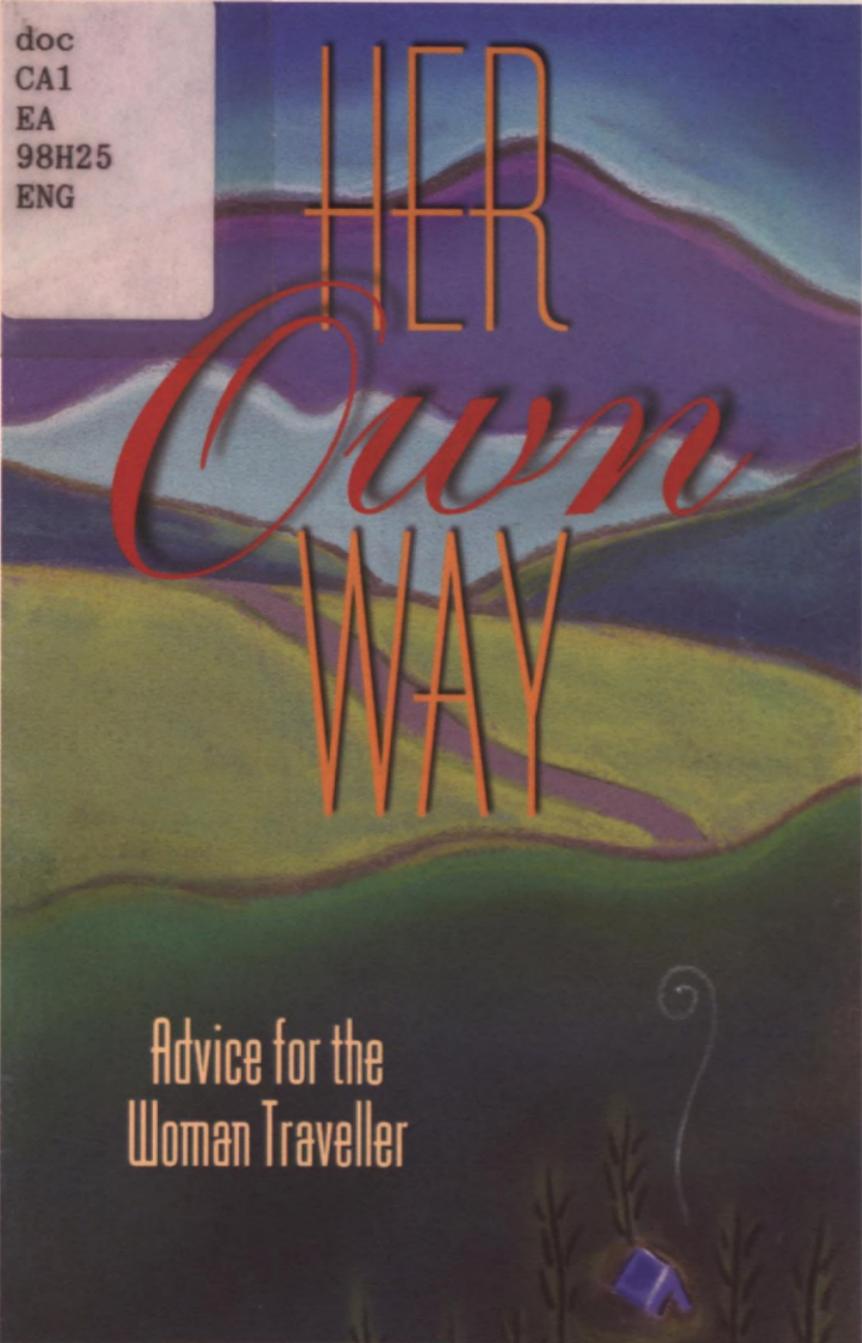


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HER *Own* WAY

Advice for the
Woman Traveller



Department of Foreign Affairs
and International Trade

Ministère des Affaires étrangères
et du Commerce international

Canada

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Introduction

From young university graduates to businesswomen to energetic grandmothers, Canadian women are travelling like never before. They're travelling solo, in pairs and as members of interest groups. And while women travel for many of the same reasons as men do, their social concerns, as well as their health and safety needs, are very, very different.

