### CARGO PLANES

You can't beat cargo planes for fast, cheap travel. They fly over the world, into and out of all airports, but it's easiest to link up with one at a remote airstrip rather than at a big-city terminal. There'll be no coffee. There's no first class and no tourist class; it's all skids of machinery and crates of goods. Be forewarned: in most of the Third World, cargo planes and air safety have nothing to do with one another. You must trust to God, not your co-pilot . . . and unless you know how to fly yourself there's rarely any co-pilot at all.

To cash in on this adventure, ask the captain at the airfield or go to the office of the cargo company. There are sometimes laws against their taking passengers, but with a little talking you may convince them that rules are made to be broken. Schedules are uncertain, but once you have permission to go, you can keep calling the office and they'll tell you when to go to the airport. If you are turned down at the office, don't hesitate to go down to the field. Sometimes you can get on free flights with the military, especially in Latin America, and especially if you're a beautiful woman. (And sometimes you can provision rides on private planes--but not with much luggage!)

### CHARTER FLIGHTS

Be sure you're flying with a reputable company, or at least with a reputably unreputable one, since it's no fun to be stranded abroad when the authorities crack down. However, airline regulations change so frequently that it pays to check them out for yourself when you buy a ticket. You can get low-cost flights in major cities in the developed world or from student travel organizations. The Asian-American Recreation Club, which has several offices in North America, can get you extremely cheap flights to Asia from cities on the West Coast. Don't worry, this one really exists. You can also check ads in underground newspapers. There are cheap tickets for sale in the Middle East, Kenya, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Singapore, and especially Thailand and Hong Kong. Prices are usually less than half the full fare.

Frequently on notice boards in cheap hotels and restaurants abroad, you will see cut-rate air tickets for sale. These are usually the return legs of charter or excursion-flight tickets. If they're not domestic, your passport will probably be checked against the name on the ticket. People have gotten around this by erasing the name with ink eradicator and replacing it with their own. The other alternative is to go to the airport with the seller, and have him check in and get the boarding pass. You then take the pass, give him his money, and bon voyage. If you're caught with the wrong name on the ticket, tell them absently that you took your friend's ticket instead of your own by mistake and just walk away, ticket in hand. You are always taking a risk if you pay the seller before you get your boarding pass. The ticket may be phony to begin with.

### REGULARLY SCHEDULED COMMERCIAL AIRLINES

Prepare to shell out three big bucks. There are, however, *some ways to cut down on air-travel costs.* One is to fly with non-IATA (International Air Transport Association) companies like Icelandic, Air Bahamas, Korean Airlines, or *Aerocondor (Colombia). The IATA is the airlines' international price-fixing organization, and companies not in the cartel compete by lowering fares instead of by offering champagne on economy class. Another way is to look for airlines that have youth or student fares, like Thai International. Other airlines offer special discounts to members of the clergy or the press. You can get these if you have a card from a dime-store church or a phony press card, which you can buy on the black market in places like Bangkok or Istanbul. A friend got a 15 per cent discount on a flight in Peru with his Universal Life Church card.

There are occasionally government-run airlines with low fares, like Satena in Colombia. Often even IATA companies charge different prices for the same run because they use different types of airplanes: so look into flights on propellor or jet-prop planes. Or you can fly on weekends or at night. Even the straight travel agencies can sometimes get you special prices, because some agents buy blocks of seats for resale at low cost. By going to just about every agent in Nairobi, a friend got an unbelievable price of $150 on a flight to New Delhi with a stopover in Cairo. I paid almost as much for a boat that took two weeks. At least I learned to play bridge.

Domestic flights are much cheaper than international ones, and sometimes it pays to go out of your way to fly domestically. For example, the cheapest way to fly to Colombia from Costa Rica is to buy a flight to San Andres, a beautiful Colombian island north of Costa Rica in the Caribbean. From there you get a domestic ticket to Colombia.

You should always ask about free stopovers and extra onward stops that can be added to your ticket at little cost. Adding a stop in Panama City will increase the cost of a Miami-Costa Rica ticket by only a few dollars. Learn to use the "Official Airline Guide" (OAG), which is available at any travel agency, since travel agents will rarely go out of their way to help you save money or inform you of extra stopover privileges.

If your baggage is lost or damaged, fill out the claim form and ask for money to cover immediate necessities like clothing and toilet gear. On international flights, lost luggage is generally covered for up to $750 for checked bags, with no liability for unchecked bags. Stick to your guns. If there's any problem, insist on speaking to the manager. Often asking the official's name, with the apparent intent to report him to his superiors, will scare him enough to give you what you deserve.

