**CHAPTER TRAVEL FORUM UPDATE**

**By Dan Sockle and Terry Babin**

The Chapter’s first *Travel Forum* was held the evening of March 11th as a Zoom meeting. Nine members plus several spouses participated during the hour discussion.

Much of the second Forum continued the discussion about planning trips and traveling during the pandemic

* Do your research for travel and destinations early before booking, and check for updates frequently.
* Give yourself plenty of time to obtain the test, set up and do the test, and get the results back before commencing travel
* Hawaii was a destination of particular interest and shared advice. Recommended website for current travel information and restrictions is “**beatofhawii.com**.” Because a COVID-19 test is required before departure, the “**costcotravel.com**” website was recommended for both research and receiving the COVID test and results before departure.
* Airline and cruise websites are also a good source of information about COVID-19 tests, and other requirements and restrictions.
* Many hotels and resorts can help arrange tests for the return trip to the U.S.A.—expect costs to vary up to and even over $300 per person.
* Make sure you have a copy of all test results and other required COVID documentation on your cell phone as well as carrying printouts.

Discussion also focused on the financial risks of travel. There were several suggestions about how you can reduce the risk of loss of deposits and payments, or incurring additional fees for travel and tours:

* When booking travel, use the airline, tour, or cruise company’s official website instead of a discount website—the company is usually more willing to work with the customer to rebook or otherwise help avoid forfeitures and fees.
* Pay the extra costs for a no cost/no fee for rebooking or, if offered, free cancellation of tickets, and reservations.
* Determine if you should buy travel insurance; however, check the fine print since many policies do not cover cancellations or trip interruptions because of COVID.
* When possible, use “one stop shopping.” Easier when there is a cancellation (e.g., a tour or cruise) to deal with one company handling all changes, re-bookings, and refunds or credits. So, consider tours which include hotel, travel, and well as the tour/cruise as part of their offer and travel package.

Other items of interest and discussion:

* If you are planning road trips in the U.S. and Canada (if it opens to U.S. citizens’ travel), route and overnight stops may require more advance planning and reservations—particularly for RV parks—than in the past. Reservations are already difficult to get in many popular destinations.
* Some travel agents are already reporting a heavy volume of interest and reservations for tours and cruises for 2022. Regions of significant travel interest are the Caribbean and Europe.
* Some recommended websites to research future travel include:
  + **costcotravel.com**
  + **tauck.com**
  + **oat.com**
  + **vacationstogo.com**
  + **travelwithallan.com**

Note: Since the forum, some additional information has become available regarding testing. If the destination requires a COVID-19 molecular (e.g., RT-PCR) test with results tested/certified by a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment (CLIA) laboratory, the test administered through COSTCO (Azova)—even though use for Hawaii and Bermuda--is CLIA certified. Still, travelers need to confirm that the destination will accept the test results. This information is often available on the destination’s tourism or public health websites

Next forum meeting is 7:30 PM on Thursday, May 13th. Agenda items to include:

* Current Events: including COVID-19 travel updates.
* Places you enjoyed.
* Travel planning and booking advice and recommendations.