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Personal Narrative

Shit Happens

I've been fortunate enough to travel the globe with both my friends and family. Every trip I've experienced has brought highs and lows. Whether tangible or not, I've always brought back something memorable from my travels. From cheap souvenir t-shirts, to embarrassing cultural faux pas, a piece of my travels always stays with me. An opportunity arose to go on an incredible trip across the world and I couldn't let this one get away.

Winter break of 2015 was no exception. This was the year I embarked on a trip to India for two weeks without parents and with my best friends: Alston, Luke and Shriji. As native to the country, Shriji and his family were meant to be our tour guides as we were to explore an entirely new culture.

To say I was excited is an understatement. This was to be the farthest East I had ever traveled. "We would see the Taj Mahal, we would see an Indian wedding, and everything in between." None of us could keep our mouths shut - we were researching and planning like we had never before. I felt prepared for this trip because I have always been independent, my parents raised me to be self-reliant. This experience would teach me many more lessons that my parents couldn't even prepare me for.

The day "to leave" arrived and we had a 14 hour plane flight ahead of us to Dubai

“, where we would stay for a couple of days before heading to India”. Boarding this gigantic plane, my friends and I were eagerly looking for our seats. To my dismay, they all got to sit next to each other in the middle row and I was stuck in the window seat with three older men. I felt totally trapped. Of course my friends were laughing at the situation, but I wasn’t too amused.

Before the trip even started I was struck with anxiety because it was the longest plane flight and I have borderline claustrophobia. The plane ride was exactly what I expected, terrible and confined. I only got to get up once or twice because the old men sitting next to me passed out the entire flight and even tapping them to wake up would not work.

Aside from the plane ride debacle, a couple of days went by and the trip to Dubai the trip was going great. I couldn’t be more thrilled about everything I was seeing and experiencing for the first time. Dubai was beautiful and the food was delicious everywhere we went. I was definitely excited to expand my palate abroad, but I had packed a lot of American snacks just in case we didn’t enjoy the food or were just hungry. The rookie mistake we made was eating all of our food in the hotel room in Dubai. We didn’t know what was to come.

After our couple of days in Dubai ended, we boarded our flight to Mumbai. I remember so vividly looking out the window before our flight landed and all I could see were tin roofs and blue tarps covering as far as my eye could see. “I learned later that the largest slum in Mumbai is located right next to the airport.” None of us really knew what to expect besides Shriji and he didn’t really prepare us for what we would

experience.

After we landed in Mumbai we got into a van and drove 4 hours to the Indian state of Gujarat. On the ride, I continued to notice the obscene amount of poverty and trash. That was the point where I could see the debilitating socioeconomic gap between the rich and the poor in India. Unlike in the U.S., there seemed to be no in between. This eye opening moment made me even more excited to experience what made India distinctive. This was the first feeling I got of being totally alone all across the world.

The other thing I noticed on that drive was that we were driving in the middle of night and there were no cars on the road, but our driver was honking maybe every 10 to 20 seconds for no apparent reason. I asked Shriji what was wrong with this guy and he told me everyone honks non stop in India for no apparent reason to the common outsider. Later to learn that honking in India is a form of communication. People there honk to say to other drivers and to pedestrians, "I'm here. I see you. Coming through. See me?"

The next couple of days, we loved the experience of exploring all of the tourist sites, having an absolute blast checking off all of the boxes for our India bucket list. We were eating out every meal and really enjoying the food and culture of the colorful country. Being in India without the comfort of my parents made me feel like I was all grown up in a sense. I had a feeling of power walking around the streets of India because I was not accompanied by my parents.

This all took a sharp turn when Alston was hit with some severe food poisoning and couldn't leave the house for a couple of days. This was getting us worried that

sooner or later we were going to hit with food poisoning.

Alston began to feel better and that's when we decided to drive to the Taj Mahal which was around 4 hours away. It was only 100 miles or so from where we were staying but the condition of the roads and the traffic made the drive pretty miserable.

Right when we were approaching the Taj Mahal I began to feel terribly sick and I began to panic. Surprisingly I did the whole tour and by the end of it I was having terrible symptoms.

The whole ride back was literally hell. I had food poisoning stuck in a car on dirt roads in traffic. My friends were comforting me but it started to get really bad. I began throwing up in the car and outside of the car multiple times on the ride home for 4 hours straight.

Shriji's family gave me some medicine and put me in bed and for the next couple of days I couldn't leave the safety of being 10 yards from the nearest toilet. A day or two went by and it was time for the wedding. At this point I was feeling a lot better and felt comfortable attending. I was very glad to attend, because a traditional Indian wedding is something you have to experience. Me and the boys were having a great time dancing and celebrating.

Before I knew it, the food poisoning had struck again but this time it was worse and me and Luke were in it together this time. So while Alston and Shriji explored, Luke and I were stuck inside with some of the worst food poisoning I have experienced. At this point we were all terrified to eat anything because of the fear it would poison us. The last couple of days "there", I was surviving on chips and bread because that was

the only thing I trusted.

