



I Wanted a “Calmer Trip”

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Front Cover: A neurodivergent wellness traveler in Taughannock Falls State Park, enjoying a present moment.

Introduction

Planning a weekend trip to Ithaca had long been on our bucket list. Not only did it give us something to look forward to, but it also offered a welcome escape from daily stress. Traveling together boosts our happiness and supports our overall well-being, making such getaways an important part of our lives.

Ithaca, NY, was an ideal place in early October because it was the best time to explore a new place, see the falls and changing leaves, and visit the farmer's market and Cornell Botanic Gardens. *I know that exploring places makes me happier, less stressed, and more motivated.*

The night before our weekend trip, we gathered as a family around the kitchen table to finalize our thoughtfully crafted 2-day itinerary. Our main purpose was to embrace slow, mindful travel—choosing quality experiences over quantity. After researching a variety of places, we carefully selected Taughannock Falls State Park as our first destination, since visiting it has been on my bucket list for years. *The anticipation of standing in front of the majestic waterfall, listening to the thunderous roar and feeling the mist on my face, filled me with excitement. I've always believed that immersing myself in the sights and sounds of nature, especially waterfalls, has a restorative effect on my well-being. In fact, studies show that time spent near waterfalls can significantly reduce stress and elevate mood, making this trip not just an adventure, but an opportunity for healing and happiness.*

Taughannock Falls has a good history, and my father researched its origin and history. This will be an educational trip, which I will discuss later in the blog.

An Exciting Day

The next morning dawned bright and full of promise. I could hardly contain my excitement—it was finally the day of our road trip. My family and I gathered in the kitchen for a simple, hearty breakfast. As I savored my cereal with nonfat yogurt and nut butter, I felt ready for whatever adventures awaited us. At exactly 8 o'clock, we loaded up the car, said a quick prayer for safe and smooth travel, and set off into the morning light.

Determined to enjoy every moment, I promised myself that this trip would be different—calm, unhurried, and mindful. No rushing, no stress. Just the open road and my family by my side.

As the miles slipped by and my mother drove steadily along I-476, we made our first stop at the Allentown Service Plaza. My father and brother headed to the restroom, leaving me time to wander. I strolled through the bustling plaza, studying travel brochures and dreaming about all the destinations I wanted to explore—Harrisburg, Reading, the enchanting Finger Lakes of New York. My imagination soared with every page I turned. I especially longed to visit the Reading Pagoda and Hershey, the magical town of chocolate. One day, I thought, when I finally have my driver's license, I'll set out to see them all on my own.

We spent nearly 40 minutes at the plaza, soaking in the sights and moving at our own pace. My parents, brother, and I gathered for a snack—sweet corn for everyone, and for my brother, the half-burger I had packed from my shift at work. It felt good to slow down, laugh, and enjoy these simple moments together.

I remembered how different this was from the hurried group tours of the past, where strict schedules left little time to rest or

to simply step outside for fresh air. This time, we set our own pace, and it made all the difference.

As we continued our journey, I gazed eastward at the rolling Pennsylvania hills, basking in the golden sunshine. The landscape seemed to mirror my mood—peaceful, unhurried, and alive with possibility.

Compared to those now outdated group tours, slow travel has become our new norm. We lingered over 20-minute restroom breaks without a care in the world. Traveling at our own pace was not just easier—it was liberating.

My parents agreed wholeheartedly. They took their time, carefully navigating the twists and turns using the phone's GPS. Ithaca was uncharted territory for us, and the sense of adventure made the journey even more exciting.

We all knew it would be a long drive, with plenty of rest stops ahead. But that was part of the adventure—each stop a small story, each mile a memory in the making.

Ever the traveler, I had come prepared with snacks for the journey. I pulled out bags of Hot Cheetos, Bran Flakes, a MadeGood breakfast bar, crunchy dry-roasted edamame, hard-boiled eggs, and a handful of candies to share with my family. These little comforts made the miles pass more sweetly.

A little later, I took a nap, letting my thoughts drift away like the car rolling smoothly down the highway. No worries, no overthinking—just the gentle hum of the engine beneath me and the promise of another story waiting to unfold about Ithaca.

Remember that taking necessary naps is also self-care.

After a short nap, I opened my eyes to find the scenery had changed. We were in northern Pennsylvania, almost at I-81, the trees outside blurring with speed. My phone GPS chimed in its digital voice, guiding us north toward Ithaca, NY—a new chapter just ahead.

About an hour later, the familiar restlessness of the road set in. We missed a rest stop on I-81, and my father glanced at me, his voice hopeful, “Where is the next plaza?”

“I’ll check,” I replied, pulling out my phone and tapping through Google Maps, becoming the navigator of our little adventure.

“Service plaza,” I typed, watching the results pop onto the screen. “Found one! It’s near the state border—35 miles to go, so about 25 minutes,” I announced, feeling like the bearer of good news.

“Dad, the next service plaza is just 25 minutes away,” I reassured him, hoping to ease the tension in the car.

“Okay.”

Just then, the state line appeared—the border between Pennsylvania and New York. Excitement bubbled up as, a few miles later, we pulled into the Southern Tier Welcome Center, a gateway to new adventures.

A bright sign greeted us: “I ♥ NY.” It felt like a warm welcome, a promise of memories yet to be made.

Inside, the space dazzled with its “I ♥ NY” sign glowing overhead. The air buzzed with the energy of other travelers, all pausing on their own journeys.

