

## The lady's side of solo travel

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Yet, there are some amongst them that are the most memorable ones.

"I was once stranded in Nepal due to a transport strike, but I ended up being offered to be driven back with a group of female Chinese monks, who chanted prayers and shared their food with me along the way. There is always space for at least one person! Another time, a taxi driver in Barcelona took me to his house, and his wife fed me till I could not move, simply because he

budget you can think of.

I visited Bangkok of course, as well as Ayuthaya, plus Kanchanaburi — made famous by the movie, 'The Bridge on The River Kwai.' I have been to Thailand quite a number of times, but this trip in 2012 was the one to remember.

Now, if you want to talk about memorable, I have a rather not-so memorable experience here. My tuk-tuk driver (tuk-tuks are the quintessential travel buggies in Thailand) took me to a very

remote place. I ended up taking a boat, using the backwaters in a roundabout way to move on farther. If it were a scenic route, it would have been perfectly alright, but all I came across was dirty, slimy water, in short nothing to write home about, especially since it cost around 1000 baht!

I have been to China recently, then again, I have been to China quite a few times, but this one had a slight hiccup. One major barrier in China is the language, and the other, of course, is

and the seller there, after taking a look at the printed route I had at hand, told me that it was a pretty roundabout route. He offered new directions, and by following this new route, I ended up on the opposite side of the avenue on which my hotel was at. You can understand that momentary panic in such a tired state of mind. I still wonder if that was done intentionally, or if I missed something, but at that very moment, it was nothing short of a panic.

Out of the seventeen countries I have visited so far, this I would say, was the strangest incident, if you can say that. At the same time, this also changed into one the kindest gestures I had seen so far. I was still at the subway, and was struggling to ask what I should do to get to my hotel. After some time, a quite friendly young woman approached me and understood my predicament. She did not just lead me to the bus stop for the bus I would have to take; she rode it with

me till I reached the hotel, and waited until I got into the lobby. It took her an hour to accompany me to a direction that was completely the other way from her own residence."

Sarika Siraj, however, recalled a common, but less talked about predicament for women going on their journeys —

"A really struggling memory would be the time when I went trekking solo in the mountains in Italy. It was my first day of walking, and I got my

period within the first three hours of walking. I had a nearly 13 kilometre walk ahead of me, and my menstrual cramps started to kick in. At some point, it got so bad that I had to take a break every 10 minutes, and started to worry whether I would be able to reach the next village before dark. I was lying on some stone or even the ground, in some unknown forest, with no sign of anyone around, and a severe pain in my lower abdomen. The only thing I told myself to keep going was, I am not going to stop just because the universe decided to make me suffer physically at this unexpected place and time. In the end, I did manage to reach the next village on time, with an exhausted body and a fulfilled soul."

