

Bad American! Eric is booted Back to Bali, Blog, October, 2015

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After yoga-lecturing around Bali, I popped back to Perth, Australia on October 14th.

I love Aussie immigration.

You poke your passport in a friendly kiosk.

It flashes a welcome green.

You stroll through saloon-door scanners.

A guard smiles warmly there, peeks casually at your customs card, then waves you through.

Easiest border crossing on Earth.

But . . . not this time.

The saloon-door guard walked me to the desk guard.

the desk guard walked me to the office.

And there, the office guard interrogated me with inexplicable warmth. (No kidding. Ozzie immigration is stunningly friendly and fair.)

The truth is, I'd moved to Australia on March 1st (my birthday!) seven months before.

Yet, I'd been flying beyond the country's borders every month or so, too.

I was home in Oz (Australia) for 4 weeks, then away teaching in the US or Asia for 4 weeks, then back in Oz again, etc.

But, in spirit, I was living in Australia, and to "live" in in there on a tourist visa is an Immigration Sin (and I had more sins, besides . . .).

I'd found a [tiny town in the middle of nowhere](#) that made me terrifically happy.

Going and coming like I did, I was abiding by my 60-day stay limit, but my visa status clearly forbade me from "living" in [The Lucky Country](#).

It also forbade me from earning local cash (from teaching yoga, in my case)—a temptation I'd surrendered to all-too-freely when small-town studios began knocking at my door.

Apparently, the state's gatekeepers had been tracking my waywardness.

Sigh.

Back in the Horrible Now, I sat stunned as the office [gendarme](#) laid out the case for my work violations using advertisements that were littered across the web. (Terrific investigative work!)

She offered me cups of tea and formal opportunities to contradict her.

Bad yogi that I am, I prayed madly to the Gods while offering a rash of half-truths—which they initially believed.

But I was nailed.

Frantic prayers and white lies weren't going to slow this juggernaut.

I turned squarely toward it like a man.

But my inner boy needed a good cry.

As I leaned into my fate, they collected me and two other new-made convicts, put us in high-vis vests, and stacked us in a van.

They shuttled us to a nearby locked facility that held people from Chad, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and elsewhere—treating us like honored guests the whole way.



“Fly you back to America, Mate?” a good-natured guard asked.

“America doesn't interest me anymore,” I

answered, quoting an old friend who'd gone permanently to India.

“Make it [Bali](#),” I added.

I know. I'm ungrateful.

But I had a Shanghai appointment in 21 days, and zero intention to zip back to the States.

Oz was my preferred home.

But Bali was a good back-up!



They said a flight would come available in 1-3 days.

Hmmm.

This was a flight perk.

A chance to fulfill the fantasy of prison!

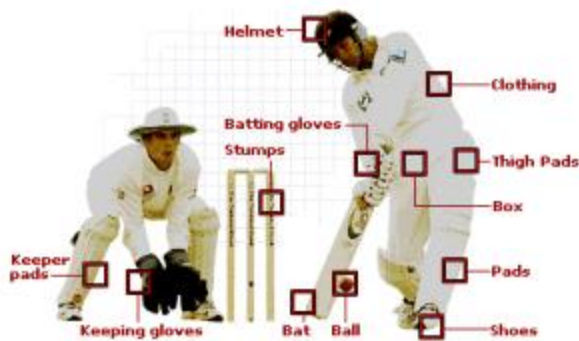
A yogi by trade, sitting down and doing nothing seemed like a pretty good deal to

me.

But prison ain't all meditating and behaving monkish, dear [Grasshopper](#).

It includes work, play, and emotional processing.

After collapsing onto my bed out of existential angst for an hour or so, I rose to wander the compound and direct myself to the business of yoga book study, emailing my friends in [West Australia](#) that I *wasn't* on my way, and weeping over the loss of an Aussie woman I can't seem to forget.



In my grief, I watched movies and played poker and cricket (yes, [cricket!](#)) with the boys.

I traded stories with the infinitely-decent guards and my somewhat neurotic fellow prisoners—a number of whom had been stewing there for 10 years.

Most—even the German couple who'd they gathered from the same [Jetstar](#) flight (and who, incidentally, exited jail before me)—

busied themselves with bitter complaints.

But I've dealt with immigration officials in lots of places and have seen how evil they can be and—till now—always were.

I knew I'd landed in a golden cage.

They provided us with a weekly emolument of 25 Australian dollars to waste at the commissary (DVDs! Chocolate! Socks!) and heaps of things to do.

Maybe because I understood I'd exit before the decade ended, it all seemed delightfully new and intriguing to me.

Still, as the savants say, "All things must pass."

