



Traveling Insured

"To insure or not to insure"

That is the Travel Question

Hamlet, Shakespeare's fictional Prince of Denmark, was not the only individual to debate with himself about what choices to make when preparing for a life experience involving risk. Travelers, putting down their deposit for a cruise, tour or other vacation package, do it every day.

You may have recently had the debate with yourself or with your travel partner. "Should we buy a travel insurance policy to protect the cost of our trip and any potential emergency medical costs or not?"

Your answer might have been: "No, our credit card insurance will cover us." Or your partner may have answered, "Well we have Medicare insurance, don't we?" or "We can get a plan directly from the travel supplier, can't we?"

You may also have seen a *Consumer Reports* article earlier this year, which recommended against travel insurance and said that travelers ought to "save their money for souvenirs." Less than a month later the respected former editor of *Consumer Reports* Travel Newsletter Ed Perkins wrote for *SmarterTravel.com* about travel insurance, and said he thought the *Consumer Reports* "authors listened to some bad advice."

We agree with Perkins, who wrote: "Far more trips are canceled because of accident or illness, and you don't get any refunds for those. Any time you face a penalty or loss that's more than you can comfortably afford, consider Trip Cancellation insurance."





What about that credit card insurance? Most people, just as with rental car agreements, rarely if ever look at the fine print of their credit card insurance plan. Many cards' plans are limited to accident insurance on a common carrier and baggage loss coverage. No trip cancellation, medical protection or emergency evacuation coverage is normally included.

In addition to the credit card being required to purchase the trip being insured, the card insurance terms are normally limited by an

"excess coverage provision." It means coverage only applies "when all other valid collectible insurance benefits are exhausted."

A comprehensive insurance plan is **primary insurance** that pays you first! The plan covers you for documented Trip Cancellation, the most important feature cited by Ed Perkins above. The Trip Cancellation reimburses you up to the full prepaid trip cost.

There is also Trip Interruption, in case you have to cut the trip short for a covered reason, reimbursing up to 150% of the prepaid trip cost and should include emergency medical protection and evacuation, missed connection, trip delay coverage, baggage loss and baggage delay. There is protection available for a Pre-Existing Medical Condition of the traveler, his or her travel companion and their covered family members.

As for Medicare and many other U.S. health care policies? They often do not provide coverage for you in a foreign destination, where hospitals and doctors often require payment in advance for treatment! A solid travel insurance program will guarantee that you will be admitted to a hospital or appropriate health care facility.

If you decide you can get the cheapest insurance directly from your travel supplier, check the small print again. Many suppliers' policies, especially those that offer "cancel for any reason," only offer you a credit to rebook a trip with the same company. You do not usually get a cash refund.

Additionally, most suppliers' policies only credit up to 75% of the original trip cost, and the credit for rebooking is only valid for up to one year from the originally scheduled trip that you cancelled!

By contrast, when a Worldwide Trip Protector covered claim reimburses you, it is a cash refund. It's your money, use it again however you choose.

When you get to your vacation spot, your one wish is that your bags arrive with you. Unfortunately, the airlines don't always make your wish come true. A Worldwide Trip Protector policy can reimburse you for up to \$1,000 for lost baggage or personal effects, and up to \$200

for delayed baggage. The latter will, at the least, get each insured into clean clothes and personal necessities until your bag, hopefully, reaches your accommodation.

Finally, if an emergency illness or accident happens far from home, nothing will be more welcome than a helpful voice on the phone working to get you assistance on the spot. Make sure your policy has a global emergency travel assistance service, which goes with you 24/7 with every insurance plan. You will be able to contact the service toll-free from wherever you travel, even when your family or loved ones are not immediately in reach.

As Shakespeare again might say, you can learn to "count the ways" to love travel insurance when you get to know it as a steady travel companion. You can also say that having a comprehensive travel policy is much like having a knowledgeable, professional travel agent to arrange your trip. You will most appreciate both when they come to your assistance in a travel emergency. That's when you'll know you made the right choice to plan ahead.

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