

Canadian man ignored knock at Oberoi in Mumbai: CNN

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WASHINGTON (AFP) — A Canadian businessman who ignored a mysterious knock on his door at Mumbai's Oberoi hotel said Friday it was one of a series of life-saving decisions that enabled him to narrowly escape terrorist mayhem.

"I feel asleep relatively quickly, a bit of jet lag," Jonathan Ehrlich told CNN in an interview from his home city of Vancouver, relating his ordeal with calm gravity.

"About an hour later, a knock at my door, then the doorbell rang, and I thought to myself, who could this be?" Ehrlich said.

"There's no way it was the hotel staff this late with the turndown service. So I stayed in bed, and then didn't get up, didn't say a word.

"Then five minutes later, the chaos started and the bombs went off, and I learned a couple hours later at the airport that the terrorist had first gone to reception and got photocopies of people's passports, looking for Westerners.

"Erich with an E, I'm assuming, was one of their first stops, and I didn't get out of bed and I'm still here," he said.

It was his second life-saving decision Ehrlich made that night. Earlier, thinking of a plane he had to catch in the morning, he turned down a friend's invitation to have a drink in the lobby.

The friend was taken hostage when terrorists stormed the lobby, but eventually escaped after being taken to the roof.

That friend's drinking companion, also taken hostage, "is actually still in the Oberoi," status unknown, Ehrlich said.

After hearing an explosion, he saw smoke out his window and went out into the hall where he heard someone shout "bomb."

"As soon as I heard those words it was like an explosion in my chest," Ehrlich said. Adrenaline pumping through his body, he threw his clothes into a bag and ran to the lobby "as fast as I've ever run."

In the lobby there was "blood on the floor, and broken glass" so he ran instead to the hotel basement, urging people he saw "milling around" to flee.

Outside there was a massive crowd, but a hotel employee "threw me into a taxi" and he went off to the airport.

"You know, I was the luckiest man on Earth before. Now I'm the double luckiest man on Earth," he said adding that he feels "very, very bad for the people in India."

"If I could give one message to your audience, they should go to their travel agent and buy a ticket to Mumbai," he urged.

"Please go. Please go. They need your support," he said.

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A hostage peeks from a window of the Oberoi/Trident Hotel where hostages are held by gunmen in Mumbai

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