

## One Way Ticket

India looked out of the window watching the rain as it pelted down on to the tarmac outside, quickly turning it into more of a stream than a runway.

"Typically British summer," chuckled a voice behind her. India turned to see a lady, who must have been around her mid 70s, looking across her and out of the window too. "At least where we are going it will be warm and sunny," she continued as the air hostess walked past to ensure their seat belts were fastened.

"Yes.." India replied quietly.

She turned back to the window and felt tears prickle the corners of her eyes. She could hear the woman behind her still chattering away but her thoughts were elsewhere and the tears now rolled silently down her cheeks. Suddenly she felt a warm hand on hers and turned to see the lady looking at her with concern.

"You ok, dear?" She asked softly, handing her a tissue.

India shook her head as she blew her nose. "I'm so sorry..." she started, when the air hostess summoned their attention to go through the safety procedure.

By the time this was complete they were gaining speed down the runway and before they knew it London looked like a toy town through the clouds.

The lady looked back over and smiled sympathetically. "I'm Anna," she said.

"India," she replied through the tears.

"That's a pretty name," Anna said. "Unusual .. I don't think I have ever met anyone with that name before."

"Thank you," India smiled at her. "My mum, she is a traveller and has spent most of her life exploring the world. She denies it but I'm sure I was conceived there. Could have been worse, I suppose.... could have been Turkey." India laughed despite herself and for what felt like the first time in a long time.

The lady looked at her with kind eyes "...and is that who you are off to see, is your mum in Thailand now?" She asked.

"Umm.." India sniffed. "Yes, something like that." Another tear rolled silently down her cheek and she wiped it away with the back of her hand.

Anna opened her mouth to speak just as the air hostess arrived offering drinks. She ordered two teas and handed one over to India.

India took it gratefully and let it warm her hands as she told Anna that her mum had always wished that they would travel the world together but she had never been interested.

She lifted the cardboard cup to her lips and took a sip of the warm, sweet liquid. "So," she continued slowly, "that is why I am going to travel with her now. We are going on the journey that we should have gone on a long time ago. Starting in Thailand, one of her favourite places."

India's mother had travelled all over the world, buying her first plane ticket the second she was old enough to do so. She had continued travelling with her daughter while she was growing up, only moving back to England when India was five and she decided she needed some stability in her life. But she always had itchy feet, she was a traveller at heart and felt trapped back in her hometown.

As India got older her mum begged her to go travelling together but India just didn't have the same desires as her mum. She was career driven and she wanted to meet someone, buy a house, settle down. Unfortunately things weren't going quite to plan, at 32 she had been made redundant from her dream job and was single after discovering her boyfriend of 10 years had been having an affair with her oldest and best friend, Josh.

"Oh honey!" Anna said, when India stopped for breath. "You can't beat yourself up about it. You can't change the past and what you are doing now is so lovely."

India smiled, "thanks for listening and sorry to talk at you for so long, I didn't realise how much I had been keeping bottled up."

Just a few hours later and the plane was making its decent to Bangkok airport. After collecting her backpack, India hugged Anna as they prepared to go their separate ways. "I hope this trip is everything you want it to be and more" she whispered as she leaned in to kiss her on the cheek.

As India stepped outside she felt the humidity hit her and quickly removed the jumper that had been keeping her warm on the air conditioned plane just a short while ago. She felt beads of sweat start to form on her forehead and wiped them away with her hand and quickly jumped in a taxi. Before she knew it she was in the hustle and bustle of Khao San Road as tuk tuks sped past her and groups of young tourists surrounded her, their chatter filling the air. Suddenly she felt very unsure of herself and wished with all her heart that she was back home. But, her thoughts quickly turned back to her mother and she shook her head, took a deep breath and as she clutched her bag of precious cargo tight to her chest, she began to make her way to the hostel she had booked for the night.

Arriving at her room she lay down on the bed for a rest, falling asleep before her head even hit the pillow, exhausted from the journey, her emotional conversation with Anna and the stress of being so far from home all by herself. She had vivid dreams that caused her to wake with a start. It took a minute for her to remember where she was and why, causing her breath to catch in her chest.

