

CONSULAR SERVICES

HER OWN WAY

A Woman's Guide to Safe and Successful Travel



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International Trade Canada

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HER OWN WAY

A Woman's Guide to Safe and Successful Travel

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This booklet was originally written for the Consular Affairs Bureau of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada by "women and travel" consultant Evelyn Hannon.

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The information, however, is subject to change at any time without notice. Consult our website and resources in the "For More Information" section for the most up-to-date information. The reader is also encouraged to supplement this information with independent research and professional advice.

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INTRODUCTION

Now, more than ever, this booklet is a woman's key to safe and successful travel. Since the first edition was published nearly 10 years ago, the world of women's travel has evolved. From young backpackers to experienced businesswomen, females of all ages are exploring the planet in growing numbers. They are venturing further and touring, studying and working in more remote and sometimes less secure areas than they once dared. This trend continues against a global backdrop of increasing security concerns and our own country's changing societal norms. Like never before, it is essential that women educate themselves to travel the world safely and responsibly.

While women travel for many of the same reasons as men do, their social concerns, as well as their health and safety needs, are different. Female travellers are more directly

affected by the religious and societal beliefs of the countries they visit. As they make their way around the globe, they need to adapt the way they dress and how they interact with local populations. The more they prepare themselves for differing norms and attitudes, the richer and safer their travels will be.

In some countries, it is considered improper for a woman to wear a bikini; in others, she should not go out alone after dark. Businesswomen who travel and work abroad may find that their productivity increases in direct proportion to their knowledge of the cultural do's and taboos of foreign boardrooms. Women thinking of marrying overseas need to learn beforehand about a country's customs and laws regarding relationships and marriage.

Whether you are a breast-feeding mother, a busy executive or an older traveller, as a woman, you will have unique

health concerns to deal with on the road. A bit of planning and research in this area will prove invaluable once you are abroad.

Even if you choose luxury hotels over budget accommodations, you must always be vigilant to protect your well-being and security. What steps can you take to avoid sexual harassment? How can you make your hotel room more secure? Where can you obtain consular assistance if you experience problems abroad?

This booklet is filled with practical tips and advice to address these and other issues from a woman's point of view. Its main objective is to encourage Canadian women to take a preventive approach to safe travel. For further information on planning a safe and problem-free trip, see our publication *Bon Voyage, But...* or visit our Consular Affairs website at www.voyage.gc.ca. And bon voyage!

"Travel always gives us a fresh perspective and is truly a school of life. I would encourage all women to take the daring step of discovering how interconnected we are as human beings through travel. It is a journey of discovery that enriches our mind and our soul."

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada

COPING WITH CULTURE SHOCK

A smart traveller finds out everything she can about the culture, customs and role of women in the countries she plans to visit. She learns what to expect and prepares for as many situations as possible.

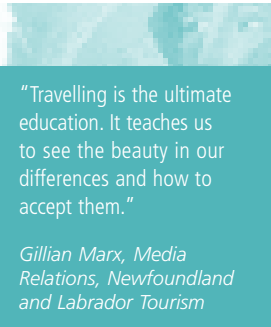
One of your best sources of travel information is other women. Connect with them through women's associations and online travel networks (see the "For More Information" section). Ask for their advice. Note their recommendations on hotels, bed and breakfasts, and restaurants. Find out if they have friends or know of organizations that you could contact at your destination.

Supplement the mainstream media with travel books, newsletters, magazines and websites just for women. They offer an understanding view of the health, safety, cultural and emotional issues experienced by females on the road.

Surf the Internet. Post your queries on web-based bulletin boards. You could get responses from helpful travellers around the world. But beware of those who may use the Internet for malicious purposes.

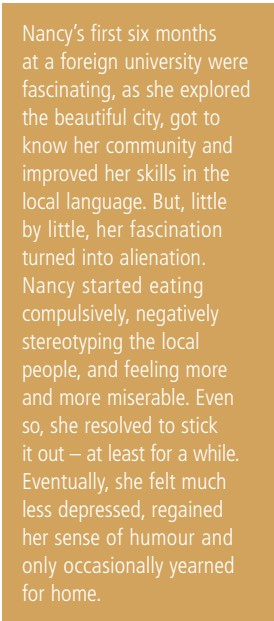
Seek out women at home who were born and raised where you plan to visit or who have travelled there frequently. They are perfect guides to appropriate behaviour and dress for women in that culture. Get them to teach you a few key words and phrases in the local language.

For more information on coping with culture shock, see the "While Abroad" section of our website.



"Travelling is the ultimate education. It teaches us to see the beauty in our differences and how to accept them."

