

By Doug Miller
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"Travel in the Time of Covid"

I returned from a River Cruise along the Danube from Nuremberg, Germany, to Vienna, Austria, followed by a flight from Vienna to Glasgow, Scotland. The plan was to spend two nights and three days in Glasgow, and I got caught in Covid-19 Hell. I was scheduled to depart Glasgow on Monday, 30 May 2022, at 6:15 AM and had to have a negative Covid Test from a testing facility (self-testing was not sufficient) within 24 hours of departure. Of course, when I had the test at one of the few sites open on Sunday to do testing, it came back positive for Covid-19.

Whoops. Glasgow was celebrating the Queen's Diamond (or perhaps, Platinum?) Jubilee for the entire week from Monday, 30 May through Sunday, 5 June. Rooms had been booked in hotels in central Glasgow for months in advance. I was faced with two of the hazards Mark warns about in *Map and Compass*: getting Covid and being caught by local holidays. I managed to extract one extra night from my first hotel (Monday), and they found me a room in another member of their chain for Tuesday. The second hotel found rooms available at yet another member of their chain some 11 miles outside central Glasgow.

I took a (quite expensive) cab ride to the outlying hotel and made a serious error of judgment. Being a very honest individual, when the desk asked why I was visiting their community, I admitted that it was because I had tested positive for Covid-19—a bad, bad mistake. Suddenly I was informed to leave their lobby and the building immediately. "Where can I sleep tonight?" "I don't know, but it won't be here." No appeal worked. Get out. I could stand in the 60-degree temperature outside to call for a cab. Of course, the wireless connection to the telephone system didn't extend to their parking lot. I finally got them to call a taxi for me to return me to central Glasgow, where the hotels were a bit more forgiving of quarantining guests. Just as I left, the desk clerk came a bit closer and said, "At your next hotel, don't tell them you've tested positive for Covid."

The cab arrived, and we started back. On the way, I noticed a sign for a different hotel chain near the airport and had the cab stop there. They put me up (in a very expensive room) for one night. I got back to central Glasgow, got two more nights at my second hotel, and my daughter, back in the United States, booked yet another one-night room at yet another hotel near the airport. I was still hoping to get my "free-to-fly" document from the US.

Throughout the whole changing hotels exercise, I had run out of my extra medication stash, so interocular pressure was rising in the left eye, blood sugar was running amok, and COPD was making walking any distance "challenging." I had established intermittent contact with my physician in Houston, and he sent .pdf files of the required prescriptions. Of course, they were signed by a US physician and had to be re-written and signed by a UK physician. Again, oops. The Queen's Jubilee. Find a local physician's office in central Glasgow with unbooked open hours. I was fortunate; I had found one shortly after the Covid test. I took the .pdfs to her, and she gave me a quick exam (and said, "You don't look like you're suffering from Covid-19, type 2 diabetes, or high blood pressure), re-wrote and signed the prescriptions. The pharmacy in Glasgow accepted and filled them.

I got to my final room, near the airport. I received a text from my US physician, stating that I was no longer showing signs of Covid-19 infection and that it had been 10 days since my positive test, so I should be allowed back into the US. The hotel turned that into a paper copy, which along with the paper copy from my positive test, would probably get me through the airline's scrutiny in Glasgow. I got to the hotel to get a cab for myself at 3 AM and went to the airport. My airline was not a "permanent resident" of the Glasgow airport, so it was a bit difficult to determine which line to stand in to check in for Amsterdam. The one intelligent choice I had made during all of the preceding was to tell the travel agent in Houston (whom I had kept informed about the foregoing) that "I don't care what it costs: change my tickets from Glasgow to Amsterdam, and especially Amsterdam to Houston, to Business class. Spend as much as you need; just buy an upgraded ticket."

The "Business class" ticket simplified the airport line confusion. There was a line marked "Premium" traveler (not Business or anything else intelligible) with one person in it, and the adjacent lines with lots of people with lots of children and lots of luggage. I asked the person in the first line if that was the line for business class. He said, "Yes." We waited for the gate agents to show up and check people in. And waited. And waited. Finally, check-in began. I presented my documents. They were examined carefully and were the objects of discussion among a few agents. They were ultimately accepted. We were getting close to departure time. The airline's Mobility Assistance (wheelchair) attendants came and got me to the boarding gate with a few minutes to spare. One return hurdle down.

I arrived in Amsterdam, had another harrowing wait for a wheelchair, and went from one end of Schiphol to the other to check in for Amsterdam. Another thorough check of my Covid documents, more concerned discussions about them, culminating in acceptance. I got wheeled to the main boarding ramp (as the business class ramp already had the aircraft door closed) and staggered to my business class seat. Second hurdle down.

Shortly after takeoff, there was an announcement (first in Dutch, then in English) that we should expect an inspection of our Covid paper on arrival in Houston during the Customs and Immigration and Border Protection baggage claim process. I did manage to sleep a bit on the flight. My seat reclined; I was given a real pillow instead of using the neck pillow. I got my carry-on down from overhead, pulled out a short-sleeved shirt and shorts, changed into them in the toilet, returned to my seat, re-stowed my carry-on, wrapped myself in the airline blanket, and slept the rest of the way. Nearly there.

In Houston, Mobility Assistance showed up reasonably soon after we landed, and I got a cart-ride heading to Customs and Immigration and, ultimately, baggage claim. As we approached the Customs and Immigration gates, I noticed a sign for Global Entry. I turned to the Mobility Assistance person and told her I had a Global Entry pass. She said, "And no checked baggage?" I told her no, it was all on the wheelchair. She turned down the Global Entry line, stopped at the first machine, and adjusted it with a downward tilt, so I wouldn't have to stand. My picture was taken, and a receipt was printed with the image, and we headed to C&I. The inspector looked at my receipt and said, "Welcome home, Mr. Miller." No Covid questions. No "Anything to declare." Just "Welcome home." The final hurdle.