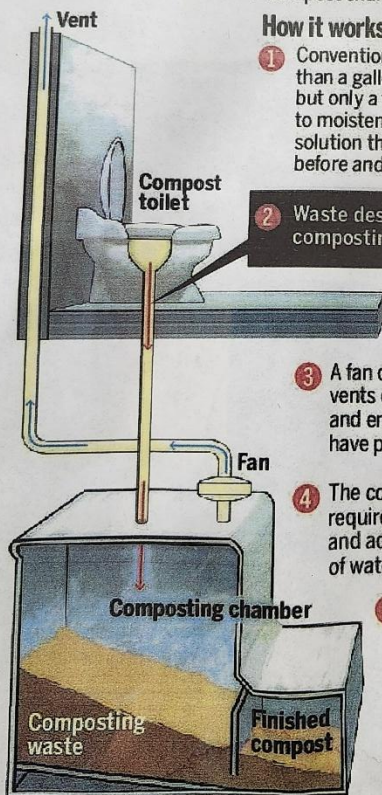
I snapped pictures, capturing the window view of I-81 stretching on, and wandered over to interactive screens showing places like the Finger Lakes and charming upstate towns. My eyes traced the ceiling's playful decorations—everywhere I looked, there was something new to discover.



Even the restroom held surprises: compost toilets, a first for me. It struck me how travel offers lessons in the most unexpected places.

Natural solution to nature's call

Composting is the decomposition of organic matter by organisms that get oxygen from the atmosphere and give off carbon dioxide. The compost toilet uses this process in the contained environment of a compost chamber.



How it works

- 1 Conventional toilets use more than a gallon of water per flush, but only a few ounces are needed to moisten a biodegradable foam solution that coats the bowl before and after use.
- 2 Waste descends into the composting chamber.
- 3 A fan circulates air and vents outside, reducing odor and ensuring the bacteria have plenty of oxygen.
- 4 The composting process requires occasional sifting and adding about a gallon of water per day.
- 5 Bacteria, fungi, arthropods and earthworms break down solids into a soil-like substance extremely rich in organic matter.

Sources: clivusmultitrum.com, staff research

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If I never ventured out, how would I gain knowledge, manage stress, or understand new norms? That's why I created 'I-Powers Travel'—to share these discoveries, especially around solo travel, wellness, and neurodivergence.

We also spent another 35 minutes at the plaza, taking pictures from inside and outside while I had a quick lunch. My parents were separated for a bit, and each took turns taking the big slogan, “I heart NY.”

We called a truce and gathered for a smiling family photo—a rare moment of unity on the road, relaxed and deeply rewarding.

Before heading to the car, my parents and brother also had a quick lunch break, and I had ½ burger while my brother then ate another bun my mother and I brought.



As I slowly finished my burger, savoring each bite, my father took over the wheel. I practiced mindful eating, letting the road slip by and the moment linger just a little longer.

Lively music filled the car and the vibrant trees flashing past calmed my mind. For a while, it was pure Zen—just us, the open road, and the anticipation of new stories to write about Ithaca, before drifting off into another nap.

After another nap, I blinked awake to the winding curves of NY Route 79. The car dipped and climbed, each turn a gentle thrill—like riding a roller coaster through the hills. As we rolled into Ithaca, I pressed my face to the window, taking in the town’s charm. Crowds of students milled about, laughter echoing from the sidewalks as they savored a weekend of freedom. For a moment, I felt swept into the story of this place, a traveler in search of new scenes and characters.

At 2 pm, our car crunched over gravel as we entered the park gate. Dad’s voice cut through my daydreams: there was a park fee to pay, a small toll for the adventure ahead.

“You have to pay?”

“Yep, it is a \$10 fee because the NY state park required it. I researched it.” I smiled because I’d prepared in advance.

“What about the other side of the road?”

“Yep, this too.”

My father flashed a smile and handed over his credit card. The barrier lifted, and just like that, we were granted passage into a new chapter of our journey.

“Enjoy.”

“Thank you.”

We found a spot near Cayuga Lake, the waters sparkling beneath the afternoon sun. Taughannock Falls State Park stretched out before us—a place I’d chosen after hours of research, eager to script an unforgettable day for my family.



Crossing the small wooden bridge, I felt a surge of happiness and energy. The air tasted fresh, and nature's beauty buzzed through me, urging me onward.

After a quick pit stop, I unwrapped a piece of York Peppermint Pattie—my secret treat to savor the moment. My parents wandered the paths, soaking in the scenery. Watching their smiles, I felt the joy of bringing them somewhere special.

We set off down the Gorge Trail, surrounded by fellow adventurers. My father's stride was light, his enjoyment clear, and I couldn't help but feel a ripple of excitement—this was what I'd hoped for when I planned our trip.



“Where is the waterfall?” My father asked.

“I can show you,” I said while navigating on Google Maps. “We are right here, and the waterfall is ahead.”

Standing at the base of the waterfall, I watched the water crash and tumble, mist cooling my face. Gratitude welled up inside me—this moment was meditative, healing, and a memory to cherish.

The afternoon sun filtered through the leaves as we stepped onto the trail at Taughannock Falls State Park. Every new adventure shapes my story, and today, the promise of towering waterfalls, ancient rock, and winding paths stirred something inside me—a sense of happiness, wonder, and the anticipation of discovery. For me, travel is more than movement; it’s a narrative that connects me to the world and to myself.

