

Chapter 29 Delhi 2009



Wednesday, December 16, 2009, Delhi, India

I'm in Delhi for a conference. The conference starts tomorrow and runs through the afternoon on Saturday, here at the hotel that I'm staying at, Claridges. I made my arrangements to include an extra day before the conference, and an extra day after, so that I could see my friends here. In addition, I've now made appointments to meet with two former students of the Ford School to discuss the possibilities for our current and future students doing internships here with their organizations. So, I have quite a busy week planned.

The conference is organized by UNCTAD-India, the local branch of the United Nations organization, and its topic is "Global Economic Crisis: Opportunities and Challenges." I'll be giving the keynote address during the first session tomorrow morning, after which I'll be free for the rest of the conference. I don't know how much of it I will attend.

I arrived last night after midnight, as seems to be customary when one flies to India. I was met by a driver from the hotel. The drive in from the airport was the same as I've experienced the other times I've been here. Not much seemed to have changed. The moment I got off the airplane, I noticed the very familiar and unique smell of Delhi, which hasn't changed a bit, in spite of the considerable economic progress they've made since I first came here more than 15 years ago. I don't know if the smell is due to the polluted air or what, but it is not like I've smelled anywhere else, even in other very polluted cities like Beijing.

The airport, too, is the same as always, all marble floors and walls, and lights that are not quite as bright as elsewhere. That may change, though. My driver pointed out, just

across the road, a huge new terminal that is being built for the Commonwealth Games that are to be held here next year.

The ride into Delhi was as usual too, except for one thing: what I thought was an elevated highway being constructed at several points along our route. I've since learned that this may have been for a train not a road, or perhaps both. Either would be very much needed, as the road to Delhi is narrow and poor, with people all along the way, even in the middle of the night, either carrying things or just seemingly camped out.

Once we entered the city proper, the portion we went through was clearly New Delhi, not old Delhi. It is composed mostly of a grid of broad boulevards running beside walled compounds in which one could often only barely see the buildings inside. But outside the walls, between them and the road, little space was unused, being filled again with people walking, sleeping, camped in tents, or whatever. Almost every intersection of these boulevards takes the form of a traffic circle, with the result that one rarely sees a traffic signal.

Claridges hotel is old and luxurious. My room is large, with both a couch and a bed, and large flat-screen TVs opposite both. The floor is dark, polished wood made up of separate boards each maybe ten inches long. A control panel by the bed controls almost all the lights in the room, plus the temperature, the alarm clock, and even the motorized drapes. In the bathroom, the shower extends the length of one wall, and the shower head hangs high overhead from the ceiling and is a good eight inches in diameter.



Claridges, from Web 2025

I went down for breakfast after 9:00 this morning, to what's oddly called The Senate. This is a lounge with widely spaced tables, so that one doesn't have to be too close to other diners. That wouldn't have been a problem, though, since at that hour I was the only one. I ordered from the menu and was constantly aware of at least one waiter in the room behind me, ready at any moment to refill my juice and coffee. Ready, that is, until I wanted to leave, at which point they directed me to another room to get my check, where I waited some minutes as three people seemed to discuss how to ring it up. There is no shortage of staff in this hotel. [Reading this now, later, I realize that on subsequent visits there for breakfast I never asked for a check, but just left, since the breakfast is included with the room. I suspect now that the confusion among the staff that first day was because they were trying to satisfy my uncommon and unnecessary request.]

I spent most of the day preparing my talk for tomorrow and catching up on e-mail, on which I'd fallen woefully behind during the last couple of weeks. At 4:00, a car came to take me to the office of NCAER, where I met my friend Rajesh Chadha and chatted for a couple of hours until we went for dinner. We dined with Arvind Panagariya, who is here

from Columbia for just two days, and we had a good conversation. Dinner was at the India International Center, where I used to stay on my first several visits to Delhi. We were joined briefly, before dinner, by Vijay Kalkar, who seems to be Rajesh's most important contact in the Indian government. He's the one who arranged my entry, years ago, when I left for Delhi without a visa. He stopped by just to say hello to Arvind and me, and during the conversation he referred to Rajesh as my "disciple."

Saturday, December 19

I'm waiting now, in the afternoon, for Rajesh to pick me up. The conference is not over, but I decided not to attend the final day. It consisted of several parallel sessions with minor papers, and I felt I wouldn't be missed. Also, at 11:30 I was meeting here at the hotel with one of the former students, and the conference was taking place at a different location, to accommodate the multiple sessions, I presume. It would have been awkward to get back and forth.

