

In a twist over towels

Former MediaCorp Radio Gold 90FM DJ STEVEN SHALOWITZ is on a round-the-world journey after leaving Singapore. Having left Tel Aviv, the Chicago resident turns up in Amman without a towel.

IF THERE'S any truth to the expression "how you travel is who you are", then I must be schizophrenic. That's because I never seem to stick to one "class" of travel.

In Bangkok, for example, I stay at the minimalist Metropolitan Hotel yet prefer eating outside the swanky property on the gritty streets, at a wobbly table together with hookers, truckers



NO FRILLS: Teatime at Wadi Rum.

and accountants.

And there was my last trip through Cambodia where I hired a Mercedes taxi to drive me from Phnom Penh

to the sleepy seaside community of Sihanoukville where I stayed in another minimalist hotel — a two-story walk-up with rooms featuring nothing but a mattress and a television which, due to a faulty satellite, would change channels every two minutes.

But no matter where I've stayed, the things I absolutely insist upon are clean bedsheets and towels. Indeed, like most travellers, I've discovered enough DNA samples on both to fill an entire season of *CSI*.

So, after checking into my three-star hotel in Amman, Jordan, moments after midnight, I was fully prepared to expect the worst.

THE SHOWER CAN WAIT

Khalid, the night duty manager, showed me to my room. It was dimly lit with a trail of crumbs snaking across the ripped carpet.

outofoffice
explore with attitude

With these aesthetic mishaps, I was sure I'd find something suspicious between the sheets. I peeled back the blankets and, to my surprise, found only crisp white linens that looked inviting.

The hotel laundry seemed to be fully functioning. I peeked into the toilet — but alas, no towels.

Given the late hour, Khalid explained, the supply room was closed and fresh towels would be delivered first thing in the morning.

I called reception the following morning asking for my two fresh towels. "I'm sorry, Sir" a voice apologetically offered at the other end. "The housekeepers haven't yet arrived. We'll have the towels delivered to you shortly."

I put my clothes on from the day before and headed downstairs for a breakfast of strong coffee, olives and goat cheese and inquired at the front desk when I might expect the delivery.

"Soon. Very soon," I was told. I had the entire day planned and didn't want to miss any of the ancient

wonders in the city the Romans called Philadelphia. The shower could wait.

NO TOWELS FOR AMERICANS? Rummaging through my duffel bag, I discovered the "fast drying towel" I packed for my Libyan desert-journey several weeks before. I hit the jackpot.

But when I returned that night, despite earlier promises, I had no towels.

A call to reception was like a bad recording from the night before: "The supply room is closed. We'll deliver fresh towels to you first thing in the morning."

The volley of calls requesting towels and not receiving them marked each of the four days of my stay.

I used Amman as my base to discover the fascinating northern half of Jordan, often missed by tourists who simply drop in on Petra.

Truly, if there was any nation where I needed a regular



DAY TRIP FROM AMMAN: The top of Mt Nebo, from which Moses looked down onto the Promised Land.

shower, it was Jordan — to wash off the dust of 2,000 years from the ancient Roman city of Jerash, to scrub after baking my body in a layer of black mud from the bottom of the Dead Sea.

While I had my own towel, I was determined to get one from the hotel. I would even break my rule of using a dirty towel just to see that they had a towel.

I later learned that the hotel occupies the former US Embassy building in Amman. Were they denying me a towel as "payback" for my government building such an unsightly structure in the midst of their fair city?

EVEN MOSES HAD TOWELS

On my final night at the hotel, I returned from a day visiting the desert castles to the east of Amman,

including the one at Azraq used by T E Lawrence (aka Lawrence of Arabia) as his headquarters during the winter of 1917.

Surely he must have been given a towel when fighting the Ottomans.

At this point, it was futile to expect towels waiting for me when I returned to my room. I was already planning my next day, which included a visit to Mt Nebo where Moses looked down on the Promised Land — promised, I thought, because they probably had towels over there.

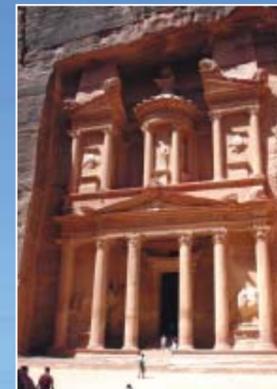
I opened the door to my room, the street lamps illuminating it just enough for me to notice something on top of my bed. I turned on the light and smiled.