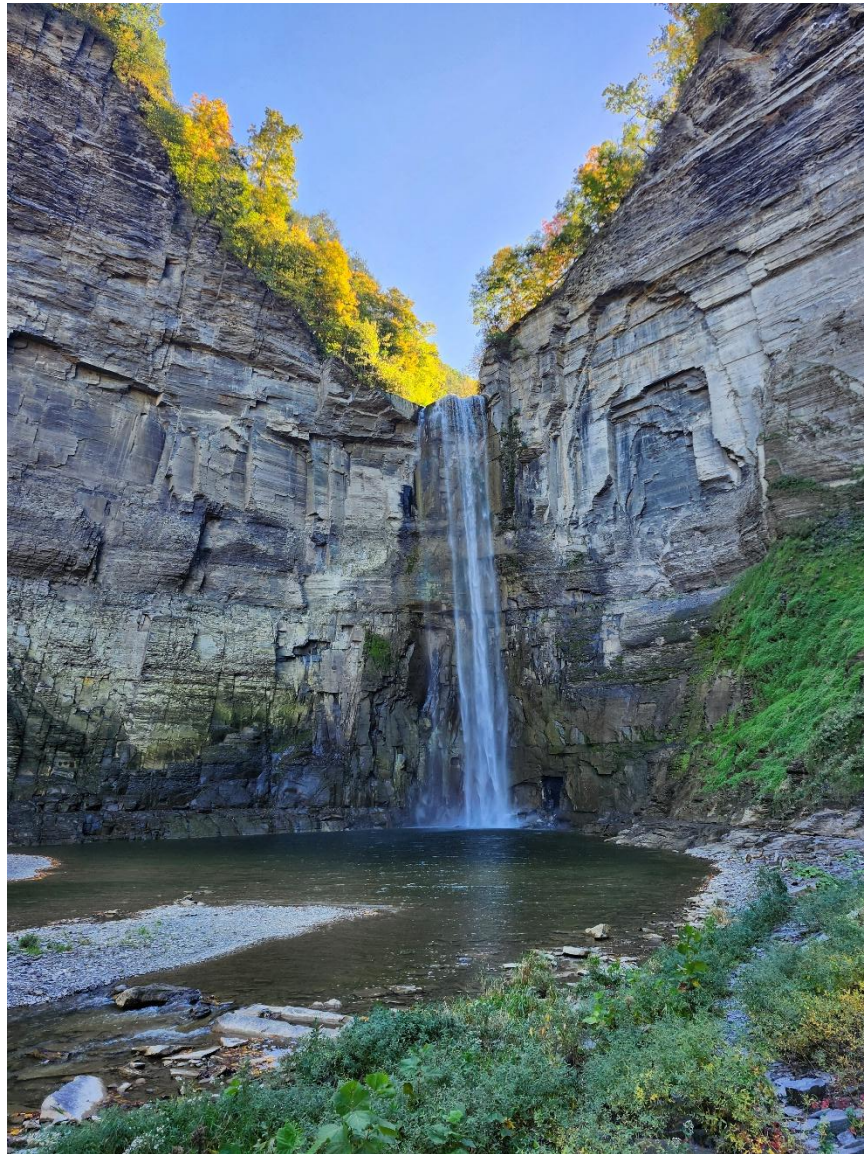
Camera in hand, I caught the morning light sparkling on the rocks before we continued down the Gorge Trail. Dad pointed out the dry creek bed—a silent witness to history and the shifting nature of climate. The stream that once roared here was now a memory, its story told in stones and the lines carved into the earth.

“Did you know this valley was formed over 12,000 years ago?” Dad mused, his voice echoing under the tree canopy. Each step became a lesson—about geology, time, and the power of natural forces. Inspired, I began composing a story in my mind—a weekend in Ithaca, family, learning, and the wellness that comes from slowing down and truly seeing a place.

Standing at the edge of the overlook, I felt the weight of history beneath my feet and the excitement of learning something new. Slow travel, I realized, is about letting a place reveal itself, layer by layer—each view, each fact, each quiet moment feeding my curiosity and sense of well-being.

At the trail's end, families and friends clustered together, taking turns to capture the breathtaking expanse of the gorge and the waterfall's mighty plunge. The energy was contagious—everyone sharing in the awe inspired by nature's handiwork.

“This feels like a once-in-a-lifetime moment,” I said softly, the roar of the falls and laughter of fellow travelers filling the air. I wanted to remember every detail—the spray on my face, the sunlight glinting through the mist, and the warmth of family by my side.



We snapped dozens of photos, but it wasn't about rushing from spot to spot. *With no strict schedule, we could linger—taking in the view, sharing stories, and letting the hours slip by like the water over the cliff.*

“I believe that spending more time in 1 location gives me the present moment and allows me to slow down as I walk and explore. This takes time to rejuvenate my mind.”

After retracing our steps, we paused to catch a distant glimpse of the lakeside lighthouse, its white silhouette framed by the afternoon sun. Somewhere, a speedboat's engine hummed—a reminder that adventure, big or small, was all around us.



By 4 o'clock, we found a quiet picnic table shaded by maples, and dug into an early dinner: Zongzi, hard-boiled eggs, and snacks. Laughter rose as we traded bites and stories. I nibbled slowly, savoring each taste, grateful for a meal shared in the heart of nature.

We spent 2.5 hours at Taughannock Falls State Park—more than twice the time a group tour would allow. With no pressure to hurry, we let the park's magic sink in, unwinding and truly connecting to the place and each other.

As the day faded, I looked back on our visit to Taughannock Falls State Park with a sense of pride and contentment. I had planned this slow-paced adventure, one that let us savor not just the sights, but the spirit of the place. It was more than a trip—it was a story we wrote together, one memory at a time.

Since my parents' travel has been challenging because of their age and limited mental and physical capacity, I opted for slow, solo travel, which I list in the blog, **"A "Calmer Trip" is a Norm."**

Hoping to get to the car, I also wanted to see Ithaca Falls, and my parents were proud and agreed to visit, so I set my phone's GPS to Ithaca Falls.

Confused about the size, my father mentioned heading back to the hotel if we couldn't find a parking spot for Ithaca Falls.

