Terrorism

I'm not quite sure exactly when I realised I was being stalked by terrorists. Funnily enough it's not really the kind of thing that crosses your mind on a regular basis, unless perhaps you live in the White House. But anyway, once it had occurred to me, I did a quick mental check and, yes - *every single country* I've been to in the last 5 years has had terrorist problems. Coincidence? Let's see.

The trend must have started in 1999, when I visited Tanzania about a year after the Dar Es Salaam embassy bombing. No big deal there. Then in 2001 I went to Bali on holiday, two weeks after the 9/11 attacks - one year later (almost to the day) my favourite nightclub in Kuta gets bombed. Again, no big deal, I was long gone. Then I started working as a travel writer.

First job: Morocco, early 2002. No problems, everything fine, six months later - Casablanca gets bombed. Second job: Kenya, summer 2002. No major problems, lots of punctures, the occasional unintentional detour in bandit country and a couple of face-offs with large mammals, nothing unusual there; six months later - rocket attacks on planes, Mombasa gets bombed. Anyone else starting to see a pattern?

2003: Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan. To be fair, all of these places had quite enough trouble of their own before I stepped in, but in case I'd thought that was the end of it: oh no. One month before I arrive three tourists blow themselves up on a landmine in Niger. I hitch a lift out of Algeria with a group of Germans, driving their own vehicles, without a guide - two weeks later a group of Germans, driving their own vehicles, without a guide, gets kidnapped in roughly the same area, sparking a six-month hostage crisis.

And the list goes on. While I'm in Niger there's a huge explosion in Lagos, Nigeria (which I was also writing about, from a safe distance), and rebel fighting cuts off both the north of Chad and the west of Sudan. Finally, I reach Khartoum to find that the Iraq war's just kicked off, and after 2 days the students start rioting - cue regular explosions and some slightly comical police brutality.

By now I'm starting to feel shellshocked every time it goes quiet, so some European work seems like a welcome relief. Late 2003: Germany. Come off it, this had to be fine, right? Well, think again. Two weeks before I get there, there's a bomb alert in Dresden Hauptbahnhof; two weeks after I

leave, there's another one at Frankfurt which practically shuts down the entire country's rail network for a day. If I wasn't paranoid before, I sure as shit am now.

Admittedly, my most recent job, in Berlin, was remarkably devoid of any terrorist activity (maybe they figured they'd done Germany already). Then again, just two days after I email my Commissioning Editor to say I'd quite like to go to Turkey next, someone parks a carload of C4 next to the HSBC in Istanbul... I had even thought about trying to nip over the border into Iraq while I was there, but I idly mention this to a friend and what do you know - Mosul gets bombed. At this point I seriously start thinking about putting 'Harbinger of Doom' on my business cards and planning a trip to Alistair Campbell.

I can't quite decide whether to consider myself jinxed or just really lucky - as Kurt Cobain once drawled, "Just because you're paranoid/Don't mean they're not after you". Either way, I'm certainly not going to try and get through US immigration until I've renewed my passport and got rid of all these incriminating stamps. Hell, if I didn't have blue eyes I'd probably be on the waiting list for Guantanamo Bay already. I guess there's only one thing left for me to do: does anyone else want my job? anyone??

Tom Parkinson is a freelance journalist and writes for Lonely Planet guidebooks. He never used to worry about this sort of thing.

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