Gillian Marx, Media Relations, Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism



Nancy's first six months at a foreign university were fascinating, as she explored the beautiful city, got to know her community and improved her skills in the local language. But, little by little, her fascination turned into alienation. Nancy started eating compulsively, negatively stereotyping the local people, and feeling more and more miserable. Even so, she resolved to stick it out – at least for a while. Eventually, she felt much less depressed, regained her sense of humour and only occasionally yearned for home.



TRAVEL LIGHT, TRAVEL SMART


It is best to travel light. As a woman alone, you will be far less vulnerable and much more independent if you are not loaded down with heavy luggage and extra bags. Depending on your style of travel, a small suitcase on wheels or a backpack is a good choice. A tote bag or small day pack is useful for shorter excursions. Try to have at least one hand free at all times.

It is wise to keep your luggage locked at all times. Carry several small locks and two sets of keys.

Avoid expensive-looking camera bags and other showy accessories, which may mark you as a wealthy tourist.

Luggage tags with flaps that hide your name and address from inquiring eyes are a smart idea. They protect your anonymity and thwart would-be thieves who may try to identify the empty home you have left behind.

The ideal handbag, if you are taking one, has zippered inner compartments for added security and a thick shoulder strap that goes over your head and shoulder. The best way to carry your handbag is in front of you, next to your stomach, where it is not easily accessible to pickpockets.



“The best piece of advice for Canadians travelling abroad? Don’t forget to pack your flexibility!”

*Dr. Manisha Rajora,
surgeon, Doctors Without
Borders*

STAYING SAFE

Remember to pack your common sense when you go abroad. In your handbag or backpack, carry only items that are lightweight and that you can afford to lose. Conceal in a money belt or neck pouch any necessities that cannot be easily replaced and that are crucial to your travel arrangements: your passport, airline ticket, credit and debit cards, traveller’s cheques, cash, a copy of your insurance policy, medical prescriptions and contact information for your doctor and the nearest Canadian embassy or consulate.

If you plan to spend time at the beach, consider buying a waterproof hip pack to keep your valuables safe and dry, rather than leaving them unattended while you swim.

Be sure to make copies of all important travel documents and store them in your suitcase, in case the originals are stolen or lost. Leave additional copies with a family member or friend in Canada.

Christine was checking her email at an Internet café in Barcelona, when a young man sat down next to her and began to chat. As the stranger was leaving, Christine realized that her knapsack, containing her wallet and travel documents, had disappeared. She shouted, “¡Basta!” and confronted the thief before he could escape. From then on, she never put her bag down for even a second in public areas.

If you are travelling in developing countries, pack a small flashlight. Power failures can be frequent.

Study a street map of your destination in advance. Avoid opening a map while out on the street – or do so as discreetly as possible – in order not to give the impression that you are lost or vulnerable.

Well before leaving home, be sure to obtain a valid Canadian passport and an appropriate visa for every country on your itinerary. Understand the terms of each visa, as you could be arrested for violating visa conditions in some countries.

Maintain contact with friends and family back home, especially if you are travelling solo. Whether by letter, fax, email or telephone, keep them posted on where you are and where you are heading next.

If touring solo for the day, leave a note in your room explaining where you are going. If you do not return as planned, this information could be used to help track you down.

Always carry the address or a business card from your hotel or bed and breakfast. If you get lost, approach another woman on the street and show her the address. She may be able to point you in the right direction.

In some destinations, hailing a cab on the street can be risky. It is always wise to call a reputable taxi service.

Avoid sightseeing in isolated areas. If renting a car, consider carrying a mobile phone. Make sure you have an emergency phone number in case you experience a mechanical breakdown or find yourself in danger. Never pick up hitchhikers. And never get out of your car if another vehicle bumps into it. Thieves sometimes fake accidents as a ruse to steal cars or the valuables inside. Instead, wait for the police to arrive.

Never accept food or drink from strangers. Understand that drugging is always a possibility.

Beware of petty criminals who target tourists. They may work individually or in teams, sometimes posing as good Samaritans or causing distractions to steal belongings.

You may want to carry a personal security alarm that emits a piercing sound to help ward off an attacker or deter an intruder.

Consider investing in a self-defence course designed for women. You will embark on your journey with added confidence.

Never take envelopes, parcels, luggage or gifts across borders or through customs for anyone else. Whether you carry drugs knowingly or inadvertently, you will likely end up in jail if caught.



“To stay safe when traveling, if strangers ask me what I do for a living, I tell them I’m a policewoman.”

*Evelyn Hannon, editor,
Journeywoman.com*

Attention Canadian Women Travelling Abroad!

