

Planning helps head off problems

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

As the recent winter storm that closed highways and airports along the Eastern Seaboard proved, travelers can never be certain what to expect.

A major snowstorm is a dramatic but infrequent problem. However, more common problems — ranging from late-arriving luggage to stolen passports — can also adversely affect a trip.

But local travel agents say that if travelers take a few common-sense precautions, they can increase their chances of overcoming misadventures.

Take, for example, the frustration of arriving at a vacation or pilgrimage site while your luggage ends up somewhere else.

Judy Graper of Judy Graper Travel in Rochester has seen that problem enough times to have some suggestions.

Graper recommends that people put at least one change of clothes in their carry-on bags so that if their luggage goes astray, they will have things to wear while waiting for their luggage to catch up with them.

She also suggested that people traveling together cross-pack — with each of them putting some of their clothes in the other person's luggage. That way, if one person's luggage goes astray, that person will still have some extra clothes available.

In addition, Graper said, people should put cameras, traveler's checks, passports and toiletries in their carry-ons. And they should also carry any needed medications with them.

"One time, we had a person who was insulin dependent, and they sent it on in their checked baggage," Graper recalled. "There was no way to get it back."

She also recommended that all medications be kept in their original bottles to help avoid awkward questions by customs agents.

Jim Shaw of J.B. Travel in Rochester also suggested that if you take a camera, make sure it is registered "with customs officials so they won't think you bought it over



there."

Moreover, Shaw recommended that you bring little cash.

"Always keep your money primarily in traveler's checks if you're not going to use credit cards," he said.

In case of theft, Graper noted, traveler's checks are easier to replace than cash. Graper also suggested that to avoid problems due to stolen credit cards, leave the credit card numbers with a trusted friend back home. The friend can then call the credit card companies to report the theft.

Moreover, Graper suggested bringing only the cards you intend to use. Other cards, such as store cards, should be left at home.

People should bring a little cash for tipping and small expenses, Graper said — perhaps \$20. She recommended that people wait until they get to their destinations before exchanging the money at banks for local currency to make sure they get the best rates.

As for passports, Graper recommends that people make photocopies of the face pages of their passports to make it easier to get a copies made in other countries. She also recommended bringing

an extra passport picture or two — as she herself does.

"If my passport were stolen," Graper explained, "I wouldn't have to find a photographer who could take a picture that would be acceptable to the U.S. government."

Mildred Mathis, who organizes trips out of her Geneva home, also had a tip for traveling seniors. She noted that a number of cruises offer walking tours of the various cities where they stop. These tours may be too much for seniors, however, so she recommended that several people pool their money and hire a cab to take them to the sites on the tour.

Mathis also warned, "Pack as lightly as possible. You may have to carry it."

In preparation for going on a trip, Graper suggested planning well in advance to make sure there are no last minute mixups or needed items not obtained. In particular, the recent shutdown of the federal government points out the need to obtain a valid passport well in advance.

"My advice is every grownup should have a passport because the world is getting smaller all the time," Graper concluded.



Courtesy of Donald Dwello

Pilgrims to Medjugorje can visit the top of Mount Krizevac (Cross Mountain) where a large cement cross was built in 1933 by women of the village to honor Mary.

Pilgrims

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Pilgrims climb Apparition Hill and Mt. Krizevac ("Cross Mountain"), the two major sites in Medjugorje, at least once each. Some go four or five times. At the top of Krizevac, 1,200 feet high, is a large cement cross built in 1933 by women of the village to honor Mary.

Apparition Hill is an easy climb, Dwello said, adding that his groups are lodged near the foot of it. Often a prayer group gathers on the hill, where a visionary still reports seeing Mary. Some pilgrims stay overnight on the hill.

No matter how many or few

climbs a pilgrim makes, Dwello said, "Something special happens to everybody who goes. Father Shamon always said from day one 'No one goes to Medjugorje unless Our Lady invites you.' And once she invites you, she takes care of everything — the fear, the anxiety, the money."

He cautioned, however, "The biggest thing people need to know and understand ... is you go to Medjugorje as a pilgrim, not a tourist. You're going to spend time with our Lady."

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