

TRAVELLERS' TALES FROM HEAVEN AND HELL



MISSED FLIGHT.

It's a strange affliction, punctuality. I am extraordinarily punctual, I can leave my house two hours late and arrive at my destination an hour early. I am always early for the bus or the train and I don't know how I do it. This punctuality, however, does not extend to the catching of aeroplanes.

I know you're supposed to check in at least two hours early. I know you're supposed to wait in the lounge and keep a tab on your departure time. I know you're supposed to do these things, but I just can't seem to do them.

I have been given a thick ear by a stewardess for being the absolute last person to board an aircraft bound for Canada, for delaying everyone on board yet arriving with a 'what, who, me?' expression. I have even been wheeled through security, drunk as a lord, and perched on top of a luggage trolley pushed towards the departing plane. But I think the worst case of flight delay happened to me the first time I visited Turkey.

I had been there for about a week, staying in an idyllic, almost undiscovered paradise called Akkum. It had been my first foray to this country and I had taken it to see a mate - Howard - who was living in a tent on Akkum beach and hindering the waiters and staff of a nearby fish restaurant. He'd been there for about six months. I was to be there for 10 days.

Life in Akkum was slow, languid, warm and hassle-free. In fact it was so without problems that even decision-making became an ability beyond my reach: should I go for a swim, or stay on the beach? Should I eat dinner or wait until dinner came to me? Should I stand on a stool when hanging my trunks out to dry, or stand on tip-toe?

I got up one morning and went for my usual hangover-curing swim,

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but couldn't shake the feeling that there was something I had to do. This was strange because I was on holiday, where the thing to do was. . . nothing. Lots of it. I didn't even have to buy anything: I was all stocked up on sun-tan lotion, my toothpaste hadn't run out and my pictures had been developed at the little photo booth at the top of the beach. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was amiss. I even told Howard about it and he couldn't think of anything either.

It finally hit me around four o'clock in the evening. I was supposed to have caught my flight home at eleven that morning. I had totally missed my flight. My parents were waiting to meet me at the airport.

I phoned home and got an ear-bashing. They seemed to think I had done it for purely selfish reasons, wanting to extend an idyllic holiday. That was all well and good, I said, but had they realised that I was now stuck in Turkey with no money and no way of getting home? That quietened them down a bit.

My salvation came in the guise of Ahmed, the owner of the fish bar, who just shrugged his shoulders and said "no problem." Like, yeah, right.

He took me into town, a fishing-port place called Mersin and, from there, into a Turkish Airlines office. He waved my ticket at the man behind the counter. The man behind the counter turned and shrugged. A heated conversation in Turkish followed. I was gradually informed that firstly the ticket was void and that secondly, it wasn't their problem. Ah well, I thought, I am now a Turkish resident. However, Ahmed cunningly pointed out that I had no money, my visa would run out in one day and that, in short, I would become a burden on the Turkish community, all due to the uncaring attitude of Turkish Airlines.

I got my ticket for a flight three days later. I didn't miss it.

