

How to travel in STYLE

Or in other words;

“I hitched a ride on a Lear Jet!”

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Not so long ago, I had the most amazing experience.

I'd not long finished my senior exams, in the UK we call them A'levels, and I had some time on my hands, before I went to College to study Occupational Therapy.

I had heard that the USA was a fairly big place, and had been told that most of the people there spoke English.

I thought to myself, "Well that would be a country I could do some travelling round". Being a poor student I didn't have the funding at that time to travel in style. So I did two things.

I got an air ticket as a courier, in the days when you could deliver a package by hand, and the fee was the plane ticket (I'm not sure you can do this these days, but at the time it seemed a fabulous idea.)

So there I was with plane ticket in hand and a strange brown envelope which I had to carry in my hand luggage onto the plane, to deliver at the other end.

I figured even if I had little disposable income, once I got to the USA I would find a way of getting around. My preference was to hitch. My rationale for this was, it would cost very little, I would meet loads of new people, and it would be a fabulous challenge to go all the way across the country for nothing.

To cut a long story short - I had three months before I had to get back to start my OT course, so I was going to do my best to travel from one end of the country to the other.

I landed in Miami airport, and set off to find a youth hostel for my first nights stay. I met some like minded people who wanted to get to the west coast, and we ended up delivering a car to San Francisco, for the cost of sharing the gas.

So although it wasn't a free ride, I figured it would be a great way to do a big chunk of the journey - and so it turned out it was. I made 3 new friends, and had a lot of fun on the way.

If I recall, we had time to spend in New Orleans, Las Vegas, Texas, and even stopped by Death Valley - I thought that would be a great place to run a marathon, what a challenge.

I can't rightly remember all the places we visited and stopped by, but I think it was a fair few, if I ever find my old notebook, I'm sure it will be worth a fuller recall.

Well, I stopped off at San Francisco, said goodbye to my new friends, and off I went on my own - this time to try my hand at hitching.

So round the north I went, Oregon, one of my favourite places full of wonderful trees and green smells. Seattle, and a few others besides.

On to Canada, across the border, Vancouver and onwards. Spent some time with my brother who emigrated a few years earlier to Calgary.

Onwards east.

My brother had told me during my stay with him, that whatever I do, if I was hitching, I should not stop at a place called Wah Wah. Just north of the great lakes, and in the middle of nowhere. He told me, that when he had hitched across Canada a year or two earlier, that he had got stuck in Wah Wah, and for 3 days no one gave him a lift.

I put this to the back of my mind, and thought no more about it.

Strangely enough, I got dropped off in Wah Wah on my journey east. Aha I thought, this is the place he mentioned. My brother had said it was notorious for not getting lifts out of. Of course this was just his experience.

I thought, no cause for concern, and went off to get a nice dinner and coffee. While I was sitting eating, I got to thinking. "I've always wanted to hitch a ride on an aeroplane, I wonder if they have a small airport here?"

So with a full stomach, I asked around, and discovered that there was such an airport, not more than 8 minutes walk from

the diner.

With backpack on my back, off I strolled, confident that this was going to be my lucky day ;-)

I found the airport, small country airport that it was, and began asking around if there were any planes going east on that day.

It just so happened that there was. A Lear jet had arrived that very morning with a collection of business men who had come to spend the day apparently looking at an old gold mine that they were thinking of investing in.

I went off to chat to the Captain and the co-pilot who were lounging around outside the plane, and they told me, that yes they were headed back to Toronto within the hour, they had arrived that morning with 8 people, and two were travelling back by car, and the other 6 were going back in the jet.

Aha I thought, that leaves 2 spaces - One for me, and one for my backpack ;-)

So I gently prompted the captain if this indeed was the case, did they have 2 empty seats? Sure said the captain. Could they give me a lift and drop me off in Toronto?

"No, sorry, we aren't insured to carry non-paying passengers, so no can do."

"Ahh," I said, "that's an awful shame, because it would save me three days of my hitching journey if you could help me out."

"Well" he said, "this isn't strictly true, if the charters of the plane were happy for you to take a ride, and waive the insurance issues, I'd have no problem allowing you on the plane. It's really up to them."

"I tell you what," he said, "if you get an agreement from the boss of today's charter that he is happy for you to be on the plane, and he is OK with the insurance issue, then I would be happy to give you a ride, ask the boss of the charter, they will be back in less than an hour."

So I hung around, the six men turned up in their smart suits and briefcases, I asked the captain to point out the boss of the charter, then smartly strolled up to him and said.

"Hi, I'm James, I'm from the UK and I understand you have come

here today to look at a goldmine, is that right?"

"Yes", he said, with a quizzical expression on his face.

"Am I right in thinking, that you came with a total of 8 of you, from Toronto this morning?"

"Yes" he said.

"Am I also right in thinking that 2 of your party are going back to Toronto in cars, and not in the plane?"

"Yes," he said.

"Then am I also right in thinking that you have 2 spare seats on your plane, for the return journey you will be making to Toronto this evening?"

"Yes," he said. "Why do you ask?"

"Well" I said, "it would really help me if you are able to give me a lift to Toronto, it would cut 3 days off my hitching journey and allow me to spend more time seeing some of Toronto. Would it be possible for you to give me a lift?"

"Well", he said, "it's not up to me, it's the Captains responsibility for who can or cannot go on the plane, although we have chartered it, it is his responsibility, and would be his decision. It would be fine with me, but I can't make that decision."

"Well," I said, I understand that the Captain would need for you to be OK with it, because if I travelled with you I wouldn't be insured, I don't mind about that, but would that be alright with you?"

"Sure, if the captain OKed it, then I have no problem with the insurance situation."

"Ahh", I said, "that's great, I have already had a chat with the Captain, and he said if it was Ok with you, and you had no objection to me travelling with you lot uninsured, then he would be fine with it."

So off he went, and had a 3 minute chat with the Captain while I crossed my fingers, and hoped and hoped.

A few minutes later he came back, and said.

“It's fine, you are welcome to travel with us back to Toronto, but there is one condition.”

My heart sank, as I wondered what that would be.

"You can travel with us, provided you serve all the drinks and sandwiches for us on the journey."

“Fine” I said, “deal.”

And that was that.

So with an enormous grin, I humped my backpack onto the plane, and tossed it onto a spare seat, sat back in the oh, so comfortable seat, and gave thanks for another plus on the trip.

Not much time later, and off we went rolling down the runway. Once we had levelled off they showed me where the sandwiches and drinks cabinets were, and I went round taking the drink orders, and handing round the sandwiches.

45 minutes, and some 300 or so miles later we landed at Toronto airport.

I thanked the Captain and the charter boss for a lovely ride and their help in getting me on the plane, said my goodbyes, and walked out of the airport to the bus stop, which was just round the corner.

I couldn't sleep that night.

What a trip!

So, you know why I'm telling you my story?

I think the point is, we don't have to believe what other people tell us about what can or cannot be done.

Believe in yourself, and imagine what may be possible. Let your intuition be your judge!

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