Female travellers are directly affected by the religious and societal beliefs of the countries they visit. As they make their way around the globe, chances are they'll be called upon to adapt the way they dress or the manner in which they interact with the male population. They might even find that, in some places, it's inappropriate to be outdoors after sundown. The more that women prepare themselves for these differing attitudes, the richer and safer their travelling experiences will be.

Whether you're a breast-feeding mother, a busy executive or an older traveller, as a woman you'll have a unique set of health concerns to contend with on the road. A bit of pre-planning and research in this area will prove

to be invaluable once you're on your way.

Everyone knows that, when travelling, a woman must be extra vigilant in terms of safety and security. What steps can she take to avoid possible sexual harassment? How can she make her hotel room secure?

This publication is filled with practical tips specifically of interest to the female traveller. Its prime objective is to inform and inspire Canadian women to travel safely. Bon voyage!

We would like to receive your comments on this booklet. Was it helpful? Write to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) at the address given on the inside front cover and let us know what you think.

This booklet has been written for DFAIT by "woman & travel" consultant Evelyn Hannon.

Lessening the Culture Shock

"Knowledge itself is power." A smart traveller is one who finds out everything she can about the culture and customs, and the role of women, in the places she'll be visiting. It makes sense to learn what to expect and prepare yourself for as many eventualities as possible.

Information Sources

One of your best sources of travel information is other women.

Connect with them; ask for their advice. Note their recommendations on hotels, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs)

and restaurants.

Find out if they have friends or know of organizations or book-stores for you to

contact at your destination. Tips and information from these sources can be invaluable.

Ask other women if you may read parts of their travel journals. If they don't mind sharing, this is a wonderful way of acquainting yourself with other cultures from a woman's point of view. It will also prepare you for the emotional highs and lows that may occur on your journey.

Don't count on mainstream media to present information specifically relevant to the female traveller. Instead, supplement your reading with travel books, newsletters and magazines for women. They address, with appropriate empathy, the most important health, safety, cultural and emotional issues experienced by females on the road.

Surf the Net. Post your queries on on-line bulletin boards. You could get responses from helpful travellers around the world.

In Southeast Asia, signs are posted at religious landmarks asking women not to enter if they're menstruating.

Canada is a multicultural country. Seek out women in your community who were born

and raised in the places you plan to visit. They are the perfect guides to appropriate behaviour and dress for women within their culture. Get them to teach you a few key words and phrases in their mother tongue, too.

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

Travel Light, Travel Smart

It's a good idea to travel light. As a woman alone, you'll be far less vulnerable and much more independent if you're 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 luggage choice. Try to make sure you have at least one hand free at all times.

A few days before your departure, you might want to try some test walks. Pack your bag and make your way around the block. Visualize yourself climbing subway stairs or getting on and off a train unassisted. You'll probably go home and reduce the bag's contents by half.

A fanny pack, tote bag or small day pack is useful for shorter excursions. If you plan to do a lot of shopping, you'll need an extra lightweight bag to bring your souvenirs home.

It's smart to keep your luggage locked at all times. Carry several small locks and two sets of keys.

Avoid expensive-looking camera bags. They may only serve to identify you as a wealthy tourist.

Be creative. Try using a diaper bag instead.

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've left behind.

Taking a purse? One that has zippered inner compartments for added security and a thick shoulder strap that goes over your head as well as your shoulder is ideal. The best way to carry your purse is in front of you, next to your stomach. This way, it isn't easily accessible to pickpockets.

"The three most important things about travelling: pack light, always wear comfortable shoes and SMILE!"

*Erin Woodley,
Canadian Olympic
Silver Medalist, Synchronized
Swimming, 1996*

Extra Security Makes Sense

In your purse or fanny pack, carry only those necessities that are lightweight and that you can afford to lose or have stolen. You should conceal those items that are not easily replaceable and are crucial to your travel arrangements — your passport, traveller's cheques, cash, medical prescriptions, contact numbers for your doctor and a copy of your insurance policy — by carrying them close to your body.

You can use a cotton money belt that you wear around your waist or a cotton pouch that hangs around your neck and is concealed by

"Foreign women aren't seen as women per se in China, but first and foremost as foreigners. As such they won't be any more vulnerable than a male traveller."

*Jan Wong,
The Globe and Mail
columnist and author
of Red China Blues*

"As a woman, my fear of being cooped up in my home without new challenges, new conversations, new vistas, far outweighs any fears I might have of travelling solo in a strange land."

