

**IF YOU ARE THINKING OF TRAVELLING
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
YOU MAY ‘ENJOY’ READING THIS STORY**

This is the story of a young, Hongkong couple, married just last December, that went to The Dominican Republic, a Caribbean nation that shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, on what could rightly be described as an adventure, mini-holiday.

As agreed by this medium, the names of the husband and wife have been omitted, but other than this agreed, journalistic compromise, all of the names, dates and events within this story have been confirmed as being accurate.

The Journey From Toronto, Canada, To The Dominican Republic

In the exact words of the husband:

‘We chose the Dominican Republic (for this five-day, adventure holiday) because we wanted a tropical vacation with nice beaches. At the time, Toronto was still quite cool. We flew direct to Punta Cana via WestJet and arrived at Punta Cana International (Airport) on Sunday, May 28th at 1:20 pm. The trip was booked through American Express and my wife (the name has been left blank, purposely) chose the hotel from the Relais & Chateaux group.’

The trip from the airport to the hotel, named Eden Roc at Cap Cana, lasted about one hour and the couple was transported via hotel’s motor car, a Cadillac Escalade, the chauffeur, being in the employ of the hotel.

The chauffeur did not ask for a tip, but one was offered, nevertheless, so that this English-speaking chauffeur was enriched by \$C20 (about \$HK116) for his one-hour of work.

(According to an advertisement of Eden Roc at Cap Cana, this five-star hotel boasts of having ‘34 rooms, private pools and private spa tubs, plus free WiFi and plasma TVs with satellite channels’.)

Arrival at Eden Roc at Cap Cana was a little before 3 o’clock.

It was the original intention of this Chinese couple to stay at the hotel until Thursday, June 1, 2017.

The charge for the one-bedroom suite was \$US950 per night (about \$HK7,410). The rear of the suite faced a forest area.

The suite comprised one bathroom, a private pool and the use of a golf cart, during the couple’s stay.

As the couple entered the suite, a basket of fruit and a note, welcoming them to the hotel, were among the first things that they noted.

Since the original suite was Number Four (which is an inauspicious number in the Chinese language since it suggests ‘death’), the couple requested, and were transported to, Suite Number 18.

Taking up this part of the story in the exact words of the husband:

‘When we entered our suite, we felt good. It was clean, bright and luxurious.’

After a late lunch, the couple determined to explore the hotel and its surroundings, and, with this idea in mind, they started out on a walking tour of the resort and, time permitting, to take some exercise in the hotel’s gymnasium.

However, it was soon discovered that the grounds of the hotel were comparatively vast and that the gymnasium was not a short distance from their suite.

The couple, therefore, smartly returned to their suite with the intention of driving their golf cart round the grounds.

It was on arrival back at Suite Number 18 that the couple was shocked to discover that which appeared to be, in their eyes, an attempted robbery of their goods, in full swing.

Taking up this part of the story in the words of the couple:

‘(The wife’s name is omitted, purposely) and I were outside our suite #18. I looked at it and saw our front door was open with people inside. I walked closer to the front door to see what was going on. When I stepped inside, I saw three men. One was counting the \$US20 I had left on the table earlier. The second man was standing with him, and a third man tried to explain to me in his limited English that they were Eden Roc Security and that our backdoor was open.

‘I was stunned at that moment because I had never been intruded upon at this level. I looked around our suite to see if there was anyone else. None was seen. I walked outside to join (name omitted), sitting on our golf cart. At this point, (name omitted) was not aware of the situation because she was on her mobile telephone.

‘I gathered myself (together) and told her (that which I had seen). (I told her) I saw them (the three men) counting (our) money on our table.

‘We quickly ran in to check our belongings.

‘My wife screamed and said our safe had been opened.

‘We check all our belongings. Nothing was missing.’

In respect of the in-room, suite safe, it had been locked, prior to the couple’s departure, the code number, having been set at 0328 by the wife.

As for the American banknotes, left on the table of the Suite Number 18, there was \$US20 in denominations of \$US1.00 bills and \$US5.00 bills. These had been obtained from the hotel’s receptionist at the time of checking in. The purpose of obtaining the smaller denomination of banknotes was in preparation to pay tips to deserving serving staff.

The pile of banknotes that the husband had left on the table in two stacks was being counted by the purported hotel staff and, then, on noting that interlopers were being studied by the husband, the banknotes were quickly returned to the table in one pile.

Continuing with the details of this incident in the words of the husband:

‘(name omitted) runs in in a panic and she screams and tells me the safe is open.

‘At this point, the three hotel staff should have been too far away from our suite to be able to hear (name omitted) scream.

'She then sees that our passports, my watch and some jewelry were still in our safe. I count that all \$20 was still on the table. That was all the valuables (that) we had with us and they were still there with us in our suite. Nothing was stolen from us.'

'Honestly I was very stunned when I saw three men in my room, one of them, counting my money. I didn't know what to do and we were very lucky they decided not to take anything.'

The husband said that he did not see any weapons in the hands of the three (purported) hotel staff members, but, in his words: *'They could have (had) weapons in their pockets.'*

Continuing the verbatim account of this incident in the words of the husband:

'Immediately after (name omitted) and I checked all of our belongings, we notified reception of the incident.'

'Coincidentally, at that point in time, electricity and the (tele)phone was down (frequent power outages) so I asked (name omitted) to contact reception in person while I stayed behind to protect our belongings.'