"Dad, I think there are some parking spots. Don't panic." This makes conflict resolution works by speaking calmly rather than raising voices. "We will still enjoy our fun-filled trip."

"Pray!"

With the sun still high and our spirits lifted by the morning's adventures, we set our sights on Ithaca Falls—a hidden gem nestled near the heart of Cornell University.

Pulling into the small gravel lot, my father's brow furrowed with worry over parking. But I assured him, remembering the empty spaces I'd read about online. Relief washed over us as we found a spot beneath the shade of tall trees.

We stepped out and strolled along the short, leafy trail, savoring the slow pace. On the way, we met Lauren*, a solo traveler from Pittsburgh. She was kind, open, and brimming with first-time wonder at the falls' entrance. I admired her courage—venturing out alone, following her sense of adventure. Would I ever be that brave?

**Name changed to protect person's privacy*

The question lingered: Could I become as adventurous as Lauren, finding confidence in unfamiliar places?

My parents understood my longing for solo exploration, though always with safety in mind. Dad reminded me, “First, you’ll need to show you’re responsible—for your safety, your choices, your independence.”

Standing at the entrance, I remembered Mom’s words from home: once I proved myself—earning my license, learning responsibility—she would support my solo adventures.

Lauren laughed about her 5.5-hour drive from Pittsburgh. Meeting fellow travelers like her reminded me how far curiosity can take you—and how shared smiles make every journey richer.

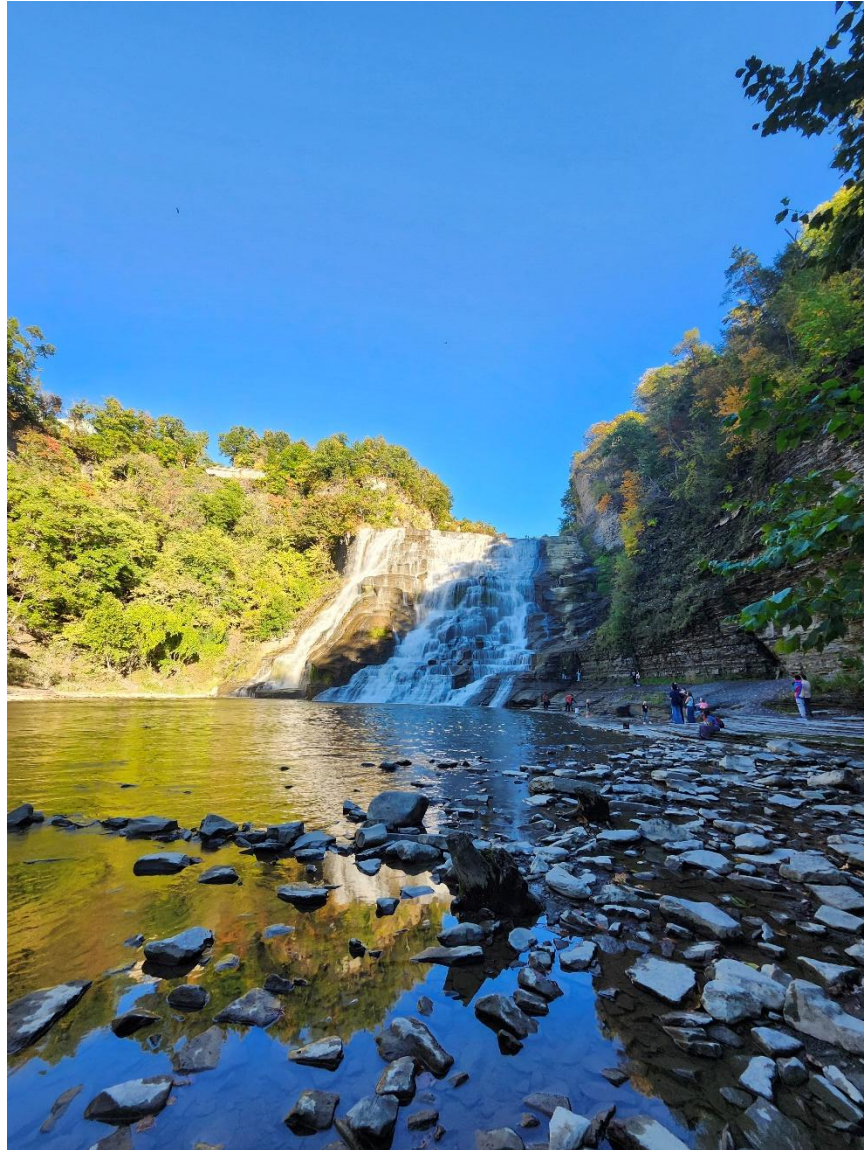
Meeting new people is one of travel’s greatest gifts; in those moments, loneliness fades, replaced by camaraderie and shared experience.

“I wonder if there are any hostels around here,” I joked, breaking the ice.

Dad chuckled, “Not in a small town like Ithaca—you’ll have to wait until your next big city adventure.”

“Nope, no hostels here,” he confirmed, sharing a knowing smile.

We made our way to the overlook, where Ithaca Falls crashed down in a white curtain of water, the roar filling the air. I'd first discovered this place through a travel blog, but standing here—feeling the spray, hearing the endless rush—was something no photo could capture. We lingered, letting the beauty sink in.



We spent 30 minutes in the falls, snapping photos, reading the plaques about its history, and soaking up every moment. Ithaca Falls

was more than a stop—it was a chapter in our story, a memory etched in sound and sunlight.

The golden hour light stretched across the windshield as we turned onto NY Route 13, our car humming with tired satisfaction. Our destination was the Quality Inn Ithaca – University Area—a temporary home after a day packed with adventure and laughter.

