their shopping from the market. Sacks and bags of various things were constantly being taken and placed in the luggage compartment or the roof. Finally we reached the beach.

This town only had electricity at night. There were no ATM machines here either. I stayed here for a few days and was almost out of cash. There was a possibility of finding an ATM in the more developed, fancy beach resort area. It was possible to get there on a scooter, but it was a 3 hour journey through the jungle and beaches without any paved road. It would involve 3 boat crossings, just go get there. The alternative was to take that horrible long bus again back to that town.

I got a scooter and set out through the village to catch the first boat. I drove the scooter dangerously up a shaky wooden plank onto the boat. There were local men wearing their traditional Longyi dresses and shirts. The woman and kids had the special cheek makeup called Thanaka, which the people of Myanmar use to protect themselves from the sun. Other than that I was the only foreign tourist on the boat, if not the whole town. We crossed to the other side of the water. There was a dirt trail into the jungle. I drove through a little village of wooden shacks, past rice paddies with CDs hanging from the trees, presumably to scare the birds away.

The grassy jungle trail skirted a beach before eventually ending. I drove on the beach, following tyre marks from other scooters, until I arrived at the unmarked boat stop. There were two men waiting for the boat. They reassured me it was the right direction, though they didn't speak English. We stood awkwardly as a tiny wooden boat appeared.

The man running the boat was helped by his very young daughter. We got to the other side and stopped in shallow water on the sandy shore. The previous day I nearly destroyed the engine of the scooter, when I drove into a hole of soft sand filled with seawater on the beach. I was worried it might happen

again but this time, I would be really stranded.

Thankfully the scooter was alright and I made my way through more beaches, following the two other men. One of them was going to the same boat as me, so I followed him to a small wooden house by the water. Chickens ran about the outside of the house next to a woman with a jar filled with money. I paid her for the boat and waited.

Finally it came, but it was absolutely tiny, closer to a kayak than a little boat. I rolled the scooter on the boat as did the other man. There were also a couple of school kids sitting on the sides of the boat. We all barely fit into it. I stood with the scooter between my legs as the boat rocked from side to side. The boat was so small that I took up the whole width of it. The fear of capsizing was too scary to consider.

We reached the other side, where to my surprise, was a new paved road. This was clearly a very different beach area.

Petrol was getting low at this stage, so I bought a little bottle of petrol with my dwindling reserve of cash. I asked for an ATM machine and was pointed in the direction of another fancy beach resort that had one. The resorts were all very spread out along the road. When I got to the ATM machine, they told me it was broken and pointed me to a resort which they thought had another one. Worried that I may be in trouble, I was getting desperate to find a working ATM machine.

Thankfully the other ATM was working, but only between noon and 1pm. I had to wait for a while, so I ordered a meal with the very last of my cash.

Thankfully the ATM worked. What a relief!

I explored the really nice beaches of

Ngwesaung for a while and made my way back to the boat. There were some teenagers carrying a big barrel of some kind of liquid. They had it tied to a big stick that balanced on their shoulders. They tried to lift the barrel onto the shaky boat, but it all fell into the sea.

I followed the same trails back and took the same boats. While waiting for the last boat, I spoke to some of the villagers. They told me that they don't live in the little beach town (where I was staying) because of all the stampedes by elephants. Apparently the elephants keep getting pushed out of

their habitat and rebel by attacking and trampling towns and villages. They were very curious as to where I was from. I showed them where Ireland was on my phone.

The boat finally came. I made my way back and dropped the scooter to the owner, who was glad to see I had survived. He was getting a massage from his guru massage guy, probably to de-stress from his disastrous attempt at giving a snorkeling tour the day before. I also got a massage from the guru, it was one of the best ones ever, despite the circling mosquitos and the dusty wooden floor.

It was great to have some money again and what an amazing little ATM adventure to get it.

Camels in India

I was in Rajasthan, travelling with two friends. We planned head west from Udaipur, to the desert and take a camel trek into the desert and see the stars. My friends had to fly home soon. Therefore, we didn't have time to go all the way into the west, where most people go.

We spoke to a tour agent in Udaipur a few times and eventually settled on a tour.

A guy was going to drive us to a desert place that was nearer, though it was still very far away.

We would spend one night in the desert and then we would take the train back to New Delhi from the nearest city.

We set off for a long drive the following morning in a very shaky car. The driver was showing us his notebooks, containing all the positive reviews he had from other tourists. That evening we arrived to somewhere, which can only be described as, 100 miles past the middle of nowhere.

The land was getting a bit sandy, which was a good sign. Here, the driver stopped and told us that we would be picked up by the camels and another driver would take our bags. The driver said thanks very much and then asked us for a tip. He wanted a huge amount of money. We were not impressed.

One of the guys argued with him and ensured he waited with us until the camels and the other driver came. We gave him his extortionate tip and awkwardly waited in the car for ages. Finally 3 kids arrived on top of 3 very tall camels. The camels sat on the ground and the kids got off. The oldest kid must have been 12. He spoke a little English. He welcomed us and told us that his father would come for our bags later in a 4x4. We were to go on the camels with them before the sun went down. We were not very happy about the bag situation. They ensured us it would be fine, so we gave them the benefit of the doubt.

We rode the camels through a few small sand dunes into some scrub for a while. Then we came to a tiny village with shacks and what looked like mud houses. There were women with sarees and big gold coloured nose rings. A few kids would wave and stare as we rode past. After about 45 minutes we arrived at a very basic brick dwelling. We went into the house and met the mother of the 3 boys. She didn't speak a word of English. The older boy told us to sit on the concrete floor and wait for his mother to bring us food. The only other thing in the room was a couple of very basic raised beds. The place was filthy. They gave us water, but we were afraid of getting sick from it. The food was very basic and plain. The three of us shared about a liter of bottled water that I had left, between us.

