

The horrors of travelling – unleashed!

The intention of my writing today is not to scare but more to prepare, as being tackled and mugged by a bunch of random men, while you are swooning and mooning over ancient architecture, just might not be anybody's idea of a comforting end to an otherwise incredible Roman holiday. Losing your passport, mobile phone and money/credit cards all in one go can leave the most rational human being completely vulnerable and clueless, especially, if it has to happen to on the last leg of your trip, on a Friday night, with all embassy and consulate offices shut for the remaining weekend.

TRUE STORY!

And although misadventures such as these can turn you into a storyteller overnight, precisely what I am doing right now, and can serve as a remedy to old age, I have heard, feel free to live vicariously through the horrors of my time to help decide what NOT to do!

THE MOB

Continuing the story from my last night in Rome five years ago, my friends and I had decided to revisit the Spanish steps on that ill-fated night. We wanted to sit at the top, one last time, and embrace the city's majestic views while hordes of tourists thronged the pubs and cafes all around, including the dazzling McDonald's flashing its 24-hours existence.

In my defence, you do not expect to get mugged in an environment that buzzing, and certainly not on your fifth or sixth trip to the same spot! However, when five or six men cut through me and my friend in a rush, to separate the two of us from the rest of our group ahead, with such fluidity and precision that had I not been subjected to utter misery for the next four days, I probably would have found admirable. We were left helpless!

LESSONS LEARNT

The first traitor who practically sold us to this gang of muggers, and made us look like lucrative targets was the DSLR slung right across my friend's shoulders. If you are a photographer and you must carry a camera that announces to the world you are on holidays, exercise extra caution, however, if you can get by using your phone's camera, do so.

It's always great to not dangle any of your possessions out of excessive enthusiasm, giving your tourist status away and inviting trouble.

Secondly, if you have the option to leave your passport back in your hotel's vault, please do so. But then again, we did meet some ladies at the embassy afterwards who had their hotel vaults broken into and passports stolen, so I guess it's a fine balance between what you trust more on your trip – the credibility of your hotel versus taking a chance carrying it on you.

The rest is resigned to fate, which sometimes makes you stare after your most valuable possessions, vanishing through thin air in the midst of a crowd.

THE TERROR

More like the taxi meter terror, this is about the most common taxi hoodwinks encountered in a lot of countries but particularly in Thailand. After a super long connecting



because we were not up for a verbal session where the language barrier would make half the conversation fall through the cracks, which none of us were physically up for. In hindsight though, this could have easily been avoided through some proactive measures.

Firstly, it's always best to google or ask the airport authorities for a ballpark figure of what it should cost to reach your destination. Secondly, and belatedly for us, it is a good idea to negotiate a price around that ballpark in cities where the traffic is unpredictable.

FEAR STREET

This particular fear on the streets spring up from an injured or a child beggar that you feel obliged to pay. It's a pretty common occurrence when I'm visiting Dhaka and leave a restaurant and stand outside to say bye to my friends but on my last trip to India, I experienced an escalated and more forceful version of it outside a popular tourist attraction in Delhi.

When I stepped outside the Red Fort, admiring the intricacies in its sights and surroundings, a woman cradling a baby appeared and decisively tugged at my sleeves, asking for money. Before I could decisively walk away from the scene, armed with my Bangla experience, I heard the unmistakable jingle in my friend's purse and saw a wave of mob shifting to her side.

It took us the next hour or so to remove her purse from sight and flee the scene. Thankfully, there were no accomplices noticing us from the corners (a very common plight) and the rest of our day went uneventful.

LESSONS LEARNT

Well for me, a good start would be to stop travelling with some of my friends. But more importantly, if you find yourself in a situation such as the above, remember to not lose your calm and composure. It is best if you make a habit of never taking your wallet out in public as a rule. Food and giveaway clothes should be perfectly fine, as they do not involve your wallet and also cannot contribute towards any gangs who might be controlling the beggars on the street.

Thumb rule — Simply remember that it is impossible to completely avoid any horrors that comes within the territory, and let's face it, the stories that you are saving up for your grandchildren cannot be half as exciting if they do not have some shades of grey. So, keep an open mind, rest well in between travels and off you go!

By Naaz Fahmida

Photo: Collected

Hairfall solution
without coconut oil?

No way!



Solution on the next page

flight last year, when my friends and I arrived at the Don Mueang airport in Bangkok, we were at the end of our tethers, completely spent and mentally looking for nothing but a bed to lie down in. It is usually in times like these that most of us get taken in for a ride, quite literally!

Given it was a fairly off-peak time of the day, we decided to go by the meter, and in

Bangkok you have the option of negotiating fixed prices as well. But as soon as we found ourselves stuck in one of those historically famous Bangkok traffic gridlocks, half asleep in exhaustion, we suddenly peeked at the metre and realised it had doubled.

LESSONS LEARNT

We decided to let it go that day simply