Sign up for our **Registration of Canadians Abroad** service, so we can contact and assist you in an emergency.

You should register if you will be abroad for more than three months or if you will be travelling to, or living in, a foreign country that has security concerns, is covered by an official Travel Warning, does not have a Canadian government office or is prone to natural disasters.

Registration is voluntary. The information you provide is confidential and used in accordance with the Privacy Act. You can register online at www.voyage.gc.ca.

Sylvie met Alonzo on a train ride from Belgrade to Athens. They really hit it off and decided to explore the Greek islands together. Just before Sylvie’s return to Canada, Alonzo asked her to take a gift back to Montreal for a close friend – a pair of bookends in the shape of Greek columns. Sylvie was stunned when she was arrested and charged with drug possession at Athens International Airport, where officials found 500 grams of heroin stashed in the bookends. Despite her pleas of innocence, Sylvie faced a long jail sentence and a heavy fine.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Choose your accommodations carefully. Consider guest houses, bed and breakfasts or home stays. Their smaller size generally allows for more caring, personal attention.

To avoid needless stress, travel early in the day, especially if you do not have reservations, so that you will have time to find a suitable place before dark. Make sure your accommodations are in a safe area.

No matter where you stay, always ask to see the room before accepting it. Does the door lock properly? Are there holes in the door or walls that could be used by peeping Toms? Does it feel safe? Trust your instincts. Do not stay anywhere unless you feel completely comfortable.

Ask that your room number and location be kept private. Never accept a room if the check-in clerk calls out your name or room number. Others within hearing distance may use this information to try to call you or gain access to your room.

You should avoid ground-floor rooms or any room that has easy access from outside, such as from a balcony or fire escape. Book a room that is close to an elevator and away from exits.

Be aware that stairwells allow troublemakers to hide and to come and go undetected. Do not get in an elevator unless you feel safe.

Never open your door to anyone without taking the necessary precautions. Even if your visitor claims to be a member of the staff, you should check with the front desk to verify the person's need to enter your room.

Consider investing in a small, lightweight, portable smoke detector, as well as a rubber doorstopper that can be easily installed on an inward-opening door. These items are perfect if you plan to stay in simple accommodations.

NETWORKING ALONG THE WAY

It is a good idea to connect with other women on the road. They will become your community and support system as you travel. However, while enjoying their company, be prudent about sharing important personal information with strangers.

As soon as you begin your journey, start plugging into the female network. Finding a good source may lead you to many others.

Carry referrals from women back home. Take advantage of the travel contacts they have made.

In larger cities, make a quick check of local directories under the headings "female," "woman" or "travel." You will likely find listings for women's organizations, craft collectives, bookstores and entrepreneurial councils.

Check with the Canadian embassy or consulate for listings of women's expatriate clubs and organizations. Members of these groups can be an excellent source of information and may even invite you to one of their cultural events.

In less populated places, the manager of your accommodations will probably know everyone in the village and be ready to provide advice and introductions.

If you cannot communicate in the local language, seek out female teenagers. Chances are they are studying English at school and will take pride in being your translator.

DRESS SENSE

No matter where you travel, it is best to dress modestly. Leave both valuable and authentic-looking costume jewellery at home. Blending in, rather than sticking out, will help you stay safe.

In Saudi Arabia, a woman must wear an abaya (a long black dress that covers the body from the shoulders to the toes). A scarf should be carried at all times to cover the head when requested. In addition, a woman is not allowed to drive a motor vehicle or ride a bicycle. She must have a male driver.

If you travel in developing countries and male-dominated societies, make every effort to dress conservatively. Customs based on religious and moral beliefs strongly influence the way the women dress in some cultures. To blatantly break these rules would be considered irreverent and could put you in jeopardy. Instead, adapt your clothing to fit the customs of the host country.

You can find out more about dress codes for women worldwide at the *Journeywoman* website (see the “For More Information” section).

When visiting a religious site, a woman traveller should dress appropriately. She should carry a scarf in case she needs to cover her head. She should never wear shoes in a Muslim mosque or Buddhist temple.

During a visit to Kuala Lumpur, Michelle was frustrated by the constant stares and occasional rude remarks from strangers, despite her attempts to dress conservatively and avoid standing out. She finally realized that as a tall, blonde, fair-skinned foreigner, the only solution was to be herself and accept this uncomfortable invasion of privacy.



AVOIDING HARASSMENT

There is potential for sexual harassment and intimidation around the world. Be prepared. Do your research before you leave home. Find out as much as you can about the roles of both women and men where you plan to visit.

Avoid wearing provocative, form-fitting clothing.

