

FUNNY BUSINESS

Souvenirs of a Carefree Me

The Things We Buy on Vacation Are Often Reflections of the Hipper, Sexier, More Adventurous Women We Long to Be



By Jane Resnick

Does this happen to you? I was on vacation, and I made one of those because purchases. Because for more than two seconds in a row, away from home, I thought I could be someone else, someone hipper, sexier, wittier, more spontaneous and adventurous.

This one was a small purchase, but money loses value on vacation. If the purchase works, it's worth it. I bought a slickly wrapped package with all the dry fixin's for Southwestern Turkey Chili, a one-dish, food-fashionista dinner—ethnic, low-carb, high-protein, and good for you. I must've thought, "Olé, I'll be chic in the kitchen."

Yet this is something I would never cook, and no one in my family would ever eat. Worse, when I unzipped my suitcase at home, my clothes reeked of cumin, corian-

der, oregano, and chili peppers, *Eau de Fajita*. My underwear was spicy in a way that Victoria's Secret never imagined. I tried storing it in the pantry, but my kitchen smelled like Taco Bell, so I keep it in the garage, where I hope it will repel varmints.

I have any number of these objects staring down from my shelves, flouncing in my closet, tarnishing in my jewelry box, things I bought during a bout of what I think of as Vacation Shopping Syndrome—VSS—not exactly a disease, but not a normal state of mind, either.

Last year, I found myself in a fur store in a Colorado ski town, standing before a mirror in a deep chocolate shearling coat with a rather fancy collar and cuffs. My daughter, who has swift and generous instincts with my money, is doing the appraising.

"Buy it," she says.

"Maybe it's a little ostentatious," I say, my real self talking.

"It's not. You always say you want one of these," she says. "And it's on sale."

I have wanted a coat like this, but it is a lot of money. I ask, "Are the buttons crooked? Seems like they're on an angle."

"Stand up straight," my daughter says, giving me back the words she's had to hear all her life. "It's not the coat, it's you."

And that's it. VSS overcomes me. In "you," I hear "drab, penny-pinching, homebody" me. Must I be a slouchy, black-wool-coat woman forever? I need this coat. I deserve this coat.

When I get home, I try it on for my sister. I stand up straight.

"The buttons are slanted," she says. "You look like a Hershey bar hung on a crooked hanger."

The coat now lives in the cedar closet, along with my real Norwegian wool sweater, which

seemed so, well, Nordic, at the time I bought it, but really it makes me look like a short milkmaid without the braids.

Once, though, Vacation Shopping Syndrome led me to what I was after. In Katmandu, a city I love for its hushed temples tucked among chaotic street life, I was searching for a Tibetan *tanka*, a painting on cloth related to the life of Buddha—a clear case of VSS, as if I could morph into a Buddhist if I owned one. I was sidetracked by a jewelry store, not a surprise. The salesman was about my age, and flirting was part of his pitch.

Bargaining is indigenous to buying there, but I hate haggling more than paying. The man senses my discomfort and lowers the price, but sweetly, not with the "only for you, beautiful lady, a very special price" tap

dance. After a half hour of this-is-my-life chitchat and a pot of hot tea that seems to hit me like booze, I tell him that I can't find the *tanka* I want.

"A friend of mine sells them!" he exclaims, delighted. "Let me call him." Of course, I should have known, a special *tanka* for the American who pays too much! But the buzz of the tea is still on.

"Okay," I agree.

"He has many," he insists, after speaking to his friend in a language I can't understand. "I will take you there."

"Where is it?" I ask, hesitantly.

"Not far," he says, as if theft and kidnap require long distances.

"No, thank you," I demur, like the good girl I am. I've walked this whole city, and I know how to get there.

"But you must," he pleads. "You are my guest in my country. I will be insulted."

Insulted? Insulted means I'm being rude

and everything else I don't want to be—cautious, timid, and hesitant, the me I want to leave at home. And then "okay" pops out of my mouth again. "Meet me in front," he says and disappears.

I wait on the curb for him to pull up, when suddenly a motorcycle vrooms from the alley behind me. "Hop on," he says.

My feet stick for a minute, while I'm transformed into someone hipper, wittier, sexier, more spontaneous and adventurous. And then we're off!

In the end, I never bought the *tanka*. But I found what I really wanted on the back of a motorcycle on the streets of Katmandu. □

Jane Resnick has written books, magazine articles and newspaper pieces on a wide variety of subjects. She is working on a memoir called "When I Said 'I Do,' I Didn't Mean That."

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