There, carefully laid upon the shimmering gold floral bed spread was not one but two sparkling white towels folded origami style.

The one on the left was in the shape of a crane.

The one on the right? It was in the shape of a heart.

MORE TRAVEL STORIES
PAGE 62



GEMS OF JORDAN: The Treasury (above) at Petra, a top attraction in Jordan, and the desert castle at Azraq (below) that Lawrence of Arabia used as his headquarters in the winter of 1917.



PHOTOS: STEVEN SHALOWITZ



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Angelina's now a Cambodian citizen



GOODWILL HUNTER: Actress and UN goodwill ambassador Angelina Jolie, pictured at the Worldwide Orphans Foundation Gala in October in New York City, is now a citizen of Cambodia, where her adopted son Maddox (inset) was born.

NEW YORK — Hollywood star Angelina Jolie has received a Cambodian passport after being made a citizen of the impoverished South-east Asian country.

The actress can use it when she visits the native land of her adopted son, Maddox, said Stephan Bognar, executive director of the Maddox Jolie project in Cambodia.

The project, managed by San Francisco-based WildAid, promotes wildlife conservation and community development in a former Khmer Rouge guerrilla stronghold in north-western Cambodia.

Bognar said the actress was "ecstatic and thrilled" last month when he handed her the passport and an official copy of a royal decree giving her Cambodian citizenship.

"Maddox was there and she

showed him the passport," he said.

"It gives her a closer link, a stronger bond" with her adopted son's native country, he said.

Jolie has had a simple wooden hut built to stay in when she visits Cambodia, Bognar said.

He said he did not know when Jolie's hectic schedule as a mother, actress and conservationist would allow her to next visit Cambodia.

Jolie has donated US\$1.5 million (\$2.54 million) to the project in the past three years. The project trains villagers in sustainable economic activities in the hope that they will conserve natural resources.

It also aims to provide supplemental income for government rangers to protect wildlife and forests in the former war zone, Bognar said. Parts of Jolie's adventure movie *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* were filmed at Cambodia's famed Angkor Wat temple.

The actress adopted Maddox three years ago and has recently adopted an orphaned baby girl from Ethiopia. —AP

SUDOKU plus

HOW TO PLAY: The rules are easy. Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.

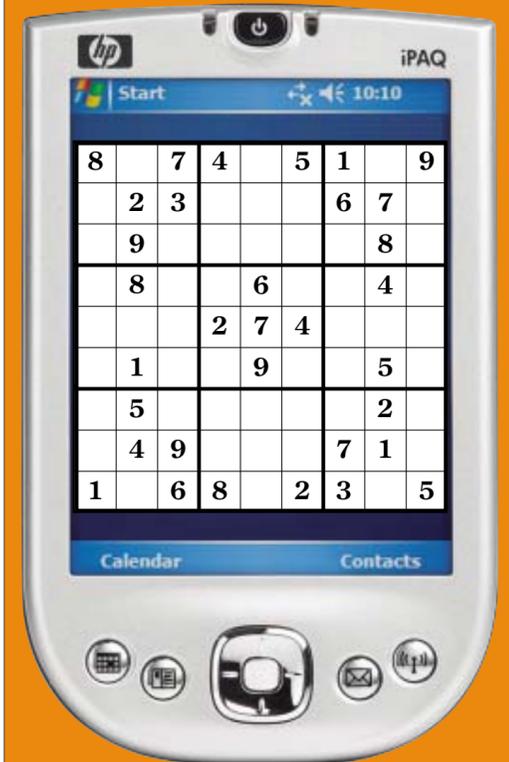
YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	7	6	5		
7	5	3	6	8	1	9	4	2
4	8	6	9	2	7	5	1	3
6	3	8	1	7	5	4	2	9
5	1	4	2	9	3	6	8	7
9	2	7	8	4	6	3	5	1
2	4	1	7	6	9	8	3	5
8	6	9	3	5	2	1	7	4
3	7	5	4	1	8	2	9	6

What are your views on Sudoku Plus? Email us at plus@newstoday.com.sg



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