*Evelyn Hannon,
Editor, Journeywoman Online
magazine*

loose-fitting clothes. Another excellent option is a security half-slip worn under a skirt or dress. Hidden under the hem are three zippered compartments perfect for holding travel documents, cash and credit cards. If you plan to spend a great deal of time at the beach, consider the Seal Pak™, a waterproof pack worn around the waist. It's a practical method for keeping your valuables safe and dry.

Be sure to make duplicate copies of all your important travel documents. Store these in your suitcase and, if the originals are lost or stolen, you'll have a workable

backup system. It's also a good idea to leave copies of these documents with a family member or friend.

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

Consider carefully whether to accept food or drink from strangers. Understand that drug-ging is always a possibility.

Air Travel

Remember that, when you're flying, your body has to adapt to changes in cabin pressure, the air you're breathing and different time zones.

Travelling in comfortable, casual clothes that don't restrict body movement is a good idea. Also remember that your feet are bound to swell. Avoid travelling in pull-on boots; shoes with laces make the most sense.

Lip balm and moisturizer can help to combat the dryness of aircraft cabins.

If you use contraceptive pills, be sure to take them every

In any country you visit, avoid sightseeing in isolated places.

If you plan to rent a car, consider travelling with a cellular phone. If you do, make sure you have an emergency telephone number in case you experience a mechanical breakdown or find yourself in a dangerous situation. Never pick up hitchhikers. And never get out of your car if someone bumps into it; wait for the police to arrive.

24 hours. Don't be misled by crossing time zones.

A good way to minimize jet lag is to drink a glass of water for every hour you're in the air.

Chewing gum will help to relieve the pressure that builds up in your ears, especially during the plane's final descent.

Shoes are never worn in Muslim mosques and Buddhist temples. Travellers should pack a pair of heavy socks.

Accommodation

Choose your accommodation carefully. You may wish to consider small hotels, B&Bs or homestay exchanges. Their size generally allows for caring, personal attention.

To avoid extra stress, travel early in the day, especially if you don't have reservations. This gives you time to find a place you like before it gets dark.

Whether the accommodation is a hotel, a B&B or a hostel, always ask to see the room before you take it. Is it clean enough? Does the door lock properly? Does it feel safe? Trust your intuition. Don't stay anywhere unless you feel entirely comfortable with both the accommodation and its location.

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 (i.e., a balcony or fire escape). Book a room that is close to an elevator and away from exits. Stairwells

allow troublemakers to hide and to come and go undetected.

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 deadbolt that can easily be installed on any inward-opening door. These items are perfect if you plan to stay in very simple accommodation.

"Women travel differently than men. Whether they choose a hot pink nail buff, a fake wedding ring or the proverbial baggy dress while trekking in Nepal, life on the road for women is simply a different trip."

*Debra Cummings,
Travel Editor,
Calgary Herald*

Networking Along the Way

For those who would like to connect with other women on the road, here are some suggestions:

As soon as you begin your journey, start plugging into the female network.

Finding a good source may lead you to many others. Local women are usually as pleased to meet you as you are to meet them.

Carry referrals from women back home. Take advantage of the contacts they made when they travelled.

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

Check with the Canadian embassy or consulate for any listings of women's expatriate clubs

and organizations. Members of these groups can sometimes be an excellent source of information. They might even invite you to one of their cultural events.

"A woman travelling is able to gather up those encounters and observations, moments of clarity or frustration, wonder or defeat. And they all become part of her personal history."

*Donna Nebenzahl,
Editor, WomanNews,
The Montreal Gazette*

Think about joining a female-guided walking tour. It's not only a wonderful way to learn about a place, but it's also a perfect way to meet other female travellers. Be sure to chat with the leader; she'll be a worthwhile source of female-friendly information.

In less populated places, the person who runs the place where you're staying will probably know everyone in the village and will be ready to provide advice and introductions.

Carry a small notepad and coloured pencils. While children might not understand the language you speak, they'll delight in drawings you make for them.

Pack photographs of your home and family. They're perfect ice-breakers wherever you travel.

If you can't make yourself understood in the local language, seek

Dress Sense

When visiting a religious site, a woman should always dress conservatively. A woman traveller should carry a scarf in case she needs to cover her head.