The conference started on Thursday morning with three different people providing introductory remarks before I gave the keynote address. One of them introduced me as "the one and only Alan Deardorff," which I've never been called before, that I recall. Perhaps I'll add that to my website or put it on my business card. I presented the same talk that I'd given at an earlier conference in Bangkok, and it was very well received. I had lots of people afterwards tell me how much they liked it.

The rest of the papers that day were unexciting, at least for me. The conference room was laid out in a way I've never seen before. Between the front table on a dais, and the room full of round tables with white tablecloths for the attendees, was a row of brown leather couches. It was never clear who was supposed to sit in them, but as there had been a couple of people in them when I was speaking, I chose to sit in one of them for the other sessions. It was more comfortable than sitting at a table, but perhaps too comfortable. In the first session after lunch, I struggled unsuccessfully to stay awake. At one point I awoke, with my body feeling the same unpleasant drained sensation that I always get if I take an afternoon nap, which apparently I had done. I couldn't tell how much of the presentation I had just missed, nor how obvious it had been to others that I'd been asleep. If I were prone to snoring, it might have been a problem. Oh wait...

In the evening, we were to have dinner at the India International Center, where I had just been the night before with Rajesh. During the afternoon, a man approached me and said he would be driving me to the dinner, and therefore that I would not be taking the bus that had been arranged for the bulk of the participants. I didn't know who he was, although I've later realized that he was one of the more eminent professors here, and I should have known of him.

He and I sat together in the back seat of a rather small car. I don't know for sure, but I gather that the driver was his employee, and the car was his as well. At one point, at an intersection, the driver started to go straight and my host directed him instead to go right. Then, almost immediately, he corrected himself and said to go straight after all, causing

an abrupt adjustment. As we reached the other side of the intersection, the driver pulled to the curb and stopped, because he'd been flagged down by a policeman. My host thought the problem must be that we had twice changed direction in the middle of the intersection, so he jumped out of the car to explain and apologize that it wasn't the driver's fault. He spoke to the cop for several minutes, then got back in the car and we went on. It turned out that we'd been stopped not for our moves in the intersection, but because the driver had started across the intersection before the light turned green. However, my host apparently took full responsibility and settled the matter in part by mentioning his important guest – me. I was never clear whether he'd also provided a bribe, although I suspect he had.

At the IIC, we proceeded through the portions of the complex that I knew and into a wide yard beyond, where tables had been set, and a large buffet was being assembled. My host and I found a table and settled there, soon joined by a talkative American from Georgetown University and another Indian Professor, also talkative, retired from Delhi University, now teaching in Chennai. We spent the entire evening in conversation, with me having to contribute very little. Which was fine. I learned a great deal that evening, none of which I can now recall, but I know that at the time it was very interesting.

What I do recall, from when I went across the yard to get my food from the buffet, was watching them make the bread (naan). The cook stood next to what looked at first like a giant black cauldron. But the inside of the cauldron was empty, and its walls were hot, apparently because they somehow contained the hot coals for cooking. The cook would pick up a ball of dough from the table next to him, flatten it out with his hands, and then reach into the cauldron and slap it against the side where it cooked very quickly. Tossed out onto a platter, it was then ready for us to eat, within seconds of it having been baked. I gather that this is how naan is cooked in restaurants as well, although I wonder if that is what is done in US Indian restaurants. In any case, it gave me a new appreciation for naan, and I've been enjoying it at each meal ever since.

It was rather cold that evening, something I hadn't expected to ever feel in Delhi. There were braziers with glowing charcoal placed at intervals about the lawn, and one was next to the table where we sat. I was as close to it as I could politely get, but that wasn't enough, and I was thoroughly chilled by the end of the evening. I was tempted to get up from the table and just stand by the fire, especially during a period when two attractive young women were sitting next to it. But I couldn't see how to do that without seeming rude to my two talkative tablemates, so I did not. Only when we got up to leave at the end of the evening did I briefly move to the fire and try to warm up.

My host eventually – after most of the guests had left, presumably by bus – realized that we should leave, and he offered a ride to the American at our table as well as to me (the other Indian was going somewhere else). We walked to the front of the IIC, he phoned his driver, and as his car approached he decided that we'd be more comfortable without him. He sent the two of us on our way to the hotel, with instructions to his driver to return for him. That worked fine, but I still don't quite understand the reason. He could

easily have sat in the front next to the driver. Perhaps a person of his status just doesn't do that.

