

BUSINESS DAY

A Diverted Flight Offers Lessons on Keeping Cool

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I DO a lot of international travel. I used to be annoyed by long flights, and now I look forward to them since I have time to read, work or catch up on some TV I never get to watch, like “Game of Thrones.” I travel so much, I blew through three seasons and am now caught up with Season 4.

I am the C.E.O. of Villency Design Group, and my business trips involve meeting with clients and making sure manufacturing is going smoothly. This is a family-owned business, and some of the team have known me since I was probably 5 years old. I’m sure they find it amusing that I’m now flying to Asia and Europe all the time, since we started as furniture makers and movers and have expanded into interior design, as well as product design and manufacturing.



Eric Villency, the chief executive of Villency Design Group, in Angkor Wat, Cambodia.

Frequent Flier
By ERIC VILLENCY

Q. How often do you fly for business?

A. Sometime as often as every week, and at least half is international.

Q. What’s your least favorite airport?

A. The old Hong Kong airport held that distinction for years, but it’s better now. So, J.F.K. is my new least favorite because of all the delays. It’s my home airport, but I hate it.

Q. Of all the places you’ve been, what’s the best?

A. Hawaii. We vacationed there as a family when I was young, so I have great memories. It’s beautiful and I love the energy of the people.

Q. What’s your secret airport vice?

A. It’s never too early for a Bloody Mary, especially if I’m scheduled for a long flight.

I also once had a chance to meet the famous Captain Sully, otherwise known as Chesley Burnett Sullenberger. It was right after the Miracle on the Hudson happened when Captain Sully managed to execute an emergency landing in the Hudson River. He was besieged by attention and the collective embrace of New York and the world. I watched how effortlessly he handled the mobs, and, not surprisingly, he never once got flustered. Instead he kept his cool and acquitted himself with tremendous grace.

Staying calm and never letting the situation get the best of you is a not a bad way to live your life, whether you are in the air or on the ground. Thanks for the lesson, Captain, and thanks to those people I met on the bus to Milan. Both of those instances taught me to relax when things don’t go as planned. So far, so good.

As told to Joan Raymond. E-mail: joan.raymond@nytimes.com

I’ve been traveling internationally for 20 years. New planes don’t come around very often, and when they do it’s akin to the Navy launching a new carrier. I fly in a lot of really old planes in some less-developed parts of the world, but I was lucky to be one of the first Americans to travel on the new 787 Boeing Dreamliner to Tokyo.

Since the fleet was grounded for a while because of mechanical problems, there was a bit of nervous humor on board before we took off. I’m not one to engage in much conversation on planes, but I happened to be seated near a very well-known former senator. At one point, he leaned over to me, smiled and said, “Pretty cool plane, huh?” I had to agree with him. I also had to chuckle because this was the very first time in my life I wholeheartedly agreed with his point of view on anything.

I’m a Type A personality, so I used to hate it when flights were delayed or canceled. But I’ve had two experiences that made me reassess my reactions.

I once took an Alitalia flight departing from Paris and scheduled to land in Milan. I was really tired, or maybe obsessed with watching a TV show, and I missed the announcement the flight was being diverted to Bologna. When it landed in Bologna instead of Milan, I was freaking out. I wasn’t rude, just really annoyed. Actually, I was the only person who was annoyed. All the other passengers were taking things in stride and probably thought I needed to relax. They were right.

We wound up taking a bus ride to Milan and one gentleman took out a guitar and started playing, and another one passed around a bottle of wine. Everyone was making the best of a bad situation. The problem wasn’t that the flight was diverted to Bologna. There was a reason for that. The problem was me, and my reaction.