Give some thought to how you dress. In the Western world, you'll encounter few, if any, clothing restrictions, but it still makes sense to dress conservatively. Leave your valuables at home. Instead, take along interesting costume jewellery that might serve as a conversation piece with those you meet along the way.

If you travel into developing countries and male-dominated societies, make every effort to dress modestly. In some places, customs based on religious and moral beliefs strongly influence the way the women dress. For you

out female teenagers. Chances are they're studying some English at school and will take pride in being your translator.

to blatantly break these rules would be considered irreverent and might put you in jeopardy. Why not adapt your clothing to fit the customs of the host country? It becomes an interesting and educational challenge.

For publications that deal in detail with dress codes for women worldwide, check the listings in the resource section at the end of this booklet. For example, *Journeywoman Online* contains a section entitled "What Should I Wear?," which offers some good tips on how to dress appropriately.

Outside North America, a one-piece swimsuit is always a safer choice than a bikini. Yet, in some countries, local women might swim entirely clothed, in accordance with their religious beliefs.

Avoiding Harassment

Unfortunately, the potential for sexual harassment and intimidation is a reality

around the world, as it is at home.

Be prepared.

Do your networking and

research before you leave. Find out as much as you can about the roles of both women and men in the places you plan to visit.

Avoid wearing provocative, form-fitting clothing.

A woman alone may be considered fair game. Understand this and prepare yourself mentally for any propositions, suggestive comments or catcalls. Then simply ignore them.

In some male-dominated cultures, it's considered incorrect for a woman to travel solo. For these and other potentially challenging destinations, you might want to team up with a companion. Two women travelling together might have an easier time.

In some cultures, making eye contact with a man is a sign that you want his company. Some

women solve this problem by wearing dark glasses.

In the Pacific Islands, a woman's thighs are considered an erotic part of her body and should not be exposed in public.

Be aware that you'll probably be openly stared at. In countries where you look very different

from everybody else, both men and women will make no attempt to hide their curiosity.

Behave confidently. When you're out, try to look as if you know exactly where you're going and what you're doing.

Take your cue from the local women. As a general rule, if they don't sit in cafés alone, you shouldn't do so either. If they aren't wearing sleeveless dresses, neither should you.

Never accept car rides or hitchhike. Ask the 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 perfect breeding grounds for anti-social behaviour. Some men will use this opportunity to touch or

pinch the female passengers standing close to them. If this happens to you, make a fuss. Point at the offender and chastise him in a loud voice. He'll probably slink away. However, to avoid these types of advances, consider choosing reserved seating if you can afford it. It will be money well spent.

In countries like Egypt and India, take advantage of the female-

only sections in buses, trains and subways. Use this excellent opportunity to communicate with local women and their children.

In India, a female's upper arms are considered sensual areas of the body and therefore must never be exposed in public.

Alone After Sundown

Women rightfully tend to be more cautious about going out after sundown.

However, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't go out at all. Simply

take precautions: for example, in planning an evening at the symphony, arrange in advance to have a taxi take you there and back; in deciding where to eat dinner, choose a restaurant that is close to where you're staying.

Since it's always interesting to experience the sights and rhythms of a place after dark, consider joining a sightseeing group. Check with the local tourism centre for

In Saudi Arabia, a single woman doesn't drive a rental car. She must have a male driver.

events that are available. Make sure that the tour bus picks you up and drops you off at your hotel or hostel.

Alternatively, you may appreciate matinée performances, which are far less expensive and may give you an opportunity to meet others.

If you're not comfortable eating alone in the evening, have your main meal at lunch-time when even the finest restaurants offer their specialities at more reasonable prices.

During the day, why not stop in at a market or supermarket and shop alongside the local women?

You can learn about the food specialities of the area and put together a meal to eat as a picnic in your room. Even with wine, it's less expensive than eating out every night.

Understand that, in some parts of the world, "respectable" women

don't go out alone in the evening. In these places, a flagrant rejection of this custom could very well put you in jeopardy. Instead, after a long day of sightseeing, welcome the opportunity to rest, relax and rejuvenate yourself, so you can be ready to enjoy another full day of new experiences.

Maintaining Connections

You should maintain contact with at least one person back home, especially if you're travelling

solo. By letter, fax, e-mail or telephone, let that person know where you are and where you're heading next.