A woman alone may be considered fair game. Prepare yourself mentally for propositions, suggestive comments or catcalls. Then simply ignore them.

In some cultures, it is considered improper for a woman to travel solo. When travelling to countries that present such challenges, you might want to team up with a companion. Two women travelling together often have an easier time.

In some cultures, making eye contact with a man, or simply smiling, may suggest that you want his company. Some women solve this problem by wearing dark glasses or by maintaining a formal demeanour.

Be aware that, in countries where you look different from the local population, both men and women may openly stare at you and make no attempt to hide their curiosity.

Behave confidently, as if you know exactly where you are going and what you are doing.

Take your cue from the local women. As a rule, if they do not sit in cafés alone or wear sleeveless dresses, neither should you.

Never hitchhike or accept rides from strangers. Ask local hotels to recommend reputable taxis and, whenever possible, try to double up with someone you know when travelling by cab.

Crowded trains and buses can be hot spots for anti-social behaviour. Some men use this opportunity to touch or pinch the female passengers near them. If you are targeted,

make a fuss. Point at the offender and chastise him in a loud voice. He will probably slink away. To avoid such advances, consider choosing reserved seating. Or take advantage of female-only sections of buses, trains and subways, where available.

If you become the victim of sexual assault, you should immediately seek the assistance of medical and police authorities. The nearest Canadian government office can help you find support to deal with the emotional, social, medical and legal consequences of the assault (see the “Consular Assistance” section).



While she was working in Mexico City, Lucie was infuriated by the whistling and hissing that met her each time she walked down the street. What was worse, when she protested to her female colleagues that this form of “male appreciation” was offensive and degrading, they laughed and insisted that she should feel flattered. In time, she understood that, while the conduct of the local men was beyond her control, how she reacted was up to her, so she learned to ignore the unwanted attention.

ALONE AFTER SUNDOWN

While you should be cautious after dark, you should not feel restricted from going out at all at night. Simply take precautions. For example, arrange to have a taxi pick you up and bring you back. When deciding where to eat dinner, choose a restaurant that is close to where you are staying.

Since it is interesting to experience the sights and rhythms of a foreign town after dark, consider joining a sightseeing tour. Check with the local tourism centre for appropriate tours or cultural events. Make sure the tour bus picks you up and drops you off where you are staying.

If you are not comfortable eating dinner alone, consider other options, such as shopping for food to eat in your room or having your main meal at lunchtime, when most restaurants offer their specialties at more reasonable prices.

Understand that, in some parts of the world, “respectable” women do not go out alone after dark. Ignoring this custom could put you in jeopardy. Instead, after a long day of new experiences, welcome the chance to rest and relax.

STAYING HEALTHY

Not all travel books deal with female health needs. You can complement your reading with the experienced advice of other women travellers.

It is a good idea to carry your doctor’s phone number, fax number and email address, as well as copies of prescriptions for medication you might need along the way.

Prescription drugs, including your regular brand of contraceptive, may not be available at your destination. Take enough with you to last the whole trip.

You may want to pack a supply of condoms to guard against unwanted pregnancy as well as to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases, even if you do not intend to have new partners.

When travelling to developing countries, carry a supply of tampons and sanitary napkins. They tend to be difficult to find and may be expensive.

If it is not unusual for women to stop menstruating when travelling for a long time. Do not worry if there are no other symptoms and you do not think you are pregnant.

If you are prone to yeast infections, they are more likely to recur in warm, moist climates. Wearing loose-fitting cotton underwear and skirts rather than pants may help. Carry appropriate medication in your first-aid kit. It might not be available where you are travelling.

Cystitis is an infection of the urinary tract and bladder. Drinking a lot of purified water, especially in hotter climates, may help to reduce your chances of suffering from this problem.

Note that prescription medications can raise suspicion in foreign countries, causing delays and protracted investigations. Keep them in their original, labelled containers and pack them in your carry-on luggage

with a note from your doctor explaining their use. If you use contraceptive pills, remember to take them every 24 hours. Do not be misled by changing time zones.

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, be sure to carry an extra pair as well as a copy of your prescription.

If you choose to have any piercings, acupuncture, tattooing or manicures while on the road, keep in mind that improperly sterilized instruments can carry hepatitis B and C or AIDS.

If you absolutely must have dental work, injections or an internal examination while abroad, contact the nearest embassy or consulate of Canada. Consular officials can provide a list of local doctors and hospitals. Your travel insurer can also assist you.

