

## Travelling in Troublesome Times: A 12-Point Guide

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Travel can be a trying experience for some in the best of times. There are so many things to keep in mind; so many precautions to take, so many distractions and scams to watch for. Some travellers cringe at the idea of travel, while others embrace the challenge of discovery, activity, education and adventure. But what happens when the normal challenges are compounded by conflict somewhere on our small planet? For those who wonder whether they should venture forth, here are some ideas to ponder:

- 1) **Discover Canada.** Think of all the advantages: Close to home, relatively safe, amazing number of activities, ideas for single, couples, families, seniors and special interest travel, great photographic opportunities, active and passive vacations, familiarity with the language and the currency, no special travel documentation needed, phone calls home are cheaper and, just like a far-flung destination, your Certified Travel Counsellor (CTC) can make all the arrangements for you, from flight to train to motorcoach to car rentals; from a variety of accommodations to evening theatre and special event tickets.
- 2) **Discover areas within your Comfort Sphere.** So you've travelled the depths and breadths of Canada and you really did want to venture further. Many tour operators will be focussing on travels to the Caribbean, Mexico and the Pacific this summer. Likewise, cruise lines will emphasize Alaska, the Caribbean and Mexico, rather than Europe. **ACTA** the Association of Canadian Travel Agents notes on their web site ([www.acta.ca](http://www.acta.ca)) that while tour operators are in a wait-and see attitude in deciding whether to adjust their cancellation policies, a number of cruise lines are restructuring their cancellation policies to treat the cancellation penalty as a credit, good for one year, minus an administration fee.
- 3) **Airline cancellation policies:** When you book your travel, ask your Certified Travel Counsellor about the airline's cancellation policies. Is there a cancellation fee? If hostilities occur and you have a non-refundable ticket, will the airline allow you some flexibility? Remember that this is a service your Travel Counsellor will provide. If you book on your own—then you must do your own research.
- 4) **Will you join the re-booking line up?** If you are out of the country and hostilities arise, your travel counsellor in Canada will be working on your behalf to get you home. If you have booked the trip on your own, you will most likely join a long (and in many cases, long-distance) line up to call "someone" to help you secure a flight home. Your travel plans should include booking your travel with a Certified Travel Counsellor. Don't be fooled by ads that manipulate you into thinking you are celebrating your freedom by booking your own travel arrangements. You can end up paying through the nose when something goes wrong.
- 5) **Pay attention to Government Advisories.** In Canada, visit [www.voyages.gc.ca](http://www.voyages.gc.ca) to obtain the latest travel advisories on the countries you wish to visit. There may be general travel safety advice given, or out-and-out hard advice to avoid a certain country. The advisory may instruct Canadians to avoid tourist destinations in the country, hotels, group scenes etc. or it may advise Canadians about stringent security and screening when entering the country. Ignorance is never a good excuse. Do your research. Again, your Certified Travel Counsellor will have access to this important information. The best advice that anyone can give is to take these advisories very seriously.

- 6) **Are your travel documents up-to-date?** The rule of thumb is that most countries will not admit you if your passport expires within 6 months of the date of entry. Some countries have, in light of recent world events, instituted visa requirements for certain nationalities. And...this situation could change on a daily basis. Therefore, you should not only be aware of the entry requirements of the country you wish to visit—but stay in touch with the government site—about any changes to those regulations. If you do travel, safeguard your passport and other travel/legal documents, and know how to access them easily when necessary. See # 7, below.
- 7) **Did you know** that in the Province of Ontario, Regulation S.21(2)(d) maintains that travel counsellors are required “to inform their customers (in writing) about the information and documents that will be needed for each person for whom travel services are being sold”. Michael Pepper, the President of the Travel Industry Council of Ontario advises that “Even Canadian passport holders may be refused entry to the USA if their place of birth is in a specifically listed country”. Therefore, the services of a travel counsellor to the consumer become essential. Your travel counsellor will also advise you on the terms and conditions relating to cancelling a trip, should a travel advisory be issued after you book. Visit [www.tico.on.ca](http://www.tico.on.ca)
- 8) **Don't lock your suitcase...**In select Canadian airports and in the US, suitcases are scanned for dangerous objects, prior to check-in. This means that you will experience longer waits before check-in and, potential frustration. Take it easy. This is reality in the year 2003. Arrive early, psyche yourself up for a longer wait. Lock your suitcase only after the inspection has taken place (otherwise you will be contributing to an even longer wait while you fumble for your keys). Ask your travel counsellor or airline about prohibited items. Also, keep your jokes, your complaints and your snide comments to yourself. Uttering them could lead to criminal charges!
- 9) **But I have a Canadian Flag on my suitcase...** For years, Canadians have displayed Canadian flags on their suitcases, camera cases, backpacks, purses and clothing. For many it was a statement of pride, for others it was to distinguish themselves from other nationalities. Guess what? Now other nationalities, seeing the positive reaction of foreigners to Canadians, have started to sew Canadian flags on their travel gear—even though they are not Canadian. Don't believe that a \$1.00 Canadian flag patch sewn on your jacket, will provide you with any special privileges or security.
- 10) **Check your Insurance Policy.** According to **ACTA**, as far as Travel Insurance is concerned, “If someone chooses to travel contrary to the advisory, they would not be covered for any expenses incurred related to the reason for the advisory being issued”. John McKenna, Vice Chairman of RBC Travel Insurance cautions that consumers should do their homework regarding travel insurance. A travel counsellor will be able to explain the various types of travel insurance that are available. RBC lists Ten Top Travel Tips at <http://micro.newswire.ca/74615-0.html>
- 11) **6<sup>th</sup> Sense—not just a movie.** When all is said and done, the consumer must ultimately make the decision whether to travel or not. If you get that nagging feeling about taking that overseas or cross-border family vacation, then listen to that little voice and alter your plans until you feel 100% comfortable. There are alternatives (see Point #1) to going abroad. The joy of travel is based on discovery, education, and doing something different, that is energizing and stress-free. If one of these components is not in place, then your entire trip

could be jeopardized. Play it safe...talk to your Certified Travel Counsellor today about your next vacation.

**12) Is your Travel Counsellor on The List?** Canada's 2235 Certified Travel Counsellors and Certified Travel Managers maybe found at <http://www.citc.ca/certifiedcoun.cfm> Type in your postal code and get a listing of CTC's and CTM's in your neighbourhood. **Remember that if they are not on the list...then they are not Certified Travel Counsellors.**