

"You've Got to Let Me Out of Your Country! "
Certified Travel Counsellors, Travel Documentation and You!

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When travel industry people speak about "travel documentation", they are referring to those legal documents that must accompany you on your travels. It could be a passport or a birth certificate or a visa or another government issued document. There are too many travel mishaps that occur when **incomplete advice** is given to a traveller--or **no advice** is given at all because the traveller has decided to make his/her own travel arrangements.

Incomplete Advice? A traveller is advised that he must have a valid passport to enter Belgium. The traveller knows his passport will expire in 2 months but, then again, he is only going to be in Belgium for a three-day Conference. When he gets to the airport, the airline denies boarding, because Belgium requires a passport to be valid for **three** months after arrival. Most countries require a passport valid for **six** months after arrival, but this rule can change from country to country. Canadians travelling to Cuba, for example, need only have a passport valid for **one week** after departing Cuba.

Passport misinformation can lead to a lot of stress from missed flights, missed connections, missed vacation time, not to mention the expense and time involved in securing an emergency passport, if in fact the traveller is even aware that emergency passports exist. Certified Travel Counsellors can provide proper advice about travel documentation, as well as any information about travel warnings that may not only effect the traveller's journey, but could also impact on travel insurance coverage.

No Advice? As I was lining up to check into my flight from Ulan Bator (Mongolia) back to Beijing, an American woman was obviously frantic. She was saying in a loud voice "You've got to let me out of your country!". The woman had made her own travel arrangements and was unaware that if you leave Beijing and then return--even if it is just to catch a flight back to the States, you are required to have a double-entry visa. The woman had already used her single entry before she had arrived in Mongolia. The airline denied boarding the woman on the flight to Beijing. The reasons? Firstly, she would be refused entry into China, as she did not have the proper travel documentation, and secondly, the airline would be responsible for flying the woman back to Ulan Bator, at their own expense.

By the way, this happened on a Saturday when the Chinese Embassy was closed--and even if they had an emergency weekend visa service, the Embassy was quite far from the airport. The woman's connecting flight from Beijing to New York was leaving later on this day. She was in quite a stressful dilemma that could have been resolved, had she received expert advice from a trained travel professional.

Missing Advice? The rules of travel documentation can change from week to week--and sometimes from day to day--depending on global events. When the SARS scare hit Toronto, some countries imposed visa restrictions on Canadians for the first time. When Foreign Affairs Canada issued warnings about the changed rules, certified travel

counsellors contacted their clients to let them know. Those who made their own travel arrangements were left on their own.

Some rules for visiting the United States have changed since 9/11. A Canadian passport does not guarantee you entry into the U.S if, say you were born in specifically listed countries. A criminal conviction in your past may prevent you from entering the U.S. If you are travelling with your child and your spouse is staying in Canada, you need documentation allowing you to take the child out of the country. The list goes on and on.

Do travel counsellors memorize all these rules? Probably not--but they have an obligation to ensure that their clients have worry-free travel and therefore the travel professional is knowledgeable in accessing up-to-date accurate information for the traveller. They know which questions to ask in order to ensure that there are no surprises at the airport in Canada--or at the destination.

The analogy is often made: If you want to have a tooth fixed, you go to the best dentist in town. If you are having a car repaired, you take it to the most knowledgeable and experienced mechanic. If you want to safeguard your hard-earned travel dollars, why wouldn't you go to the best trained travel professional available? **This person is the Certified Travel Counsellor (CTC) or Certified Travel Manager (CTM) in your community.**

A full listing of Canada's Certified Travel Professionals can be found at www.citc.ca/en/directory or by contacting CITC at info@citc.ca; 1-800-589-5776; 416-484-4450.

Incorporated in 1968, the vision of the **Canadian Institute of Travel Counsellors** is to lead the Canadian travel industry to be the most skilled and professional work force in the world, and to ensure that the CTC / CTM designations are recognized, accepted and valued by the travel industry and consumers as the ultimate achievement in professionalism. Information on membership, certification, educational programs, publications and consumer travel advice is available at www.citc.ca

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