Getting Medical Advice

Your risk of contracting a disease while travelling depends on several factors. These include your age, your current state of health, your immunization status, your itinerary, the duration and style of your trip, local health conditions and your anticipated activities, such as visits to natural areas, contact with animals, exposure to fresh water and sexual relations.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), through its Travel Medicine Program, strongly recommends that your travel plans include contacting a travel medicine clinic or physician **six to eight weeks before departure**. Based on an individual risk assessment, a health-care professional can determine your need for immunizations and preventive medication and advise you on precautions to avoid disease while travelling. Visit PHAC's Travel Medicine Program website at www.travelhealth.gc.ca for a list of travel medicine clinics in Canada.

The Canadian Society for International Health also provides information on travel and health (see the "For More Information" section).

See our booklet *Bon Voyage, But...* for further information on vaccinations, childhood immunization, tropical diseases, medication and AIDS.

Consider joining the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers (IAMAT). This non-profit organization provides information on immunization requirements, health and climatic conditions, tropical diseases, food and water sanitation, and a list of English-speaking physicians around the world.

Do not leave Canada without adequate health and travel insurance. Review your policy thoroughly so you know exactly what is covered. For example, does your policy include a worldwide emergency hotline that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week? Does it pay foreign hospital and related medical costs? If so, does it pay up-front or expect you to pay and be reimbursed later? Does it provide for medical evacuation to Canada or the nearest location with appropriate medical care? Does it cover premature births and related neonatal care? Carry proof of your insurance coverage with you.

“Every year, new women travellers set out on adventures great and small. Their medical needs are unique, and they require health advice adapted to their own situation, whether it involves vaccinations, disease prevention or a temporary halt in menstruation. Through a complete travel-health consultation, preventive measures may be implemented and fears and misconceptions laid to rest.”

Dr. Dominique Tessier, MD, CCFP, FCFP, Medical Director, Medisys Travel Health Clinics

When travelling in Asia, it is a good idea to carry your own chopsticks. Dishwashing facilities are not always adequate to kill bacteria.

THE PREGNANT TRAVELLER

If you are pregnant, visit your physician before going abroad, especially if travelling by air. An ultrasound may be advisable to rule out an ectopic pregnancy, in which the fertilized ovum is implanted outside the uterus.

Check airline rules for pregnant passengers before booking your ticket. In Canada, airlines will allow you to fly up to the 35th week of pregnancy, provided that you are healthy and have no history of premature labour. The rules in other countries might be different. You could be asked to supply a letter from your doctor verifying the stage of your pregnancy.

Make sure that your travel insurance policy provides coverage for all eventualities. Most policies do not automatically cover pregnancy-related conditions or nursery care for premature infants.

The low humidity in airline cabins can cause dehydration, so you may want to increase your water intake.

Pregnant women have an increased risk of blood clots. Request an aisle seat and try to stand up, walk or stretch your legs regularly.

Once your pregnancy has been confirmed, you will need expert advice. A Canadian organization called Motherisk will answer your questions about the safety or risk of vaccines, drugs, chemicals and disease during pregnancy (see the “For More Information” section).

It is wise to build in extra rest stops while travelling. Your body is busy nurturing a baby, and the added effort of travelling makes it work even harder.

In developing countries, pasteurized milk is often difficult to find. You can take powdered milk with you to ensure that you get enough calcium. It can be added to most foods.

To cope with morning sickness, ginger is an excellent remedy. Crystallized forms can be found in most supermarkets and health-food stores. Otherwise, raw ginger root is available almost anywhere in the world and can be grated into your food in small amounts.

If possible, avoid travelling in malarial zones. Even while taking anti-malarial drugs, pregnant women are more prone to catch the disease, and the illness tends to affect them more severely.

Especially during the first trimester of pregnancy, avoid high-altitude destinations, where oxygen to the fetus could be decreased.

Pregnant women should avoid using iodine to purify water. Iodine could have an adverse effect on the fetal thyroid.

BACKPACKING YOUR WAY

Travelling with a backpack is no longer the exclusive domain of young travellers. Women of all ages are benefiting from this less structured, lower budget mode of travel. But staying safe and avoiding problems while backpacking requires preparation and research.

Before departure, it is wise to do training walks to get used to backpacking, especially for older travellers. Make sure that you are in adequate shape if you plan to walk a lot and carry a heavy load.

Finding safe accommodations should be a woman's first concern. Camping solo or accepting lodging from a stranger can be an invitation to danger. If staying at a hostel, do not trust the locks. Carry your own to secure your belongings and your room. Never leave valuables or travel documents in your room and keep them close to you if sleeping in a dorm.

"One of the most important rules of travel is to know how to leave behind our prejudices as wealthy North Americans. Being willing to embrace the customs of the local people, to sit down with them and to try to understand them – that is how we connect with what is most important."