One noticeable change from my prior visits here: the use of mobile phones to call drivers. Always before, drivers were summoned by the "hailer" which was a microphone at the entrance to the IIC, connected to a speaker in the lot where the drivers parked the cars. One would give the attendant the number of the car, and he would announce it over the hailer. That system has now been supplanted by the wide use of mobile phones. Progress.

The second day of the conference started with my friend Simon Evenett giving a longer talk than I had. It was excellent – so good that I then asked him to visit my class this winter when he's in town (he comes to Ann Arbor regularly to teach in the business school) and give the same talk. From there it was again largely downhill, although I did like the talk given that afternoon by the talkative Indian professor from the night before. In the afternoon I sat at a table, in hopes of staying awake. I'm pretty sure I succeeded.

Yesterday evening Simon and I went to dinner. He had eaten before at a wonderful restaurant that he says Bill Clinton praised as the best in Delhi, and he wanted to return there. It was in the Sheraton Hotel, and it was not only wonderful, but priced accordingly. We split the tab evenly, and we each paid close to \$100. That amount seemed more to me then than it does now, having just spent close to \$40 on lunch. Most of my meals have been, and will be, provided by others, thank goodness. The falling dollar is taking its toll.

Simon had arranged a taxi for us to the restaurant. When we got there, the driver asked if we wanted him to wait for the return trip, and after asking the price, Simon said yes and got the driver's card so that he could phone him when we were ready. The price, round trip, was only about \$12, which seemed much more reasonable than the food. Simon asked if we should pay him now, and the driver did the shrug that seems very characteristic of Indian men. He said we could wait until later.

When we were done, Simon called him to come pick us up, and we waited in front of the hotel as a long queue of vehicles pulled up to collect passengers. When a taxi arrived, Simon said, "This is ours," and we got in. I complimented him on having paid attention so that he would know our car when it arrived. Right after that, however, the driver – who had already driven out onto the street and away from the hotel – asked over his shoulder where we wanted to go. Simon told him Claridges, but then looked abashed, and said perhaps this wasn't the right car after all. He felt very bad that we had stood up our own driver.

As we approached our own hotel, Simon's phone rang, and it was the driver. Simon apologized profusely, and said he would wait for him in front of our hotel to pay him. I gave Simon my share of the cost and left him there to take care of it. I presume it was settled amicably, as I saw Simon today and he didn't mention it. Saved again by

technology: the driver knew Simon's phone number from the call Simon had placed to him.

I saw Simon this morning as I was having coffee with the student. We were at a table out on the lawn in front of the hotel. The weather here is delightful, and sufficiently cool that I was happy to find a place in the sun. My reason for meeting with this student, whom I hadn't known before, was to look for internship possibilities with her organization. We had a nice chat, but she had already sent emails to our Career Services folks with most of what they needed to know, so I'm not sure that my meeting with her was necessary.

Sunday, December 20

Rajesh had said that he would pick me up at 2:30. At about 2:20 he texted to say that traffic was bad, and he would be 20 minutes late. When he arrived, to my surprise he had both his son Rajat and his daughter Lakshita with him. I knew Rajat well from previous visits as well as from his visit to Ann Arbor in 2000. I had met Lakshita as a baby and most recently in 2004 when she was five. Now she's ten, is almost as tall as Rajesh, and carries herself like a woman. At first, she was very quiet, understandably, but when she did speak, I was surprised that she seemed to have an English accent, and sounded very mature and womanly. We talked about that later – the accent, that is – and she said that her teacher has also mentioned this accent. We could not account for it. When I asked what she watches on TV, the answer was Hanna Montana, and I don't think that is British.

Rajesh drove us close to the center of Delhi where we planned to do some shopping. The traffic was so thick that this took some time. When we reached our destination, we were on the wrong side of the road, so he had to drive further and circle a large central park to return on the correct side. Here we pulled off into a narrow strip of land between the road and the buildings where cars were parked. This was already jammed almost full of cars, with hardly any place to drive. But we were met by a man with what looked like the handheld computers that rental car agencies use to check in cars when you return them in the US. We got out, Rajesh exchanged his car keys for a receipt from this device, and we walked on to do our shopping.