After the meal, there was no sign of the father and our bags. We asked the boy to call his dad as he had a mobile phone but there was no reception. We had no reception either. We went back on the camels and made our way to another concrete shell of a building. This is where we were going to spend the night, on the roof. There were blankets on my camel, it turns out, that these smelly dirty blankets, lined with camel sweat, were for us to lie on, when we slept.

The French guys were angry at the whole situation. It wasn't really a proper desert, we had kind of been conned. Our bags were gone, possibly stolen. We were on a tour run by kids in the middle of nowhere with no water or anything else for that matter and to top it off we couldn't even see the stars because of clouds.

So, there we were, in bed at 7pm because there was nothing else to do. One of the guys was wondering if they would come up and murder us while we

were sleeping. It was almost impossible to get to sleep. Mosquitos were circling around us. The filthy camel blankets were intoxicating and the only alternative was the concrete roof of the half finished building we were stuck on. One of the French guys had diarrhea too and a bad stomach.

I dozed off for a couple of hours and I think the others did too, for a little bit. The sun came up early the next morning. We waited for the kids to arrive with their camels or the mythical father with his 4x4 and our bags. We wanted to get the hell out of there. The kids came and brought a flask of tea. The older kid told us his father was sick and had to go to hospital that night, but now he is ok and he has our bags.

They brought us up to the top of a little sand dune, as the sun hazily rose up. We went back to their house on the camels for breakfast. The father met us and apologized. We told him we wanted to leave. He insisted we have breakfast. After a few hesitant spoons of “something” at breakfast on the filthy concrete floor, He drove us down a dirt trail for ages, at lighting speeds in his buggee 4x4. It was fun but we thought we were going to turn over a few times.

Eventually we got in a car and went to Jodhpur, the nearest city. It was boiling hot. We got dropped off at a little mall. The train was not leaving until later that evening and none of us had any appetite for exploring the town. I remember when we drove by the town on the way, when a woman on the street shoved her baby through the car window begging for money. The streets were absolutely filthy.

There were almost no shops at all in the dilapidated little mall and it was very early. There was however a McDonalds there. It didn't look great but there was nothing else around. We waited for it to open. It was a bit of a relief to get something first world, after such a long time. It finally opened. I think the staff were very surprised to see foreigners in there. The place was filthy. We ordered some stuff but it was horrendous, nothing tasted like it should. There were no cooking standards. I went to the toilet and was hit with a smell so pungently horrific, I nearly threw up.

We got a bit of Wi-Fi and found a fancy hotel in the town. We got a tuk tuk to the hotel and paid some money to hang around their amazing pool for the

day. It was a stunning place to find in an absolutely sweltering hot, horrid city. It was like an oasis.

That evening we went to the train station. Hundreds of people were hanging around the station. Many homeless people and beggars are found at Indian Railways. A teenager came up to me and was chatting. He wanted to practice his English. Suddenly there were about 20 of his classmates around me. I said hello and shook all their hands and left to board the train. We found our carriage and prepared for our first “Indian night train” experience.

We were all in separate compartments which was a little disappointing. I asked one of the staff if it was possible to have our own compartment. He brought me through a few carriages into first class to a dimly lit compartment. Inside was the Indian train conductor. He had shiny rings on his fingers. An official uniform, polished shoes, a hat and a mustache.

I told him what we were looking for and he told me how much extra we'd have to pay. I tried to bargain a little as he did that signature Indian head nod. The guys agreed and we went to our very own first class compartment. It was like being in James Bond. We could play music, smoke and drink. Two of us at least got to enjoy it, the other one still had diarrhea and stomach problems to deal with.

We arrived into New Delhi the following day and opened the curtains of the train compartment, only to see a man defecating on the train tracks. Welcome to New Delhi.

We booked into a kind of fancy hotel to recover.

New Delhi Scam

It was a boiling hot New Delhi evening. I had just separated from my friends who were heading to the airport to fly home. I was going to get the metro to a stop near my new hostel, but first I was going to book a train ticket, to see the Taj Mahal the day after.

The metro, as usual, was packed. Before boarding the metro security makes a half assed attempt to screen people. When I got off the metro at the big train station in New Delhi, the magnitude of my surroundings, were pretty

daunting. I had heard of a Tourist office located in many train stations, to help tourists buy tickets. I tried to find one and asked a man standing by an idle luggage x-ray machine for directions, to the tourist office of the train station.

He told me that it was just outside the station in another building and advised me to get a tuk tuk (A motorcycle with back seats for passengers). He told me to make sure it was a government licensed tuk tuk. I thanked him and turned to walk towards the exit.

Immediately, he approached me again offering to show me how I could tell a government licensed tuk tuk, from an unlicensed one. He brought me to a tuk tuk and explained to two old guys where to take me.

I sat in and we whizzed through the streets. I thought it was odd that I had to leave the station but just decided to go with it. One of the men was driving the tuk tuk and the other one was talking to me. We were stuck in traffic and a woman was praying in her car. He told me that there was a big religious festival in New Delhi for the next few days and that people from all over the region were coming into the city to celebrate it.

After about 10 minutes we got to the tourist office. I was not comfortable with the distance we had travelled from the station, but I vaguely recognized the area, as we were somewhere in the backstreets close to Connaught Place (a well-known landmark).

The driver said he would wait outside while I got the ticket and would bring me back to the station.

The building was official looking. It was labeled a “government tourist office” and had flags and tourist posters. I entered and was met by someone who brought me into their office and asked me where I wanted to go. He searched the trains and showed me that there were none available. He told me all sorts of nonsense, such as that he had a brother in law living in Ireland and he would love to visit him one day. He kept telling me about how busy New Delhi was because of the religious festival. He said all the trains were booked and that I should hire a car. He was trying to sell me a whole tour, so I could see all the things I wanted to see, in that part of India. The price of the short tour came to over 300 Euros.

At this stage I believed the religious festival was an issue. Looking back I feel like a fool, but being there was quite different. The lies all these people told me, was very well presented. They were scammers with an Academy award winning level of acting. They ensured I didn't have a chance to think.

