

## Damn GPS

---

*By Mr. G N Hegde, Former General Manager, Indian Bank*

My wife and I had travelled to United States for the first time in June 2010 to visit my daughter and son in law residing in New Jersey. We were put up in Jersey City on the shores of river Hudson across New York. During this visit we explored various places like New York City, Washington DC, Niagara Falls and Orlando Universal Studios.

One such weekend we had planned a visit to the world famous Niagara Falls. At a height of 167ft this falls is known for its beauty and uses of hydroelectric power. Niagara Falls lies in the border of USA and Canada a shared resource by the two Countries.

**Image 1:** Niagara Falls view from Canada



The four of us set off on a road trip on a Saturday morning in a car from Jersey City NJ to visit Niagara Falls. It was a beautiful drive on a sunny day with broad roads and lush greenery around. The traffic mostly moved without any interruption because there are no crossings, u turns and people followed rules and the speed limit. While there were four lanes on each side, one lane was exclusively reserved for patrolling vehicles and ambulances or relief vehicles so that in an emergency the vehicle can move fast hassle free. Step by step we were guided by a voice of a lady in the car who seemed to know the exact directions to our location. By now, surely you guessed that I am talking about the GPS (Global Positioning System).

Once you enter the destination and start it will give full directions and driver has to simply follow. Unless otherwise specified it takes the shortest route.

We reached Buffalo, a location close by to the falls at about 3.00 p.m. and we checked in to a hotel. Though we were scheduled to visit Niagara Falls on next day, we set out to witness the evening fireworks scheduled on that day as suggested by son in law. Since Niagara was only 19.4 miles(32km) there was no problem to go and return by car in the night.

Little did we know we would never forget this short unplanned outing. As usual, we entered our destination in the GPS as Niagara Falls and we commenced our journey. During the journey I noticed that the boards on the highway pointed us to go left and we were heading in a different direction. When I mentioned it, both my daughter and son-in-law said, “Oh but the GPS says this way. It surely is a shorter route”. I nodded, after all the GPS is never wrong. After a few minutes we found ourselves on a bridge called Peace Bridge. My son-in-law began to explain that the peace bridge was built to commemorate peace between USA and Canada. At this point we realized we were heading to Canada's side of the Niagara Falls, the shortest route to get to Niagara Falls. Too late, we were in the middle of the bridge with no way to return. After crossing the bridge we stopped in the check post and explained the position to the officer. He shouted “Damn GPS“,I am getting so many visitors coming like this every time but nobody is putting alert or warning before entering the Peace Bridge. He asked for the pass port. While my son in law and daughter had their USA driver's license, our passport was left in the room. I had photo copies and visa copies and he obliged by making suitable entry and asked us to return. He gave us a letter stating we were denied to enter Canada. We took a turn and drove back on the other side of the bridge to enter USA.

**Image 2:** Peace bridge view at night and view in Google maps.



We drove and reached the other side where USA check post is located. We gave him the letter given by the Canadian authorities. However they wanted original passport to let us in. We explained the position and showed him Xerox copies. They escorted us inside for additional checks since we didn't have the passport and made us wait for almost an hour. At this point panic set in that we would be stranded there. After a series of biometric fingerprints given similar to ones at the time of granting visa he allowed us to get back in to USA. We let a sigh of relief! We drove to Niagara Falls this time without the GPS providing instructions and just looking at the directions on the highway boards.

We reached just in time to witness the evening fireworks show. It was a beautiful show and we returned back the night to Buffalo city and stayed in the hotel. The next day we visited Niagara again. We went close to the falls in a boat and the view was beautiful and amazing.

**Image 3:** Niagara Fireworks at night from USA side



On my return to India I shared this experience with friends and colleagues. A few informed that they had a similar problem. One of my friends said that he made similar mistake but as he had not checked in to hotel he took Visa on the spot and proceeded to Canada itself to see the Niagara Falls from the Canadian side. Another said that as he had original passport they were checked and came back to take the other route.

The purpose of sharing this is to highlight the pitfalls of totally relying on GPS and how slight negligence of not carrying original passport can delay/disrupt your plans and also how keeping at least copies can come to your rescue in case of need. I also appreciated that the authorities there are strict and follow procedures thoroughly but of course due courtesy is extended.