Try not to buy a ticket in advance unless you have to or unless you are offered a special price for early purchase. It's usually better to stay flexible; and besides, buying transportation within a country is usually cheaper than buying it abroad, especially in countries where you can buy tickets with black-market money. Gradually officials are becoming wise to this and insist that you buy with hard currencies or that you bring bank receipts showing that you've changed money at an official rate. Sometimes, as in Egypt, this rate is lower than the preferential rate given to tourists. However, several people have been able to change $10 or $20 at a bank, get the receipt, and then add a few extra digits on their own to make it appear that they've changed much more.

A miscellaneous charges order (MCO) is a receipt for a sum of money paid to an IATA airline. It looks like a ticket, and can be used as cash on any IATA flight. It's also easier to cash in than a regular ticket. It may be expedient at times to accept a refund in the form of an MCO rather than in local currency.

Unless you're getting a special deal from a travel agent, it's wise to buy your ticket directly from the airline company, since doing so facilitates getting refunds when necessary. If you buy from a travel agent, you may have to wire him for a refund. For easy refundability it's best to pay in cash or travelers checks.

Rules on refundability vary among airlines and countries. Some airlines give full refunds; others deduct a percentage. Tickets bought in some countries can be refunded only domestically, others anywhere. The purpose of these rules is to prevent capital from leaving a country in the form of airline tickets. Thus you'll be better off if you buy them with foreign exchange instead of local currency. If there's any question about whether you'll use the ticket, buy it from a company that has a convenient office where you may want to get the refund. Big companies are therefore best. Another reason to buy from companies with many offices is that agents differ in the strictness of their adherence to company regulations, and if you fail to get a refund at one office, you may succeed at another. Ask if the company gives refunds at any office or only at the office where you bought the ticket. If it is the latter, you may be able to exchange the ticket at a second office and then later refund the new ticket at this second office.

If you're wondering why I'm placing such emphasis on refundability, it is because many countries are now requiring that you buy onward airline tickets before they will allow you into the country. If you don't know how to get a refund, you may get stuck with an expensive ticket you never planned to use.

Make a copy of the ticket number in case you lose it. Some companies give immediate refunds on lost tickets, but others make you wait until the ticket expires, usually in one year. If someone uses the ticket, you lose.

If the airline raises its prices in the interim between purchase and flight date, you may have to pay the difference. However, airport clerks rarely check the price on the ticket; so make your reservation by phone. If you have trouble getting a reservation on a flight to a remote place, be sure you get a reservation out, so that you won't be stranded. You're not obligated to use it, but if you do cancel it's only fair to inform the airline beforehand. It is because so many people make reservations and then don't show up for the flight that airlines have felt impelled to overbook.

*E.European Lines, especially "Lot" (Polish) & "OK" (Czech) are cheap too!

courtesy of 'TRAVELING CHEAPLY' by Rick Berg.

### THE HASSLES *Suggestions for Women Travelers*

Many of the problems I've experienced or heard about from other female travelers could have been avoided if we had only been willing to face the fact that women's lib simply hasn't made it to many parts of the world. In fact, the inhabitants of many countries, including the women, are neither ready to be nor want to be "liberated." You'll find that the norms for women's dress and behavior are vastly different in these areas than they are where you live, especially in strict Moslem and Catholic countries. It's a good idea to take a look around when you first arrive in a new country and observe how local women dress. If, as in Algeria, you see women shrouded from head to toe in white linen, with only a single tiny aperture in the fabric where there ought to be a face, then it's unquestionably time to dig the more conservative rags out of your pack. To walk the streets in such places with bare legs or unbridled tits is to invite trouble. Besides, your dressing that way is actually rather cruel to the male residents, because you're tantalizing them when you have no intention of letting them get at the goods. Therefore the safest and most considerate thing to do is dress modestly. You needn't don a veil, but it's wise to use some discretion.

### MEETING THE PEOPLE

You'll also meet more people if you pay a little attention to your appearance. If you're long-haired and grubby, you live in a different world. You're viewed with suspicion by border guards, which makes it harder to get into countries. You may need to show money or an onward ticket where someone less freaky-looking wouldn't. It is harder to hitchhike. Locals, even those who aren't hostile, may look at you more as an object of curiosity than as a human being. Your appearance can make the difference between walking down the street and being greeted with smiles, or seeing frowns and hearing insults and laughs, between being hassled by cops or being free. Is it worth it?

Remember, it is not your country, and you are always a guest. It is one thing to try to change your own society, another to violate foreign mores that have existed for centuries. Of course, you shouldn't be judged by how your look, but the reality is that you are. Looking freaky, you'll attract other freaks, and if you want to do this, maybe you'd be better off on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley.

