

## Travel Tip: Travel Protection Plans (aka Trip Insurance)

I have written about travel protection many times in blog articles, and even a few newsletters. Still we have clients that choose to pass on the additional peace of mind a travel protection plan offers, and



some have encountered circumstances causing them to regret that decision. Most of our clients purchase some form of travel protection and when they have needed to file a claim, let me tell you they are glad they did. Trip insurance should be considered an integral part of your vacation booking and not some ancillary charge like the extended warranty you might purchase on an appliance. It is best to think of trip insurance as a comprehensive travel protection plan, not just cancellation coverage, because if you buy the right policy that is exactly what it provides.

Back in September, 2017 when we were going through back-to-back-to-back hurricanes, I wrote a travel tip covering the importance of a travel protection plan if you should have to cancel your trip. And of course that is how most people think of insurance...a hedge against the risk of having to cancel your trip for an unexpected medical or family emergency. While you may miss your vacation, at least you get your money back. That is an important consideration, but we recommend that you purchase a travel protection plan for all of the other benefits you get when traveling. In Systems Engineering we call it the unknown unknowns. Those are all the things you don't know will happen, but that happen often enough to others that you know they may happen to you.

Even if you are willing to live with the risk of having to cancel your trip without insurance, basically self-insuring, what about the risk of needing to be medically evacuated? Nobody wants to think of things like that when booking an exciting vacation, but those are the things we worry about on behalf of our clients. Medical evacuation can be expensive, like six-figure expensive. And the need for medevac doesn't have to be due to a life-threatening illness or injury...it can result from something as simple as stepping off a curb and breaking your ankle. An important consideration for making the decision to purchase a travel protection plan is that the decision that you require medical evacuation is made by the medical professionals, not you. You don't get a vote...just the bill.



Another benefit that comes with a comprehensive travel protection plan is if your trip is interrupted or you are delayed. The plans we recommend to our clients provide coverage for both trip interruption and travel delays, though there are differences in coverage, restrictions, and limitations based on the specific circumstances of the interruption or delay. Trip interruption covers unexpected expenses that you incur if something causes you to have to cancel your plans after you have departed. Most often this is a medical issue either with you or someone in your party, or with a close family member at home. It could also be something like damage to your home from a storm or fire, or even a business-related matter. When your trip is interrupted, the most pressing need is for you to get home as expeditiously as possible. That means a change to your scheduled return travel plans, and that usually means paying more. Much more. Trip interruption coverage will reimburse you for some or all of these additional

expenses, provided it is for a covered reason and you stay within the limits of the policy. Think of it as peace of mind coverage, and something you hope you never need to use.

Travel delays are another matter entirely. They can be incredibly frustrating and aggravating, and if you travel often I am sure you'll have your own horror story of spending the night in an airport or hotel



unable to get to your intended destination. There can be a range of causes for a travel delay, but most often it involves air travel. If an airline is the cause of a travel delay and it was something the FAA considers avoidable, like a mechanical problem or crew scheduling issue, the airline should provide you with food and lodging until they can get you to your destination. The reality is they often don't, and you are on your own to cover any expenses you incur as a result of the delay. They are also not required to fly you out on

another airline, nor are they required to put you on their next flight...only the next available seat on one of their planes. That can mean a delay of several days or even a week if you are traveling during a busy time of year since most planes fly full these days and you will be competing with everyone else from your cancelled flight for the few seats that may be available.

The coverage a travel protection plan may provide due to travel delays is complicated and subject to some tricky restrictions and limitations. Tidewater Cruise and Travel is licensed by the State of Maryland to sell travel protection plans, but we are not licensed to provide specifics regarding coverage limitations and restrictions. Not to worry...one of the things I like most about the travel protection we sell is that it provides a 24X7 travel concierge service to help you navigate the complexity of a travel delay. The travel concierge phone number is your lifeline to someone with tremendous resources at their disposal, and your quickest ticket to getting your trip back on track.

