



ESL Podcast 711 – A Difficult Place to Find

GLOSSARY

to make one more pass – to try to do something one more time, especially when trying to find something while driving

* Okay, we'll make one more pass to try and find the ice cream shop, but this is the last time!

to head back – to begin to go back in the direction from which one came; to turn around so that one can go back to where one started

* The kids were screaming so much in the backseat of the car that the parents decided to head back home.

desk clerk – receptionist; a person whose job is to answer the phones and greet people who come into an office or business

* The desk clerk has to sign a form whenever the mail carrier delivers packages.

hidden away – not easily seen because something is partially or entirely behind something else, not where one would expect to see it

* When traveling as a tourist, it's a good idea to keep your money and passport hidden away.

to keep an eye out – to look for something; to be aware of one's surroundings

* Keep an eye out for holes on the dirt road, or you might trip and fall.

blink and you'll miss it – a phrase used to tell someone that the thing he or she is looking for is very small and/or very hard to find, so he or she must be actively looking around for it

* They used to joke that the town they grew up in was so small, they had to tell people, "Blink and you'll miss it."

stretch – a particular section of a road between two points

* This stretch of highway has a lot of dangerous curves.

off the beaten path – sites that are not well-known and are rarely visited by tourists

* When Jimmy travels, he likes to eat at restaurants that are off the beaten path, and not described in tourist guidebooks.

prominent – seen easily, often because something is very large or very different from the things around it

* When you drive to the city, the first thing you'll see is a prominent sign that says, "Welcome to Bainbridge!"



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landmark – an important building, statue, or natural object that helps one identify where one is

* The Statue of Liberty is probably the best-known landmark in New York City.

charm – the characteristics that make something likeable, especially in a sweet or old-fashioned way

* Part of her charm is the way she blushes whenever anyone compliments her.

hideaway – a place where one can go to be far away from other people and be left alone, without interruption

* Many writers do their best work in secret hideaways.

neon sign – a sign with words and images shown in bright lights created by putting gas in glass tubes

* The neon sign said, “open,” but the doors of the restaurant were locked.

tucked away – far away from other people, buildings, or things, in a quiet place

* They own a cabin that’s tucked away in the Appalachian Mountains.

to keep (one’s) eyes peeled – to actively look for something when one knows it will be difficult to find

* In New York City, drivers always have to keep their eyes peeled for a parking space.

to spot – to find something that one has been looking for; to catch a glimpse of something; to see

* Vince has great vision and was able to spot the airplane before anyone else could see it.

geez – a word used to show one’s surprise, relief, or bewilderment

* Geez that was a hard test!

to find a needle in a haystack – to find something that is very difficult to find, usually because it is very small or because it is one of many similar objects

* Getting a good job in this economy is like finding a needle in a haystack.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Marsha, what is special about this hotel?
 - a) It's very old and beautiful.
 - b) It's not very well-known.
 - c) It's less expensive.
2. What does Ricardo mean when says, "Keep your eyes peeled"?
 - a) He wants Marsha to try to stay awake.
 - b) He wants Marsha to stop crying.
 - c) He wants Marsha to help him look for the hotel.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to make a pass

The phrase "to make one more pass," in this podcast, means to try to do something one more time, especially when trying to find something while driving: "The flight instructor agreed to let her student make one more pass at landing the plane before taking control of it herself." The phrase "to make a pass at (someone)" means to try to start a romantic or sexual relationship with someone, perhaps by saying something, making a facial expression, or touching the other person: "Don't you see that man winking at you? I'm sure he's trying to make a pass at you." Finally, the phrase "to come to a pretty pass" is not very common, but means for a situation to have become very difficult or bad: "Things would have to come to a pretty pass before I'd steal food from a store."

stretch

In this podcast, the word "stretch" means a particular section of a road between two points: "The children believe that this stretch of road is haunted and ghosts live here." A "stretch" can also refer to a period of time without interruption: "Her teenage son can sleep for 14-hour stretches!" The phrase "by any stretch (of the imagination)" is used to emphasize the truth of something negative that one has just said: "Those fashion models aren't overweight by any stretch of the imagination." The phrases "the final stretch" and "the home stretch" refer to the last part of a project or activity: "We're in the home stretch now. All we have to do is write the conclusion and then we'll be done with this report."



