



AN *international* INCIDENT

*An ageing mother, airport customs rules and a hotel safe.
What, asks Rosie Green, could possibly go wrong?*

THE LAST INTERNATIONAL TRIP I WENT ON WITH MY mother, she declared her banana. Yes, such is her unswerving honesty that she threw herself upon the mercy of the scary moustachioed man at US customs and confessed she was carrying contraband fresh produce. Cue a two-hour wait and an excruciatingly thorough search of our luggage.

Now I am doing it again. Going away with my septuagenarian mother on a voyage of rediscovery (to see the Swiss Red Cross hospital she went to when she was eight). Within seconds of getting in the car I revert to a hormone-ravaged Kevin the teenager-type who is mortified by her every action (flashback to being 13 and my mother, on the escalator in Boots, with a packet of tampons held *above her head* in case anyone thought she was going to pocket them between floors).

There is a gulf between my and my mother's preferred approach to travel. I like to affect a *laissez-faire* air, while she is all about flapping and pre-planning: packed lunches, Thermos flask and traveller's cheques (ordered six months in advance). When we arrive at Luton, she pulls out a 'diagrammatic map' of the airport and its facilities. I can hear myself make a wailing noise I haven't made since A-ha's Morten Harket adorned my wall.

We were not able to avail ourselves of the facilities, however, because she had bought one of those combination locks on a strap for her case and, when the check-in woman asked if she had any sharp objects in there, she felt compelled to tell her about some nail scissors. Which the check-in lady then asked to see. Cue a very long 10 minutes, while my mother tried to recall the combination, running (out loud) through every family birthday she could think of. This was then followed by frantic rummaging through neatly pressed briefs.

When we arrived at the very smart Victoria-Jungfrau hotel in Interlaken, my mother was unbothered by the fruit, and could take or leave the marble bathroom, but was overjoyed to see the safe. She put things in, she took them out. Passport. Purse. The 1996 mobile phone in

Liberty-print case. Passport back out. Pearls in. Remove itinerary. Forget code. Again. The concierge only had to come up three times to reset it.

The trip, while emotionally enriching, did bring home to me how I am slowly turning into my mother. Here's how:

- Failing to apply a verbal filter. At a children's party a particularly strait-laced dad bought me a coffee. As I poured the milk into our mugs, it spilt on the table. 'Ooh,' I said, as he picked up his dripping cup, 'let me wipe your bottom.'
- Believing the parking space directly outside my house is mine and feeling affronted if someone else has parked there.
- Arriving with Christmas presents in July to save on postage.
- Washing up directly after friends leave. You know you've reached maturity when the thought of vin rouge-stained glasses and crusted-on lasagne at 6.45am is too much to bear.
- Wrestling - physically wrestling - to pay the bill in restaurants. 'No, let me!' 'Allow me!' Not long 'til I'll be rolling


around outside Wagamama, battling with my friends, tummy-control knickers on display.

Things I will most certainly not do. Well, probably not; not in the near future anyway:

- Wear Transitions lenses. Driving through tunnels with my mother necessitates extra life insurance - bright sunlight into sudden darkness equals near-total blindness, while they adjust. My celebrity best friend Amanda Lamb had all her wedding photographs in *Hello!* ruined by a break in the cloud that made her over-sixties relatives look like Sicilian Mafia.
- Be reticent about turning on my mobile. My mother's is kept in a case, which is inside a zip-locked plastic bag and is used only for Real Emergencies. Like full-scale nuclear war.
- Abide by the rule that no money will be handed over on the internet - but tell a person in a call centre *everything*.

- Worry about food going off on the way home from the supermarket, then eat stale bread with the mouldy bits cut off.

But whatever her foibles (erm, our foibles), I feel very lucky to have her. I do. In fact, let me pay for the lattes, Mum. My treat. No, *seriously*.

Otherwise, lady - osteoporotic bones or not - we're going to have to take this outside. 

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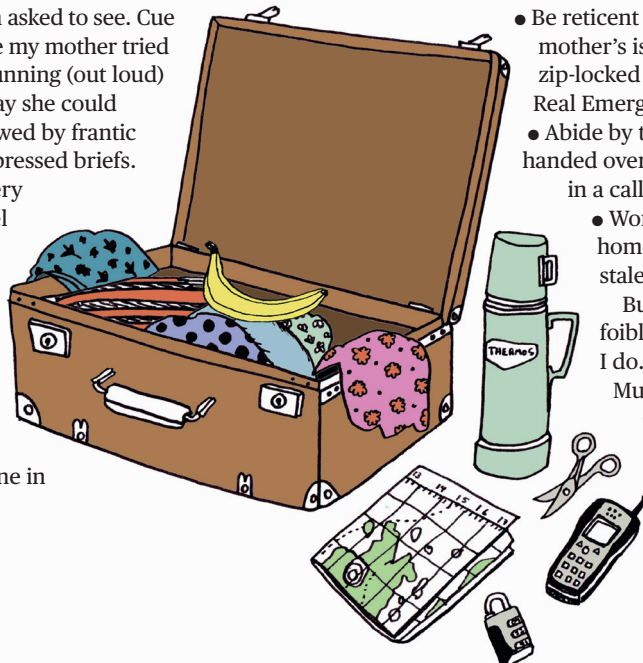


ILLUSTRATION ZOE MORE OFERRALL; PHOTOGRAPH JESS REFTEL; EVANS AND MARTIN REFTEL; HAIR AND MAKE-UP LINDSEY POOLE; STYLING FELICITY KAY; ROSIE WEARS: COTTON TOP; CHEAP MONDAY; COTTON TROUSERS, JAEGER; SOPHIA WEARS: COTTON DRESS; BODEN; ARTIE WEARS: COTTON JUMPER; BODEN; JEANS, LEVIS AT JOHN LEWIS