'(name omitted) came back about 15 minutes later and explained to me the resort's version of the story: That is the security staff regularly patrol resort grounds and they saw our backdoor had been opened so they went inside to keep a record of all of our belongings in case a real robbery had occurred.'

'I'm not sure why we did not leave (the hotel) that night. Maybe we were tired.'

'We contacted the front desk a few more times that night because their explanation and what we experienced didn't sit right with us.'

'We stayed that one night anyway, but we couldn't get much rest because we were so afraid.'

'In the morning, (name omitted) and I came to the same conclusion that we had to leave.'

The story continues with the statement that the couple spoke to hotel's receptionist, early the next morning.

Not satisfied with the hotel's interpretation of the version of the events, the couple threatened to call the police.

The receptionist stated that the acts of the three hotel staff members was *'standard protocol'* all over The Dominican Republic.

The couple demanded a full cash refund. But the demand fell upon deaf ears.

The Managing Director Offers A Compromise

After a meeting with the Managing Director of the hotel, a Mr Stefano Baratelli, at about 10 o'clock in the morning of May 29, it was agreed that the hotel would only charge for the one night's stay.

On Wednesday, May 31, the couple contacted the Canadian Embassy at The Dominican Republic in order to ask for assistance.

But to no avail: The Embassy did not respond to the call for help from the husband who, also, is a Canadian citizen.

On May 30, 2017, at 7:19 p.m., Mr Stefano Baratelli, the Managing Director of Eden Roc at Cap Cana, sent the following message via his iPhone to the husband of the couple:

'Dear (name omitted),

'I trust your e-mail finds you well and I hope you are enjoying your stay at the Hard Rock Hotel.

'I appreciate your e-mail and your suggestions about the procedures in place in order to avoid any misunderstandings for situations like these in the future. I will review this personally with our security team and see how we can improve the information process and our systems in order to avoid this perception to be repeated in the future would a similar situation arise.

'As explained during your meetings with our team, it is a procedure for our security team to go in the suite together with housekeeping once an outside door is left open. Regularly they enter the suite for a review, make a report of valuables found if any, and inform our Front Desk and Management of the situation for it to be passed on to our guests. By coincidence, at the exact moment our Head of Security was in the Suite with our Assistant Manager you returned to your suite and found them there.

'I apologize once again if this situation made you feel uncomfortable, and I will work in modifying this procedure taking into account your suggestions.

'I am very sorry to read you do not intend to return to Eden Roc in the future, and I really hope that there is something I can do in order to change your mind on this point. In the meantime, i remain at your service for anything you might need from our property and in the Dominican Republic.

'Best regards,

'Stefano Baratelli'

On June 1, 2017, at 12:24 p.m. Mr Stefano Baratelli sent another communication to the husband of the couple:

'Good evening (name omitted),

'Thank you for your e-mail.

'As explained in person and in my previous e-mail, I am very sorry that you feel this way about the Dominican Republic.

'I can assure you, however, that it is regular protocol in most hotel for the staff to review a room where the door has been left open by the guest. In this case, as explained previously, when you left your suite and left the door open, the staff who noticed it reported to security and housekeeping manager. They arrived in the room, checked for presence of the guest (in this case would be you and your wife but you were not in the suite), and noticed the belongings and valuables left outside of the safebox and with the guestroom door open.

'Would you not have returned to your suite, it would have been locked by security after making the report of what was found and you would have been notified. I understand your comment of possibly not entering the room and leaving someone positioned in front of the guestroom until you had returned, however, this might prove complicated would the guest have left the hotel premises for long periods of time.

'You might understand that what happened is actually to ensure your safety and security, and the results of it prove this as no belongings or valuables were missing after the guestroom had been left open and valuables outside of the safety box. It would seem strange for

someone with intent of stealing from you, to call the head of security and inform Front Office of the hotel about them going to the suite to make a report prior to going into your room.

‘We take security with the highest priority in our operations, and the people you found in your room were part of the management who had been called by the person noticing the open door you had left to your suite patio.

‘As I assured you during our meeting, there was no situation to be alarmed of and once again, I apologize if you did not appreciate our procedures. Eden Roc is located in a private gated community, where we do not recall any situation of theft or even lost & found items not being recovered.

‘As a gesture of goodwill we waived any penalty for early departure even on a situation where there was a cancellation penalty to be applied based on your decision of departing early. I’m sorry if you did not like the other resort either, but I’m afraid I do not see how else we could be of assistance to you.

‘... As you might have noticed, Eden Roc has an impeccable security record there as well. (name omitted), I can guarantee that what you experienced in our property was only procedures taking place and a misinterpretation of those. I am very open to have a further phone call with you in order to reassure you and your wife about this in order for you to feel better about your trip to the Dominican Republic. This is a very safe country, and Eden Roc is located inside one of the safest communities of the Dom Rep, and possibly the Caribbean.

‘Kind regards,

‘Stefano Baratelli’

Due to prospective legal considerations, **TARGET** () cannot comment on the events, faithfully recorded in the above story, and/or the explanations and/or excuses of Mr Stefano Baratelli with regard to his interpretation of the events that took place at Suite Number 18 in the afternoon of May 28.

But it does appear anomalous, to say the least, that the hotel’s staff should have determined to break into the locked, in-suite safe at Suite Number 18, isn’t it?

Mr Stefano Baratelli did not seem inclined to try to give an excuse or explanation in respect of this act of his purported staff members.

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