At 3am on the third day, they woke me—saying they had a flight.



The exit papers took 20 minutes.

I grabbed my bags from lock-up.

I showered.

Shaved.

Donned fresh underpants.

Nothing can stop me now!

Two kindly guards threw me in a mom-and-pop Ford, and ferried me to Perth International.

They locked me in the car, went in, secured my ticket, and checked my bags.

Then they drove—across the tarmac!—to my gate.

There, we then bought a fresh pineapple juices, plopped down, and began to gab.

I looked at the rash of travelers waiting for planes.

For a second, I felt shame.

But then I thought: "No-one knows if these guys have a detainee or a diplomat on their hands!"



So, I sat up and conjured the posture of a well-loved rockstar, a spy stalked from Kiev, or a CEO with drawers knit from gold.

I relaxed into it.

. . . and learned my lock-keys were pretty sweet dudes.

They told me tales about their families and cultures. (Most Aussies I meet on my travels are immigrants.)

One came from Pakistan.

His mom had just died back home.

He said his time in Oz was near done.

“In Pakistan, there is food waiting for me to eat,” he said.

“Uh, what?” I answered.

Then he patiently explained that [nomadic Muslim culture](#) says people travel only because fate draws them to eat food waiting for them where they arrive.

I was touched.

Work stories came.

They told me how they’d flown deportees to Nigeria, Myanmar, and Paris—where they’d always arranged to stay a few extra days for French cuisine.

I told stories of poking around Mongolia, Korea, and north India—eating dogmeat, bugs, and heart-rendingly good desserts.

We spent an hour in this sweet conversation.

Then, a two-guy-sized [Maori](#) tribesman showed up—bald, tattoo-sheathed, and sporting opinions like Archie Bunker—to relieve my [companeros](#) from their 6am shift.

They stalked off.

I looked after them, forlorn.

We'd bonded.

I pushed past the Maori's opinions to get to know him too, but time was short.

A gorgeous groundstaff girl was given my passport as we bussed out to the plane. I made conversation with her, but—paradoxically—she hated flying and travel.

I couldn't figure out what else to say.

The monster Maori walked me to the plane-door.

He handed my passport, body, and phone to the flight attendants.

I fist-pumped him goodbye, and pivoted to the plane.

Hullo Jetstar!

I strolled past the expectant eyes of my law-abiding fellow-passengers.

It was the first, sad moment of my three-year banishment from Oz, but I glided smilingly to the last row—like a French king to the guillotine.



Despite the grim occasion, the ecstasy of air travel that keeps me a complaisant wayfarer immediately seeped toward my bones.

In no time at all, I was entranced by the burly efficiency of the baggage-handlers beyond my window.

Then I looked back to the cabin.

The flight was shaping up like the usual Aussie affair—everybody on board was the picture of ill-health and happy as sin.

As the seat-belt sign blinked off, everyone stood, talked garrulously, and generously purchased pasta, sandwiches, and beer. (It's JetStar! Nothing's free!)

"Go ahead and party," I thought.

In my new criminal persona, I was feeling distant, and my no-cost flight had gifted me 3 free seats.

I stretched out to sleep.

Three-odd hours of flying dissolved in a dream.

I woke to the firm murmur of a pilot gargling weather stats on the P.A.

The landing was rough, and I wondered if my supercheap airline couldn't filch for computers, and actually made Mr. Mummy Speech land the plane.

I exhaled.

On to the next chapter!



In [Denpasar](#), Bali, Indonesia, the attendants handed me off to a smokin' hot stewardess in a radiant pink company dress, accessorized with dashing black heels.

We marched happily down the concourse.

I felt like I could hold her hand.

Exhausted by my dreams of global romance, I had the overpowering urge to ask her to marry me, join my American-ness, and retreat beside me to Dust-Thick Nowhere, New Mexico.

But I elbowed the thought away with notions of the ominous logistical and cross-cultural details, and—despite small talk—kept my co-habitational thoughts to myself.

Two bright-eyed, slightly-puzzled, young male attendants joined us as we paraded past the mobs of eager tourists snaking in infinite lines toward their face-to-face with Indonesian immigration.

My I.D. was taken through what seemed like a janitor's dirty closet door, then quickly brought out again.

My consorts led me to the staggeringly-skylit international lobby.

The pink beauty passed my passport and phone over to me like holy relics.

The boy-guards smiled mutely.



I walked to the light and the trees of the debarkation area.

I broke the calm—phoning my default driver to wheel me to the neighborhood of my [expat](#) friends—and a meal.

Bali's thrillingly-warm air received me.

I blinked.

I was free.