

A Not-So-Fun Incident - Friday, April 01, 2005

Contributed by Oliver Hansen
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Hello everyone,

This letter will not be quite like the previous, I am afraid. An unfortunate event took place which I feel I should at least share with everyone.

I went to Negril last thursday, planning to stay on vacation until Sunday or Monday. It's usually a very expensive place to stay, but there is a hotel owner who is very nice to Peace Corps Volunteers and only charges us \$500J(~\$8US)/ night. I arrived about noon because is it on the very west end of the country and takes about 4hrs from Kingston. I checked into my room where I would be staying with my friend Jess (female) and Nathan. Jess' brother and his fiance were visiting her and they had another room. We all went out and took a taxi down to the main beach. We hung out in the sun and swam until about 4:30, then went back to the hotel to shower and get ready for dinner.

We decided on a nearby resturaunt for dinner where they served jerk chicken and some seafood. After finishing dinner and chatting for a while, Jess' family decided they were going to go in for the night, while we decided to go down to the beach and see what clubs we could get into. Most of the clubs require wristbands because it's Spring Break and they can cost anywhere from \$30 - \$160US. One of our friends had collected some from vacationers who had left, so we were just going to try to use them.

Soon after we left the resturaunt, about 9:45pm a taxi came by and the 3 of us got in to go down to the beach. There was the male driver, a male passenger in front, and a boy in the back. We squeezed in which is very normal here. When we got close to our stop, the driver said he needed fuel and turned off the main road. We told him we could get out there, but he insisted it was no problem to drop us off after he filled up so we just sat back. Nathan noticed the fuel gauge was on empty. It did feel a bit weird that we ended up on a dirt road, but sometimes taxi drivers do weird things and maybe the passenger was a friend and he was dropping him home on the way or something, I reasoned. We passed through a residential area, and then up a hill where the driver acted like he was turning around and then stopped the car. The passenger took a knife out of the glove-compartment (which I didn't see) and came around to my door behind him. Nathan had locked my door after seeing the knife, but the man just reached around and unlocked it as the driver and boy got out the other side and started pulling Jess out. When the passenger had opened my door, he said, "alright, give us all your money". I had been in total denial up to this point, and now still couldn't believe it was actually happening. I didn't have hardly any money, and I never do. I gave him the \$100J(~\$1.60US) in my pocket and told him I didn't have much money. He then took my watch off my wrist and I took out my bank-card holder which I had \$1000J (~\$17US) and gave it to him. All this time I was staring at the knife which he was moving around as he seemed frustrated at not getting more money. I tried to reason with him telling him we lived in Jamaica and were not tourists, and he felt my other pocket and asked what was there and I told him my phone and so he took that. It is almost the cheapest phone you can buy here, the same one Jess had, and Nathan's was even cheaper. After he was done he had the boy (probably 12 or 13) come pat me down to make sure there was not more. Then he had me stand behind the car while they finished with my friends. As their attention was turned from me, I noticed I could see the license plate. I quickly memorized it and then they backed us further from the car and then drove off leaving us there. We were all in shock but I repeated the number out loud so we could remember it.

We walked down the road and asked some women how to get back to town.

We followed the road until we came down to the main. We found the police station, and as expected, the front desk person was not helpful at all asking us to come back in the morning because the person taking reports wasn't in. I don't know how, but eventually a detective came by and when

we told him we were Peace Corps Volunteers and what happened he took care of us. He took a report and let us call Peace Corps to report it, then we finally got a ride back to our hotel. Now, in the states, having a license number and make of a car would almost surely get some results, but I don't expect much here. The last two numbers I had were 01, but the format is that those have to be letters, so it has to be DL or DI. Still not difficult to narrow down as far as I'm concerned but that's the way it is....

Anyways, no one was hurt and that's the best thing. Peace Corps reimburses us the cash, which we were able to get at another hotel through an arrangement with Peace Corps to pay them back. The phones or any other property, unfortunately, are not replaced. So I used the extra I had to get a phone because I really felt naked without being able to communicate.

Then I went home early on Saturday because I didn't have the money to stay

anymore. The first night, I had trouble sleeping but I've been better since.

Don't want to scare anyone but I thought I would share the experience.

Once again, no one was hurt and these things do happen here, you just never think it will happen to you!

Talk to you later,

Oliver