Off travelling for the day? You should leave a note in your room explaining where you're going. If

you run into trouble, at least there'll be clues to follow.

"Travelling — it opens your eyes. It makes you realize how well off we are here in Canada."

*Captain Nicole Sauvé, Pilot,
Canada 3000 Airlines*

Always carry a business card from your hotel or B&B. If you get lost, approach another woman on the street

and show her the address on the card. She may be able to point you in the right direction.

Staying Healthy

Not all travel books deal with uniquely female health needs. You can augment what you read with the experienced advice of other women travellers.

It's a good idea to carry your doctor's phone and fax numbers, as well as copies of prescriptions for medication you might require along the way.

You won't always be able to eat properly. Consider carrying multi-vitamins to supplement your diet.

Your regular brand of contraceptive pill may not be available at your destination. Take enough with you to last the whole trip.

Major stomach upsets (diarrhea or vomiting) cause your body to lose its ability to absorb the contraceptive pill. It's wise to use condoms to guard against unwanted pregnancy.

You may want to pack a supply of condoms to protect yourself against sexually transmitted diseases too.

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

It's not unusual for women to stop menstruating when they're travelling for a long time. If there are no other symptoms and you're *not* concerned that you might be pregnant, don't worry.

If you're prone to yeast infections, they're more likely to recur in warm, moist climates. Wearing loose-fitting cotton underwear

When travelling in Asia, it's a good idea to carry a supply of disposable chopsticks. Dishwashing facilities are not always adequate to kill bacteria.

and skirts rather than pants may help. Carry appropriate medication in your first-aid kit; it might not be available where you're 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.

If you wear contact lenses, consider using disposables. Storing and cleaning your lenses can become a nuisance if you're going to be on an extended journey.

It's definitely inadvisable to have ear-piercing, acupuncture, tattooing or manicures while you're on the road. Instruments that are not properly sterilized can carry hepatitis B or AIDS.

If you absolutely must have dental work, injections or an

internal examination, contact the nearest Canadian embassy or consulate. Officials there can often recommend appropriate local medical practitioners.

Consider joining the International Association of Medical Assistance to Travellers (IAMAT). This organization provides information on immunization, as well as listings of English-speaking physicians around the world. Call (416) 652-0137.

Make sure that you don't leave Canada without adequate health insurance for travellers. Review your policy thoroughly so that you know exactly what your coverage entails. For example, does your policy have an in-house worldwide emergency hot-line that you can call if you're in trouble? Does the policy pay foreign hospital and related medical costs and, if so, does it pay up-front or expect you to pay and be reimbursed later? Carry proof of your coverage with you.

Coping with Foreign Bathrooms

Modern bathrooms as we know them in North America do exist around the world, but not everywhere. As a traveller, you'll come across everything from outhouses to simple holes in the ground where squatting is a necessity.

Some toilets will flush, but many won't. In developing countries, some cubicles are enclosed. However, as you venture further into the countryside, you might have to make do with little or no privacy.

"Oh Canada! I enjoy leaving it, but I love coming back."

*Erica Ehm, Host,
Real Life with Erica Ehm,
Life Network*

To cope with the vagaries of foreign bathrooms, consider wearing a long, full skirt. This will allow for some modesty in

situations where you have to "go" outdoors.

Always carry a supply of toilet paper with you.

In some parts of

the world, it's either very scarce or too coarse to be usable.

In parts of Asia and Africa, expect a jug of water, left beside the toilet, in lieu of paper.

The smell in toilets is sometimes overpowering. Try dabbing some mentholatum under your nose to help mask the odours while you use the facilities.

Carry your own antiseptic wipes or a small bar of soap. These are generally not easily available.

The Pregnant Traveller

Try to have at least your first prenatal checkup before you travel.

Most policies don't automatically cover pregnancy-related conditions or nursery care for premature infants.

You should check airlines' rules about pregnant passengers before you book your ticket. In Canada, airlines will allow you to fly up to the

Most, but not all, vaccines are considered safe during pregnancy. Once your pregnancy

35th week of your pregnancy, providing you're healthy and there is no previous history of premature labour. The rules in other countries might be different. You could be asked to supply a

"Don't just read the book!

Travelling to new cultures and meeting new people is not only rewarding in itself, it also gives us an enriched vision of home and the people closest to us."

