

FREQUENT FLIER

Helpful Strangers, The Upside Of Travel Calamities

I'm a lucky traveler. My luggage has been lost only three times, and I'm the person who can leave a wallet in a cab and get it mailed back with all the cash still in it.

When something bizarre happens, it's usually my fault. But people can be very kind.

I was scouting new hotels and meeting with the management of some of our existing hotels during an eight-week trip through Italy, Spain, Tanzania and South Africa. A close friend who was taking a sabbatical from work was traveling with me.

Our journey began in Spain, and I thought it would be fun to rent a car and drive. I quickly learned my Spanish was rusty, but people were still very helpful. I wound up driving in circles a lot, but meeting some amazing people and seeing the countryside made it all worthwhile.

I was particularly proud of the

By Lindsey Ueberroth, as told to Joan Raymond. E-mail: joan.raymond@nytimes.com

planning that went into the Tanzania leg of our journey. Everything was going smoothly, and my friend and I arrived at the Dar es Salaam airport with six large pieces of luggage. We were scheduled to stay at Ndarakwai Camp, and my job was to look for the two people that were supposed to meet us. I thought I'd see someone with a sign with our names on it. No such luck.

I called, and was confused because I was told they were at the airport. I couldn't figure out how they couldn't find us. We were the only two blonde women, standing curbside, with way too much luggage. They were confused too, and then told me to stand by a specific sign, which was for a rental car company. I didn't see the sign.

Then I realized I made a huge mistake. We flew into the wrong airport. We were supposed to be at the Arusha airport. I was pretty humiliated.

The only choices we had were a six- to eight-hour car ride, if we



Lindsey Ueberroth, the president of the Preferred Hotel Group, visited India in 2008.

could find a driver. Or we could talk our way onto a chartered flight. I was grateful that my friend didn't say a word.

While all of this was going on, we attracted a small crowd of locals who seemed amused by us.

A young man decided he would become our unofficial spokesperson, and would help us make our way to Arusha. He managed to

negotiate our way onto a 6 p.m. charter flight.

One of the very inquisitive cab drivers who overheard our conversation got his cousin to help us carry our luggage to a nearby restaurant. No one wanted any money. They just wanted to help.

We finally arrived at Arusha and were met by the lodge manager, whose name was "Happy."

She was happy, and so was I.

At the end of the trip, I was scheduled to visit hotel properties in London. This is one of those times my bags didn't make it, but I wasn't worried. I had my passport, wallet and phone.

The concierge at the hotel offered to shop for me, and by that evening I was presentable enough to attend some meetings.

Q. How often do you fly?

A. At least twice a month, domestic and international.

Q. What's your least favorite airport?

A. It has to be Los Angeles. I know they are making improvements, but the infrastructure can't keep up with the demand.

Q. Of all the places you have been, what's the best?

A. It's a toss-up between South Africa and India.

Q. What's your secret airport vice?

A. I spend too much time on my iPad.

But by the second day in London, my bags still hadn't arrived, and my phone was dying. The charger was in my luggage, lost somewhere in Europe.

I was headed to a meeting and my driver could see that I was upset about my dying phone.

When the driver picked me up after the meeting, he surprised me with a little gift. He bought me a phone charger.

This entire trip was amazing from a business perspective. But what really hit home is just how amazingly kind total strangers can be. That's an important lesson to remember, especially if you wind up in the wrong airport.