Hopefully other travelers, whose companionship you can have with discretion, will not judge you too harshly if you have short hair. Unfortunately, you can not pick and choose with police and border officials. You've come thousands of miles to meet foreigners. Do you want to blow it just to prove a point? Besides, long hair is a hassle, especially on the road.



# Visas, Borders, & Legal Hassles

### VISAS

Visas are stamps put into your passport by officials of foreign governments. You need them to enter most countries, but they do not guarantee entry; they merely indicate that your passport is registered with the proper officials. The requirements you need to get a visa depend on the country, the type of visa you want, your nationality, where you get the visa, and what kind of mood the official is in when you apply. You can also get a copy of the *Travel Information Manual*, which has up-to-date information on visas, passport, and custom's regulations.

Generally you'll be dealing with tourist visas. These can be valid for one or more entries; if you think you'll be going to a country more than once, ask for a multiple-entry visa. In any case, find out the cost of all the different visas you're eligible for. Sometimes you may get permission to work thrown in at a small additional charge, but most countries are adamant about your not working. All visas have an expiration date before which you must enter the country. These ordinarily range from three months to four years. There's also a maximum allowable stay, ordinarily one to six months. Ask for the longest you can get, and how and where extensions can be obtained. When you get the visa—sometimes after a three-day wait during which your passport sits untouched on some bureaucrat's desk—verify all the information in it, especially if it's written in a language you don't understand. Two Dutch guys who got their Algerian visas in Morocco thought they were getting one good for a stay of four weeks. It was only when they arrived at the border that they noticed it was good for just four days. Ask also about exit visas. These are fairly uncommon, required only if you've spent a lot of time in a country, but if you need one, and don't have it when you reach the border, you'll have to go back to the capital or other major city.

Usually it pays to get several visas at a time in a foreign capital. If a visa takes a long time to process, ask if there's a charge for fast service. They'll know just what you mean. Often telling the officials you'll be leaving the next day helps.

When they're not free, visas will usually cost only a few dollars. If you need to get some expensive visas, try to pick them up in countries where you've scored on the black market. Wherever you get your visa, often you'll need photographs, from one to six. Of course there will be ridiculous forms to fill out. If they ask you to name a hotel, make up a name if you don't know one. Bureaucrats are horrified by blank lines. Putting down a ritzy hotel may facilitate matters, and they'll never check up on whether you stay there. If you have friends living in the country you're golden, but be prepared to write down or make up their addresses. For occupation "student" is fine, as is "salesperson." Never put down something like "revolutionary," even in a guest book at a museum. One guy I met who did so in Guatemala spent six weeks in jail as a result. Journalists are also considered undesirables by repressive regimes.

An increasing number of countries are attempting to screen out undesirables by imposing financial requirements, such as having you show $200 per month of visa validity. If you never let your funds get too low, this should be no problem at all. Otherwise a major credit card, a letter of credit, or a letter from your bank should be sufficient to convince the authorities you're respectable. Even a fully-used letter of credit may fool the officials, especially if you look prosperous. For greater firepower, one traveler recommends that, before you leave, you borrow some money and open up a beefy savings account. Report your passbook lost and get a new one. Then close the account. You've now got a passbook with lots of zeros in it and this never fails to impress. Or stick a few of your friend's checks in your stack, or simply borrow some money to show the officials.

But all these are cheap tricks. For real class, buy one check in Japanese yen. It will look much like dollar checks, and since there are a few hundred yen to the dollar, your check will have big numbers on it. Just stick it in your bundle, and watch the officials' eyes pop when they see what they think is a check for $5,000 that you ostensibly keep for "minor contingencies." Yes, sir, anything else, sir? If they notice the check is in yen, so what?

### ONWARD TICKETS

By far the biggest hassle of all is the onward ticket. Some countries will not grant you a visa unless you have an onward ticket as evidence that you're a respectable traveler who has already purchased transportation out of the country and therefore won't wind up broke and begging on some street corner. Sometimes onward tickets are required for visas and not demanded at the border; if so, you simply buy the ticket and cash in in as soon as you get the visa. Having a credit card will save you the trouble of laying out cash. If they want to see the ticket at the border, you can sometimes cash it once you are inside, but more likely you'll have to wait until you've left the country. Buy your ticket from an IATA carrier with a convenient refund office in the next country you plan to visit.

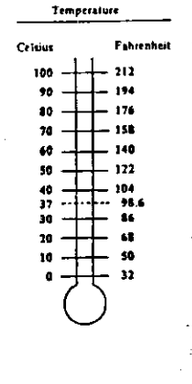
Sometimes you can cash in your ticket within the country by going to the immigration office with the driver of a vehicle who says he'll take you out. I did this once in Costa Rica. Another time upon entry I waited until a foreigner drove up to the border and asked him to take me in. I've never seen border guards put a stamp in the driver's passport requiring him to take a rider along when he leaves. A friend bought a cheap bus ticket out of Costa Rica to be allowed entry. When he went to cash it in, he was told he couldn't get a refund until he had purchased another means out of the country. So he bought a plane ticket to Panama, cashed in the bus ticket, and then cashed in the plane ticket when he arrived in Panama. The same person successfully used a plane ticket out of Ecuador to demonstrate his financial ability to get out of Colombia.