After a couple days went by, I began to feel better again and at this point was ready to go home. On the drive to the airport, my friends and I couldn't stop talking about the first thing we were going to eat when we got home. Whataburger was at the top of the list and all of us would do anything for some regular American food. We decided to get lunch right outside the Mumbai airport. We sat down at a cafe and I ordered the most American thing on the menu, a club sandwich. Little did I know this was going to be one of the worst mistakes I have made.

We were up in the air, flying back to Dubai for our 10 hour layover. I slept for a little and I woke up to the worst feeling in my stomach I have had the entire trip. I began to panic and run to the bathroom. The food poisoning escalated very quickly and I was in tears on the flight. I talked to a flight attendant and tried to get help because I didn't know what else to do. Of course, the flight attendant tells me to sit down because we would land in no time. Thank god I was in the aisle seat, because I made 10 more trips to the bathroom that flight. I spent the whole time trying to stay composed and just think about getting home. When we landed in Dubai, I was experiencing the all time worst pain/sickness I have ever felt in my life.

All that water I drank would not stay down so now I was severely dehydrated with all of my other symptoms. It got to the point where anything I would eat or drink would come right back up literally 10 seconds later. The walk from one terminal to the other felt like an eternity. I had to get on a train to get to the terminal where my gate was."Not a good idea." I puked all over the train as everyone just stared at me in disgust. I was

pale and barely had energy to keep walking. At this point I didn't trust myself to walk around the airport so I made camp in the bathroom right next to our gate and spent the next couple of hours sobbing on the phone with my parents. I had never felt so hopeless in my life. My friends were sick as well but not even close to the extent that I was. My friends were not the most supportive because they had their own shit to deal with (literally). So 10 hours go by and my condition has worsened and I was beginning to panic because of the 14 hour flight ahead of me. I felt so alone in this situation and I was becoming emotional. I was in the airport stall curled up in a ball just praying that I would get home in no time.

When it came time to get on the flight, I was nervous because of my condition but I was so ready to get home and get better. So I boarded the flight and found my seat. Luckily this time I was next to my friends. Before the plane had even finished boarding, I had filled up two barf bags and already asked a flight attendant for more bags. A couple of minutes went by and then I was surprised with a whole medical staff who told me that I cannot take this flight because I am not fit to fly because of my condition.

I burst into tears and began to try to tell them that I am fine and will make it. They deny my offer and tell me to get off the plane and pick a friend to stay with me so I am not all alone in Dubai. I look at my friends and none of them would stay. I was scared and upset in the moment, but looking back at it now I understand their decision. My friends were just as ready to get home as I was and that is a tough situation to put on somebody in their position and physical health. Feeling invincible on my own across the world to feeling absolutely hopeless was tough for me.

The medics escorted me off the flight and took me to see a doctor in the airport hospital. The doctor didn't speak great English and the service in this hospital room wasn't existent. I couldn't even contact my parents about the situation. I begged the doctor to get me a phone that worked so I could call my parents. Eventually, the doctor put me in touch with my parents. I was so relieved to hear a familiar voice.

They gave me some medicine and put an IV into my arm. I also have a terrible phobia of needles, so this was the icing on the cake. But the IV made me feel so much better. After talking to my parents, they got me another flight to the States. I was alone, scared and didn't know what to do. Emirates the airline was great and took care of me because I was a minor at the time. They had a room for me to lay down in with nurses checking on me all the time. My next flight was a whole day away. Laying in that hospital bed felt like an eternity and I was terrified the whole time. I was forced to be brave in a situation I could not plan for and ultimately this helped me become a stronger independent person.

I ended up losing 15 pounds from the trip and was in pretty bad shape. My parents picked me up at the Houston airport and it was one of the happiest moments I have ever had. My appetite wasn't good and I could barely eat when I got home. It took me a couple of days to get back into the swing of things.

Looking back on the trip it was an amazing experience being that immersed into such a diverse country. Me and my buddies laugh about it all the time still and none of us regret going. Surprisingly I would like to visit some day again. Recollecting all of the memories I have from this trip, it has made me a more independent person. This trip

made me want to travel more and diverse myself in different cultures. Despite the food poisoning the trip was a blast and I would do it all over again.

Authors Note

This personal narrative was so fun to write because I got to relive the experience again. This narrative was a benchmark for me in this class and taught me how to open up. This article relates to my others because it is personal and this experience means a lot to me. I showed my buddies this narrative and they were laughing and appreciated how honest I was. If I had to go on this trip again I would with no question. Me and my friends have only gained a closer bond from this experience and it will be something we remember the rest of our lives. This narrative taught me how to express my experiences in a way that makes sense. I'm grateful that I took this class because I learned a lot about myself and others that were in the class.