The need to get a prescription or seek medical treatment when traveling out of the country comes with its own special risks and demands. How do you find a competent medical professional or facility in a foreign country? How do you pay for it if you need expensive diagnostic tests or treatment requiring hospitalization? Many health care plans won't cover you when traveling out of the country. Again, not to worry. The same 24X7 travel concierge service that comes with the travel protection plans we recommend serves as your lifeline for medical and prescription issues as well. They'll find a competent medical professional and facility based on your location and specific condition, and they'll even arrange for your transportation if needed. Your travel protection plan will reimburse you for actual medical expenses, subject to the coverage limits in the plan and provided you need treatment for a covered reason, you seek that treatment from a professional medical establishment, and that you provide receipts and documentation of the condition you were treated for. For minor conditions you'll have to pay up front and then seek reimbursement. If you have a more serious condition where significant funding may be required, the 24X7 emergency concierge may also help arrange payment for the treatment you need and let you sort things out once you return. The coverage is nice to have, even for small things. I forgot to bring some medication on a trip and had to get a refill. Fortunately this happened in Miami so getting the refill was easy, but it was too soon for my regular health care plan to cover so I had to pay out of pocket. I kept my receipt and submitted a claim when we got home and was fully reimbursed.



In most cases lost luggage is a minor inconvenience, but occasionally it can ruin your vacation. On our very first cruise we got on board only to find one of our suitcases was taking a cruise aboard a different



ship than we were on. The cruise line did their best to accommodate us, and thanks to Janet's thoughtful packing strategy we were able to get through the cruise with minimal disruption. Had we packed the way I wanted to, the trip would have been a disaster and since that was before we started routinely purchasing travel protection plan, it would have been costly as well. If your trip is to a remote area where delivery services are unable to get your luggage to you once it is found, then a minor inconvenience can quickly become a very real

threat to your vacation. Airports are hit or miss with delivering lost luggage to begin with, but it can get complicated quickly if you hit the ground running at your destination on a fast-paced itinerary that has you visiting a different city each night. This is another area where a travel protection plan can help, because it may provide you with reimbursement for whatever you need to buy to keep your travels on track. That can be clothing or any staple items that you may need until your luggage shows up. You probably won't be reimbursed for an expensive camera or a designer handbag, but a toothbrush and a couple of days' worth of clothing should be covered. If your luggage is completely lost, a travel protection plan will supplement the coverage provided by the airline up to the limit of coverage. And let me tell you, travel protection plan limits are higher than the airlines offer.

There are a number of travel protection products and providers available, but not all are created equal. Online price comparison services boast that they can help you get the lowest price for your trip insurance, but one of my favorite catch phrases applies here...the lowest price isn't usually the best value. OK, there is another catch phrase...you get what you pay for. These price shopping services don't know your specific circumstances, nor can they evaluate your risk tolerance. Only you can make that decision, and it should be fully informed by the coverage provided as well as all of the exclusions and limitations. A low-priced trip insurance policy is not the same as a comprehensive travel protection plan. It generally covers trip cancellation with only minimal, if any, coverage of the other issues you may encounter that could cost you really big bucks. That's why we like to recommend a comprehensive travel protection plan that provides a wide range of coverage. We also like using the same provider for all our clients. TravelSafe is the provider we recommend now, and that we use for our own travel protection coverage. TravelSafe provides unique aspects to their coverage, and they have been responsive to our clients that have needed to file claims or use the travel concierge service. Janet has developed a rapport with the Vice President of the company, and we get direct answers to our questions in writing...a rarity in the insurance world let me just say.

Nobody wants to think about all the things that can go wrong when they take a vacation. Talk about your Debbie Downer. That is one of the many reasons to work with a travel agent...we do the worrying for you. At the end of the day what travel protection you get, if any, is a decision only you can make. Our job is to make sure you know your options when it comes to a comprehensive travel protection plan so nothing gets in the way of you creating lifelong vacation memories!