



U.S. TRAVEL JOURNALIST STUCK IN REMOTE, DANGEROUS PART OF INDIA ARRIVES HOME, THANKS TO COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS AND PARTNERS



SATW, the Society of American Travel Writers, offers thanks to the Committee to Protect Journalists and the U.S. Embassy in New Dehli for their tireless efforts on behalf of our member, Anietra Hamper. International security firm G4S, the International Center for Journalists, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the British Guild of Travel Writers, The Women’s Travel Group and SITA World Tours also provided invaluable assistance.

Hamper arrived home this past weekend, just in time for Easter.

“Without the extraordinary efforts of the Committee to Protect Journalists and the U.S. Embassy, Anietra would not be safe today,” said Jane Wooldridge, SATW President. “We are indebted to each and every person who provided the contacts and counsel that helped sustain her through this ordeal and bring her home.”

Hamper, a travel journalist and SATW member, left the U.S. on March 4 for a four-week reporting trip to Nepal and India. On March 24, the Indian government abruptly announced it was locking down the country to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

At the time of the outbreak, Hamper and her guide, Ian Henderson of The Greatest Fish, were in a remote northeastern corner of India. After a voluntary curfew was announced on March 22, Hamper and Henderson were subjected to violence from villagers. A local newspaper featured their picture with a caption, “Foreigners bring coronavirus.” Most hotels closed.

“A hotel took us after looking at health certificates, then stalked us and tricked us to wait in the lobby as they called authorities,” she wrote via What’s App. “An ambulance screeched up with

six people rushing out with stethoscopes and thermometers charging at us.” On another occasion, the two were taken to a local hospital for a health check in conditions that were highly unsanitary.

For three weeks, Hamper and Henderson stayed at a remote fishing camp in the Himalayan foothills, where they were cared for by a local family as they sought permission to make the 14-hour drive to Dehli. Police visited regularly.

Without a series of written documents, Hamper could not pass through the many police checkpoints between her location in the Himalayan foothills and the capital, 14 hours away. India’s extensive bureaucracy became an ever-increasing hurdle as the Indian government changed paperwork requirements without warning. The situation was complicated by the fact that Henderson is a U.K. national and the two had minimal internet access.

The Committee to Protect Journalists provided direct contacts and made countless calls to regional authorities to help smooth the way. Several representatives were in contact constantly via What’sApp, providing advice, encouragement and updates. The U.S. Embassy in Dehli worked vigorously on the needed permissions. Ashley Almanza, chief executive of G4S, took a personal interest in the case.

Finally, the permissions came through. Hamper and Henderson drove through the night, arriving in Dehli just a few hours before a rare evacuation flight to the U.S. Hamper secured a seat and arrived in San Francisco on April 11, then made her way home to Columbus, Ohio, where she has self-quarantined.

“I’m indebted to CPJ...I’m beyond exhausted but it’s amazing to feel safe again,” she wrote from home. “My embassy contact texted this morning to check on me and said there are no more flights going out. I made mine by only hours.”

ANIETRA HAMPER is a freelance communications expert, travel journalist and former television anchor at WBNS in Columbus, Ohio.

THE COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide and defends the right of journalists to report the news safely and without fear of reprisal. Reporting and safety guidance for reporters covering the coronavirus pandemic is available at www.cpj.org/covid-19.

SATW, the Society of American Travel Writers, is the world’s largest association of travel communicators. In fulfilling its mission of Inspiring Travel Through Responsible Journalism, SATW maintains rigorous standards for membership.