

CUSTOMS HOUSE BROKERS

If your presenter has not agreed to assist with the customs clearance of your material, perhaps because he is based in a city far from your port of entry into his country (he is in Lyon but you enter through Paris), the best thing to do is to engage the services of a customs house broker.

A customs broker is a bonded agent who is permitted to make representations to customs officials on behalf of his clients and guarantee to them that all duties levied will be paid. Obviously engaging someone like this can considerably ease entering and leaving countries where you have no connections or anyone to greet you and to help with the formalities. Even if you are carrying a Carnet, the services of a customs broker can still be a worthwhile investment.

Choosing the right broker is important. You should start in Canada by finding an international broker with either offices or affiliations at all the customs points in all of the countries — except communist ones — that you are going to visit. Do not choose a broker without long-standing experience in these areas. As most custom house brokers are also international freight forwarders, a well-chosen company can also assist you by making all your cargo transportation arrangements.

The best customs brokers are very busy people and, to get the best results, you must deal with them concisely and efficiently, including confirming and reconfirming all arrangements made prior to departure. There is a cost to all of this, of course, so you should shop around for the best service at the best price.

CHECKING-IN AT AIRPORTS

There is an effective way to speed up your check-in at most international airports. A representative of your organization, usually the company or tour manager, should arrive

at the airport at least thirty minutes prior to the rest of the members who should, in turn, arrive no later than the announced check-in time for the flight that is going to be taken.

Whereas you may be able to give many details of your organization's preferences when you reconfirm your flight (special meals, arrangements for the handling of musical instruments if you are travelling with an orchestra, etc.), never attempt to cancel or change any reservations which are part of a group "file" by telephone as you can run the risk of the entire file being erased. Such changes should always be made in person. Always check if there will be a "group desk" available at the airport to speed up your check-in.

Being early at the check-in — and, hopefully, ahead of most of the other passengers registering for the same flight — will almost always help you get a lot of things that can make a flight just that little bit more pleasant. If your representative is armed with all the air tickets and a list of the number of smoking and non-smoking seats you require as well as the exact number of pieces of baggage you have to check-in, the boarding passes and the baggage labels can be prepared in advance of the arrival of the group. When the members of your organization arrive, it should only be necessary to put their bags on the scales and for your representative to distribute the boarding passes according to the pre-determined preferences.

It is recommended that you limit the members of your organization to one suitcase of the appropriate size and weight each (remember that the free weight allowance can vary from country to country and from airline to airline). Each suitcase should carry a label that prominently identifies it as belonging to your group so that tracing a lost piece of luggage should be somewhat easier. You will also find that if you put the same number on each suitcase as you have assigned to their owners on your visa list, you will be able to quickly identify which piece is missing if all the baggage does not show up at your destination.