



Toolie's Business Travel Newsletter

March 2005

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Results of the Business Travel Expo

I just got back from Hong Kong where my company, Tooliedotter Press, had booth #217 at the Business Travel Expo at the Hong Kong Convention Center. My sister Melody helped me work the booth, where we met business travelers, business travel buyers, and a number of potential new partners in the business travel arena. I've also uncovered a new segment of the business travel market to which my services are appealing: incentive travel. Business travel buyers of this type are always looking for new places to send travelers, but new places involve a measure of risk. I would be the person who does the advance work, doing what I already do: collecting the logistical information that mitigates the risks of travel for business travelers.

As a result of what I've learned, I've rearranged the time schedule of planned product releases (products other than my guides) and I will certainly let you know when some of these new items are available for sale. I will also be adding new members to my email list next month as a result of our contact at the show, such that my newsletter will now be read by people in 29 countries.

This Month's Travel Tip: A Tale of Two Passports

This month I am going to talk about two passports: mine and my sister's. My story is about renewing a passport, hers is about recovering from a passport problem.

Renewing My US Passport

I try to keep a global perspective when I write my newsletters; I know that I have readers all over the world. Even though this month's newsletter is US-centric, there are principles here that apply to all passport renewals.

I've been waiting to talk about passports until after I renewed mine this year. It's a bit of a celebration for me: 10 years as a business traveler! I had only 3 weeks' notice before my first trip out of the country, so the whole process of obtaining a passport was a flurry of activity. I was lucky enough to live in a city with a passport office, so I was able to go in person with a certified copy of my birth certificate to get my passport, and the passport was provided to me the same day.

When I visited Singapore last fall, a very nice passport agent there pointed out that I had less than 6 months remaining on my passport. She issued me an entrance visa anyway, but told me that the officers at my next stop, Hong Kong, might deny me entry when I landed because there were fewer than 6 months of validity left on my passport. My stress level went up immediately. I was only going to be in Singapore for one business day, so I had to find some answers quickly!

I sat in my hotel room that night and looked through the website for Hong Kong visitors. I finally concluded that the entry visas issued to US passport holders required only 3 months validity, and that I would be fine. I decided to smile a LOT when I got to the passport window in Hong Kong, just in case. When I did get there, the officers didn't even flinch -- I was given entry into Hong Kong without comment. <whew!>

I knew that I was going to return to Hong Kong in March, so I definitely had to renew my passport before then. The fact that I was thinking about this four months in advance did not prompt me to get that passport renewed right away, oh no, not!! Ever the procrastinator, I waited until I had only 2 months left. Then I ran to the local photo processing store and had new passport photos taken, and I requested expedited service from the National Passport Agency.

Sending my beloved passport out in the mail has always been a stressful experience for me. I've been on group tours to China twice before, and each time they've taken my passport from me in order to obtain the visas, which are physically stamped into the passport. I'm pretty proud of the passport stamps I've collected over the years, so when it was time to ship my passport to the National Passport Agency, I was afraid I wouldn't get the old one back. I painstakingly photocopied each page just in case -- I'm trying to reconstruct all my travels for the last 10 years, and I hadn't gotten a chance to do that before it was time to let go of the passport as a record of those travels.

Finally, I had my new passport photos, the application, and a check for the fees ready to go. I selected the expedited service, and included a return envelope with the postage already attached. The next day I realized that I had forgotten to request a 48-page passport instead of the usual 24 pages. I obtained the number to call from the passport website, but 2 more business days went by before I could call them.

Calling into the center was easy, and the phone was answered promptly. By the time I reached them though, the passport had already been processed, and was on its way back to me!! I was pleased and impressed. The US passport website (<http://travel.state.gov/passport/>) says expect 2 weeks processing time. Because I provided US Express Mail (overnight) envelopes going and returning, I got my new passport (and my old one) back in less than 10 days. I was VERY impressed.

To summarize passport renewal in the US:

- Current passport photo (it really should look like you do TODAY)
- Old passport
- Application form
- Proper fees

Optionally, you can include a return envelope; otherwise expect your passport to arrive by regular US mail. I used the Express Mail Flat Rate envelope to have mine sent back to me. This service allows the sender to put as much stuff in the envelope as they want, regardless of the total weight, as long as they can close and seal the envelope. I knew that the envelope would have sufficient postage for both my old and new passports.

The Passport That Didn't Fly

My sister has given me permission to tell this story about our trip to Hong Kong. Melody had just changed jobs prior to our trip, and her life was quite full of exciting changes. She also looks after our 88-year-old father, so her life is quite busy. The first leg of her trip was on a Friday, and it was a domestic flight from Chicago to Seattle, so all that was required for check-in was her driver's license.

Shortly after passing through Security, Melody realized that she didn't have her passport with her. She called me for help and left a message, knowing there wasn't time for her to go home and get her passport. Also, because of Spring Break, there weren't any seats available on flights later that day, and the earliest flight on Saturday would not get her to Seattle in time to connect with our international flights. I called Melody back and told her that I would somehow get her passport to Seattle. Courageously, Melody boarded her plane to Seattle and managed to remain calm during the 4-hour flight. She boarded her plane just before 3 pm Central time.