Saturday’s journey was more than just fantastic—it was a gentle reminder of how travel can be restorative, wrapping us in moments of relaxation and self-care.

While Dad and my brother waited in the car, Mom and I slipped out, the evening air crisp against our skin. The hotel lobby was quiet, almost expectant. The front desk was empty at first, so we exchanged a knowing glance and waited. After a moment, a smiling receptionist bustled in, her presence as warm as the lobby lights.

“Hello, how can I assist you?”

“I would like to check in for 1 night.”

“Sure!”

I handed over my credit card and ID, nerves fluttering with the small responsibility of checking in for the family. The receptionist typed away, then handed us our key cards—room 226 on the 2nd floor, along with the Wi-Fi code and a map of the hotel layout. It felt official: this was our space for the night.

“Don’t forget,” she added with a wink, “free breakfast is served from 6:30 to 9:00—just down the hall.”

“Thank you.”

Since I had no questions, a nice lady gave me 2 key cards to open the hotel door.

“Enjoy your stay.”

“Thank you.”

I grinned, stepping out into the dusk to share the good news. “We’ve got a room—226 on the 2nd floor,” I announced, pride seeping into my voice. The family’s faces lit up, the day’s travel fatigue momentarily forgotten.

A quiet satisfaction settled over me. All the saving, planning, and phone calls had led to this small victory—a weekend away for my parents, a chance to give back for all they’d done for me.

We gathered our bags, arms full of snacks and travel-worn suitcases. The climb to the 2nd floor was slow, my father’s legs protesting each step, but nobody complained. It was just another piece of our family’s story—helping each other, one stair at a time.

The door swung open to reveal a cozy room—beds neatly made, sunlight filtering through the curtains. It wasn’t perfect, but I was glad I’d packed my quick-dry towel, ready for any little adventure or imperfection.

“Look, there’s even a fridge!” I grinned, already imagining our leftovers tucked safely inside.

Mom tucked away the leftovers and hard-boiled eggs, her smile full of pride. As we settled in, my parents reminded me how much this trip meant to them—a family adventure, carefully planned by their solo travel-loving child.

The Boiling Point

Just after 7pm, I settled onto the hotel bed, letting the quiet of the evening wrap around me. I tried to anchor myself in the moment, my mind drifting back to the day's adventures. Ithaca, with its charming small-town spirit, had already begun to work its magic on me. Images of waterfalls tumbling through rocky gorges, golden fall leaves swirling in the crisp air, and the breathtaking scenery along our drive replayed in my mind. Anticipation buzzed within me for what tomorrow might bring.

A shiver crept over me as I realized I had forgotten to pack pants for the night. The room was chilly, and I fumbled with the AC, switching it off in hopes of warming up. My fingers tingled as I reached for my notebook—writing about Ithaca was both a joy and a distraction. I wanted my words to capture the town's spirit for anyone who might one day wander its street.

Just then, Dad complained about the heat, tugging at his sweater and fanning himself. Our little hotel room seemed to shift with each of us—one too cold, another too hot, all of us searching for comfort in our own ways.

"I am hot and sweating." He sighed.

Mom, meanwhile, declared she wasn't hungry. We'd eaten an early dinner at the park, but the memory of Zongzi and laughter under the trees already felt distant.

A few minutes later, I turned to my brother. "Are you hungry?" I asked, and he nodded, a quiet 'yeah' escaping him as my father scrolled on his phone.

We debated dinner plans—Dad hesitated, unsure whether to order from Spicy Asian or Old Mexico, the local Chinese and Mexican spots. The indecision hung heavy in the air, as if our whole evening depended on this simple choice.

“Why don’t you look up the menus instead of just playing with your phone?” I finally said, my voice sharper than I intended.

He said nothing, eyes fixed on the screen, lost in the blue glow of indecision.

“Are you sure you don’t want to go out and get something?” Mom pressed, her tone edged with frustration.

“I am fine.”

To me, ‘fine’ felt like a wall—a word that meant nothing, a placeholder for emotions left unsaid.

“If you’re really hungry, I brought snacks for all of us,” I offered, rummaging through bags for granola bars and dried fruit. “Plus, we’ll save some money.”

Without another word, Mom announced she was tired from the long day and disappeared into the bathroom for a shower, her footsteps heavy with exhaustion.

I tried to focus on my blog, letting my thoughts wander back to Ithaca’s waterfalls and winding streets, but the tension in the room kept tugging me back.

The breaking point came quietly. Dad sat motionless, sweat beading on his brow, weary from age and health struggles. Mom grew restless,

unsettled by the uncertainty of dinner plans. The family trip, meant to be a joyful escape, suddenly felt fragile.

“Dad, you can have my snacks,” I repeated softly. “Ask my brother to grab them for you if you want. We’ll be okay.”

Steam curled around me as I stepped into the cozy hotel shower, the sound of water nearly drowning out the muffled voices outside. My mother had just left the bathroom, leaving behind the faint scent of her perfume and a heavy silence that clung to the air. The day’s exhaustion pressed in; tension seemed to seep through the hotel walls, and I could sense my brother’s anxiety growing with every raised voice.

The reasons:

- Daddy slumped onto the bed; eyes heavy from a long day’s drive that had drained the rest of his patience.
- He winced, rubbing his aching back, each movement a silent testimony to the pain settling in his body.
- The rumble of empty stomachs echoed between us, making everything feel sharper and more urgent.
- Tempers flared when I’d reached over and flicked off the AC for a moment, the room quickly growing stuffy and tense.

Wrapped in a towel, warmth still clinging to my skin, I tried to savor the rare moment of relaxation. But shouts echoed through the thin walls, and fear prickled at the thought of someone in the next room overhearing—maybe even complaining. What if the strangers next door reported us?