*Françoise Ducret, Chair,
Canadian Chapter, European
Travel Commission*

is confirmed, you'll require special advice. A Canadian organization called *Motherisk* will answer any questions you might have about appropriate drugs and immunization. Call (416) 813-6780.

letter from your doctor verifying the stage of your pregnancy.

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

Check your travel insurance policy carefully to make sure that you'll be covered for all eventualities.

Constipation can be a problem, especially if you're taking iron supplements. Try to eat plenty of high-fibre foods, like fruits and vegetables.

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

For coping with morning sickness, ginger is an excellent remedy. Crystallized forms can be found in the baking section of most supermarkets. Otherwise, raw root ginger can be found just about 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 liable to catch the disease, and the illness tends to be more severe.

Especially if you're in the first trimester of your pregnancy, avoid high-altitude destinations, where oxygen to the fetus could be decreased.

As you're pregnant, you should avoid using iodine to purify water. Iodine could have an adverse effect on the fetal thyroid.

Travelling with Children

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

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

If you're breast-feeding, take your cues from local women, since

cultural practices vary from country to country. However, when in doubt, try to breast-feed in private.

Never leave a young child unattended. Always keep some form of identification in your child's pocket in case you accidentally become separated.

For emergency identification purposes, take along several recent photographs of your child. You may also wish to leave extra

copies of those photographs with a family member.

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

When entering or leaving a hotel elevator, keep your child right beside you. If the doors close too quickly, he or she could be stranded.

If your offspring is under 16 and is not listed on your passport, you must have a notarized document from the child's father giving permission for the child to travel.

If you're travelling to another country with your child and there is a possibility of a custody dispute developing in Canada or abroad while you're away, talk to a lawyer before leaving home. A

special publication, *International Child Abductions: A Manual for Parents*, is available from DFAIT's InfoCentre. Please refer to page 21 for details on how to order this publication.

"I've been travelling with my kids since the youngest was three months old. When she fussed, I went into a larger than life singing or dancing routine to distract her. Often, this made fellow travellers laugh and sympathize instead of trying to get as far away as possible from an upset mother and child."

*Kathy Kastner, Vice President,
The Parent Channel*

The Older Traveller

This is a wonderful time in your life to be travelling. In most cultures, age brings respect. Children will gravitate to you. Local women will be protective, and you'll suffer less from unsolicited male advances.

the older adult. They contain valuable information about obtaining discounts, avoiding single supplements, educational holidays and the many group travel opportunities available for those of mature age.

Check your library for the many travel books written especially for

Planning an adventure holiday involving hiking or a lot of

walking? If you're not already involved in fitness activities, consider beginning an appropriate exercise program at least a month before your departure.

Expecting to carry a backpack? You might want to do a few training walks to get used to it. You can start light and work your way up to carrying the full capacity.

If you're experiencing the hot flashes of menopause, pack a wardrobe of "layers" that can easily be adjusted to your fluctuating body temperature.

A small magnifying glass is perfect for reading the tiny print on maps.

If you have a medical condition that could present a problem while you're travelling, you should wear a Medic Alert® bracelet. Through the Medic Alert® Foundation, your vital

In China, sandals without a heel-strap are viewed as bedroom slippers and are generally considered inappropriate outdoor footwear.

medical facts become part of a database that can be accessed 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world. Call 1-800-825-3785

for membership information.

Make very sure that you have adequate health and travel insurance.

Businesswomen Abroad

In many parts of the world, a woman's traditional role is in the home. The concept of woman as business executive is much less common. Understanding the customs and proper business protocol at your destination is imperative.

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. Especially in countries where women generally don't hold key corporate positions, this will eliminate any misunderstanding about the rank and

México: ¿Qué pasa?

This booklet provides information on the preparation required for doing business in the Mexican market, as well as tips for a safe and healthy trip.

***Working Abroad:
Unravelling the Maze***

This booklet covers the ABCs of working in a foreign country. It includes straightforward advice and tips to make the working adventure safe and successful.

Travel Reports

Travel reports offer travellers current information on conditions in over 170 countries, including safety, health and passport requirements. They are available via telephone at 1-800-267-6788 in Canada or (613) 944-6788; a FaxCall system at 1-800-575-2500 in Canada or (613) 944-2500; or the Travel section at DFAIT's Internet site (<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca>). These services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Newsletter

Traveling Healthy: Health Advice for the Global Traveler

Bimonthly. P.O. Box 13795, Milwaukee, WI 53213-0795, U.S.A.