I have always wondered what one does in a situation like this: no one at home to retrieve the passport and send it; no one who has a key to one's apartment; no later flights, and no way to board an international flight to join a trip you'd planned for over 3 months. Terrifying, isn't it!!

My first call was to the National Passport Agency. I had just renewed my passport, so I had the number handy. Was there any recourse for a missing passport? What did people do who were without passport but needed to travel? The short answer was, they waited until Monday to get a new passport. How do they get a passport? They need a certified copy of their birth certificate. How do they get one? Someone has to send it to them. What if they don't have an extra copy? They have to get one from the state where they were born? How long could that take? Weeks! By then, they could just go home and get the original passport. So, the Passport Agency was not going to be any help in getting my sister's passport in time for our 12:30 p.m. flight out of Seattle.

The next call was to my father, who lives nearby, to explain the problem. I knew that if I could get him into the apartment, I would need him to get the passport to either the Post Office or Federal Express. The Post Office would deliver on Saturday if my zip code was eligible for overnight service; FedEx would deliver on Saturday for an extra charge, but would it arrive in Seattle on time?

The next call was to a locksmith. Since Dad didn't have a key to Melody's apartment, we were going to have to pick or drill the lock to get in. The locksmith could provide the service in time, but we needed him to get to her apartment so Dad could retrieve the passport before the cutoff time at FedEx.

Next we tried to track down the landlord to get permission to get Dad into the building and to destroy and replace the lock if we could get in. The landlord travels as much as I do, but when I called, her cell phone wasn't even accepting messages, so without her permission to enter, we were facing a serious challenge.

The next call was to Federal Express nearby. Our saving grace was that the cutoff time for overnight packages was 7:30 p.m. Central time. There was hope that if we could get the passport, there would be time to get it to FedEx and on their plane to Seattle.

The next question was, will it arrive in Seattle Saturday morning in time for us to pick it up? Initially, no! Delivery before noon at my house was not guaranteed. The solution lay in having the package sent to the central FedEx hub in Seattle as a "Hold for Pickup" package. I would be able to pick it up by 9 a.m. local time, and still be home in time to be picked up for my ride to the airport at 10 a.m.

I finally reached the landlord at just after 5 p.m. Central time. The locksmith arrived at the apartment along with my Dad at about the same time, and within minutes the locksmith had drilled and replaced the lock. Melody had given precise directions to find the passport in her apartment, and Dad headed for the FedEx-Kinko's in St. Charles, IL. My heroes at the FedEx-Kinko's, David and Micah, took care of the paperwork and charged the cost of shipping to my FedEx account number, so that all Dad had to do was walk in and drop the passport in the envelope. I picked up the passport the next morning, and the trip was saved.

After all of the phone calls were finished and the passport was on its way to Seattle, I collapsed in a heap on my office floor. I was very relieved that Melody was going to be able to accompany me on the trip!

So what did we learn from this experience?

1. Make a list of what you need to take on your trip, and check the items off as you pack. (By the way, I'm working on travel checklists that will help you with this.)
2. You gotta have a backup plan. If you live alone, someone besides you needs to be able to get into your home or apartment. Who do you trust enough to either give them a key or tell them where you've hidden one? Whom do you know who would go to this much effort to send you a passport? Here's hoping your life is full of people you can count on like this.
3. Sign up for a FedEx account. You've heard me say this before, and in 4 years of relying on them, I have never been disappointed with their service. You give them a credit card number to which charges are posted, and you get an account number you can use globally. I love it.

Truly, I hope you never have this kind of stressful experience. I hope that sharing this story with you prompts you to take steps to prevent it. And Melody, thanks for letting me share so that others can benefit.

[Toolie's Travel Plans](#)

At the end of April I am attending the Humor Lab in Phoenix sponsored by the National Speakers Association, of which I am a member. I will be working with some of the top humorists in the country to develop my funny bone into a reliable friend onstage.

I'll be in Chicago briefly in early May, and in the Orlando area in late May for a meeting of the Society of American Travel Writers. I'm not yet a member of that elite group, but I'm working with two mentors to meet their requirements.

Most of my travel for future guides will be scheduled in the latter half of the year, after I get the mechanisms in place to sell the first 10 guides. Stay tuned for updates on my travel plans.

[Chat or Ask Toolie Questions Online](#)

You can chat with me or ask questions online by visiting my website and clicking on the button in the middle of the top of each page.

I welcome the following inquiries, whether in live chat or by email:

- General questions on travel procedures
- Questions about specific destinations
- Productivity ideas and needs during travel
- Questions about my speaking, writing, or travel guide services
- Feedback about my newsletter and (soon) my products
- General customer service needs

Here is the link to my site: <http://www.tooliethetravelguide.com>. I love to hear from my subscribers anytime!

Very "Toolie" yours,

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