I said to him "why can't I just book a flight?"

"You won't get to the airport, my friend. There are millions of people coming to New Delhi for this festival". I refused to believe this and after 45 minutes of frustration, I walked out of the "tourist office" into the street.

As I left the building with my backpack, a man walked next to me asking "where do you want to go?" The driver was gone so I walked down the street. The street was filled with cars stuck in traffic, it was night time now. I finally said "I wanted to go to my hostel."

He told me that all the cars are stuck in traffic because of the religious festival and that I won't be able to get anywhere. He told me the streets are very dangerous here at night, especially for a tourist. There was no sign of the metro either. He advised me to go back into the tourist office. I didn't appear to have any other option, so I went back to the tourist office. This time I spoke to another man. I ranted to him that there are so many liars in India. He was sympathetic. He again showed me that the trains were all booked. He again was advising me to leave by car and was trying to sell an extortionate tour. It seemed to be never ending.

At this stage I asked to charge my dead mobile phone. Thankfully I got an Indian sim card, so I could try and Google if this was a scam. He was taking rubbish to me while I was searching on my phone. I searched for "New Delhi Railway scam" and after a while, found an almost identical scenario.

He must have spotted that I had realized this was a scam as I scrolled down my phone. He started saying

"Are you going to take this tour"

I unplugged my charger and said

"I'll have a think about it, but I am not booking anything now".

He got very angry at this point, and began saying something along the lines of “Don’t come back you asshole, wasting my time” as I walked down the stairs I just replied

“Ok I’ll be back tomorrow”.

I got the hell out of there, wary that there would be someone on the street ready to rob me, now that the scam didn’t work. I quickly walked to another busy road and asked a Tuk Tuk driver to take me to where the hostel was.

It was absolutely no problem. I was furious to be nearly scammed and absolutely exhausted from the whole event, but delighted to get to the hostel and not to have totally fallen for it.

It was vulnerable moment. I was in a very hot, massive, busy, dump of a city. On my own, tired, hungry and confused. These are ideal situations that scammers can capitalise on.

I resolved that it is good that this happened, only because I would be much less naïve for the rest of the trip, which by the way, was awesome.

Hospital in Las Vegas

It was a record breaking, hot summer in New York in 2011. People were even frying eggs on their cars in Manhattan. I was visiting friends in Long Beach. My friend’s house has no air conditioning and though it was near the beach, it was like a sauna. This coupled with a bit of partying, sunburn and maybe the flight, ended up in me being dehydrated (though I didn’t really know that at the time). My wrist began to pulsate. It was freaking me out a bit so I stopped the partying and only drank water for a couple of days. My heart was also palpitating.

Friends advised me to take aspirin or go see a doctor. I didn’t want to go to a doctor in the US and I figured it would just go away after a while.

I was going to visit Las Vegas for the first time and took two planes, changing once in Chicago. By the time I landed in Las Vegas, I was feeling very faint and woozy. I asked the stewardess if there was a medical department or first aid in the airport. She said there was. I managed to get my bag, but was feeling very ill at this stage.

Thankfully I found the Medical department. They sat me down took my blood pressure and called an ambulance.

I had phoned my medical insurance at home before leaving Ireland, to ask do they cover medical insurance abroad. They did and in fact it was free, but I wouldn't have been covered if I didn't ask them to also cover my travels on that phone call.

I knew this when the ambulance was on the way. It came and the ambulance paramedic was really nice, as was the doctor, in the hospital. They did a bunch of tests and eventually gave me two drips. After 4 hours in the emergency department, I was perfectly fine again. I had been dangerously dehydrated. The doctor said it was a common thing in Las Vegas and was nicknamed "holiday heart". The heat, sun and the partying take their toll. He told me to drink electrolytes and that it is the minerals I need not just water.

"Do you have insurance?" they asked. I told them I did. They asked me to pay some money there and then, as the insurance would not pay until they had investigated the claim.

The bill was almost \$6000 including \$1000 for the ambulance. I knew the American health system was screwed up, but this was pretty shocking for a 4 hour experience. I only gave them what I could afford, \$700.

It took almost a year for my insurance to finally pay out. They refunded me the \$700 too. I enjoyed the rest of the trip with a new found respect for electrolytes, hydration and reasonable health care costs.

Kangaroo Crash

On the tip of North West Australia, you will find the very, very isolated Cape Range National Park and the little village of Exmouth. I made the drive with some friends up the west coast from Perth, over 1250Kms away.

It was totally worth it. The coral reef is astounding and it's right next to beautiful empty beaches. We snorkeled some of the untouched reef by the beach, floating along with the current. The second time I went in for a snorkel, I saw a small shark lurking amongst the reef. It looked like a proper shark, not a reef shark, but it was only about a meter long. I decided I had

enough snorkeling for the day and went back to the beach.

I told my friend about the shark and she decided to have a look. She returned some time later and told me she saw him and started to follow him. Then the shark turned around and stared at her. It was then that she decided it was time to leave him alone and go back on land.

In those few days we saw massive whales skirting Australia on their way down to feed in Antarctica for the summer. We also saw two huge Green turtles come ashore and lay their eggs. It was an amazing site as we quietly watched, sitting on the moonlit beach, with a few beers, in the middle of nowhere.

Four of us travelled up to Exmouth, but only two of us watched the turtles. We decided we should drive from the national park, back to Exmouth and show the other two. On the way back to the village, there were many wild Kangaroos lining the road. We got to the village of Exmouth and collected our two friends and drove back to the beach. On the way back the Kangaroos were lining the road again. Kangaroos can be a bit suicidal when it comes to bright lights.

Suddenly a kangaroo jumped right out in front of the car. There was a bang. I immediately braked, but it was too late. I got out and saw the kangaroo was alive but had its leg stuck in the vent of the grill. He was still alive and a little stunned. He got free from the grill of the car.

