

Travails of a Trolley by Lydia Penn

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It lay hidden in a dark corner of the loft, a small but sturdy luggage trolley, forgotten or unwanted by the previous owners of the house, and now discovered by Edwin and a friend while adjusting a faulty TV aerial, just two weeks prior to our overseas trip. It seemed to be the perfect answer to our luggage needs.

Previously we had always travelled light with cabin baggage only. But regulations had changed and after testing airline cabin baggage size allowance on a stand thoughtfully provided by a local department store, we realised that with the smaller size now allowed we would be forced to check in an extra suitcase to take all we needed for a five-week trip overseas. We had not wanted to purchase any more luggage – we had cupboards full already. But nothing on wheels. We found a suitcase which fitted well on to the little trolley, which had an adjustable handle and seemed ideal and in good working order. We strapped the suitcase securely on to the trolley and everything seemed perfect.

But was it?

We arrived early at Sydney Airport and while waiting to check in, we studied with amusement the people passing by with large airport trolleys piled high with a mountain of suitcases and bags of various shapes and sizes and smugly congratulated our selves that we had all we needed firmly strapped to one small trolley. When we were finally able to check in with Austrian Airlines we were so preoccupied with the fact that we had not been allocated the window seats we had requested, that we paid scant attention to our luggage as it was whisked away.

After a not very pleasant flight, we arrived on time at Vienna, just after 6am local time. Once landed we headed for the Austrian Airlines office to lodge a complaint about the officious stewardess who had made this flight so unpleasant and had refused to give her name. We also ensured that we had the requested window seats for the return flight. All this delayed our arrival at immigration and then to the baggage area to collect our luggage.

Only it wasn't there.

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The baggage carousel was empty, and so was the area around about. As is usual in such situations, there was no official to be seen. We spent the next hour alternatively hovering at the carousel, and walking around looking for help. Finally, we got some help from the airline office when in desperation we made our way back there. Someone suggested that we try what was a sort of 'Left Luggage' office, and there was our suitcase on a shelf wedged between two other items. Because the suitcase had a soft top, it was classed as "fragile" and so travelled separately from other luggage. If only someone had told us! However both trolley and suitcase were in good condition and with great relief, we emerged from the airport ready to enjoy a weekend in Vienna, before travelling to Isreal.

But our problems were just beginning. As we packed to leave on Monday morning, the buckle on the improvised strap round the suitcase broke. While Edwin tried to cope with this new problem, I was frantically stitching up the side of a haversack which we used to take with us on day trips and bewailing the fact that the alarm on our travelling clock was no longer working. We finally got everything fixed and arrived at the airport with a three-hour wait for our flight. We were checked in by a girl who didn't seem to know what she was doing and by now I was really concerned about the luggage being labelled "fragile" and wondering where it would end up. But there was nothing we could do about it now.

We were annoyed rather than surprised when on arrived at Tel Aviv there was once again no sign of our "fragile" luggage or any indication as to where we would find it. We pushed our cabin luggage on an airport trolley through what seemed an endless maze of corridors, until we located the "lost luggage" counter where we began the process of filling out the necessary claim forms when someone came along and said they had located our luggage. There it was – intact, but standing quite alone in a vast empty space away from any carousel and looking like some lost traveller in the middle of an inhospitable desert.

To get into Israel had been comparatively easy. To get out was a different matter! After touring for three weeks we returned to the airport for our return flight to Vienna, where we would have an overnight stay before flying onto London. Check-in took about an hour! After

an initial X-ray of all baggage, we were subject to a long and intensive grilling by an Israeli security officer. With sighs of relief, we then continued on in the queue. But as I was watching a woman ahead tipping the contents of her suitcase on to the counter, I suddenly realised that while both our cabin bags had stickers on, the check-in suitcase did not.

During the intense interrogation, I had stated that I had been given a candle by the Jewish friend with whom we had been touring Israel. This, of course, was in the suitcase. So we now had to go through the complicated business of detaching the suitcase from the trolley before we could open it. The small squat candle was finally located at the bottom of the case, taken out, examined, x-rayed then returned to us. Once we had repacked the case, again secured it to the trolley, we were on our way to another x-ray!

By now we were tired, stressed out and horribly sick of airports – and luggage! On arrival in Vienna, This time we went straight to the luggage office where we had previously found our suitcase. After some delay, it arrived.

The next morning we again had difficulty in securing the case to the trolley, as the strap continually came adrift. By now we had decided to discard the “fragile” label which was causing so many problems, and at the check-in, the suitcase was put into a large wire container.

When our luggage finally arrived on the carousel at Heathrow we were delighted to find that some kind person had secured the case to the trolley with a very strong strap which had a combination lock. Now the only problem was that we did not know the combination!

Over a leisurely sandwich lunch, we finally managed to work out the combination and thought our troubles were now over. Not so! When we arrived back in Vienna and the trolley came off the carousel, we found that it had been badly knocked about. It took Edwin some time to fix it so that we could once again wheel it along.

But it seemed that our luggage problems would never end! Back in Sydney, tired and frustrated, we stared glumly at yet another now empty carousel which had been spewing luggage fiercely from both ends – but not ours. We couldn't believe that it had happened again. As we stood there, uncertain as to what to do, our green haversack attracted the attention of a sniffer dog and therefore that of the official with him. This area was now deserted, except for a few officials and people who were beginning to stare. Once again, now with another couple, we found ourselves in an office filling out claims for lost baggage, when someone called out that more baggage had appeared on the carousel. Our suitcase had arrived! Thankfully we trundled it off to be x-rayed.

Guess what? Before we went overseas the following year, we purchased a strong hard topped suitcase which ran smoothly on wheels.

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