After finally falling back to sleep she woke up feeling refreshed and had a quick breakfast, before packing up her backpack and making her way down to the bus which would take her to the south islands.

Once seated she reached down into the bag and took out the diary that her mum had written when she travelled during her 20s and opened it to the first page. She would be following the exact same route. She looked up and gazed out the window, watching the world go by and imagining her mum doing the same.

A few weeks later after several buses, boats and stopovers she finally made it ... she was in Ko Phi Phi, her mothers favourite place in the whole of Thailand.

As India walked off the boat she took in her beautiful surroundings, the palm tree lined, golden sandy beaches dotted with beach huts and the turquoise sea that lapped at the shore in front of them. She smiled as she was directed to the one that would be her home for the next few days.

After dropping off her bag and changing into shorts she headed straight out to explore and quickly found the place she needed to book the trip she had travelled all this way for.

Feeling a bit lost, as her trip wasn't until the next day, India head back to her beach hut and changed into her bikini before settling down on the beach and opening her book. She read until the sun started to go down and then head back to her beach hut. After changing into a floral summer dress she sat down on the chair next to the window and looked out on the reflection of the moon as it danced on the waves outside.

She suddenly felt very alone and incredibly uncomfortable at the thought of heading out among the groups of young travellers she could hear laughing and drinking along the beach. Just as she resigned herself to getting into her bed her tummy rumbled loudly. Thinking about it, she couldn't remember the last time she had eaten.

She looked in the mirror and admired how the sun had started to brown her skin and lighten her hair, before running a pink lipstick over her plumped lips, picking up her purse and heading out the door.

She walked along the beach for a little while before stopping at the first restaurant she came to. She ordered a Massaman curry and a Chang beer and then sat back in her chair to watch the world go by. She was so busy watching the groups of youngsters

walk past with their buckets, sucking on the straws between raucous laughter, that she hadn't noticed the food put down in front of her.

"Oh!" she jumped, "thank you."

After devouring the food, she head over to the internet cafe across the road to check her emails. Nothing, junk, junk and more junk mail. She didn't know what she was expecting to find but felt disappointed all the same. She logged off and made her way back to her little beach hut to get some sleep ahead of her trip the next day.

The following morning she woke up early as the sunlight flood in through her window and got up, packed a small bag and headed down to where she would get the boat.

There were already quite a few people there and she joined the queue behind a couple and waited her turn to board.

It wasn't very long before they saw the high cliffs that sheltered the bay they were heading for - they must have been at least a hundred metres tall. As they approached them she could see the gap that they would be sailing through and inside it was so beautiful it took her breath away. As she waited to get off the boat she looked across the beach and back to the luscious greenery that sat behind it.

A man reached his hand out to hers and she took it as support as she climbed out.

"Thank you," she smiled.

"No problem," he replied, as he let go of her hand.

She made her way to the beach and sat there for most of the day admiring the view and watching the tourists as they splashed and swam in the crystal clear water.

It was only as the sun started to go down, she noticed how many boats had left and how quiet it had since become.

"Come on," came a voice from the other end of the beach, "it is time to eat."

India along with about 9 or 10 others had booked to stay the night on Maya Bay, an experience her mother had talked about many, many times.

She began to head towards where they were all sat and her mouth started watering at the smell of the food that wafted towards her. She sat down next to the man who had earlier helped her off the boat and smiled at him as he passed her down a bowl.

Once their tummies were full they made their back down to the beach to drink beer, and as a few started to play guitars they all began to sing along. India couldn't

remember the last time she had had this much fun. She let herself get lost in the moment and enjoy it for a few hours before deciding it was time and got up to leave them to it. Walking down the beach, listening to the music and their voices fading the further away she got.

She quickly grabbed what she needed from her bag and made her way down to the waters edge.

She could still here the music playing softly in the background as she paddled into the sea, she stood there for a while looking out at the silhouettes formed by the cliffs ahead of her and then remembered what her mother had said and gently kicked the water in front of her.