At this point we could see his pinkish white bone was on show. He had lost a leg. The poor Kangaroo managed to get himself to the side of the road. The Toyota badge of the rental car had been blown off. I found it further down the road. I had no idea what to do with the kangaroo.

Should I kill it? Should I put the bleeding Kangaroo in the rented car and bring back to the town? It was too big to roll over with the rental car. There was nothing in the car to kill it with. We decided to go straight back to the village and tell the police. They could shoot it or bring it to the vet (if there was a vet).

We drove 20 minutes back to the village. The police station was empty but we saw a police car on the main street. I approached the police, a man and a woman, and told them the whole situation. Feeling very guilty, I asked

“Can you go back and kill it?”

They asked me why I didn't kill it or roll over it. I told them I had nothing to kill it with and it was too big to roll over.

They basically pretended they would go back and kill it and asked roughly where it was, but there was no way they would really bother to go looking. Perhaps it happens all the time.

Sorry Kangaroo.

When we got back to Perth, we learned that the amazing beach had been temporarily closed to the public after we left. A shark in the reef had attacked a middle aged woman as she was snorkeling. She was bitten in the arm and had some of her nerves severed. The authorities closed the beach until they killed the shark(s).

Dead Body in New York

I was working in a Beach Club in Atlantic Beach, New York (10 miles from JFK airport). One of my jobs was to drive a tractor on the beach with a machine that raked the rubbish and seaweed from the sand and makes it smooth. I would get up at 7am and drive forwards and backwards past 5 beach clubs 6 times.

One morning, I was about 5 minutes late. When I was a little late, the boss would make a point of taking out the tractor onto the beach and starting the job, until I came along to takeover. This was one of those mornings.

I saw him driving the tractor in the distance, so I walked down to the shore. He drove past the other beach clubs and at the same time a police truck drove onto the beach. They all got out and talked. He drove back, stopped the tractor, opened the door and said “You've had an interesting summer”

He told me a dead body had washed up on the beach.

He told me to keep driving anyway. “So, I should just drive around the body? How close should I drive” He told me to ask the police. I jumped up on the

tractor.

The first time, I awkwardly drove towards the body, wondering if I should look at it. I did look. It was a big African American guy, his face was in the sand. He was bloated and must have been in the sea for days. His red tshirt and navy shorts were slightly ripped. Thank god I didn't see his face.

I stopped and asked the police if I could drive past and how close should I drive. They told me it was no problem and I could drive right next to the body, which I thought was far too near.

I drove over and back another 5 times past the body and the police. A few more people appeared, on their morning beach walk. They would often wave at me, but this time when they passed the body, we just exchanged nods, to acknowledge the situation. Finally the police decided to make a half assed attempt at cordoning off the body with two plastic beach chairs.

My boss told everyone at work I found a dead body (not sure about that) and they started calling me "Heratio" Lynch from the crime TV series CSI (which I have never even watched). I never found out what happened to the guy that died, but I read something in the paper about a guy that went missing in Manhattan and was found washed up on a beach in Long Island. He had been pushed in the water or something like that. Who knows?

Another morning a few weeks after this, I was up early driving the tractor on the beach. The radio was banging out some tunes and I had my morning coffee in one hand, trying to wake up. I passed by a small yacht that was stranded on the beach up against a rock jetty.

"That's a bit weird" I thought as I drove past. Then on the way back to pass it again, I thought, "Actually, that is really weird".

Why would a yacht be washed up on the beach? My mind started to think of the worst case scenario. Could it be a drug deal gone wrong, would there be dead bodies on this boat? I've had enough of them.

I stopped the tractor and walked to the back of the boat, dreading the possibility of seeing the bloody remains of a shoot-out. What if someone was

still on the boat?

I peered in and saw nothing. At the same moment the manager of one of the beach clubs came down and told me that an old drunk man crashed his yacht last night, when he fell asleep. The rich guy was only worried about his little dog when the police came on the scene. He had written off the yacht, by cracking the bottom of the boat off of the rocks. The beach club manager reckoned it was worth at least half a million dollars.

A police tug boat had tried to pull it out the night before, but failed. They decided to wait for the tide to come in the following morning instead.

Jail in Mexico

The Yucatan is on the East coast of Mexico. It is one of the main tourist areas in Mexico. I was travelling south away from the touristy North towards Belize. On the way I stopped in Tulum to check out the Mayan ruins on the beach and the area in general.

One night in the hostel, following far too much horrible Tequila, a group of us went into the town. I was absolutely dying to pee. The group was wandering around trying to decide where to go for ages. I decided I couldn't wait anymore and started to pee in an alley. I had just finished when I realized I was surrounded by 4 or 5 police. Oh Crap.

They immediately handcuffed me and put me into the back of a pickup truck. They towered over me with their gigantic, AK47 type guns, as they stood on the back of the pickup truck. I was a little freaked out, but was also amused at the surreal moment. We breezed up the street on a balmy Mexican night. Me and my flip flops and them and their guns.

We got to the jail. I had to give them my flip flops, t-shirt, phone and wallet. They took my information and told me I had to stay here for 36 hours.

There was another tourist there, in a small cell by the officer's desk. He was freaking out. He told me he was going to be bailed out by his friends who he was travelling with and it was 150 euros (3000 pesos). I asked for the toilet and walked past two cells full of Mexicans to a really filthy toilet. When I walked back towards the desk, I was met by black metal bars. I was trapped.

I briefly spoke to one of the prisoners. He was asking why I was in here. He was in there because he was caught drinking on the street. The prison officers told me to go in the cell. It was me and about 8 Mexicans.

The cell was literally bare, concrete and iron bars. They locked us in. I decided to just go to sleep on the concrete floor. Thank god this wasn't a cold country.

The following morning I awoke to the reality of the situation. All the Mexicans in the cell next door were moved into ours, as the guards disinfected the floor. It was me and about 16 Mexicans jammed into a cell. We sat in silence for a long time. I lied down on the floor, staring at the bars.

