

Getaways

Borders of paper

Borders were established for three reasons: To make the paper barons of the world rich, to provide make-work projects and help solve the unemployment issue, and to frustrate travelers.

For a Canadian, entering the United States is usually quite easy. Proof of citizenship is all that is needed. The border guards may ask a profound question like, "Where were you born?" Providing you answer correctly by giving the name of a Canadian city or province, you can drive right through.

Entering the U.S. by an airport can be a bit trickier. If you are coming in from a drug-infested area, like Peru, even if you are only in transit, the papers start flying and the unemployment rate goes down. After the officials go through the dirty laundry, tooth-paste tubes and any other paraphernalia a traveler may have, they fill out a large form, in triplicate, declaring that the traveler is not transporting anything dangerous.

If you are a real foreigner (the U.S. considers Canadians to be baby Americans) then you get to use more paper than a victim of the Inca-two-step.

You must have a visa, which takes numerous forms, you must not have communist tendencies or propaganda, again vouched for by more forms. Of course, every form costs you money and time. All forms must be matched and re-matched by border personnel.

Entering Mexico, for a Canadian, can also be easy. All you need is proof of citizenship, a birth certificate being sufficient. Then all you need to do is fill out a simple form written in three languages, one of which is English, have it stamped and be on your way. However, do not lose that simple

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form as it belongs to the Mexican make-work border project and they take great offense if you should not take care of it. You will find yourself a guest of the local police station while the authorities ponder your fate. They need three copies of your form: One from your entry point, one in the central office, and the one you present when leaving. If they can't match all three because you have lost yours, you become a major problem.

Entering Guatemala overland is a real lesson in the meaning of borders. When we got to the border, the Mexicans said we needed a visa from Guatemala. Sometimes, they said, this visa could be had at the Guatemalan border but other times it could not and we would need to go to a Guatemalan consulate in Mexico. The Mexican official suggested we leave our prized Mexican paper with him go across the no-man's-land bridge and see if we could get a visa. If we succeeded,

we could return, be stamped out, and then go to Guatemala.

This meant trusting him with our paper. What if he went off-shift while we were going back and forth, or what if he forgot where he put the paper? We would be stuck on the bridge forever, no way back into Mexico and no way on into Guatemala.

We decided to stay in Mexico for the night and go to the Guatemalan consulate in the morning in order to obtain the visa.

When we arrived at the consulate we found a lineup longer than a Dickens novel. They were processing four people every 10 minutes. We calculated that it would take us 88 minutes to get in. However, after 60 minutes Lady Luck waved her wand and those with passports were called to the front of the line. They took our passports (another scary situation) and typed out all necessary forms, brought them back to the gate, and we were on our way again.

When we got to the border we marched past miles of transport trucks and cars waiting to fill out forms. We smiled at others at the border trying to fill out forms in a foreign language. We saw frustrated people throwing down their gear and rooting through it to find all the needed papers.

We chuckled, but we also knew that we would be back for another crossing soon.

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HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM VACATIONS

by FELICITY MUNN

Vacations are one of the few ways left to us to bring balance to stressful lives.

Yet many of us don't make the most of our time off work.

That, briefly, is what psychologist Howard Glazer found while serving as a consultant on a recent survey examining the attitudes of business executives toward vacations.

"I was shocked in my literature search at the huge amounts of publications on the psychology of work and literally nothing on the psychology of leisure," Glazer, a native of Toronto, said from his office in New York City where he teaches at Cornell University Medical School.

"To me that points up the real imbalance in our society — the puritan ethic run rampant. The imbalance we have come to is absolutely shocking.

"We have no sense of the value of play in general or vacations in particular."

A big majority of the 500 respondents to the survey, commissioned by Hyatt Hotels, said vacations were necessary to help avoid burnout and improve job performance.

"This study suggests that even vacations are looked at in terms of work," Glazer said.

In fact, he suggested, vacations are crucial to psychological well-being because they are a rare chance for people to take control of their lives.

"Our everyday lives are fairly regimented," said Glazer.

"We have to be at work at a certain time, we have to relate in certain ways to certain people. A lot of our actions and words are guided very much by the rules

of the environment, and they're not all that spontaneous.

"On vacations, we can let go of those rules. Vacations offer this unique opportunity for people to create or recapture the sense of control and balance in their lives that they really need."

While Hyatt surveyed only business executives, Glazer said it's likely people in general don't fully appreciate the value of time off.

Glazer has some advice on obtaining the maximum psychological benefits of vacations:

— Whatever you do, don't stay home.

"Even if you intend to only relax, staying at home surrounds you with everyday stress cues, such as unresolved family conflicts, calls from the office, work around the house."

— In choosing what to do, consider how stressful your work life is.

"We all have these idealized notions of all kinds of things in life and vacations are one of them — that we go away completely from work and that we relax completely. This is bizarre.

"A relaxing week on a beach may be the right choice if your work life is filled with long hours and constant deadlines.

"But if your work is boring and lacks stimulation, you will probably benefit more from a vacation that stimulates you mentally and/or physically."

— Mix short getaways and longer vacations.

"Short vacations should be thought of as circuit breakers, good when you simply need a little re-energizing.

"Longer vacations are more like cures, giving your whole system a chance to rest.

"You need significant and substantial breaks of a

couple of weeks at least once or twice a year to really rehabilitate the system."

— When vacationing with a companion, plan together.

Glazer says that no matter how well you think you know your travelling companion, personalities change on vacation.

"You don't know somebody until you play with them," he says.

"I therefore contend that people in play in general show more of their real selves, their real needs, their real spontaneous motivations.

"Suddenly someone you've got along with quite well spending an hour a night with after work, if you go away for two weeks it's a disaster."

— Couples on vacation shouldn't be together constantly.

"Society tells us if we love each other, we should want to be with each other all the time. That simply isn't true — in life or on vacation."

— It's OK to leave the kids at home sometimes.

"But the specifics are quite variable. Don't follow any traditional rule. I'm not only saying it's OK not to take the kids, I'm also saying it's OK to take them."

Glazer, who studied in Toronto and Montreal before moving to New York, follows his own advice.

"I go skiing once a year by myself or with my male friends.

"I always go to Disney World because I just love taking the kids there.

"And I try to get away once just with my wife."

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