

An Unexpected Blessing

When I crossed back into India from Nepal, I had made up my mind to head back overland to Switzerland backtracking the route I had come beginning in September 1970. I wasn't overly excited about the journey, since it would probably involve traveling most of the way alone. I had written the Stringhams from Kathmandu to tell them that I had decided not to continue the formal Zen Buddhist meditation, planned to stop with them, and then head back overland to L'Abri, the Christian community in Switzerland. Shortly after I arrived they asked me why I didn't fly to Europe. The main consideration, of course, was money. I would arrive in Europe with only about \$70 to my name.

Jim asked me how much more I would need to consider flying. I replied that I thought I would need about \$100. Jim said that he and Charlotte had agreed not to try to influence my decision to go to L'Abri, but that if I decided to go, they would give me \$100—a significant amount, about \$650 in 2021—to help me get there. Ordinarily I would have refused. But the fact that the Stringhams worked more on leadings of the Spirit than whims convinced me that there was some reason for me to get to L'Abri quickly (and certainly more safely). So I accepted. I found a company called Worldways and was able to book on a BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) charter flight for London leaving on the 22nd—the last day of my Indian visa—for \$230.



After several enjoyable days with the Stringhams, I traveled for the last time by my beloved 3rd class sleeper to Delhi. It turned out that this Worldways charter company was rather “sketchy”. I found out on the 19th that the flight was leaving from Bombay (present-day Mumbai) rather than Delhi. The travel agent was not going to pay my airfare to Bombay at first, but we dickered and finally settled on half the airfare; it would have cut it too close to travel by train. I flew to Bombay the afternoon of the 20th and spent the night in a cheap hotel. I showed up at the BOAC office the next day. The agent for Worldways was there but had no tickets as yet, because of the underhanded dealings involved. In order to fly charter, you had to be part of an organization—the Yehudi Menuhin Circle in this case. The agent sent the names to London, and they sent back a “revised,” backdated membership list.



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The departure time on April 22—the last day of my India visa—was 8:15. I showed up at 5:30—still no tickets. The other passengers and I went to the airport with the agent and finally got our tickets *one* hour before departure! A little too close for comfort. The luxury of the BOAC VC10 soon settled my nerves after the ticketing drama. I found myself in the First Class cabin. I can only imagine what my urbane fellow travelers felt about sitting next to a largely unwashed hippie. I was on the way to London and clearly headed back into Western culture. As you might guess, I never refused anything that the stewardess offered to the First Class passengers.