I realised how freedom is actually worth any money, compared to losing time in here. I wondered would they let me out. I actually even wondered if it would be cheaper to get out, now that I spent the night.

There was no sign of breakfast. Many of the Mexicans were curious as to why I was there and where I was from. Some of them were asking me in Spanish. As it turns out most of them were in there for the same thing, or drinking on the street or smoking weed. They were actually pretty cool. One of the guys had some English and told me I would get a phone call. I only had about 25 euros worth of pesos. Who could I even phone?

Some of the guys started to go out for the phone call, others just decided to spend the sentence in the jail. The guards asked if I wanted to make a call.

I went out and said I could call the hostel. They found the number and there was no answer. The older prison official, who seemed to be the boss, asked me if I wanted to pay to get out. I said yes, but I had no money and would have to go to an ATM and get my card in the hostel. After a while he agreed and drove me to the Hostel. I spoke to no one in the hostel and got my bank card. He drove me to the bank and made small talk. He was pointing to a woman walking down the street and saying "sexy chicas" and he was asking me about the woman in Ireland. I was not very impressed that he was trying to be friendly, while fleecing the living daylights out of me. We drove back towards the prison.

At a traffic light, just before we got back to the Jail, he asked me to give him

the money and put it in his pocket. At the Jail, he gave me back my phone, flip flops, t-shirt and my wallet (which still had the 25 euros worth of pesos in it). I signed out and saw that my name was spelt totally wrong.

I walked back through the town in my flip flops, to the hostel, thankful for my freedom and regretful for my wallet. The girl running the hostel has a great laugh when I told her the story and the amount I paid to get out. She told me I should have negotiated and that I could have gotten out for 20 pesos.

I felt like an idiot, but at least I was free again.

Central American borders

Leaving Mexico and heading to Belize, I had read about a scam on the border, where they make you pay 20 US dollars, as a tourist exit fee. I read that if you fly into Mexico, this fee is already included in the ticket. Having already been fleeced by 150 euros at the Mexican Jail, I was determined not to be scammed by this.

We got to the border on a bus. The border officer wanted the payment but I said no as I already paid it by flying into the country. He told me that everyone has to pay it. I asked for his manager.

He brought me over to another hut with two more officers. They proceeded to tell me the same thing and we argued for a while. I asked to see their manager and eventually they brought me into the border building, to the office of their boss. He told me I had to pay and I told him I didn't, because I flew into the country. Eventually he gave up, stamped my passport and let me through. It was a small victory over the corruption of Central America, but I was only really beginning my journey.

About 10 days later, I left Belize and entered Guatemala. The Belize official stamped my passport and gave it to the woman next to her, who gave it to me. I was confused as to why there were two people. I passed other borders where they would stamp me out of one country and pass it to the next official, to stamp me into that country. Was this the same? I saw only one squiggle of a stamp on my passport. I should have asked but proceeded onwards.

Outside, all I saw were lots of buses and people asking me if I wanted to change currency or get a lift. There was no sign of any other immigration office, so I kept walking towards a bridge.

I guess this is Guatemala then.

I asked a guy in uniform where I could get the bus to the next town, he pointed the way and off I went.

Guatemala was pretty good, though a bit of a challenge. A man working at the hostel tried to scam me with a really expensive bus ticket, but I had read about him in the hostel reviews. The area to the south, especially around Guatemala City is very dangerous, even for Central America. After about 10 days, I decided to continue south and take a bus to a surfing town in El Salvador.

We got to the border of Guatemala and lined up to get our passports stamped. There was a problem with mine (of course). I was asked into the office. The boss asked me in Spanish “where was my stamp?”

I replied “you tell me, it’s your country. There was no place to get a stamp at the border of Belize.”

We argued in my crappy Spanish for a while. He basically said I was illegally in Guatemala and I would have to pay for a stamp to leave. But there was another surprise in store.

Four countries in Central America have a common entry visa for tourists to the CA 4 countries. This means that tourists can spend 90 days in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. As Guatemala was my first point of entry to the CA4 area, I would need a stamp from there to enter the other countries.

He wanted about 90 Euros worth of the Guatemalan currency (700 Quetzals). I said no.

“How much will you pay?” he said.

“5 Quetzals” I replied. He laughed and said “ok, 200 (30 Euros)”

The bus had been waiting for me. I was worried that it would drive off and leave me stranded in this dodgy dump of a town. I could only pay in local currency, so, I asked for an ATM. I told the driver the situation and asked him to wait.

There was lots of trucks and traffic at the border blocking the way. I ran about a Km up the road, in the boiling heat to the ATM. I ran back and paid the man. He stamped the passport and wrote "Evasion control" on it. I apologized to everyone on the bus and thanked them for waiting.

We proceeded on the bus about 2 KM, to the El Salvador border control. We handed over our passports and again there was a problem with mine. The officer said he couldn't let me through because I didn't have an entry stamp into Guatemala and the CA4 countries. The Belize Exit stamp was of no use either. He said after some deliberation, that the best he could do was to give me 5 days to leave the CA4 area and would allow me in, if I got an Entry stamp on my passport.

The people on the bus were very nice and understanding about the whole situation. A Spanish guy offered to help me with the translations. We walked the 2Km back to the Guatemalan border and eventually the officers wrote a note on the stamp and another note, explaining how they can't stamp the passport again.

After another wait for the deliberation of the El Salvadorian Border Control, they finally let me through with a 5 Day visa. I was not too bothered as I wanted to just get to safer countries at that stage.

I stayed one night in the Surf town called El Tunco. The following morning I got a minivan to Leon in Nicaragua, through Honduras.

There was a very pissed off, tired looking Australian already on the bus. He has already travelled in the minivan, overnight from Guatemala. He told me later on in a petrol station, what happened to the van the night before.