My brother squeezed his eyes shut and covered his ears, shaking with every angry word that pierced the air. I wished the trip had turned

out differently—quiet, joyful, the kind of story I’d want to blog about.

In my mind, worst-case scenarios spun out: a neighbor reporting us for being too loud, hotel staff knocking at the door, police lights flashing in the hallway. The fear of someone being taken away haunted the edges of my thoughts.

Who would help us if things went wrong?

Trying to write about our trip to Ithaca felt impossible with my parents’ arguments echoing in my mind. The stress knotted in my stomach, making it hard to focus, to finish my blog, or even to feel like myself.

The evening air was thick with tension, and fear pressed heavily on my chest. At precisely 8:40 p.m., tears welled up in my eyes and spilled onto my cheeks. I turned to my sister, voice trembling, and confessed, “I’m the founder of I-Powers Travel. One day, I’ll become a Content Creator, and after I turn 36, I plan to travel the world on my own.”

After that dreadful evening that cast a shadow over our trip, my mother saw right through my brave face. She understood the storm of emotions roiling inside me, even as I tried to hide them.

I never blamed my dad for the parental tension that erupted in that hotel room; that burden was never mine to carry. Instead, I clung to the one thing I could control: planning my own solo wellness adventure.

There is something deeply rewarding in knowing that my itinerary, my feelings, my actions, and even my finances are in my own hands. My solo trip loomed on the horizon—an

adventure I had willed into existence, and a dream I was finally making real.

Finally, I managed to drift off around 9:45 in the evening, but the process was far from easy. As I lay in bed, my mind raced with the worries and anxieties of the day, each thought weaving itself into the darkness. Stress settled heavily on my chest, making it almost impossible to relax. Every time I closed my eyes, new concerns would surface, keeping me restless and alert. It wasn't until 10:30 that true sleep finally claimed me, and even then, it felt fragile, as if the night itself was holding its breath.

Later in the night, a nightmare jolted me awake around 1:49 AM. My heart pounded in my chest as I stared at the ceiling, the echoes of the dream mingling with real-life stress. Instead of finding comfort, I reached for my phone, scrolling through endless feeds in a futile attempt to distract myself. The blue glow from the screen only seemed to intensify my anxiety, stretching the minutes into hours. I remained restless and awake until 2:50, fully aware that this cycle was making it harder and harder to find peace at night.

The next morning dawned gray and heavy, as if the sky itself shared my exhaustion. Sleep had eluded me, slipping away an hour at a time, leaving my mind restless and frayed. In the still darkness, I woke suddenly, heart pounding from the echoes of my parents' muffled arguments in the next room. Their tension seeped through the walls, wrapping around my thoughts and unsettling the fragile peace of our trip.

When I naturally woken at 6:30, I struggled to open my eyes, my limbs heavy as if weighed by the night's anxieties. I dragged myself out of bed, each movement sluggish, my body aching from the

restless hours. The world outside remained quiet, but inside I was adrift in a fog of exhaustion.

“I just want to crawl back under the covers,” I muttered, voice hoarse with fatigue, another yawn escaping my lips as I shuffled across the chilly floor.

My eyes stung, swollen with fatigue, and every few moments another yawn overtook me. The cold seeped into my bones, making me shiver as I wrapped my arms around myself, searching for warmth and comfort that seemed far away.

Mentally and physically unprepared, I found myself spiraling into anxious thoughts about our next family trip. The memory of my father’s raised voice haunted me, each recollection sharpening the tension in my chest. The prospect of another day filled with conflict weighed heavily, casting a long shadow over the morning.

After getting dressed, my father and brother disappeared down the hallway, eager for the first taste of the hotel breakfast. My mother and I lingered in our room, savoring a quiet moment together before making our way downstairs around 7:15. The elevator chimed softly, and as the doors opened, the warm aroma of brewed coffee and toasted bread greeted us, promising comfort.

Today will be a better day to explore and resume slow travel with a relaxed heart.

The breakfast room bustled with gentle morning energy: clinking cutlery, soft chatter, and the shuffle of slippers on polished tiles. I felt at ease, knowing I didn’t have to worry about what to eat—everything was laid out in abundance. My mother and I exchanged content smiles as we watched my father and brother debate over

pancakes and scrambled eggs, both taking their time as if nothing else existed beyond this cozy space.

I wandered over to the buffet, eyes wide at the spread—golden omelets filled with cheese and herbs, plump sausages sizzling beside roasted potatoes glistening with oil. I loaded my plate, then poured myself a steaming cup of coffee. Its rich, nutty scent curled around me, mingling with the warmth of freshly baked pastries and the laughter of families starting their day.

Carrying my breakfast, I settled beside my father and brother. The 3 of us ate slowly, savoring each bite, letting the morning unfold without rush. Conversation drifted easily, and I felt the tension of yesterday dissolve with every sip of coffee.

I still practice mindful eating without worrying about the past. I still enjoyed the trip, the hotel experience, and the free breakfast I had chosen beforehand.

Before sitting down to eat mindfully, I returned to the buffet for my mother—filling a bowl with cereal, pouring milk over it, and grabbing a fresh coffee and a chilled carton of milk for her. She smiled in thanks, and together we enjoyed the simple goodness of our hotel breakfast, the world outside paused for just a little longer.

That morning was the perfect time to talk about Ithaca and the weekend trip. I really enjoyed talking more about the travel plans, especially because I wanted calmer, slower, slower travel, and solo travel.

