

# TRAVEL MISHAPS

*Food is our common ground. ~ James Beard*



## MISHAPS!

#flightproblems

After living four years in England, I flew back home to West Virginia into Charleston airport. My friend who was to pick me up was a no-show. This was before everybody had cell phones, so I rented a car and started driving home. So much had changed in the four years since I'd been gone I didn't recognize anything. I was forced to stop at a gas station and ask for directions. The person was helpful, but having a hard time understanding where I wanted to go. Exasperated, I said, "What road takes me east out of town. I can find my way from there."

She said, "Honey, if you go east, you'll go into the ocean."

Turns out I had flown to Charleston, SOUTH CAROLINA, not Charleston, West Virginia.

—anonymous

#worstvacationever #DisneyWorld

My parents got into a huge fight and decided they wanted a divorce on the second day of a week long vacation at Disney World. It was the most awful week of my life.

—anonymous

My favorite part of foreign travel is eating food you can't get at home. Biting into a papaya plucked ripe from its tree is so different from store-bought they're like different foods. Alas, not all travel leads to culinary satisfaction ...



## Puerto Fiasco

On Friday my wife informed me that a) she had off the next four days and b) she had a hotel booked for them. Huh, I said.

We were going to Puerto Peñasco, she declared, with one goal: authentic Mexican seafood. Well, one and a half; she wanted a seaside, fun Mexican coast time. It is a fact that everybody, every now and then, needs a fun Mexican coast time. And now, without warning, our time had come.

Puerto Peñasco is on the northern edge of the Sea of Cortez, just an hour's drive from the border. I prefer Mexico far rather than Mexico near. That's because farther Mexicans have more pride in their culture and nearer they tend to mooch off the U.S. To be fair,

#weather #roadtrip #nogas #Colorado

My wife drove us up Raton Pass. Snow got so bad they were closing down the roads pretty much as soon as we passed them. The road was terrible, we were scared, visibility sucked, and we were running low on gas. The snow was thick and wet and collected on the windshield wipers. It got so thick they wouldn't work anymore.

I reached my arm out the window on my side—the passenger side—and snapped the wiper up and down until it broke off the ice.

Of course my wife asked me to do the same on her side.

Since we couldn't even see enough to pull over—or even if we *could* pull over—it seemed the right thing to do. We thought about just stopping in the middle of the road, but there were still other drivers toughing it out, too. So I unbuckled my seatbelt, rolled down the window and sat up on the window ledge. I reached across the windshield and snapped her wiper.

Just then a car comes flashing out of the blizzard. I got a glimpse of an elderly couple and terror as they slid around at high speed. They missed hitting us by just *inches*.

I got back in the car, shaken. I don't even want to imagine what would have happened to me if they'd hit us. And, as if that wasn't enough, then the gas light came on!

We managed to pull into a gas station just as the attendant was closing up shop. Fortunately she let us fuel up. Even better, a snowplow came roaring by. We followed that bad boy all the way to Colorado Springs.

—R.C. H., Mesa, AZ

I'd never been to Tijuana. I sensed that maybe, just maybe, Tijuana might not be the superlative Mexican experience. And since I was being fair, I had never even heard of Puerto Peñasco.

Aha! An opportunity to break my preconception. That's what travel was all about!

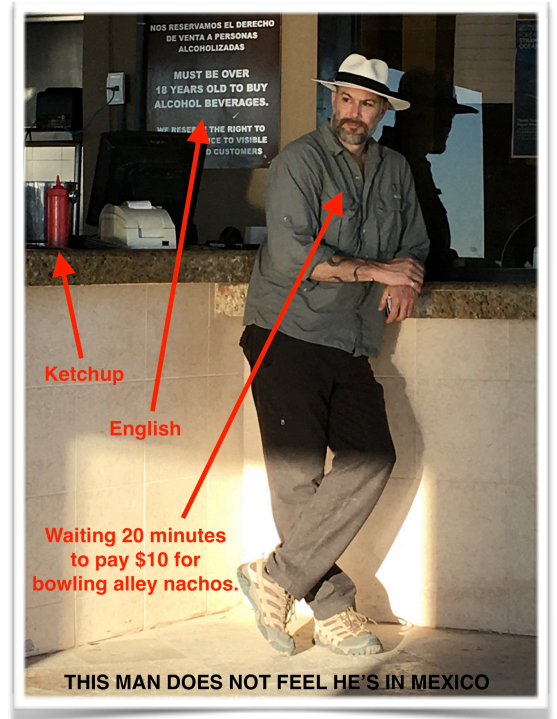
To avoid rush-hour traffic we departed at 4 AM. At 1PM we arrived.

Our room was not yet ready. Luckily, the beach was. There, for us margaritas, for I a cigar. The sand was wide and pale and groomed, the water vast and blue and calm. Opposite the bay, upon a rocky point jutting into the sea, waited Old Town. The sun was warm, the breeze slight. We watched two northern

tourists receive massages on the beach. We knew they were northerners because they were paler than the sand, and wore bathing suits. The locals wore parkas and scarves. The temperature was not quite 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Huh, I thought.

