

Who Needs Travel Insurance?

BY ELENA MATHIS

Everyone looks forward to the next vacation when they can “get away from it all.” But, travel is not necessarily cheap and the average person booking a trip these days has to be cost conscious. As a result, consumers often decide not to pay the extra \$60 to \$100 per person for travel insurance. In my professional opinion, that is a costly mistake.

Restrictive cancellation policies and the unpredictability of life warrant an extra measure of protection. When the unexpected occurs (such as illness or baggage loss), it's easy to rack up overwhelming financial costs. Consider that medical institutions in most countries (and onboard cruise ships) require payment up-front for services rendered. Or, imagine the costs associated with going three days without any of your own clothes or toiletries. Here's a quick look at what most basic insurance plans will offer:

Trip Delay and Baggage Delay/Loss:

Coverage allows the insured a daily amount (various limits apply) to cover expenses for overnight delayed flights, baggage delay (or loss), and cruise “catch up” costs if a flight delay causes the traveler to miss a ship's embarkation.

Trip Protection Plans:

These typically reimburse your travel expenses if an emergency (airline strike, travel company bankruptcy, sickness, death, etc.) occurs right before or during your trip, causing it to be canceled, interrupted, or delayed.

Medical Insurance:

Designed to reimburse medical expenses incurred when traveling out of the country, coverage may also include reunion and repatriation benefits. (Pre-existing conditions may be excluded.)

Emergency Medical Evacuation:

Protection covers the cost of transporting a seriously injured or ill person to an adequate medical facility, a hospital near home, or the hospital of their choice, depending on the plan.

Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D):

Insurance pays the insured (or his/her beneficiary) a lump sum benefit when a travel injury results in death or the loss of a body part.

It may seem far-fetched that any of these occurrences will happen to you but they do happen. I had a client whose baggage was lost for three days as well as a client whose flight was cancelled the morning she was leaving,

due to a hurricane. In these cases, the added protection of travel insurance was certainly worth its minimal cost.

A consumer basically has two options when deciding to buy insurance: purchasing it directly from the supplier or from an outside insurance company. Many travelers think it's best to purchase the insurance from the supplier with whom they are booking, since everything comes in one package. However, that is not always the case. While outside insurance companies are in the business of protecting their clients, suppliers can be biased and sometimes look to protect themselves as well.

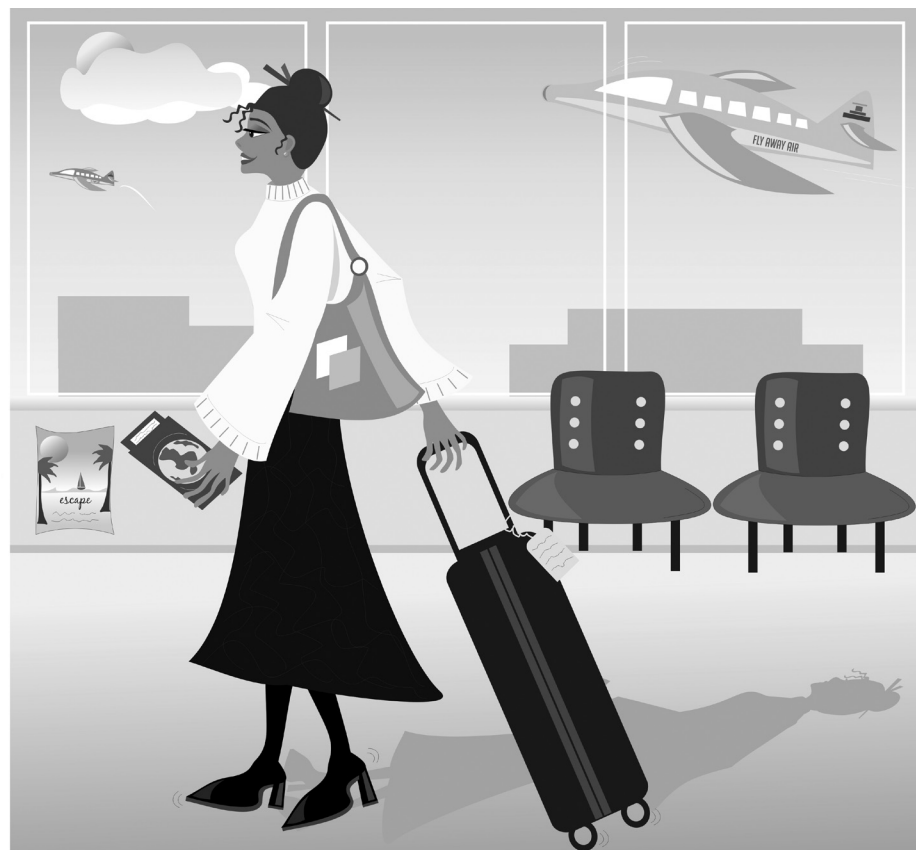
Consider this: there is a reputable insurance company that will offer a 90% “cancel for any reason” policy to their clients. There is also a well-known cruise line that will offer the same coverage ... or so it seems. The insurance company will pay 90% of all costs paid by a client in the form of a check, if that client cancels within 48 hours of departure. The cruise line will pay 90% of *cruise only* charges (that does not include taxes or port charges) in the form of a cruise line *credit* that is valid for *up to* one year. So, if you book a family cruise that costs \$2,914.64 but suddenly need to cancel, the insurance company would issue you a refund check for \$2,623.03, while the cruise line would only issue a company credit worth \$2,077.20. As you can see, there can be a significant difference. (I must point out that there is also a difference in policy cost – the cruise line will charge an extra \$357.00 total for the coverage, while the insurance company charges \$514.00).