*Céline Galipeau,
anchorwoman,
Société Radio-Canada*

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

Canadian children need their own passports. The practice of adding a child's name to a parent's passport is no longer permitted.

If you are travelling alone with a child younger than 18, you should carry a certified letter from the father giving permission for the child to travel. A sample consent letter can be found at www.voyage.gc.ca/alt/letter.asp.

If there is a possibility of a custody dispute developing in Canada or another country while you are abroad with your child, talk with a lawyer before leaving home. For details, refer to our publication *International Child Abductions: A Manual for Parents* (available at www.voyage.gc.ca).

Before setting out, come to terms with the fact that you will be travelling at your child's pace, not your own.

If you plan to visit a developing country, be sure to consult with your pediatrician on how best to protect your child's health.



When travelling by air with an infant, carry a bottle or pacifier for the baby to suck on during takeoff and landing to equalize ear pressure and keep the baby more comfortable.

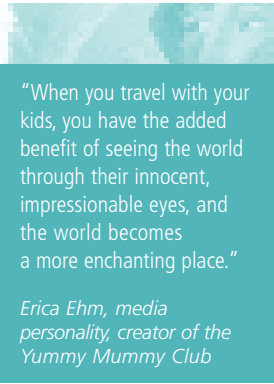
If you are breast-feeding, take your cue from local women, since practices vary from culture to culture. When in doubt, try to breast-feed in private.

Teach your child never to open the door of your hotel room to anyone else.

When entering or leaving an elevator, keep your child close to you. If the doors close too quickly, the child could be separated from you.

Never leave a young child unattended. Always keep some form of identification in your child's pocket in case you are separated. For emergency identification purposes, carry recent photographs of your child. You may also wish to leave photos with a relative or friend at home.

For further advice, consult our fact sheet entitled *Tips for Travelling with Children* (available at www.voyage.gc.ca).



"When you travel with your kids, you have the added benefit of seeing the world through their innocent, impressionable eyes, and the world becomes a more enchanting place."

Erica Ehm, media personality, creator of the *Yummy Mummy Club*

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS

Provincial and territorial authorities in Canada are responsible for authorizing international adoptions.

If you are thinking of adopting a child from another country, you must first obtain information about the adoption regulations of the province or territory in which the child will reside. While adoption is a provincial/territorial responsibility, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is responsible for allowing an adopted child entry into Canada.

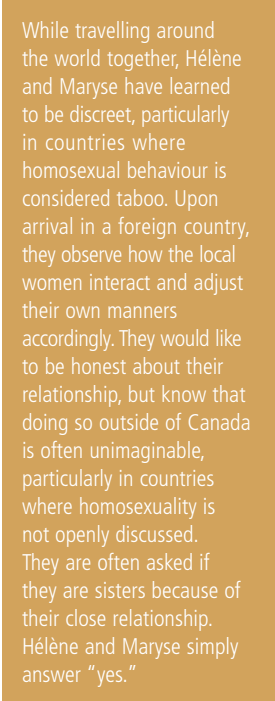
According to a proposed amendment to the Citizenship Act, a child who is adopted abroad could be granted Canadian citizenship without having to go through the immigration process. Currently, entry can be refused if the child does not hold the appropriate immigrant visa. A visa may be denied even if the adoption has already been completed.

For more information, consult the CIC publication *International Adoption and the Immigration Process* (available online only) or contact your provincial/territorial authorities or the CIC call centre nearest you (see the "For More Information" section).

TRAVELLING WITH A SAME-SEX PARTNER

Although same-sex marriages are legal in Canada, they are not recognized in many countries. Attempting to enter as a same-sex married couple may result in refusal by local officials. In addition, homosexual or lesbian activity is a criminal offence in some countries. For

specific information, consult our Country Travel Reports or the destination country's embassy or consulate in Canada.



While travelling around the world together, H el ene and Maryse have learned to be discreet, particularly in countries where homosexual behaviour is considered taboo. Upon arrival in a foreign country, they observe how the local women interact and adjust their own manners accordingly. They would like to be honest about their relationship, but know that doing so outside of Canada is often unimaginable, particularly in countries where homosexuality is not openly discussed. They are often asked if they are sisters because of their close relationship. H el ene and Maryse simply answer "yes."

TRAVELLING TO MEET A POTENTIAL MATE

Going abroad to meet a suitor must be done with caution, especially if the relationship began in the shadowy realm of cyberspace. Despite some successes, international cyberdating is fraught with danger and disappointment. Certain would-be immigrants consider marriage to a Canadian citizen to be their ticket to a Canadian visa. It has nothing to do with romance.

Did you know that in many countries a husband can lawfully impose travel restrictions on his wife and children, preventing their return to Canada?

