



## EDITORIAL

In a previous editorial [2012] TLQ 89 I made reference to my co-editor, Joe Harbaugh's comment that if you want to fix the tourism product you start with the taxi drivers. But it isn't always the drivers that are the problem – sometimes it's the passengers.

Those of you familiar with Kings Cross station will have seen its recent transformation from gloomy grime-ridden post-Victorian slum into a gleaming modern 21st century hub that sits proudly next to the Eurostar terminal at next door St Pancras.

As part of the modernisation the taxi rank has also been remodelled. Previously there was one queue for all passengers and the taxis would pull up at the front of the queue one at a time, passengers would be loaded and then the taxi would pull away and the next taxi would take its place. Not the kind of quick loading that would appeal to Disney. Now however there are four lines for passengers with metal barriers dividing them and four spaces for taxis to pull up at the head of each queue. At the end of each queue is an overhead sign saying 'Queue here'.

On exiting recently from the station in order to take a taxi we were surprised to see all the passengers, for no apparent reason, in just one line – and no one in the other three. We know the British like to queue but this seemed to be taking things to extremes. Not wishing to participate in this foolishness we entered one of the empty lines and went to the head of the queue – not anticipating the furore this would cause.

Almost immediately an intimidating chant of 'Queue jumper. Queue jumper' broke out interrupted only by angry shouts of 'Cheat, Cheat' and 'Get back to the end of the queue'.

Undeterred by the stupidity of our fellow travellers we simply jumped into the first taxi that pulled up at the head of our queue but as I was loading our cases into the back one of the aggrieved queue members pushed me aside and tried to remove the cases. An unseemly tussle followed and insults were exchanged but fortunately there was no real violence. Eventually I prevailed and we were able to drive away in the taxi – considerably shaken but confirmed in our belief that we had been the victims of a form of collective ignorance.

But taxi journeys and taxi drivers are not all bad. A fine example would be our taxi driver on a recent visit to Barbados, the delightfully named Cynthia Hercules, a young lady admirably fitted to clean out the Augean stables of the taxi industry. Cynthia was a taxi driver because she loved the job and she loved the people she met and this was immediately obvious.

She had had a short but colourful employment history – what might be termed, to use a dreadful phrase, a portfolio career – the highlights of which she shared with us. After acquiring a degree in Psychology and Sociology from an English University she returned to Barbados to work for a psychotherapist but when that didn't appeal she turned to working in a nail studio and then acquired work as a masseuse before becoming a taxi driver. While in England she had lodged with her uncle and aunt. The uncle had walked off the boat in Liverpool two decades earlier and never returned to Barbados, remaining in England as an illegal immigrant. Her aunt was Chinese and also an illegal and

was constantly worried that for some reason Cynthia's presence in the house would attract the attention of the authorities.

We had hired Cynthia to take us to the Concorde Museum at the Grantley Adams International Airport just outside Bridgetown. We were the only two paying guests in the huge hangar that housed one of the de-commissioned aircraft and even many years after it ceased to fly the sight of it was awe-inspiring. What was almost as impressive was the way that Cynthia, who had chosen to enter the museum with us, engaged the museum guide in a passionate debate about the reasons for the Concorde crash at Charles de Gaulle Airport in July 2000.

The guide, who was supposed to be the expert in such matters, was compelled to give ground to Cynthia, who had clearly done a considerable amount of research on the topic and was not to be denied. We just sat back and enjoyed the moment.

Later, we were driven around the neighbourhood of the airport and she pointed out where all her family lived, including her grandmother's house sited almost under the flightpath. She recounted how her grandmother would drag her out of the house to watch Concorde land – on one occasion 'with the Queen onboard'!

Altogether the experience was charming and heart warming and went a long way to redressing the balance of previous awful taxi experiences.

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