

# Things come in threes.

## Tea Break Travels, No 1

*This is one story from a collection of travel related stories called "Tea Break Travels". They are designed to be read in a short break from work or whatever, and cost around the same as biscuit! Some are true, some embellished, and some fictional. Some are from near 20 years of too much business travel, or our holidays, others are relayed from friends and acquaintances, yet others are just plain made up! This one is about a rather interrupted trip to Mexico – how many things could go wrong??*

*Enjoy.*

"Look on the bright side, your birthday will be 30 hours long!" said my wife.

I should have known then the trip was doomed. But still the positive side was very persuasive. It would be mid October in the UK and we'd be traveling for two well earned weeks in the Yucatan, where temperatures would be in the high twenties centigrade, the beaches would be fine, and food and drink cheap. So I agreed that a 30 hour birthday was indeed an added plus to a holiday in Mexico.

I'm not an early riser at the best of times, but on my birthday I feel it is my birthright to have a lay in. But this October 16<sup>th</sup> I was up before the lark and before any sparrow was thinking of cracking, loading the last things into the bags, the bag of rubbish to the bin and finally the bags into the taxi for the trip to Gatwick. Somehow at 6 am even the thought of Mexico, warmth, Mayan temples just did not seem to balance the books. Ah well.

We were soon onto the M25 and surprisingly it was flowing well. So well that as we crested the hill by Reigate the venerable Ford Cortina has topping 70. As we descended the hill, needing desperately to get into the inside lane for the M23 there was the distinct noise of engine components coming together in a terminal way, a loss of power and "oh doesn't sound good mate" from our driver.

The momentum carried us well, and with only a few minor cut ups we made the inside lane just before the M23 turn off, finally coasting to a halt just inside the cone defined roadworks area. I'd swear he kept rolling just to get the free recovery!

With a fury of morning motorist building up behind us, the driver got out, created a gap in the cone wall and returned to ask for our assistance in pushing his heap off the carriageway. With all the will in world the best we could manage was to get most of it out of the way, leaving the rear offside still protruding into the space generally reserved for cars and lorries doing around 60 mph. At this point our driver tried radioing in to get help.

It was like the great disaster movies.

“Alpha one to base.”

Hiss

“Alpha one to base, do you hear me?”

Hiss

We’ll starve. The search party will find skeletons and notes scratched into the paint work.

While juggernauts of every European nation swept inches away from the car, setting it rocking violently, our driver continued to battle with the radio for another 7 or 8 attempts, until finally deciding that was not the answer. As we stopped conveniently by a sign that said the emergency phones were not working, he begrudgingly took his own mobile out and called the office. A brief chat resulted in another taxi being dispatched and the roadside rescue called.

“Be a few minutes, but when he gets here you haven’t got far. Just round the next corner really.” He told us cheerfully.

As staying in the car was increasingly looking like a suicide attempt, and standing outside was a sure way to the hyperthermia ward, the time went by real slow in one respect. In another the check in deadline seemed to be rushing towards us. The Rescue truck arrived first and despite our best negotiating skills he said he could only take the car. And then only to a pick up point just outside the roadworks. No way was he going to take us to Gatwick. So our luggage was unloaded to the hard shoulder and the car was positioned to be loaded on to the truck. Only problem was this meant blocking one of the two lanes completely, causing an instant 5 mile backup of traffic. A back up that contained our replacement taxi!

The car was loaded before another venerable Ford Cortina arrived, scooped up our baggage and our frayed souls and took us to Gatwick, thankfully without further incident.

The good news was there was no queue for check in. We were last by a long way. “You’re just in time.” The assistant smiled and busied herself with the key board. This was some years back and the expected questions did not come. The boarding cards were served up without the “Smoking or none?” “Window or aisle?” questions that were normal.

“Did we have a choice of seats?”

“Yes,” she said, “you can have these or none at all. The flight’s full.”

Well at least they were no smoking seats.

At the very least as it turned out. The centre of a row of six, the last row in front of smoking and no barrier between us and them save a little, soon to be very foggy air.

“Damn taxi. Never using them again”.

We took off, the seat belt and no smoking lights went out and a nano second later every passenger for the ten rows behind us clicked a lighter and started puffing away in desperate attempt to free the world of tobacco.

A replica of an English breakfast may have appeared in the P-souper that now engulfed our row but it was difficult to say. Regardless the plane made steady progress across the Atlantic's vast nothingness. Not that we could see any of it with the nearest window a good thirty feet away, and a new bank of smog arriving every 3 minutes.

Drinks were served – thank god! And then a meal tray with a small bottle of wine. The food seemed to quell the smokers' ardour for freeing the world of tobacco, so all in all things seemed better. I was just coming to believing the meal was edible when there was a disturbance some five rows in front. It was impossible to see what the problem was but the stewardess was summonsed and left hurriedly. Just as I had convinced myself this meal would have to be edible, the classic announcement came.

“Is there a doctor of medicine aboard?”

A woman in the outer aisle seat of our row answered immediately and was taken to the site of the disturbance. By now several people were standing up in the area and things did not look good. I started to pick at the meal trying not to rubber neck at the nearby events.

Only a few moments passed before the next announcement.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have severe medical emergency on board and are making an immediate landing in Tampa. Flight crew, clear the cabin for landing.”

And that is exactly what happened. The plane that had been at 40,000 feet, smoothly gliding along was now in a power dive. The cabin crew raced along the aisle with trolleys, snatched the tray from in front of you and gleefully threw it in the rubbish bags. Odd how you become to like even airline food when you are forcibly denied it!

But there any humour in this recanting must cease. It was indeed a severe medical emergency, so severe it took the life of a young man on his honeymoon. We meet the doctor later in our trip and she told of a fit young, rugby playing man who inexplicably had a heart attack. Even by the time she got to his seat there was little hope. But the airline did the right thing and tried. Just as the emergency crew did at Tampa with the defibrillator, but sadly all to no avail, and a shocked new wife accompanied the body off the plane.

We both felt small and useless. So what IS the PROBLEM if a taxi breaks down?

The plane now had to refuel, file a new flight plan and obviously this took time. It wasn't possible to restock the catering either, so some 2 hours later we climbed up over the Caribbean somewhat peckish. There was one very positive change however. The rapid descent had caused one of the smokers to have some breathing problems, so they were now using an oxygen bottle to help them. Once oxygen is in use all smoking is banned. So the rest of flight passed with a few drinks and no smoke.

The extended flight made a long day of it, but the landing and formalities at Cancun were both smooth and we were soon in the hands of the local rep and loaded onto the coach to take us to our hotel. We got through the welcome sentences then came the punch line.

“The good news is that we have hotel rooms for all of you!”  
With over booking stories rife this did seem good news.

“The bad news is that due to the hurricane that passed through yesterday there is no beach left, the outside facilities are wrecked, and oh, nearly forgot, there is no glass in any of the hotel windows. Travel Tours wishes you a pleasant holiday.”