Never quit your job, give up your home or sell all of your belongings in anticipation of a union that may never happen.

When Odette met Hassan through an online ad, it was love at first sight. Her family was leery of the cyber-romance, but Odette felt alive for the first time in years. She sold her house, quit her job and cashed in her pension to pay for a move to Morocco. No sooner had she arrived in Marrakech than everything went wrong. Hassan was 20 years older than he had been in his online photo. Wedding arrangements began at once. Soon, Odette was trapped in an abusive marriage and had spent all her finances on an apartment for Hassan, who held her passport and refused to let her leave Marrakech.

If you travel to meet a potential husband, it is vitally important to learn beforehand about his country's customs and laws regarding relationships and marriage. How his culture views women's rights, premarital sex, child custody and other issues may be very

different from what you are used to. Failing to find out in advance could result in huge problems later on.

It is best to meet your possible partner on neutral ground. Travel with a return ticket, enough money to stay in a hotel and, in case of problems, information on how to contact the Canadian consulate or embassy closest to your destination.

Safeguard your airline ticket, your money and, most importantly, your passport. Do not divulge information about personal finances or how to access your bank accounts.

Take time to get to know the man and his family. Do not be rushed into marriage. Make your decision only after returning to Canada.

Detailed information on marriage overseas can be found under "Frequently Asked Questions" in the "Before You Go" section of our website.

THE MATURE TRAVELLER

Mature travellers are the fastest-growing segment of the travel market, and the tourism industry is responding with countless opportunities for this demographic group. This could be the best time in your life to travel.

In many cultures, age brings respect. Children gravitate toward you. Local women are protective and you suffer less from unsolicited male advances.

Check your library for the many books written just for the older adventurer. They contain valuable information about obtaining discounts, avoiding single supplements, educational holidays and group packages for mature travellers.

Are you planning an adventure holiday involving a lot of hiking or walking? If not already involved in fitness activities, you should take on a suitable exercise program at least a month before departure.

If you are experiencing the hot flashes of menopause, pack a “layered” wardrobe that can be easily adjusted to your fluctuating body temperature.

If you need eyeglasses, remember to bring an extra pair in case of breakage or loss. A small magnifying glass is perfect for reading the fine print on maps.

Make absolutely sure you have adequate health and travel insurance.

To celebrate her 80th birthday, Nicole went on a week-long safari in Serengeti National Park. At the end of one especially gruelling day tour, she tripped while getting off the sightseeing bus and fractured her hip. Fortunately, she had travel-health insurance and was rushed to a hospital in Nairobi by air ambulance. Following successful emergency surgery, Nicole was flown back to Canada with a medical escort.



WOMEN WORKING ABROAD

In many parts of the world, the main role of women is in the home. The concept of a career woman is much less common. Expectations of women in certain cultures may seem offensive or even shocking, but you have a choice in how you respond. While you should not be forced to conform to unacceptable norms of womanhood, it is important to maintain cultural sensitivity.

Understanding the customs and business protocol in your destination country is imperative, especially in cultures where women do not generally hold key corporate positions.

Learn to greet your business host in his or her language. This show of respect and consideration is always appreciated.

Always meet your business contacts in the lobby of your hotel. Avoid giving out your room number.

Print your business cards in English on one side and in the language of the host country on the other. Doing so will eliminate any misunderstanding about the rank or position you hold.

In India, men do not generally shake hands with women. They greet them by placing the palms of their hands together and bowing slightly.

Find out the correct way to give and receive business cards. In China and Japan, you are expected to use both hands. However, in parts of the Middle East, you must never use your left hand, as it is considered unclean.

Dress appropriately. If local women do not wear trousers to the office, neither should you. Wear sensible shoes that allow you to stand for long periods and to move quickly if necessary.


Learn how to decline food graciously during business dinners, so that no one will be insulted. For example, in Asia, leaving some food in your bowl implies that your hosts have fed you well and that you are no longer hungry.

Understand that, in some countries, even if you do business with men during the day, you may be seated separately with women for evening dining.

In certain cultures, businessmen may consider it acceptable to proposition or flirt with visiting businesswomen. Do not be offended. A firm “no” is appropriate.

Before offering gifts to your hosts, make sure that the type of present, and even the colour of the wrapping paper, are culturally acceptable.

For valuable information on cultural norms and workplace environments, see the “Country Profiles” section of our website. Women who will be living and working abroad for an extended period will also benefit from reading our booklet *Working Abroad: Unravelling the Maze* (available at www.voyage.gc.ca).



"I'm proud to represent my country as I travel the world, but my heart is always back in Canada."