We reminisced about authentic Mexican seafood of coasts past. Mazatlan, on a polished deck overlooking the ocean: shrimp plucked from the sea that morning, whipped up in coconut dropped from the tree that morning. Puerto Vallarta, beneath a palapa, feet in the sand: tacos of fish caught that morning, and later oysters from a vendor who set up a table on a sandbar. I excitedly discussed the possibilities of Puerto Peñasco, narrating how the world-famous underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau—inventor of the Aqua-lung—had oft claimed the Sea of Cortez his favorite body of water, due its abundant and varied sea life. Huh, she said.

Hungry, we opted for lunch. It was a nice resort, with a courtyard network of heated pools, a lazy river, jacuzzi. It was so new the plant life had yet to mature, giving it a rather sparse look.



## #Cuba #animals

I was visiting Cuba and at the end of the tour we had time to swim at the local waterfall. It was a hot day and I thought it would be really nice to swim! Getting inside was easy, you just had to jump, but getting out was trickier, as you had to pull yourself up to the stony bank. As soon as I wanted to pull myself up and put my feet on one of the stones, something bit me!

I started shouting *really* loud.

There was a Cuban man standing next to me, and everyone around thought that he was harassing me, while he was standing there, pure horror in his face, not guilty of anything, me screaming my lungs off next to him.

I swam to another side of the shore, panicking, and wanted to get out of there. It was a greener side, covered in ferns. But as soon as I swam closer, something moved there. It turned out to be just a lizard, but I was already very scared and could not get out.

At last I finally made it out, and had two bite marks on my ankle that were bleeding. The guide said there are no underwater snakes and it must have been a fish protecting a nest. She just poured some rum on my leg. I was fine, but really scared.

—anonymous, [reveriechaser.com](http://reveriechaser.com)

## #Taiwan #weather

During typhoon season we got trapped overnight in Taroko Gorge due to a landslide. Not much you can do about that!

—Tithi L., Bangkok, Thailand

## GLOBAL GOOD LUCK CAT



This guy is a full-on jungle cat. Oh, he's of the domestic variety, but it's a lifestyle choice. We met him at Bahia Rica, a cozy cabin on the jungle slopes of the Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica. This place was hard to find, not on maps or even roads, really. It's home to

entire families of howler monkeys, who far, far outnumber humans. During the daytime this good luck cat wanders in from the wild (like, 3 meters) and finds a spot to nap on the steps. Once, at least, on the lap of a Las Vegan lazing the stifling afternoon away in the hammock. The owners of the cabin do not feed him, but let him loiter. He's food aplenty, as he demonstrated by stalking, pouncing upon, and eating a

moth the size of a side plate. He's not the top of the food chain, though: Nicoya is home to numerous jaguars who wouldn't hesitate to show who's top cat.



Lucky cats need some help sometimes. Be an [Alley Cat Ally](#).

Sparse, it turned out, in more ways than one.

There was only a single restaurant: a bistro. Being from Las Vegas I was not keen on anybody's haute cuisine. That was precisely what we didn't want. It was closed, anyway. Only the poolside bar offered food. A basket of breaded shrimp came with a free draught of Budweiser. Technically, it *was* seafood and we *were* at the Mexican coast, but as authentic as Gorton's fish sticks.

We ordered their only "Mexican" dish: chicken nachos. A modest portion of stale chips, fake cheese sauce, pickled jalapeños. I'd driven 9 hours for bowling alley nachos at the low, low cost of \$10US. Hovering above was omen.

We walked the beach while waiting for our room. Now even more tired, we agreed to do the resort's bistro for dinner, go to bed early, and hit the ground running in the morning.

Surprisingly, the bistro did not offer a view of the sea. We got circles of green on a sea of dunes: the golf course. Again there was only one Mexican entree. The remainder was burgers and chicken. True, there was one Mexican appetizer: a plantain quesadilla. My



## #Egypt #fear

Perhaps the most nerve-wracking experience I had abroad was in the Mortuary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, in Egypt. America had just announced its intention to invade Iraq. That had everybody on edge in the Islamic world. Thusly every American there, too. Worse, I had just learned the history of a bloody terrorist attack on tourists at this very spot. They'd barred the only exit and mowed down dozens, hoping to kill tourism and destabilize the government.

So yeah, let's say that my situational awareness was heightened.

I was in a far corner, away from most others but still within sight. I was browsing the hieroglyphics when a guard accosted me.

American, he said. His tone indicated that he was not delighted to see me.

Having arrived with a tour group of Romanians, I at first pretended to not understand. That was silly because "American" is understood pretty much everywhere.

American, he said again. Now he was annoyed. He fingered his assault rifle.

I wondered if he noticed the heat. It was 110 degrees or so and the sun was brutal. Certainly I was sweating. He kept staring at me, hard.

Finally I turned to face him full-on, smiled broadly, and said, "Canadian! Vancouver Island."

I figured the added little detail, without nervously babbling too many trifles, would convince him. Happily, it did. And as a group approached, he retreated.