The cars were parked so close together that almost all seemed to be hopelessly blocked from ever leaving. I asked about this, and Rajesh said that the custom is to leave cars in neutral so that they can be moved by men pushing them, and that's how they extricate cars from this crush. Automatic transmissions are not common here, or this mightn't work.

Our first stop was for coffee. Rajesh first said that we could get coffee at McDonalds, but we went instead to a Café Coffee Day. This is a huge chain of indigenous Indian coffee shops, serving what you would find at Starbucks, and some snacks as well. Unlike Starbucks, waiters come to the tables to take orders and deliver what you order. I had a large cappuccino that was as good as any I've had elsewhere. Quite a change from my earlier visits to India when coffee was always Nescafé.

Adjoining the café was a clothing store, specializing in hand-woven fabrics and clothes from India. Rajesh wanted to buy something for Pat and me, so I did my best to identify a top that I thought she might like. I'm not often successful with that sort of thing, and I doubt I was this time, but the important thing, I thought, was to satisfy Rajesh's desire to buy her a gift. Rajat also did his best to persuade me to buy shirts for myself, and in the end, I succumbed to two of them, which I hope I will like. Presumably I have a better shot at pleasing myself than of pleasing Pat.

We went next to the Cottage Emporium, a four-story building where I had shopped on my earlier visits. I was glad to have this opportunity to shop for Christmas gifts for folks at home, and in addition, Rajesh said he wanted to buy another gift for Pat while we were here. We went through floor after floor of the emporium, which Rajat and Lakshita had never visited before. Rajat, especially, seemed to enjoy suggesting things for me to buy, and a few of them I did. Or rather I ordered them. The way it works at this place is that as you find things you want to buy, you give them to a clerk who gives you a receipt. You collect these receipts as you move through the building, then before leaving you submit them all to a cashier for payment. Then, once they are marked as paid, you submit them again at a counter to which all your purchases have been brought. In this case, Rajesh collected all the receipts, and then, when we went to pay, insisted on paying for all the items that I thought I was buying myself. I could not dissuade him. As a result, this Christmas my family will be getting many gifts from Rajesh, none from me.

It turned out that Rajat is quite familiar with the neighborhood of the Emporium, because the office he works in – of the Jordanian Airline – is nearby. After we finished our shopping, he insisted that we cross the street to visit the market there. The street was lined with many small shops, and a side street was filled with even more, as well as vendors with their wares spread out on tables between them. We spent a good deal of time exploring this. At one table, Rajat examined a display of wristwatches and suggested one to me. I rather liked it, and although it claimed to be a Rolex, it cost only about \$2. I bought it (or rather Rajesh bought it for me), and Rajat and Lashita bought watches as well.

All of this had taken some time, and when we returned to the lot for our car, it was sitting alone with no other cars close by. Apparently, the popular time for Saturday shopping had passed. Rajesh asked Rajat for the receipt for the car, which he had given to him for safekeeping. However, when we got to the exit from the lot, Rajesh could not find the receipt, even though Rajat had just given it to him. He was quite flustered for a moment, but the attendant was unperturbed and simply looked up the car in his handheld computer, collected payment, and we were on our way.

We headed then for their apartment, which would take us about an hour to reach in north-west Delhi, mostly because of the traffic. Along the way, as we discussed our afternoon together, Rajat asked me to check that I still had my wallet, since there had been some danger of pickpockets in the market, and he had warned me of this. In fact, even before being warned, I had kept my wallet in my front pocket and gripped it constantly with my

hand to be safe, so I was fine. But mention of this prompted Rajesh to check his own pocket and he found to his dismay that it was empty. He pulled to the side of the road and started searching his other pockets and various compartments in the car, quite upset that his wallet might have been pilfered in the market. I pointed out, though, that he had had his wallet in his hand when we exited the parking lot, since he took money out of it to pay for parking. That reassured him somewhat, but he still couldn't find his wallet for a while, until finally he noticed it over his head tucked on top of the visor. For some reason he must have put it there after paying.

From previous visits I remembered the ride to Rajesh's home as a long one, and this was the largely the same. There was one difference, however. Most of the way we were beside or under a massive overhead concrete structure that turned out to support the tracks of the new Delhi Metro. This is a train that runs underground in the center of the city and above ground in other places. The train connects Rajesh's neighborhood to the city center, and I still wonder why he and his son do not make more use of it. He says it's very nice, but I gather that he still commutes by car despite the heavy traffic and aggravation.