Cindy Klassen, six-time Canadian Olympic medalist, speed skating

Nothing had prepared Mylène for the many challenges of a foreign workplace. As a Canadian businesswoman, she was offended that most female employees played a secondary role. When she participated in business meetings, some men would pretend to listen to her and then ask who was in charge. Her male colleagues would compliment her physical appearance in an attempt to smooth communications, but ignore her professional accomplishments. It took time, but Mylène learned to handle these conflicts politely and firmly and to view once demoralizing obstacles as mere challenges.

CONSULAR ASSISTANCE

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada has more than 270 offices worldwide, where consular officials are ready to help Canadians travelling, working or living abroad. If you encounter problems while abroad, contact the nearest Canadian government office.

If you require urgent consular assistance, you can make a collect call to Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada in Ottawa, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at **613-996-8885**, or email us at **sos@international.gc.ca**.

For essential information on consular services offered abroad, as well as a contact list of Canadian embassies, high commissions and consulates, see our booklet *Bon Voyage, But...*

Patricia and Laurie were spending Christmas on Phi Phi Island in southern Thailand when the massive tsunami struck. After fleeing up a wooded hill, they squatted for two days without food or shelter. When they returned to the devastated shore, they found that all of their belongings were lost, including their passports and airline tickets. Even so, they reached Bangkok by overnight bus, with nothing but the clothes on their backs, and went straight to the Canadian Embassy. There, consular officials comforted them, advised their families that they were unharmed and provided them with emergency passports. A few days later, Patricia and Laurie were safe and sound back in Canada.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada

CONSULAR AFFAIRS BUREAU
www.voyage.gc.ca
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2

GENERAL

Tel.: 1-800-267-6788
(in Canada and the U.S.)
or 613-944-6788
TTY: 1-800-394-3472
(in Canada and the U.S.)
or 613-944-1310
Email:
voyage@international.gc.ca

EMERGENCIES

Tel.: 613-996-8885
(call collect from abroad)
Email: sos@international.gc.ca

PUBLICATIONS (FREE)

Access our smart-travel publications at www.voyage.gc.ca or order them by calling 1-800-267-8376 (in Canada) or 613-944-4000.

COUNTRY TRAVEL REPORTS (FREE)

Our Travel Reports (www.voyage.gc.ca) provide vital information on safety and security, local laws and customs, health conditions and entry requirements for more than 200 travel destinations. This information is also available by phone: 1-800-267-6788 (in Canada and the U.S.) or 613-944-6788.

DIPLOMATIC OFFICES

Canadian government offices abroad:
www.voyage.gc.ca/alt/canoffices.asp

Passport Canada

www.pptc.gc.ca

PASSPORTS, CERTIFICATES OF IDENTITY AND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Tel.: 1-800-567-6868
(in Canada and the U.S.)
TTY: 1-866-255-7655

Citizenship and Immigration Canada

www.cic.gc.ca

CIC CALL CENTRE

Tel.: 1-888-242-2100 (in Canada)
TTY: 1-888-576-8502 (in Canada, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern Time)

Canadian Society for International Health

www.csih.org

LIST OF TRAVEL CLINICS

Tel.: 613-241-5785
Email: csih@csih.org

International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers (IAMAT)

www.iamat.org
Tel.: 519-836-0102
or 416-652-0137
Email: info@iamat.org

Motherisk

www.motherisk.org
Tel.: 416-813-6780

Public Health Agency of Canada

(Travel Medicine Program)
www.travelhealth.gc.ca

WEBSITES

Journeywoman

www.journeywoman.com
An online travel resource especially for women.

HERmail

www.HERmail.net
A directory of women from countries around the world who are willing to help other women with their travel questions.

Servas Canada

<http://canada.servas.org>
Encourages global understanding by enabling interviewed and accepted travellers to stay on a short-term basis with resident hosts in over 50 countries.

Women Welcome Women World Wide

www.womenwelcomewomen.org.uk
Fosters international friendships by enabling women from different countries to visit one another. Members of all ages and backgrounds come from many parts of the world. Any woman may become a member.



Foreign Affairs and
International Trade Canada

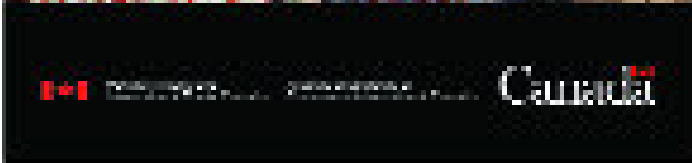
Affaires étrangères et
Commerce international Canada

Canada



www.Canada.ca/gc.ca 1-877-998-8339

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