That's just one example. Not all suppliers are created equal and some do offer excellent insurance options; it's best that travelers weigh all the choices and make sure that they know exactly what they're getting.

A travel agent is a great ally when figuring out what the best choice is. In fact, most travel agents can even book insurance for a trip you've already purchased!

I have spoken with so many people who thought they had everything set until I pointed out some factor they had overlooked. You're spending hard earned money on fun and relaxation. So, check out all of your options, enlist the help of a travel professional (whose services are usually free), splurge on the \$60 worth of insurance ... and have a great trip!

Elena Mathis owns the travel agency “The Vacation Consultant” and is licensed to sell travel insurance. Call (866) 388-6372 or visit www.TheVacationConsultant.com for personalized vacation planning.



Time Saving Travel Tips

BY THE VACATION CONSULTANT

1. Get a Passport

It's so simple to get one, and that's exactly why you should! True, people can still currently travel to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean with just their birth certificates, but that will all change by January of 2008. Avoid the inevitable backlog and get one while processing times are still normal.

With all of the extra security measures, a passport really is your best means of identification. It eliminates the guesswork as to what is and isn't acceptable for foreign visitors. If you've ever debarked from a cruise ship, you've probably noticed how much shorter the customs line is for people who have a passport. Next time, be in that line!

2. Pack Smart To Save Time at the Airport

It's a good idea to call and confirm all reservations and flight times the night before you leave to avoid any hassles or delays.

When planning your wardrobe and prepping your bags, there are several things you can do to shave off a few minutes when going through security. Avoid wearing metal accessories (such as belts) or shoes that contain metal or have thick soles or heels. Instead of wearing your jewelry or putting your wallet in your pocket, put them in your carry-on until you get on board (so that you won't have to remove everything to pass through the metal detectors). Other items that you should stow in your carry-on are cameras (and film), mobile phones, PDAs, Blackberries, and keys.

Each adult traveler needs to have his/her airline boarding pass and government-issued photo ID available until exiting the security checkpoint. At many airports, you may be required to show your boarding pass on more than one occasion so it's best to keep it handy until you board the plane.

3. Photocopy Important Documents Ahead of Time

Your travel vouchers, airline tickets, car rental reservations, hotel reservations, passport (or other form of ID), and medical prescriptions should be color photocopied and stored in a safe (and separate) place from your originals. You may even want to leave back-up copies at home with a trusted friend or family member. It's much easier to get replacements for valuable documents when you have some proof that they existed in the first place.

Never depend on your reservation to be in a computer system. While 99% of the time that may be the case, you don't want to be stuck that one time when there may be a computer glitch.

Call Elena Mathis at (866) 388-6372 or visit www.TheVacationConsultant.com to make your travel plans as easy as one, two, three!