

LONG ROAD TO AMERICA!

I had always wanted to study abroad. My government was sending graduate students to the United States (U.S.) to get their post graduate degrees. It is a very long story. The short is I worked hard and obtained this scholarship. After countless paperwork, I finally received my visa. Soon after this, the departure day had come. I was sitting in the airplane. It was about to leave for New York. A deep conversation between logical me (*italic typing*) and overly enthusiastic me (*regular typing*) began, which continued during the flight.

You needed to do many arrangements before leaving. Do you think you have a good game plan?

Of course, I do!

Let us see. How will you get to Newark, DE from the airport?

After the customs, I will take the AirTrain to Jamaica Station. Then, I will take the long island railroad to Manhattan. Then, I will walk a little bit. Finally, I will take the last Megabus to Newark.

Your flight delayed half an hour. Due to this delay, it is going to arrive probably half an hour later than the estimated arrival time. Though, even if the flight arrived on time, it is very likely for you to miss the Megabus. It does not seem like you have enough time. What if you miss the bus?

Do not worry. I will not miss the bus. I purposely chose a seat by the exit at the end of the airplane. Therefore, I will be the first person to leave the airplane.

Let us say, a miracle occurred and you made it on time to the bus. Then what?

My friend will pick me up in Newark.

“Your friend”? You only spoke with him a few times on the phone. In addition, how will you let him know when you are at the bus stop? You do not have a phone.

I will ask a stranger to use their phone.

Without speaking English? I hope you will not be accused of trying to steal a cell phone while you are trying to borrow one. Where will you stay in Newark if you can ever get there?

Thanks for the good thoughts. My friend might offer his couch.

What if he does not? You do not have money with you. You cannot go to a hotel. Well, even you had money you would not be able to get a room because you cannot speak ENGLISH!

While logical me and enthusiastic me were having this conversation, I was given a blue form, which I later discovered was the I-94 ‘Customs Declaration’ form. I did not know how to fill it out. While I was looking at it with blank eyes, I fell asleep. I woke up. Finally, we were done flying over the Atlantic Ocean and I was seeing pretty landscape, which I thought was the U.S. (I later found out it was Northeastern Canada).

We were about to land. How nice! Wait, I still need to fill out the blue form. I asked the flight crew to help. Their English was poor too. We were having a mini crisis, which I later found very amusing. Upon the extensive collaboration between the flight crew and me, I managed to fill out the form.

Despite the departure delay, the airplane landed on time, at 5pm. It seemed like the pilots made up time on the air. This was good news. I could make it on time to the Megabus. However, my exit

did not open. I was the last person to leave the airplane since I was at the back and only the front exit opened.

I hurried to the customs. I got there at 5:30pm. There were so many people ahead of me. Finally, at 6:15pmm it was my turn. I was nervous I would not be able to communicate in English with the customs officer. Fortunately, the officer only asked how I was doing and asked for my documents. It took him only a few minutes to go through the documents and approve them.

As soon as I left the customs, I saw my suitcases. This was great. I did not lose much time for the customs and claiming my luggage. Then, I ran to the AirTrain while carrying two giant suitcases and a huge backpack. I took the AirTrain and arrived to Jamaica Station at 6:30pm. Then, it was time to take the Long Island Rail Road to Manhattan. There were kiosks around but I could not figure out how to get a ticket. Fortunately, a train station worker helped me get a ticket. I ran to the train tracks. Arriving there at 6:47pm, I had just missed the train. In addition, the 7pm train had been cancelled. The next train left at 7:15pm. Finally, at 7:50pm, I was in Manhattan. I ran to the bus station. I got there at 8:05pm. The last bus to Newark had left 5 minutes ago.

I told you. (Logical me talks again)

I know. Ugh!

I asked a stranger to use their phone and called my friend. He told me to take a bus to Philadelphia, which I did. When the bus arrived to Philadelphia, he was there. I saw him first time in my life in person but, at the moment, seeing nobody else could have made me happier. I stayed at his apartment for three days and figured out everything in time.

Since I came to the U.S., I received a master's degree, a graduate minor, a graduate certificate, I published academic articles, I presented in national academic conferences, and I worked with the World Bank, the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, and many more. Currently, I am a Ph.D. student in the University of Delaware. All started with a little adventure in New York!

To conclude, I want to say a few things to international students that study in the U.S.

Do not worry. Just do your best and everything will work out for you!