

Travel

Global travel is still a serious undertaking



Vince Egan
Travel

Global travel has become so commonplace in this jumbo-jet age that many travellers have grown almost casual about what is still a serious undertaking.

As the Iraqi crisis has shown, danger still exists for travellers to some parts of the world. A certain prudence ought to be exercised in the planning stages of trips to cut through the riskier foreign destinations.

When Iraqi forces invaded neighboring Kuwait Aug. 2, it marked the beginning of a nightmare for tens of thousands of innocent people. Among them were the passengers and crews of foreign airlines that happened to be in Kuwait at that time.

After weeks of delay, Iraq has finally allowed the departure of many of the women and children among those airline passengers, including two Toronto sisters whose flight to India was unfortunately making a refuelling stop in Kuwait at the time of the invasion.

Some of the male passengers, on the other hand, have apparently been sent to Iraqi military and strategic industrial locations (along with other foreign males who had been working or vacationing in Kuwait and Iraq) to deter United Nations forces from attacking such targets.

MORE STRESS

"At one time, business travel was fun, but it's changing dramatically," said Denise Ryan, corporate travel director for Avon Products Inc., New York.

"Now it's crowded and stressful and everyone is worried about security," she told Business Travel News. "It will get worse."

Business travellers are more vulnerable than holidayers, because their schedules of meetings don't allow much flex-

ibility. Unlike Canadian authorities, the U.S. State Department is exceptionally vigilant in alerting citizens to adverse conditions abroad.

Example: Until July 9, Washington was advising Americans to defer non-essential travel to Kenya because of political tension there, with the easing of that tension, it changed that warning to a recommendation that visitors guard against "widespread street crime and confidence scams," and that people who wish to go to Kenya's wildlife reserves should travel with reputable safari organizations.

(In his annual report, Canadian Auditor General Kenneth Dye said that Joe Clark's External Affairs department wasn't doing all it could to inform Canadians of specific dangers in some parts of the world.)

LOCAL PITFALL

Apart from military and political crises, other pitfalls - in the form of unfamiliar local laws, customs and scams - may await Canadians travelling abroad.

In Saudi Arabia and some other Middle Eastern jurisdictions, alcohol is strictly forbidden. Arab customs inspectors will not only confiscate it, but are also likely to

subject the offending visitor to unpleasant questioning and other delays. Even audio and video cassettes may be seized.

In Israel, a teenager visiting from Toronto was killed on a Tel Aviv beach by a random bomb explosion this summer. Less tragic and more common is thievery on Israeli beaches; one trick is to steal the hotel keys of tourists who are swimming, and then to plunder the hotel room.

In many East African countries, visitors are required to make a currency declaration upon arrival, to keep official receipts for any exchange dealings while in the country, and then to present the relevant papers upon departure. If they don't balance (as would be the case if you yielded to the temptation to sell dollars at a street-corner black market), you could be faced with penalties, including imprisonment, before being permitted to leave the country.

TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Here are notes on news of current interest to travellers:

- Hatacard is a new travel-service card enabling holders to make reservations for hotels, car rentals and cruises, often at a discount, through a toll-free number. Fee is \$12 Canadian for one year, and the card is available from Canadian travel agents or from Hata USA, 12555 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 435, N. Miami, Fla., 33181, telephone 800-248-3380 or 305-866-0366.

- Going to the Bahamas? Canadians buying a holiday package, airline ticket or accommodation there between now and Jan. 31 are entitled to receive the Bahamas Discovery Card, valid for discounts at many local businesses. Details from the Bahama Tourist Office, 416-968-2999.

Thomson News Service.

Lufthansa airline offers unique eating choice

TORONTO - Travellers flying Lufthansa within Germany and Europe can count on more than what industry insiders call "just a peanut flight." The airline is known for its healthy snacks, even on short hauls. Until recently, these were offered in plastic bags placed on stands at the gate, ready to be picked up just before boarding. On most domestic flights now, however, the airline's passengers - including Canadians with connecting flights - can choose what they want to eat.

Introduced as a pilot programme at the Cologne/Bonn airport last October, Lufthansa's "new Gate-Buffer" replaces the usual snack bags and allows domestic passengers to choose the lunch or snack they prefer and either bag it for later during the flight, or eat it at the gate. The programme has since been extended to the airline's gates in Bremen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hanover, Muenster and Nuremberg.

The airline's market research shows that not all passengers were equally pleased by the pre-selected gatebag contents, typically fruit, a sandwich, a cup of yoghurt and some sweets - the same for all - and that a greater variety of these would be appreciated. Therefore, the New Gate-Buffer.

Presented in wicker baskets with Lufthansa linen, the foods now offered at the gate include a selection of fruits, different kinds of sandwiches, various yoghurt flavours (with and without fruit) and a choice of cookies and chocolates - Mars bars so far taking a flying lead.

Lufthansa's new service has caught on well in Germany, so well, in fact, that passengers from other airlines sometimes sneak a

treat when the airline's departure gates are not individually enclosed. The Gate-Buffer is hard to resist, especially since it comes

complete with coffee and tea brewed fresh by the cup. Travellers make their own in Italian coffee machines set up on the tables.

Lord Elgin Hotel completes modernization

The Lord Elgin Hotel, one of Ottawa's traditional hospitality centres has opened, completing an \$11 million dollar modernization program which lasted 18 months.

The expanded guest room space, some as much as 50 per cent, is the most significant aspect of the modernization.

The Lord Elgin recently won rave reviews from a world wide assembly of delegates attending Tourism Canada's Rendez-vous Canada in Ottawa. Experienced travel professionals offered comments such as "an impressive modernization," "it's bright and modern" and "with the location and rates it's a real value."

The enlarged rooms are not the only improvement in guest comfort. All rooms feature new furniture, beds, drapes and combination AM/FM clock radio/televisions. Individual air conditioning and heating controls have been installed too. Another feature is a working size desk and twin full length mirrors in each room. To undertake the enlarged rooms, the overall room count was reduced by approximately 50 rooms to 312. Guest rooms now feature twin double beds or queens.

Guest safety has increased with smoke and heat detectors in each room and has been vastly improved with a sprinkler system throughout the hotel and new fire

detection systems.

Decor played an important role in the modernization. Pleasing pastel colours are used throughout. The all new open style lobby features a striking floor design of Italian marble which greets the guest upon entry; this theme continues through the guest corridors.

Food service operations have been awarded to Connaught Restaurants, a long-established Ottawa company. The 150 seat restaurant layout has a two-tiered plan with a glass galleria roof in one area. The restaurant is open to the lobby and is adjoined by a 60 seat cocktail lounge, where light meals can be enjoyed at noon. Private and special functions can be staged in a separate area of the restaurant.

Donald Blakslee, longtime General Manager, commented "next year we're 50 years in the business, we've got a heritage designated building, however, we recognized that dramatic changes were necessary to provide guests a comfortable and competitive product. We were very pleased with the reaction of the Rendez-vous delegates."

Meeting rooms have been included for the first time, including four rooms, the largest holding 60 persons, 7 boardrooms and 2 executive suites.

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GARAGE SALE
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9 til 2

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