After breakfast, I slipped quietly back upstairs, balancing a handful of chocolate muffins and a steaming cup of coffee. The hotel room was peaceful, sunlight spilling across the rumpled bed. I sank into a soft chair by the window, savoring a slow sip of coffee, feeling warmth

settle through me. For a moment, the noise and tension of travel faded away. I nibbled on a muffin and let my mind wander, brainstorming ideas for a calmer trip—ways to nurture my own wellness and bring more ease into these journeys. As I gazed out at the town below, I realized my blog about Ithaca could wait. For now, I was content to rest, breathe, and let the anxiety ebb away.

The gentle hush of the room was broken only by the quiet tapping of my father's fingers on his phone. He lounged on the bed, scrolling through information about the Cornell Botanic Garden, announcing with a smile that it wouldn't open until 10. It felt good to be unhurried, to let the morning unfold at its own pace.

Packing for checkout, my father remained calm as we checked for any leftover items before leaving the hotel room.

At 9 am, as sunlight streamed through the hotel lobby windows, my father and brother hauled their bags to the car. I lingered for a moment, taking in the quiet hum of the morning before heading toward the front desk to check out.

“Good morning,” I said to the woman at the front desk, offering a polite smile. “I'd like to check out, please.”

She nodded, her fingers flying across the keyboard as she brought up our reservation.

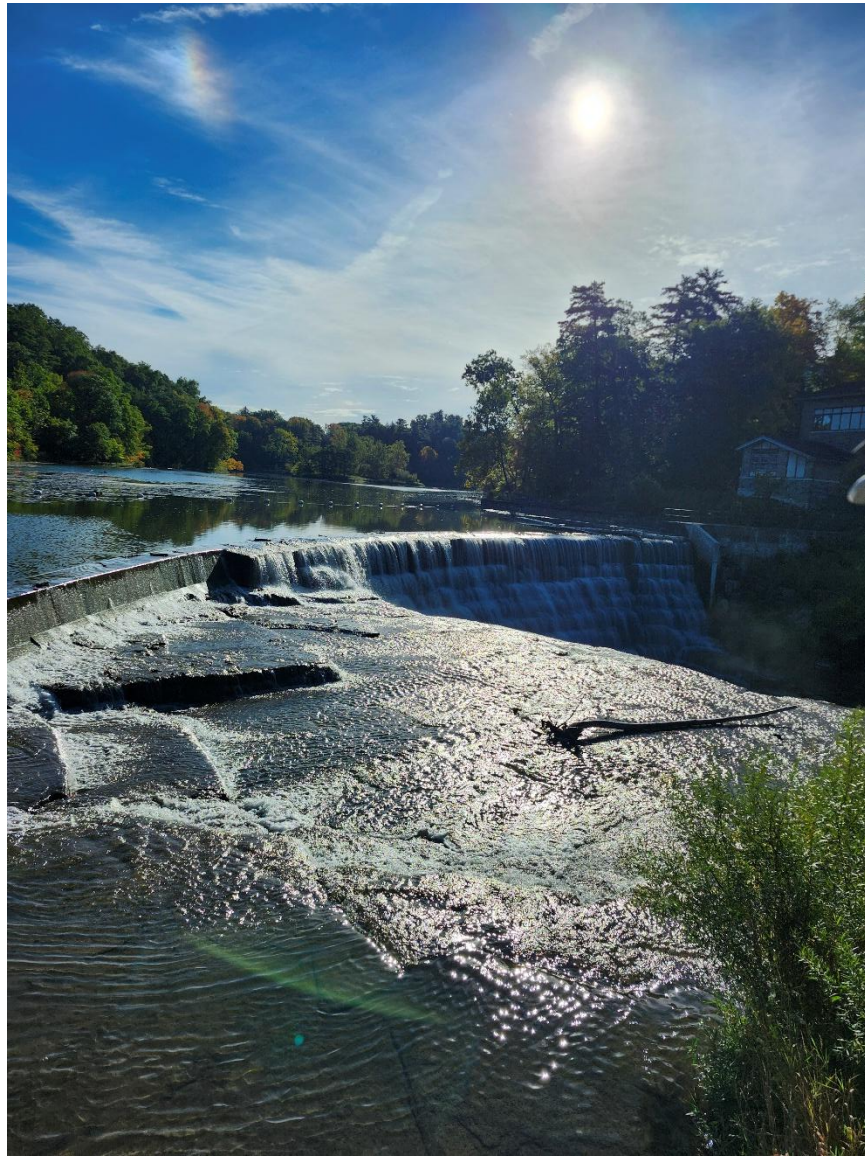
It wasn't the same woman who'd checked us in, but her friendly demeanor made the process feel just as welcoming.

“Could I get a copy of the receipt?” I asked, wanting a record of our stay.

A minute later, the printer whirled to life. She handed me the receipt, the total—(\$212.22)—neatly printed at the bottom with the balance due of \$0.00. I thanked her, feeling the finality of our departure settle in as I turned to leave the lobby and join my family outside.

After packing our bags and loading them into the car, my parents took a moment to pray for a safe and enjoyable day ahead. Their prayers filled the air with excitement and anticipation as we prepared to set off on our adventure.