More and more often, though, such a low-class mode of transportation as a bus or ship will not suffice for increasingly snobby officials. You must travel by plane. This should still not present too great a problem. Sometimes you can talk your way out of the requirement by showing a lot of money, any of your letters from judges or police, or a phony or real letter from a friend in the country. To do this you must deal with the head of the office; any lesser official will run you around. If you're refused, you can come back later and try to deal with someone more reasonable. Or you can try another consulate. When I got my Indonesian visa in Penang, Malaysia, an onward ticket was required, but in Singapore, only one day's hitch away, it wasn't.

A bribe may be your last resort. When you offer a bribe, try not to be too cloak and dagger about it. Just ask how much the fine is, or if there's any way to arrange faster service . . . whichever applies. Usually officials regard bribery as a normal part of doing business. The bribe need not be large; a few dollars will suffice. Don't be afraid to bargain. Some travel books recommend that you offer a bribe whenever you're hassled, or whenever some clerk or petty official is not giving you the service you're entitled to. I think this is a big mistake, because it encourages people to mistreat travelers. Of course, a tip to an honest official, for service beyond the call of duty, is appreciated and legitimate.

If all the above tricks fail, you've still got several options. If you arrive by air in a country where you can get your visa at the airport, don't buy your ticket out until absolutely necessary. Or suppose you're traveling through Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia, three countries that all required onward tickets at the whim of the border guard. Before you arrive in Costa Rica, find a country that charges no ticket tax and buy a San Jose/Panama City/Medellin/Panama City ticket, which will get you into all the countries and which you can cash in upon leaving Colombia. A travel agent or the OAG will provide information on the cheapest ticket out of any country. Just look at a map for cities in other countries near cities in the country you want the ticket out of. Often a $5 miscellaneous charges order, because it looks like a ticket, will fool the officials, if not airline clerks. You simply write in the names of the cities you want to appear on the ticket. For more safety, you can always use an MCO big enough to actually serve as a ticket-out; on this, you're not required to write in the name of the city. Later on, you can either cash in the MCO or apply it to a ticket you actually want.

Even with all these tricks, you're still not necessarily out of the woods, because in some countries they'll demand that your ticket be stamped "nonrefundable." But don't worry, I won't let you down. First, try all the above methods to see if you can get out of the ticket requirement altogether. In Latin America, which is still wild and woolly, a few pesos and a few words of Spanish or even just a fat checkbook are almost invariably enough to get you into any country. With few exceptions border guards are willing to get drunk with you or share in a game of frisbee or poker. In Asia the guards are at the other extreme, probably because they've seen so many tourists. They're more peaceful than Latins, but much more afraid to bend regulations. To these officious types, rules are rules; they don't have to be explained or justified.

If you find it impossible to reason with visa officials, you may be able to pay a travel agent a few dollars to make you up a ticket. He will probably ask you to leave a deposit so that you can't walk out with the ticket and then actually use it. There is also salt water and lemon juice. If you soak the ticket for a few days in either of these, especially in strong sunlight, the "nonrefundable" stamp will come off, leaving the rest of the ticket more or less intact. If this doesn't work, try ink eradicator. If the ticket is messed up, you can later tell the refund agent that you fell out of a boat with the ticket in your pocket, or that your wallet fell in a toilet while you were squatting.

If the ink is noneradicable, once in the country try all the company offices you can find for a refund. Maybe you can buy a cheap ticket you really plan to use. Also, "nonrefundable" does not mean nontransferable; you can exchange the ticket for a domestic flight you want to take. One American I met had to buy a nonrefundable ticket out of Indonesia to get his visa. He chose the cheapest, from Medan in Sumatra to Pinang. After arrival in Indonesia, he exchanged the ticket for one from Bali to Sulawesi (both within Indonesia) which cost about the same. The first two times he tried this, the clerk stamped "nonrefundable" on the new ticket. Each time this happened, the American suddenly "changed his mind" at the last minute and walked out with his old ticket. When at last the third clerk forgot to use the stamp, he accepted the new ticket and refunded it later at another office. If he had known about ink eradicator, his problem would have been much simpler. And sometimes even a ticket stamped "nonrefundable" can be cashed in, once you've left the country, if you mail or bring it to the company's head office.