Their home is two flights up in a concrete apartment building that looks to be six or eight stories tall without any elevator that I could see. Rajesh's wife, Sangeeta, met us at the door, but she then busied herself with preparations for the meal. She has never been very talkative when I've been here, I think due to shyness since her English seems to be good. She served us tasty snacks in the living room, including a delicious, sweet-corn soup. I presented the gifts that I had brought from the US for each of them (which I had at all only because Pat had been thoughtful enough to realize the need for this and provide them for me). They were received very appreciatively, even though the gifts paled in comparison with what Rajesh had bought me that day.

We moved to the dining area for dinner – not really a separate room, but just the other end of the same room. In no time, Sangeeta had filled the table with dishes: chicken, mutton, rice, vegetables, yoghurt, and more. I had already eaten so much in the living room that it was a challenge to do justice to all of this, but I think I managed.

As we neared the end of the meal, I looked for the first time at my new watch and found that it said 11:30. I found that hard to believe, but it had indeed kept correct time, which had elapsed much faster than I realized. I said I needed to get back to the hotel, but Rajesh said I first must have coffee and dessert. They had struggled to find something I could eat for dessert as a diabetic, and they had come up with fresh fruit. Rajesh took apples and some other fruit – guava? – to the living room where he cut it up and added spices for our dessert. This was interesting, and probably healthy for me, but somewhat unexpected. I've never eaten apple chunks sprinkled with black pepper before.

We advanced very gradually toward our departure, and it was almost 1:00 AM by the time we left. We were delayed, for example, by looking at several photo albums that Rajat and Lakshita brought out. These included, in addition to their family and Rajesh and Sangeeta's wedding from years before, photos from my own various visits there and

Rajat's visit to the US. It does seem that Bob Stern and I have a special place in their family.

One more tidbit from this day: The night before I got an email message that read as follows: "Mr. Alandear My name is Udith Arora I study in class 5 th . I know you are coming on 20 th Dec . Please come to my house also . I know you have worked with Dr. Rajesh chadha . Come to Ashok Vihar , phase 1 , A block , A 94 ." When I got the message, before replying, I forwarded the message to Rajesh for comment. He replied that this was a neighbor boy, in the same class as Lakshita, and he had gotten my contact off my website. I then sent the boy a reply saying that I hoped to meet him.

I learned that afternoon that after Rajesh told Lakshita of this exchange, she phoned Udith and conveyed some displeasure. So, on our ride to their home, Rajesh insisted that she phone him and apologize for snapping at him. She then passed the phone to me to talk to him. At first, he did not answer at all, but eventually he and I had a nice conversation. I only realized after I returned to my hotel that I had not in fact visited him in person, as he had requested. That's too bad.

Today, Sunday, I got up early so that I could meet another former student, Prathap, who flew in from Hyderabad to talk to me. We talked for over two hours in the Senate Lounge, and I'd say that we hit it off very well. I regret that I never got to know him much at the Ford School, even though he was one of the best students in my course. We have a lot in common, including interest in economics, love of Ann Arbor, and a passion for movies.

I've now checked out of the hotel and am spending the afternoon in the lobby as I wait for my friend from grad school, Indira Rajaraman, who will pick me up at 4:00.

Monday, December 21

It's 2:15 AM and I just used the ladies' room in the airport lounge. The lounge is crowded with people, like me, waiting for a flight delayed three hours. There are two 1-seater rest rooms, one with a sign of a woman on the door, the other with a sign that has both a man and a woman. After I waited behind two people ahead of me and became first in line after a woman entered the second of these, a man came out of the one that seemed to be just for women. He told me it was OK for me to use, though on what basis I don't know. I was actually using it primarily to take my evening insulin shot, not that it matters, and I took him at his word.

Returning to yesterday, Indira appeared at about 4:20, and we first had tea in a hotel restaurant. "Tea" was juice for her, coffee for me, and a plate of French fries. We talked for almost two hours, as we like to do, sharing details of our lives. Then we drove to her home in the south of Delhi, where her daughter and husband were waiting. Unlike my last visit when a servant served us dinner, we all four went to a nearby restaurant. This was called Flaming Mustard, for no apparent reason. It served a choice of Indian, Chinese, and Italian food. We mostly had Chinese, because Chinese food in India is

different from that in both China and the US. It looked Chinese, but it tasted partly Indian. Best were some fried thin noodles and what looked like meatballs but were made of vegetables. I wonder now what the Italian food would have tasted like.