Web Sites

Journeywoman Online.

A magazine published on the Internet for women who love to travel.

<http://www.journeywoman.com/>

The Executive Women's Travel Network

<http://www.delta-air.com/womenexecs>

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

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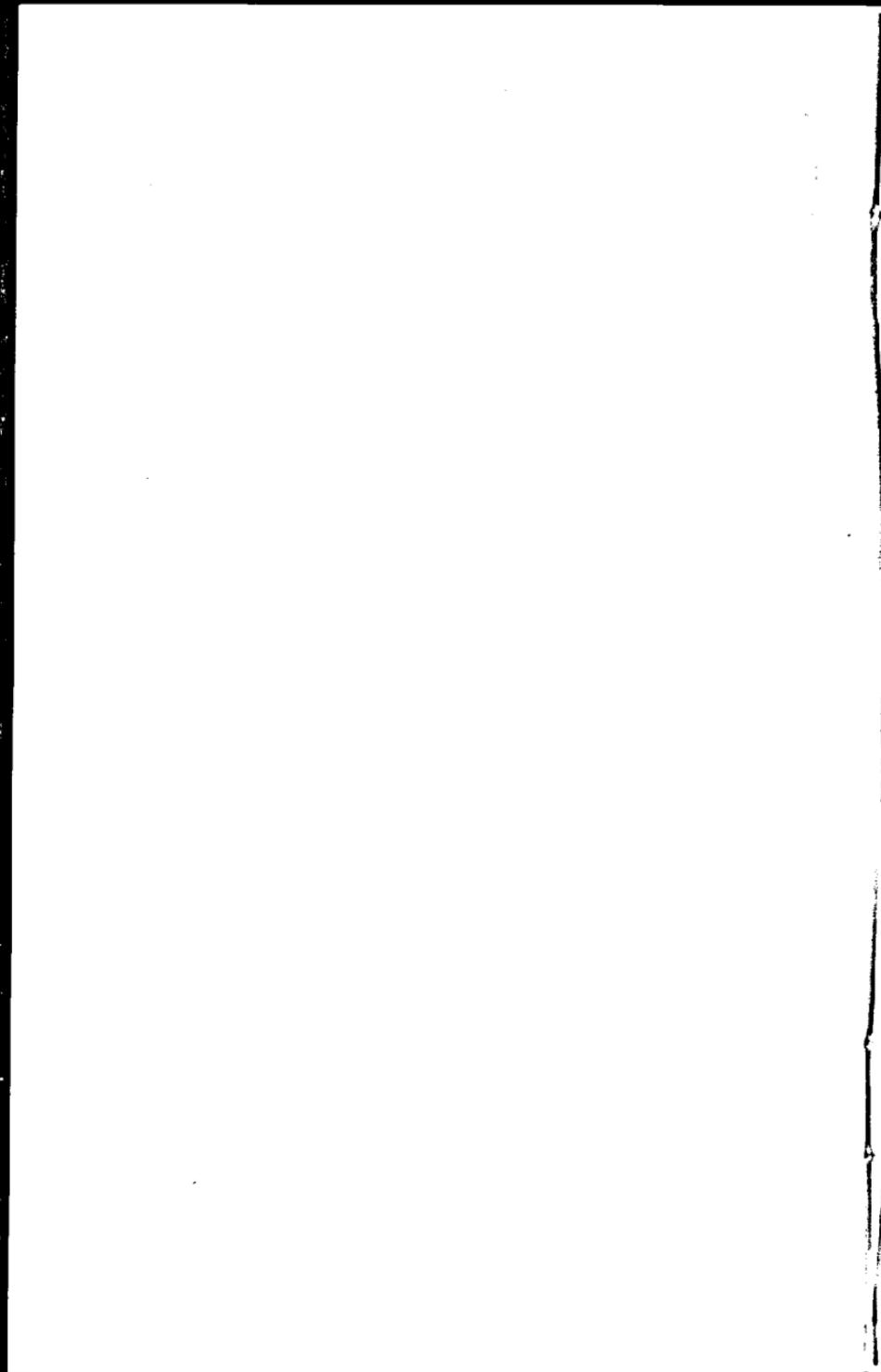
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Homestays

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