Just as she had described it lit up with the plankton below as it rippled into the distance. She held the box she had in her hand tight to her chest and felt tears form in the corner of her eye.

Walking a little further out, so the water was just above her knees, she carefully opened the box and took a small handful of her mother ashes, clenching her fist tightly around them and closed the box again. She kissed her hand before opening it wide and letting the wind take it from her open palm out to sea.

She stood there for a little while longer before making her way back to the sand where she lay back and shut her eyes for a moment, listening to the waves as they hit the shore and enjoying the feel of the breeze on her face. Opening her eyes again she gazed up at the stars scattered across the black sky above and thought this, this is what it means to be alive. How had she been content to sit at a desk 8 hours a day, 5 days a week - not to mention the time she had spent working outside of that to try and smash the glass ceiling that seemed to move further and further from reach. Her mother was right, of course, she only wished she had listened to her sooner. Life whizzes by at such a speed that sometimes you want to press pause, just for a moment, except you can't - you have to find some way of keeping up. But, it felt to India that, in this moment, time did stand still, just for a minute. Nothing else mattered, the day-to-day stresses and worries she had back home faded into insignificance.

Sitting up she saw that the others were already starting to get into their sleeping bags on the beach and so joined them, falling asleep to the sound of the waves, embraced by a blanket of stars.

Several hours later she woke up to see the leaves blowing softly in the wind above her head and made her way down to the water for an early morning swim.

The water felt cool as it started to rise up her leg to her tummy and she turned over as she lowered herself down into it, floating on her back, watching the clouds slowly move across the blue sky above. She shut her eyes and allowed herself to imagine her

mother doing the very same thing. It was so quiet, calm and peaceful - she could definitely see why it was one of her mums favourite places.

Feeling wide awake and refreshed from her swim she walked back to the beach and took her mums diary from her bag, opening it to the back page where she had listed all the places from her travels that meant the most to her. India put a tick next to the number one; Maya Bay, then looked down the rest of the list and smiled to herself. Suddenly she realised that the apprehension she had felt for this journey had disappeared and in its place was anticipation - she couldn't wait to continue and discover more of this world as she went.

The following two and a half months were spent exploring the rest of Thailand, as well as Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, using her mums diary to follow the very same route she did before ending up back in Bangkok to catch her next flight.

It was her final evening in this gorgeous country and walking through the busy streets of the country's capital city she felt nothing like the person who had first arrived here. Instead she felt like a true traveller, confident to be making this journey alone and happy to be exploring the world, and taking her mum for one last time.

She had already met so many amazing and interesting people, learnt so much and as clichéd as it sounds, started to find herself. She had first stepped foot here just three months ago a broken person and was leaving, while perhaps not fixed, with at least bandages to cover the wounds.

In a world of her own, thinking about the journey so far, she didn't notice the person calling her name until they were right in front of her. She opened her mouth in surprise and squealed "Anna!"

They women embraced in a tight hug, "so..." Anna asked, "was it everything you wanted it to be and more?"

"Oh," she exclaimed, "more, so much more! Do you have time to get a drink?"

Anna smiled and nodded as they made their way to the nearest bar where India told her in detail about her trip and the real reason she had been there.

"And, what is next?" Anna questioned when India stopped to take a sip of her beer.

"India," she chuckled. "What about you? I have told you so much about me, I don't know anything about you?"

"Me?" Anna looked out on the sea of travellers making their way down the street, each with their own story to tell. "I will continue to travel for as long as I physically can, until I have seen every corner of this incredible Earth."

India smiled at her, "do you know what? I now understand exactly what you mean. My mum always used to say to me that travel is the only thing you can buy that makes you richer. How very right she was, if only I had listened to her sooner, hey?"

Anna lifted her glass and took one final sip before standing up. "I better be on my way. Enjoy India," she winked, turning on her heel to become part of the sea of travellers that flowed past the bar and, lifting her bag on to her back, India did the same.