Indira's daughter, Kaveri, is recently returned from her studies in the US, where she did a bachelor's at Mt. Holyoke and a PhD in computational neuroscience at Harvard. She is now adrift, knowing only that she hates neuroscience and not at all what she wants to do. She's very pretty and vibrant, and I enjoyed talking with her.

To go to the restaurant, which was only 100 yards away, Indira drove Kaveri and me in her small car. The husband walked. The reason was obvious when I looked in the back seat of the car. It was more than half filled with a large suitcase. Indira explained that this was Kaveri's, and that it was in the car because their flat was too small to accommodate it. She had previously upbraided me for having our kids stay in a hotel when they visit, rather than staying with us at home.

After dinner, the two of them drove me back to my hotel to catch my ride to the airport. There I collected a package that Rajesh had left for me earlier in the evening. It seems that, before my visit, Rajat had emailed Pat to ask what she wanted from India. That day, Pat had responded, and Rajat went shopping. The package was several more items for me to squeeze into my baggage.

When I book flights for trips like this, I often select a later flight out of the connecting city than the system suggests. I do this in part to protect myself in case of delays and in part because I like waiting in airport lounges. As a result, the 3-hour delay in this case probably won't cause me to miss my connecting flight, but I won't have any time at all in the Amsterdam lounge. Instead, I'm getting more than my fill of the lounge here, which is crowded and not particularly nice. Also, I'd prefer to sleep.

Monday, December 21, somewhere over the Atlantic or Canada

I'm now on the flight from Amsterdam to Detroit. I was looking forward to this trip in part because I would be traveling business class all the way. That includes good service and a seat comfortable enough to sleep. On the flight from Delhi, I got none of the service at all, even though I'm sure it was wonderful, because I fell asleep at the start of the 8-hour flight and only woke up (except once to pee) when the pilot announced that we were beginning our descent to land in Amsterdam. I'd missed both a breakfast and a supper, plus drinks and movies. But I'd slept well, which was probably worth it.

It was apparently not enough, though. On this flight too I fell asleep at the start and missed dinner. I awoke about two hours into the flight, had some coffee, and am now refreshed and ready to read or work. Almost all around me are sleeping.

My flight from Delhi was delayed over three hours, so for many of the passengers, connections were a problem. Not for me, though, because as I mentioned before, I'd given myself four hours between flights. The main downside of the delay, for me, was

that I had to skip the lounge; I was in plenty of time for my flight, and I even stopped to have some breakfast (having missed it on my flight) before going to the gate.

Ahead of me at the coffee shop where I bought my breakfast was a woman who, when she tried to pay with a \$100 bill, was told “we cannot except dollar bills that large.” Since all I had with me was dollars and rupees, I had planned to ask first if they accepted dollars. This answered my question, as I would be able to pay with a \$20 bill. The poor woman dug through her purse for smaller bills, but didn’t have enough for what she had ordered. She left without her food, which the clerk then had to throw away and take time to record on a sheet that I presume was reserved for this common event. Yes, if I’d been more quickly thoughtful, I’d have offered to pay what the woman could not. But I wasn’t and I didn’t.

I am now, as you know, an experienced traveler. And these days I am even becoming rather experienced with the amenities of business class, even though I sometimes fail to take advantage of them. But after I awoke a little while ago, went to the loo and returned to my seat, I found that the buckle end of my seatbelt was trapped in the mechanism of my seat, and I was unable to extract it. When I left my seat, I had let that end of the belt hang down at the front. Then when I returned, before retrieving it and buckling, I had used the motors of the seat to change its position. The seat has a control panel with 17 buttons (really! I just counted them) to adjust its position. Whatever I had done had caused the buckle to be caught between the seat cushion and the armrest, below the metal support of the cushion. I tried everything I could think of, changing the seat position all ways that were possible and tugging at the belt. I knelt on the floor and tried unsuccessfully to reach it with my hand. Finally, I found a flight attendant and told her my plight. Without any of the reactions that I might have had in her place, she calmly came to my seat, pressed one of the 17 buttons, and simultaneously fished out the belt. Will I know how to do this next time? No. But I think I’ve learned now not to adjust my seat until I have the buckle firmly in hand.

I’m rather hoping there will be nothing more to tell you before we land. Ciao.