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CULTURE NOTE

Hearst Castle

Hearst Castle is a “mansion” (a large home for very rich people) on the California “coast” (land next to the ocean). Its construction began in 1919 and lasted almost 30 years. It was built for William Randolph Hearst, a newspaper “magnate” (leading businessman) but after his death it was donated to the State of California, which “maintains it” (keeps it in good condition) as a state historic park.

The mansion has 56 bedrooms, 61 bathrooms, 19 “sitting rooms” (living rooms), “extensive” (very large, covering a large area) gardens, tennis courts, swimming pools, a movie theater, and the largest “private” (owned by an individual or family, not by a government) zoo in the world. The buildings cover more than 90,000 square feet (8,300 square meters) and have a lot of European “ornamentation” (decoration).

During the 1920s and 1930s, many politicians and the “Hollywood elite” (famous people involved in the American entertainment industry) “coveted” (strongly wanted to have) invitations to Hearst Castle. Visitors included actor Charlie Chaplin, “aviator” (pilot) Charles Lindbergh, and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, among others.

Today, the Hearst family is still allowed to use the property, but they “primarily” (mostly) use just one home. Visitors can go on many different tours of the rest of the castle “grounds” (the buildings and the land surrounding them), paying 12 to 30 dollars per ticket. Tourists go there to admire the “skill” (technical expertise and ability) involved in designing and constructing the buildings, as well as the “fabulous” (very impressive) art collections found in and around the castle buildings.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 711: A Difficult Place to Find.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 711. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Download this episode's Learning Guide, an 8- to 10-page guide to our episode, to improve your English even faster.

This episode is a dialogue between Ricardo and Marsha about a place that is difficult to find. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Ricardo: I'm making one more pass and if we don't see a sign for the hotel, I'm heading back into town. I'm tired and I want a shower.

Marsha: I'm sure we'll find it. When I talked to the desk clerk, she said that the hotel is hidden away behind some trees and to keep an eye out for their white sign.

Ricardo: Did she say blink and you'll miss it? Because we've driven past this stretch three times and I don't see a sign.

Marsha: She just said that they're a little off the beaten path.

Ricardo: If they know that their hotel is so hard to find, why don't they make it more prominent with some kind of landmark?

Marsha: That's part of the charm of a small hotel hideaway. It doesn't have neon signs and it's tucked away far from the tourist areas.

Ricardo: That's all good and fine, but we have to find it first. Okay, this is the last pass. Keep your eyes peeled.

Marsha: There it is! I've spotted the sign. It's over there, see?

Ricardo: Yeah, now I see it. Geez, it's like finding a needle in a haystack!



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[end of dialogue]

Ricardo begins by saying, “I’m making one more pass.” “To make one more pass” means to try to do something one more time, especially in this case where Ricardo is driving and he’s trying to find a specific place and perhaps he’s driven down this road once or more than once, he’s going to try it one more time. He says, “if we don’t see a sign for the hotel, I’m heading back into town.” “To head back” is a phrasal verb meaning to begin to go back to the place from which you came, to return to where you were before. In this case, Ricardo is going to head back to into town. Here, the word “town” means any urban area; could be a city, it could be a small town. The general expression “to go into town” usually means to go to the busier part of a city or into a city.

Ricardo says, “I’m tired and I want a shower.” Marsha says, “I’m sure we’ll find it. When I talked to the desk clerk, she said that the hotel is hidden away behind some trees.” The “desk clerk” is the person who answers the phone for a business or an office; we might also call the desk clerk a “receptionist.” Marsha says that the desk clerk told her that the hotel is hidden away. “To be hidden (hidden) away” means that you cannot easily see something, usually because it is behind something else. In this case, the hotel is behind some trees so you can’t see it from the street – from the road. The desk clerk also told Marsha to keep an eye out for the white sign that the hotel has. The expression “to keep an eye out” is very common; it means to look for something, to be aware of the things around you. You might say to your husband, “When you go to the grocery store, keep an eye out for any sales,” anything that is being sold at a discounted or lower price. To keep an eye out, then, means to be looking for something.

Ricardo says, “Did she say blink and you’ll miss it?” Ricardo is trying to be funny here. This is an old expression, “blink and you’ll (or you will) miss it.” “To blink” means to open and close your eyelids; you do this automatically. The idea is that it happens very quickly. So when someone says, “blink and you’ll miss it,” they mean that if you’re not looking carefully you will go right by it; you will miss it; you will not see it perhaps because it is well hidden, or perhaps because it is very small, or perhaps it relates to an event that will happen quickly. Ricardo is saying that it must be a place that is very difficult to find. He says, “Because we’ve driven past this stretch three times and I don’t see a sign.” “Stretch” here refers to a certain part or a certain section of a road, between one point and another. It could be three blocks, it could be a half a mile, it could be five kilometers; it’s a somewhat vague, unspecific term to refer to a part of a street or a road. In this case, Ricardo is referring to the part of the road where the hotel is supposed to be, and they still are unable to find it.