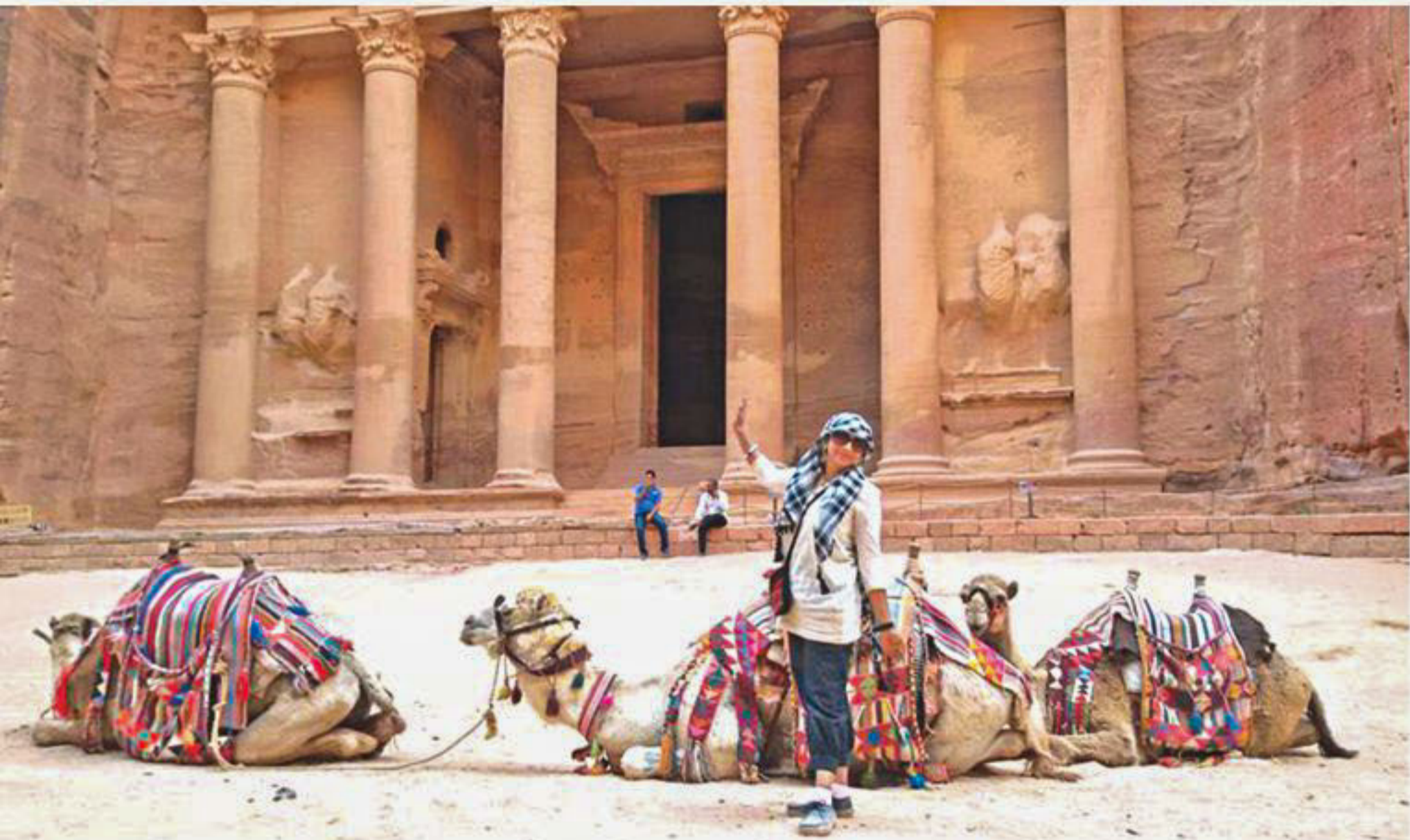
As travelling serves to give a new sense of being, Siraj recalls one thought provoking encounter.

"I have met a number of spiritual people on my travels. One of them was a Sadhu walking bare feet in the mountains of Nepal. He left his house at the age of ten and never went back home. His whole life has been the different ashrams in India and Nepal. The conversation we had about spirituality, and finding God is one I will forever keep close to my memory.

Upon asking how he found God in himself, he replied 'it is a matter of practice, it is not something to achieve in one day, just the way living a meaningful life is a matter of practice, where each moment of your life seems meaningful to you, even if not to anyone else. We can only have a sense of purpose when we practice it every day. And to me, that purpose is to be with my God as much as possible.'

His story inspired me to understand the importance of practice. It doesn't matter what the practice is about, but if the practice is done with full dedication, it is possible to reach any goal; even a goal like meeting God."

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Reema Islam



found out that, like him, I too was born in Libya!" said Reema Islam when recounting her most memorable trips.

Shahnaz Parveen, when asked about her first solo trip, says, "I chose a country I was familiar with, was closer, and could be considered an easier travel option — so Thailand it was!

I knew it was a modern enough place to visit, with something for just about everyone. Culture, nature, shopping, whatever you can think of, it is all there, and can fit just about any

remote place. I ended up taking a boat, using the backwaters in a roundabout way to move on farther. If it were a scenic route, it would have been perfectly alright, but all I came across was dirty, slimy water, in short nothing to write home about, especially since it cost around 1000 baht!

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