

I Had A Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

By Susan E L Lake
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I love taking photographs. When my eye is behind my camera, every worry I have seems to disappear. Even so, though, there are those travel days when nothing works out. The weather is cold. The clouds are too cloudy. The windows are too dirty to see through. Or there aren't any window seats available. I've traveled huge distances and it seems to be all a waste of time and money. Do I just pull my covers over my head in despair? Sure, sometimes. But there's a better solution.

If I'm out to make memories, even horrible days are part of the experience so I've learned to try to record what's making the day awful. Later when I get home and look at my collection from that very bad day I am often rather pleased. I might not have fabulous photos of Mount Fujiyama, but I will have funny ones and sad ones and even charming ones.

So what photographs do I take? Usually I take close ones. These aren't close such as macro shots of the inside of flowers although sometimes that does work. Instead I try just to see what there is to see. I try to pay attention to the ordinary. I look around not for the BIG shots but the experiential ones.

A recent visit to a much anticipated penguin island is an excellent example of what I did wrong and what I did right. And no, I never do it all right. I just try to learn from my own mistakes. This 5.5 hour excursion to a place reported to be filled with Magellanic penguins should have been fun. It wasn't. We boarded a rather well used ferry for a two hour trip to the island and came back using up another two hours. The 1.5 hours on the island was misery personified. While we had dressed for chill, it wasn't enough. The gale force freezing winds and rain made it hard for me to even want to use my camera, but to add to our distress the island had no shelter for us and our ferry left us promising to return at the end of our stay. Yes, we saw penguins but mostly we just tried to figure out how to survive the experience.



My time with these Magellanic penguins reminded me that no bad day is unphotographical.



This typical photographic record is missing something important: people.

I did take penguin photos that I like, but what I didn't take were photos recording the experience as fully as I should. I took a pic of the sign we (and many others) huddled against trying to block a bit of wind, but I didn't let a single person photobomb the shot. I should have. The shivering lot would have made a great memory shot. I did take a few shots inside the ferry including the ugly seats I spent four hours staring at. I did take a quick snapshot of the lovely young people with sense enough to sleep through the boredom. So that one I did right. I also got a shot of the door with the no trespassing sign I memorized while I wondered what was out the door that we shouldn't go out. I did take a photo of a second boat that offloaded unsuspecting passengers onto the island but not our transportation. The huge fold down back of the ferry would have been memorable.

So next time I have one of Judith Viorst's "terrible, no good, very bad days," I'm going to remember the penguin island. What I regret is not that it was a day so cold I may never be warm again but that I let the circumstances keep me from creating memories. Not all travel days will be good but they will all be memorable including even a boring four hour ferry ride with no good windows out of which to look.

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The wisdom of youth: sleep when you can.



NO Trespassing. Hmm. Wonder why?



This is my only "proof" of how cold it was. I so regret not recording the sight of our ferry with the back end folded down to let us return.