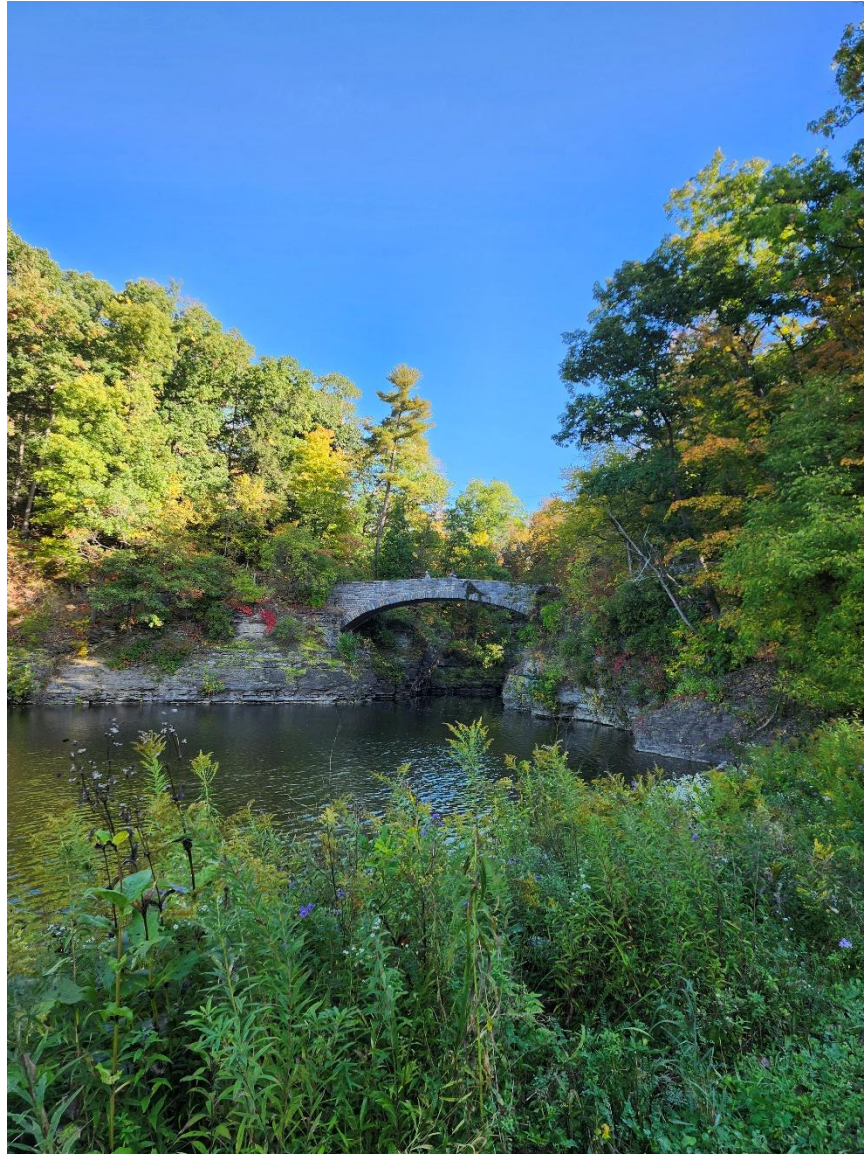
As we drove toward the Cornell University campus, we admired the beautiful landscape passing by our windows. Soon, we spotted the rushing waters of Triphammer Falls, its cascade glistening in the morning light.



We discussed which paths to explore and decided to start with the scenic trail around Beebe Lake.

The trail wound gently along the water's edge, offering peaceful views and fresh, crisp air. Along the way, we discovered Werly Island, which seemed almost magical, surrounded by a calm lake. The highlight was pausing on the bridge to take in a breathtaking panorama of vibrant fall foliage—fiery reds, brilliant oranges, and golden yellows reflected in the water below. *The entire morning*

felt invigorating, the perfect blend of exercise and the joy of being surrounded by nature's beauty.



Then we drove to Peterson Lot, which was free on the weekend.

I wanted a calm trip, and my stress level returned to normal.

At Cornell Botanic Gardens, I was greeted by a serene landscape overflowing with vibrant colors and intricate textures. The gardens were alive with the gentle hum of bees and the soothing fragrance of

blooming flowers. I wandered along winding paths lined with peonies, irises, and lilies, each bed carefully tended and bursting with life.



Stopping by the Herb Garden, I inhaled the calming scent of lavender and mint, feeling my stress melt away. The decorative ponds reflected the sky and were surrounded by graceful willows, adding to the tranquil atmosphere. Every few steps, I paused to admire a new blossom or unique plant, capturing their beauty with my camera.

Spending time among the flowers was grounding and restorative, and I found myself lingering, reluctant to leave such a peaceful haven.

After that, we stopped at the Ithaca Farmer's Market, nestled along the Cayuga Lake waterfront. As soon as we stepped inside, the air was filled with the aroma of fresh-baked bread and spicy empanadas. A folk band played near the entrance, their music blending with the chatter of vendors selling heirloom tomatoes, handmade soaps, and wildflower bouquets. I stopped at a cheese stall, sampling creamy goat cheese while chatting with the farmer about her herd. We wandered through rows of colorful produce and artisan crafts, pausing to admire hand-thrown pottery and woven baskets. It felt like the heart of Ithaca was beating all around us, vibrant and alive.



Earlier, I picked out a lavender-scented soap from a local maker, who told me about the natural oils she uses. I spent nearly an hour exploring the market, savoring every moment and making sure to stay present as I took in the lively scene.

It was the most amazing trip I ever planned.

Conclusion

Upon returning from the trip, I realized how much I had grown through the experience. Planning a slower-paced journey, navigating a minor altercation at the hotel, and accommodating my parents' needs made the adventure both challenging and rewarding. Our first long road trip from Philadelphia to Ithaca felt like a milestone—especially as I watched my parents marvel at the scenic drive and enjoy each local discovery. The highlight for me was our visit to the Ithaca Farmer's Market, where I felt a deep connection to the community and a sense of accomplishment in creating these memories for my family. As we packed up to leave, my parents told me how proud they were that I managed everything on my own. That moment, surrounded by the souvenirs and scents from the market, felt like the perfect conclusion to a trip filled with growth, gratitude, and togetherness.