

## 5. Baggage Class

It did not take long for Ted to figure out that Kristin and Piotr travelled *a lot*. In fact they travelled more than almost anyone who did not work for an airline or own an airplane. They always travelled together, because, as Kristin patiently explained to Ted, you can't have sex with someone unless both of you are in the same place. Yes, she was an old fashioned girl in that regard. Phone sex, text message sex, video sex, etc. were not sex as far as she was concerned. (The definition of sex is one of the many things that she agreed with Bill Clinton about. A lot of activities that today's kids, or yesterday's House Republicans, considered sex were definitely not what she had in mind as sex.)

Kristin had a somewhat unusual theory of travel, which Ted briefly considered making into a bumper sticker:

If you haven't done it there, you haven't been there.

So, for example, Kristin and Piotr once took a day trip to Luxembourg, but they have never been there. (Does anyone have sex in Luxembourg??) Also they once visited Antwerp, to see the magnificent old dining room in the train station, but they have never been there. However, they have been a lot of places, and in fact Luxembourg and Belgium are the only two countries they have ever visited that they have not been to. One country that they have been to many times is Portugal, but they have not been to every place in Portugal. For example, they have been to Valença do Minho and Viana do Castelo. They have been to Madeira but only visited Marvão and Monsaraz without having been there. They have been to Estramoz but only visited Elvas and Évora and Estoril. They have been to Sagres but only visited Sintra and Setúbal. They have been to Coimbra but only visited Cascais. They have been to the Azores (Açores) but only

visited Alcobaca. They have been to Porto but only visited Portimão. They have been to Bragança but only visited Braga and Batalha. They have been to Lisbon but only visited Lagos. They have only visited Tomar and Tavira, and they have not ever even visited Beja. They have also not ever even visited Fátima, which is a miracle.

Ted also liked Portugal. Part of the reason is that they don't eat bears in Portugal. But also part of the reason is that the language is not impenetrable, and yet they don't expect you to know it at all. Ted is trying to publish an article about his invention, the

language friendliness index, defined as  $LFI = \frac{1}{(ID)(ATE)}$  where *ID* is the Intrinsic

Difficulty of the language and *ATE* is the Amount They Expect you to know of the language. Practically no place has as large an *LFI* as Portugal, since *ID* is not large and *ATE* is nearly zero. Some other places (like Greece or China) have a small *ATE* but a larger *ID*. Yet other places (like Spain) have a small *ID* but a large *ATE*. The country with the world's smallest *LFI* is probably France, since *ATE* is high (they expect you to speak the language, and speak it well), but *ID* is also high (spoken French is practically impossible to understand for someone whose native language is English or Ursine). Ted is currently involved in a project to measure the *LFI* of Estonia but can't seem to communicate enough with anyone there to determine what Amount They Expect you to know.

On his first flight, from London Gatwick to Detroit, Ted had been quite comfortable in the overhead locker, but he soon found out that his days of travelling in the airplane cabin (either tourist or business class) were over. Kristin insisted that he travel baggage class, that is, in her suitcase. The stated reason was that he lacked a passport or even any government-issued photo ID, but he suspected that she was just too

cheap to buy him a ticket. However, inside a suitcase is arguably more comfortable than in a seat in economy class, and you can pack your own food and wine. The main problem is that it is *very cold* in the luggage hold, and also the air is thin. So Ted would have his meal as soon as the plane took off, and then he would take a nap until it landed. (Cold makes bears sleepy, since they think it is time to hibernate.)

On trips that involved a change of planes, Ted hoped for a long enough layover that he could party with the other baggage-class animals in the baggage transfer center. Amsterdam was one of Ted's favorite baggage transfer centers (and, coincidentally, it was also Kristin and Piotr's favorite airport for connections). The baggage handlers would open the suitcases and let out the animals, now reconverted into live mode, in exchange for a share of the liquor in the suitcase, or else they would sell them liquor at very reasonable (duty free) prices. And the food is pretty good, much better than Ted was accustomed to from his time at Gatwick. Ted remembers with particular fondness a party in Amsterdam during which he, three other bears, a moose, a cow and an otter consumed twelve smoked eels and two bottles of a very nice Barolo, finishing it off with some fine Cognac. Ted thought that a good cigar would have been appropriate too, but the entire Amsterdam airport is non-smoking, and anyway Kristin would have been extremely upset at how he smelled when they got to the final destination. Of course, Ted would not normally party with cows, which lack dignity, but a baggage transfer facility is not a good place to make fine species distinctions.

Because Kristin and Piotr had elite status with Northwest Airlines, and later with Delta, and also because they often travelled business class, Ted's suitcases usually had a PRIORITY tag on them. This generally did not result in them being unloaded any faster

than other bags at the final destination (note that the tag did not say HIGH PRIORITY), but it did identify the owners and animal contents of the bags as being frequent travelers, and perhaps as classy, dignified, business class individuals. Whether this translated into more respectful treatment in the baggage transfer facility varied from place to place. For example, in Japan, bears in bags with PRIORITY tags were called Bear-San, and bowing baggage handlers would offer them very fresh salmon sashimi, soba noodles, a choice of high-quality sake or Sapporo, Kirin or Asahi beer, and hot towels to clean their paws. Time permitting, tea was served in porcelain cups of a special thumb-free design, which had in fact been invented and made by Ted's firm and had the No Thumb But Not Dumb logo discretely displayed. At the other extreme, in Australia, the baggage handlers resented high-class bears and charged them higher prices than tourist class animals for the same schooners of beer, low quality sausages, and vaguely Greek or Indian dishes. Amsterdam was intermediate, in the sense that the Dutch had no regard for class issues – they treated all bears and in fact all species with the same degree of respect – and cared only that the transactions be orderly and profitable. Ted would reflect on the fact that, if his mother had stayed in Amsterdam, she would not have ended up in a zoo, and he would not have ended up in a suitcase. But life is full of “what ifs” and Ted was smart enough to know that the right response to that line of thinking is to have another drink.