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Marsha says, “She just said that they’re a little off the beaten path.” “A little” here means slightly, a little bit. “To be off the beaten path” means to be in a place that is not normally visited by a lot of people; it’s not downtown, it’s not where there are a lot of tourists.

Ricardo says, “If they know that their hotel is so hard to find, why don’t they make it more prominent with some kind of landmark?” “Prominent” here means to be seen easily because it’s very large or perhaps different. Some buildings have special signs or things that they put on the building so you can find them easily when you’re driving down the street. McDonald’s, the hamburger restaurant, has a big yellow “m” that makes the restaurant more prominent; you see that; you know what that means; you can find it easily because of it. Ricardo says that they should make their hotel more prominent with some kind of “landmark.” Here he’s using the term, I think, to mean some physical change in the building, some thing that they would add to the building, perhaps a big flagpole with a flag or something that they could tell people to look for that would indicate that their hotel was there. We also use the term “landmark” to refer to important buildings or statues, but here it’s used more generally to mean simply something physical that will help you find the location.

Marsha says, “That’s part of the charm of a small hotel hideaway.” “Charm” here means things that are likable, especially in a somewhat and perhaps old-fashioned way, the way things used to be many years ago. When someone says, “Oh, this is charming,” they mean it’s nice, it’s pleasant, it’s calming perhaps. “Charm” is also used to describe a personality characteristic. When you say, “That man was very charming,” we mean he was very nice; he was very likable. Marsha says that this is one of the charms of a small hotel hideaway. “Hideaway” (hideaway – one word) is a place where you can go that you will not be interrupted by other people, a place where you can be by yourself so that no one will bother you or find you. Marsha says, “It doesn’t have neon signs and it’s tucked away far from the tourist areas.” A “neon (neon) sign” is a large sign where the words and images are in special lights. You put a special kind of gas – neon gas into these tubes that act like light bulbs and form the sign. Neon signs were very popular back in the 50s and 60s and 70s, and still today in some places. Las Vegas is famous for its neon signs, so is Sunset Boulevard here in Los Angeles, and, of course, Broadway in New York City. Anyway, Marsha says that this hotel does not have neon signs, “it’s tucked away far from the tourist areas.” “To be tucked away” means to be far away from other people, other buildings, from where the rest of the people are; in this case, away from the tourist areas, places where visitors would go.



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Ricardo says, “That’s all good and fine (meaning well, that’s nice), but we have to find it first. Okay,” he says, “this is the last pass,” the last time he’s going to drive down this stretch of road. “Keep your eyes peeled,” he says. “To keep your eyes peeled” (peeled) means to look for something very carefully, especially when you know it is difficult to find. So, it’s similar to “keep an eye out,” but it requires even more concentration; you have to really be looking for it because you know it’s difficult to find.

Marsha says, “There it is! I’ve spotted (or seen) the sign. It’s over there, see?” Ricardo says, “Yeah, now I see it. Geez, it’s like finding a needle in a haystack!” “Geez,” spelled usually (geez), is an expression of surprise or relief or some sort of uncertainty. In this case, it’s more relief than anything else. Someone says, “Oh, geez! Where did I put my keys?” you’re confused; you’re lost. Or someone may say, “Oh, geez! You scared me when you walked up without knocking on my door.” So, it can be used in a lot of different cases. Ricardo says finding this hotel is like finding a needle in a haystack. A “needle” is a small, sharp pin that is used for sewing things together, putting together two pieces of fabric for clothing, for example. A “haystack” is made of hay – “hay” is basically dried grass – that is put together and used on a farm. The idea of a needle in a haystack is that it’s very difficult to find. It would be very difficult to find any sort of small object that was hidden in a large area, that’s the idea of finding a needle in a haystack.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Ricardo: I’m making one more pass and if we don’t see a sign for the hotel, I’m heading back into town. I’m tired and I want a shower.

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Marsha: There it is! I've spotted the sign. It's over there, see?

Ricardo: Yeah, now I see it. Geez, it's like finding a needle in a haystack!

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by our own charming Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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