About an hour from Guatemala City, The van was pulled over. It was the early hours of the morning. Three guys ran towards the van and were about to attack it when, the driver suddenly took off and rolled over a dog in the

process. They just got a way in time.

The Australian guy then proceeded to tell me about an event that occurred just 2 days before, to the same minibus service from, Guatemala to Nicaragua.

A minibus was shot at until the driver stopped. The thieves stunned the driver with a Taser and pointed their guns to the passengers. They shot the air conditioning, causing the gas to go everywhere. They drove up into the quiet hills and made the passengers get out. The passengers were tourists. They were lined up and had their hands tied behind their backs, with their own shoelaces.

One of the girls was raped. The passengers were robbed, however the thieves did not take their passports or cards. Told not to move until morning, the passengers were left for dead as the thieves fled.

The passengers got back to civilization and some understandably decided to go home, while others traveled to safer countries like Costa Rica.

This was a shocking story, another passenger in our van said he knew about it too.

In fact, some people I met later ran into the people that stayed traveling in Costa Rica.

Meanwhile we made our way to Nicaragua safely and the other borders were much easier. After a few days in sweltering Nicaragua, I made it to Costa Rica, before the 5 days were up.

Stranded in Barcelona Airport

Years ago, before I went to college, I was working as a postman. I was filling in for people who were on holidays or sick. There was always work. Except for one time, when my boss told me that there was going to be no work for a few days, as everyone was back in. I decided to use the few days to fly somewhere.

I was probably only 19 at the time. I flew to Barcelona and explored the city.

It was the first time I travelled abroad on my own.

I was going home after a good trip and was running late for the plane in Barcelona. It was late in the evening. I was also running out of money as unbeknownst to me, my ATM card didn't work abroad. I realised that I didn't have time to figure out the ticket machine for the train and just hopped the barrier. Probably a bad karma move.

The train stopped 5 minutes from Barcelona and there was an announcement in Spanish (a language I didn't understand at the time). As I took the same train into the city on arrival, I just ignored it. After 20 minutes, the ocean appeared outside my window, I knew something was wrong.

It turned out to be an express train that was heading south without stopping for an hour. I should have changed trains at the last stop.

Finally we arrived and I had to wait 30 minutes for another train back to the airport. By the time I got to the airport the plane was gone. The airline staff told me there was no other flight to Ireland that day and I would have to wait until tomorrow morning.

I had no choice but to wait. I was down to about 3 euro. I bought some water and had a look around the airport. It was dead. The lights were bright and florescent. What if they won't let me on the plane tomorrow?

I thought about ringing my parents and asking them to transfer money to a post office or something but the following day was Sunday and everything would be closed. Besides it would only worry them. I did ring the embassy though, probably out of a moment of desperation. They just said to see if I can get on the morning flight. All the silver airport seats had armrests. There was nowhere to lie down except for the floor. I managed to find a bench with a missing arm rest and somehow lay down for the night.

The following morning I waited for the flight to open, after a crappy sleep. There was an old couple behind me, also waiting for someone to appear at the check in desk. They chatted with me and said they were on holiday. The man said he was a retired vet from Arklow, in County Wicklow. I told them my predicament and they told me that this flight was supposed to be fully

booked, because there was an Irish Auctioneers convention in Barcelona that weekend and they met some of them on the flight over. This was not good news.

A woman opened the check in and I told her the situation. She explained that there was nothing she could do, as the flight was supposed to be fully booked. She told me all I could do was wait and see if there would be a “no show”. The vet and his wife checked in and they gave me 50 Euro. I bashfully said no but they insisted. I thanked them and told them I would give it back to them when I got to an ATM in the airport in Ireland. They said not to worry about it. I thanked them again and they went to departures.

After an hour or so there was still plenty of people lined up to check in. However, the airline staff were sure there was now going to be a seat. I wondered how they knew this, but was delighted. She told me it would be very expensive as it was the last seat. She said it would cost around 350 euro. I gasped and told her I only had 52 Euro. She said I had to pay 350 and I told her I was stranded as my card didn't work abroad.

As the last people checked in, she told me she would let me on the flight. She took the 50 euro the couple gave me and left me the 2 euro. Wow I was heading home. I bought a snack for the 2 euro and boarded the plane, but not before thanking the couple.

I sat down next to one of the auctioneers. We talked and I told him the story. The plane was on the tarmac for ages. Then an announcement came that the plane was stopped because they needed to remove the luggage of an illegal immigrant that was trying to fly to Ireland. Now I realised why they knew there was going to be an extra seat on the plane. The auctioneer said “and they were going to have the bas**rd sitting next to me!”

We got to Dublin airport and my ATM card worked. There was no sign of the old couple.

When I got back home, I looked up vets, in the town where the vet said he was from and I found his name and address. I sent him a thank you card with 50 euro in it and told him to come in for a cup of tea some time if he was

down in my part of the country.

I got a letter a few days later. It was a holy mass card with the 50 euros in it. They told me to call in for a cup of tea if I was ever in Arklow. God I love Irish people sometimes.

Worms in Cambodia

The Cambodian Riviera may sound fancy, and indeed it probably wasn't bad, until war ravaged the country for decades destroying the towns completely.

I was exploring the beaches and towns, with a friend. Cambodia is very poor and undeveloped, because of the previous war there.

We were staying in a town called Kep. This place was completely obliterated. There was little trace of all the mansions that would have populated the town, except for a few ruins. The back of my legs had been itchy now for days. I remembered when it started. We were escaping the intense heat in a little private cinema room, in another coastal town called Sihanouk Ville. We watched "Apocalypse Now" a very fitting film for Cambodia. This is where the back of my legs began to itch. There appeared to be about 5 or 6 mosquito bites on the back of each leg.

Incidentally this little cinema also sold "Happy Pizza" which later on only served to make me sick. I got talking to the guy that was running the place. He told me the previous owner was an English man. He set it up and had it running for years. One day he smoked a lot of weed, watched Pink Floyd's "The Wall". Then he went home and shot himself.

