

HELD AGAINST MY WILL IN TAIPEI

I step onto the 70-metre hunk of metal, my sweaty palms cause my bag to continually slip from my grasp. Heart thrumming in my ears makes it impossible to hear where she's directing me. I just follow the throng of people in front, stumbling through the narrow passageway. A giant mass of anxiety, I finally find my seat. I make sure to tightly fasten my seatbelt, listen intently to the flight attendant's safety demonstration, and send about a hundred silent prayers up to the powers that be for safe travels.

This isn't my first plane ride, just my normal boarding routine. Upon takeoff, through turbulence and in flight snacks, to landing – I hold on for dear life, praying the entire time that this flight won't be my last. It makes zero fucking sense. Everyone knows planes are a much safer means of transportation than driving. Yet, every time I take flight, this insurmountable terror infiltrates my psyche, pummeling away all sanity and logic and statistics of the safety of planes vs. vehicles. Even after thousands of miles traveled through the world's skies, the fear never ebbs.

Putting blind faith in some unknown yet undoubtedly qualified stranger is just something I struggle with inherently. It has nothing to do with their trustworthiness and everything to do with my reluctance to hand over control. Despite the fact that I witness car accidents on a regular basis, with [over 3,000 fatalities resulting per year](#) in California alone, I get in my car and race down the highway at 140 kph without a second's hesitation. Total solace because I'm behind the wheel - even though I'm much more likely to be sideswiped by some reckless asshole sideswiping on Tinder.

So I land in Taipei after a grueling 13-hour flight for what's supposed to be a quick layover before I reach Bali, believing the worst part of my trip to be over. I couldn't be more wrong, of course.

Seeing half the flights listed on the Departures board flagged with bright red CANCELLED notices don't give me the slight inclination that something's off. Nor the signs posted everywhere stating "Lack of service due to cabin crew on strike. Sorry for the inconvenience." Nope, ever the oblivious optimistic, I continue on to the transfer desk, determined to get to my gate.



30 minutes pass and I realize the line I'm standing in isn't moving. My brain finally wonders if something unusual is going on. Now's probably a good time to pay attention to my surroundings and start freaking out a bit.

On the verge of a panic attack in the midst of a massive horde of pissed off passengers, I'm starting to think I'll never make it to Bali. Their collective anger, confusion and exhaustion permeate the room like a near physical force. My stomach's churning with anxiety, or maybe it's the shitty airplane coffee – I'm certain it was nothing more than ground up dirt and sugar.

I wait around the transfer service desk for over three hours, unable to do much else, or speak to a single airline employee, but I'm able to gather a bit of details about what's going on thanks to the belligerent travelers shouting over the counter and the good old trusty internet.

1. [The flight attendants have gone on strike](#)
2. Every single China Airlines flight scheduled for this morning has been cancelled
3. I am royally fucked

I try to fish for info from fellow castaways.

"The staff at the service desk will be able to transfer you to another flight."

"You have to book a new flight on your own and China Airlines will reimburse you."

“They aren’t making any transfers, they’re just putting everyone up in hotels for now.”

WHAT THE FUCK DO I DO? A pitiful mess, as pools of anxiety build in my tear ducts, accompanied by the rumbling in my stomach that refuses to go away. I’m pretty sure at this point it’s gas - maybe I should just let it rip... Yeah, starting to feel marginally better now.

Ok, I just need to get to the service desk and get some damn questions answered. Only problem is the line IS STILL NOT MOVING. It isn’t long before I find out why. People at the front have been swarming the counter, and while the airline staff are unable to help them, they refuse to leave without a resolution. I mean, I can understand that. But also, dick move, you selfish assholes.

After more hours of standing around, boredom and panic doing the tango in my head, I eventually speak to someone with some actual merit, i.e. a China Airlines employee. They arrange for me to stay in a hotel for the night. And while I should feel relief at this point, I’m overcome by fear and anxiety. Though they’ve resolved one issue for me, I’m still left with tons more questions. How long am I going to be stuck in Taipei? How are they going to contact me if/when they actually manage to get me a new flight? Is there seriously nothing I could do to gain some control of this fucked situation?

All they leave me with is a vague reassurance, “we’ll call you once your new flight is booked.”

How? I want to scream.

But off I go, silently, to the room I never booked, in the hotel I’ve never seen, waiting for a phone call from a person I’ve never met.

Eighteen hours and a decent night’s rest later I find myself sprawled on this plush double bed, surfing the web via free Wi-Fi and penning a shittier version of this here article. A half-eaten feast lies discarded on the spare bed beside me, Game of Thrones playing in the background. I start to realize how useless this obsession with control is. So much time and energy’s wasted worrying about shit that I have zero power to change, not to mention the emotional suck fest.

With a newfound respect for the curveball life smacked me in the face with, I close my laptop and get ready to head out - embracing the fact that the amount of time I have here is a complete mystery. And instead of feeling like an abducted child, I’m giddy for the opportunity to explore an extra slice of this beautiful world.

Bring it on, life. I’ve got my bat handy.