—Sir Brian, Las Vegas, NV

wife loves plantain, so we ordered that and the lonely molcajete.

The waiter, noting our appearance, courteously observed that plantain would probably not be to our liking. He suggested the hot Oaxacan cheese. We agreed, surprised we'd missed it. The reason we missed it was because it was labeled fried cheese sticks. Ranch dressing for dipping, a bed of shredded iceberg lettuce.

Fortunately, the molcajete was a favorite of ours: a hot stone bowl of beef, sausage, cheese, and cactus, with a side of tortillas. And so it was upon this we dined, unable to view the sea, unable to taste it.

We did go to bed early. We did not hit the ground running in the morning. Alas, there was literally no coffee available anywhere within miles. Not until the bistro opened to sell us pancakes and waffles. Being Sunday, it opened late. So we drove into town.

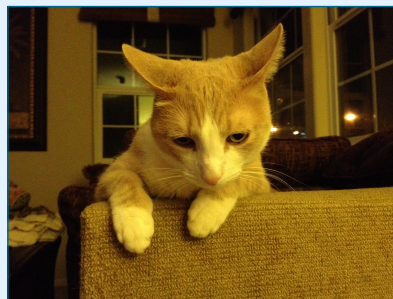
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### LOCAL HARD LUCK CAT

Unfortunately for Caesar, he looked unable to be adopted. But a fellow cat came to his aid! My wife and I had gone to the local SPCA to adopt a cat. We selected a tuxedo who heavily plied head bumps and arched shin rubs. His name was Julius. Volunteers were thrilled, for at 5 years old he was considered too old to likely be adopted. Leaving, they asked if we wanted his brother, too.

Said 'brother', Caesar, was not on display because he'd formed an unsightly clump in his back fur due stress. He's a sensitive soul. The duo had been dropped off together. The shelter had received many orphans that day. Overwhelmed, and needing oodles of names to keep track of them all, they wrote down whatever male names came to mind: in this case Julius and Caesar. Sight unseen, we said, 'Throw him in the bag!' (We didn't mean that literally.) The shelter was so happy—both cats were 5—they cut the price 75%, gave us two cat carriers, and a pre-paid vet visit. Who was luckiest is up for debate.



Help others like Caesar, donate to the [ASPCA](#).

Somewhere in the dirty mess of town we found a cute stucco restaurant. We admired the wooden door with heavy ironwork. Inside we went. A single, cavernous chamber. Dark, void of windows but for small stained glass squares. Empty, void of bodies. Tables long and in neat rows, rather like pews.

I don't want to eat alone in a churchsterant, said I. She concurred.

True, we passed a zillion places selling authentic Mexican seafood. We love roadside taco stands, but wanted to relax, soak up the atmosphere—not car exhaust. True, there were formal restaurants, but all were dark and shut out the outside world. We had driven all this way to dine over the sea.

Finally: Old Town. It was tiny, mostly shops selling kitsch and a few restaurants selling fun. They faced the sea, which fit our criteria. They served American food, which did not. Octopus was available—as a garnish atop sirloin steak. That was screaming tourist-food.

Yet one place beckoned, looming over a rocky beach above the sea. It was the quintessential tourist-bar, with rock music and dollar bills taped to the ceiling. The Satisfied Frog, it was called. Wanting to be satisfied frogs, we agreed to dine

there regardless of menu. Their specialities were southern fried chicken and St. Louis-style barbecue.

But! They had Mexican food, too: fish ceviche. The waiter, noting our appearance, suggested the shrimp because it was cooked. We declined. Finally! Authentic seafood overlooking the sea.

The beach grew cold, so we watched the sunset from the hot tub. We chatted with a couple who owned a condo in the resort. Recently retired, lived in Northern Arizona. She waxed poetic about Puerto Peñasco's food. Our hopes were rekindled. She asked if we liked it here. I gingerly commented no, not really. It's about as Mexican as Chili's. Her husband heartily agreed. He received a scathing look, retreated to a corner to soak alone.

Later I googled her recommendations. Each and every one was advertised as an American grill.

A cold front blew in. Our plan for a long morning stroll on the beach was scuttled. We would have to bundle like locals, but had not come prepared. We decided to cut our trip short. The drive home took 10 hours.

19 hours driving for 21 waking hours in Puerto Peñasco does not make a satisfying adventure. We rolled the dice and lost. So what? Maybe, just maybe, we'll win next time.



### SIR BRIAN, NOW

Your Member Benefit is here! This exclusive will be in your inbox **next Friday**, an email called: *I Got Drunk with Cannibals in Fiji.*

I'm learning to narrate audiobooks! It's a whole lotta stuff, from soundproofing to mics, amps, and interfaces. Then the software and how to edit and engineer. And post production and final publication. Our current house is too noisy to record (at all hours: Vegas, baby), but we're looking for a quieter neighborhood.

Have a tale, met a hard luck cat? Please [email me](#). And join our [FaceBook group](#), I say!

**Remember, my friends:** this isn't really about mishaps—it's about adventure, about our desire to embark, even if it barks back. The world will be a better place if we all share a little more with others and laugh a little harder at ourselves.