Back in Kep, about 8 days later, I was sure that these red itchy "bites" were definitely more than something a mosquito could do.

Before we got to Kep, we had been to another town called Kampot and were invited to an English school in the middle of nowhere by a Cambodian and bunch of British volunteers. It was a nice place but extremely primitive. We helped out, painting a wall and even teaching some classes to the local kids.

The school was set up by a local, to teach the kids English for free so they could get a job or go to college. That was our good deed, on a trip that involved a lot of \$1 bottles of local whisky, which is documented better by my friend on her blog at offatthewrongstop.com

So, back in Kep and back to the worms. Following over a week of putting tiger balm on the “bites” they were getting harder, redder and even itchier. There was a little coffee shop on the beach run by an American and his Cambodian born wife. I showed them the bites. The American guy suggested they could be worms and offered to cut them out and pour in alcohol. I think he mentioned burning them out too. That was all very horrifying so I instead opted for the second idea they offered, which was to visit the French doctor in the village.

Later that day, we took a scooter down to the French doctor. His clinic was in the back of a pharmacy. He was an elderly man and was very nice. He began to tell us about how he was one of the founding members of Doctors without borders (Medical Sans Frontieres) but he was not 18 so he wasn't credited with it. He told us he went to study at the prestigious Sorbonne medical school in Paris when he was only 16. He told us that he was related to some very famous French film director. He told us he had been working in tropical medicine for over 30 years and had worked in Africa and was previously helping to set up a new hospital in Vietnam.

When it came to diagnosing whatever was going on in the back of my legs, the French doctor decided it was a Staph bacterial infection. He gave me antibiotics and some weird cream, but not before telling us about how he was selling real pharmaceutical drugs not the dodgy, Chinese knock offs, that the other Cambodian pharmacies were selling.

We left and decided to visit a jungle resort up in the hills, having been invited by an Australian we met in the village that was drinking with locals (and police) the night before. We drove the scooter up an unpaved dirt track far into the hills. The resort was very basic. We were met by Nicki and Australian woman that lived there. She showed us her monkeys, tarantula, hedgehog, snake, dog and more. We had some drinks with her and a couple of English guys. One of the English guys was a doctor and had a look at the

back of my legs.

He said that it was definitely not a bacterial infection and looked more like scabies or maybe worms. I was pretty horrified at that. My legs were as itchy as ever. We decided to stay in the mountain resort for the night as it was getting dark. The English doctor said he would come with me to the pharmacy and get some proper medicine the next morning.

The following morning it was clear that there were red squiggle lines growing slowly down my leg from the red “bite marks” I was horrified, it was definitely worms. The doctor agreed. I joked with my friend by asking, what would she do if little baby spiders burst out of my legs? She replied that she would definitely be going home if that happened.

We all went to the pharmacy where the French doctor was. It was the only one for miles. The English doctor was afraid of telling the French doctor that he was wrong. However the French doctor agreed that it was worms when he saw the red lines. They gave me tablets for worms and thankfully, they were gone after two days.

It turns out that they were Hook worms from the beach. They are carried by dog poo or sewage and lie in the sand. I probably picked them up in Koh Rong, an island with very questionable sanitation. I found out that Hook worms are very common in South East Asia. The supposed tropical French doctor should have known it was worms. Was the doctor a con man? Was he struck off the medical board in France, and getting away with being a doctor in third world countries?

I got them again a month later in Thailand, but this time I knew what they were and got the tablets myself in the pharmacy.

Vietnam Scooter Adventure

On the East coast of Vietnam, in a town called Hue, I was about to set out with another Irish guy and an English guy on a scooter ride, up over a mountain to Hoi An.

The following day, Vietnam would be celebrating Tet (Vietnamese New Year) its biggest holiday of the year. The roads were busy and the towns were

buzzing with activity. We were lucky to find a place to rent scooters, because many places wouldn't rent them to us, due to the upcoming holiday. We agreed to drop the bikes at a certain hotel in Hoi An by 6pm.

Off we went on our three scooters, nervous of the crazy Vietnamese driving strategy, which seemed to prioritise unorganized chaos. Vietnamese drivers don't indicate where they are going and don't generally obey rules of the road, probably because there aren't really any, however it just works, like a river of traffic flowing down the street.

Out of the towns, things are slightly better. We drove out of the town and made our way into the country, passing rice paddies and farms. Only one of us had a phone with the directions. None of us had the internet.

Sometimes, one of us would speed ahead of the others. It during one of these times, that we lost the Englishman. The road split in two. One road led up the mountain and the other went through a tunnel under the mountain. We had decided to take the scenic route up the mountain. We waited for the English guy where the road split, but after five or ten minutes there was no trace of him. We wondered if he had fallen off and decided to drive back the road a bit and check. There was no sign of him or any accident. We deliberated on what to do. We figured we missed him and wondered if he had gone through the tunnel. We didn't have the map but he did.

We waited a little longer and then made our way up the winding mountain. The view was amazing and the road appeared to climb forever. We asked a few people coming down the opposite way, if they saw a guy driving up the mountain with the same t-shirt as my friend. Both my friends were wearing the same soccer jersey. They didn't see him.

Eventually we made it to the lookout point on the top. There were a few little shacks selling snacks. We asked a woman in the shack, if she had seen a guy with the same soccer jersey pass by on his scooter today. She thought that she did in fact see him. We were relieved that at least he was probably ahead of us.

We descended the mountain on the other side and were met with sweeping ocean vistas and windy roads.

The road at the bottom of the mountain stopped abruptly, as if they just stopped building it. We swung to the left and another guy speeded past. Glass began to smash on the ground as something fell from his vehicle. It backfired at the same time and sounded like a gun going off. Yep, we were heading back into a town, a city actually, called Da Nang.

There was nowhere visible to get Wi-Fi for directions. The streets were busy with people. I asked a few people but they couldn't speak English. I said the name of the city to some people, but they pointed in the direction we came in. Eventually I went into a pharmacy and asked for the city we wanted to go to again. I started laughing as I realized I was saying the wrong city. I was saying Hanoi, (the big city in the North) instead of Hoi An. Blond moment!

I said the correct name of the city the second time to the man and he brought me to his daughter, who spoke some English. She gave us directions. We thanked them and went deeper into the city. The highway turned into a market and back into a highway a few times. The Vietnamese seemed to just set up markets in the middle of the road. At one of the markets, I noticed a Vietnamese guy following me, he tried to push me into the market with his bike, but I drove forward. He was following me and had one hand behind his back. I wondered if it was a knife. I told my friend and we drove faster and faster trying to lose him in the web of scooters and traffic. It was like being in a videogame. We figured we lost him after a while.

We drove over the river across a big bridge, made to look like a dragon. At the other end, at a busy roundabout, my friend fell off his scooter. A Vietnamese guy helped him up and he pulled into the side of the road. My friend's leg was a bit scraped from the road and he was a little shocked, but he jumped back on the scooter after a while.

We drove along the beach on the road to Hoi An. It turned out to be "China Beach". This was where many of the American fighters in the Vietnamese war took leave when they were taking downtime. The sun was setting and we had to make it to Hoi An in time. We wondered if our other friend, the English guy, had made it.

My scooter, lost power and then cut out. I was out of petrol. There was no sign of a petrol station. My friend went ahead to look for petrol. I pulled the

scooter onto the foot path and waited, wondering if I was going to be robbed again and if we would get petrol on this busy evening, as people were closing up for the big holiday. He arrived back after some time with a petrol can.

We were on the road again and returned the empty petrol can. It was dark as we entered a completely congested Hoi An. The town was buzzing with people. Decorations were hanging from the buildings and we were lost again. Single scooters were carrying families of 4, 5, or more people as well as their shopping. We went to a restaurant and got Wi-Fi.

Our English friend had made it to the hotel where we were told to return the bikes. We were really relieved he was still alive and that he made it. He had a flight that night and had little time to spare. We got the name of the hotel and the directions and made our way through the throngs of people and traffic.

At the hotel we met the guy that rented us the scooters and returned them, just in time. We walked into the hotel and met our friend. What a journey. We celebrated with a drink just before our English friend had to leave for the airport. That night the fireworks went off over the lake in Hoi An as the Vietnamese celebrated their holiday and we celebrated surviving our scooter adventure.

Silver Mine in Bolivia

Potosi is one of the highest cities in the world. It is 4090 meters high (13,420ft). I arrived in the town on a rickety bus with 3 guys from Liverpool. We had just finished a journey across the driest desert and the biggest salt flat in the world, across Chile to Bolivia.

Potosi is home to one of the world's biggest silver deposits, or at least it was until the Spanish started making a big dent in it, with forced indigenous labor in the 1500's.

The mine is almost exhausted, however it is still open and some locals still mine there. Bolivia is poor and undeveloped. The mine is very, very, unsafe if compared to a modern first world mine. However, we heard that it is possible to do a tour of the mine.

With a "when in Rome" attitude and a sense of adventure, we organized a

tour. A little minivan came to collect us. It was falling apart. We met with our guide, an ex-miner. He told us that he gives tours now because it is better money and there are many health problems for the miners with the dust.

We went to the mine shop and bought some supplies to give to the miners that he would be bringing us to. We bought dynamite, Coca leaves (the leaves that cocaine comes from) flint, 98% alcohol and some other goodies. People in this part of the world chew Coca leaves all day long to deal with the high altitude. Their teeth don't tend to last long as a consequence. We put on our orange overalls and miners helmet, complete with a battery operated head lamp.

We entered a dodgy looking shaft and descended deep into the mine. The passages were old and supported by sporadic timber beams. We scurried through the mine, down slopes, up ladders, up earth passages with ropes and past mine carts. Gaping holes would appear around some bends that would drop to lower levels, god knows how deep. We had to follow the guide to ensure we didn't get lost, forever.

We saw only a few miners, sparsely dotted around the mining labyrinth. We gave them some goodies. They looked worse for wear and their job certainly was not easy. Miners would look for other minerals as the silver was almost all gone. They were literally scraping the barrel. One miner was making a hole in the rock with a big iron bar. They had no electric power tools. Everything was manual, it might as well have been 100 years ago inside in that mine.

We walked deeper into the mine and suddenly the whole mine shock and rumbled. Dynamite had gone off and it boomed like thunder throughout the passages. I got the freight of my life and wondered how the hell they are allowing tours in here. They wouldn't get away with this anywhere else.

He brought us to a big statue of a devil. The devil was painted Red and had big horns and a beer in his hand. It was adorned with Coca leaves. The devil also had a big red phallic penis. It was all very weird. The guide told us that a long time ago when people were forced to work here, they made this statue and a kind of two fingers to the "Christian" Spanish. As far as the miners were concerned they were already in Hell, so they made a devil statue. He

told us that thousands and thousands of indigenous and African slaves died in this brutal mine. The indigenous people had their own gods like “Pachamama” the Goddess of the Andes (like mother earth). They didn’t believe in the devil in the same way Christians do. Many miners, even today, come to the devil statue to pray to Pachamama for safety in their dangerous job. Our guide showed us what they do. He threw some Coca leaves on the devil, poured some of the 98% alcohol on the devils penis, lit a couple of cigarettes and put them in the devils mouth. Then he said a few words for safety in the mine.

We eventually got out of the mine, breathing a sigh of relief to be out in the open air. Especially one of the from Liverpool lads. He was freaking out a bit in the narrow passages and was struggling with the climbs. The rest of us were unusually silent, when we were down there, so I assume we were all freaking out a bit.

What a crazy dangerous place, we really couldn’t understand how they let people in there. But it sure was interesting. Would you venture inside?

MORE INFORMATION

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