

# ROUGH CUT

by Robert Rouveroy C.S.C.

Like most of my documentary friends, I do a fair bit of traveling around the world and it struck me that it might be interesting to share some of the experiences we have with those of you who aspire to this particular trade in the film industry. We sure don't have much trouble getting there from here so to speak, because we are mostly sent out by TV networks and the like, and they have usually some person (I nearly said some girl, but in view of my further observations, this might get me in deep trouble), who does the necessary running around to organise tickets and so forth. All very admirably I'm sure, but chances are the person has never ventured out of greater Oshawa for any length of time. As a result, we are often booked into a grand mudhut in the Lesser Sechelles. I kid you not. It has happened.

Furthermore, upon return we're often plagued by accountant types who go over our swindlesheet with the proverbial fine tooth comb. It is his good right, after all he has to justify his job. But how to tell him that the institute for baksheesh is a way of life in a large part of the world and that nothing moves without some palm greasing. Of course, the Art of the Swindlesheet has reached incredible heights in the past and some stories I could tell you would make good movies by themselves. However, the greatest artists of their time have now moved on to positions of responsibility in the TV corporations. The flabbergasted accountant will confer with these masters and the newcomer in this field has a chance like a snowball in hell to get past the guardians of the corporate coffers. At least not with the sheet in the form he submitted it. The Past Master will gently guide the newcomer in the right jargonese to subvert the parameters set up by the accountant.

For you who make your own documentaries there are several alternatives. Your first problem is to get from here to there and back in one piece, at the lowest possible cost.

If you've managed to arrange for your piece to be seen on TV, it's easy. Most airlines have a budget for freebies, but alas, nothing in this world is really free so you'll end with either a take-off or landing in your film, or at least a blurb in the credits. If you wish to go this way, get to the right guy, usually the publicity director of the airline. But his budget is limited and you have to do a fair con job to get a piece of the pie. You also have to agree to go on a standby basis only, as he obviously is not going to bump off a paying passenger for you. Even a small crew will rapidly eat into your reserves if you're stuck in some hotel, waiting for the trip home. So you'll have to take your chances. In the end it is not such a hot idea to get a freebee, because your TV contact is not that dumb and might object to giving the airline a free plug. You see, the airline might pull part of their own commercial TV budget when they see how nicely your documentary helps them and you can be sure that they save themselves a packet of money that way. And that might make the TV brass very unhappy indeed. So you maybe better forget it, although it has been done, and often.

Your next choice is to shop around for the best buy. Do not, repeat, *do not* rely on travel agencies. After all, they make a profit on the amount of tickets they sell. Get on the phone and pester the airlines directly. Especially in the States, where there are such huge savings to be had, it might cut your travel budget by half. I once saved over \$1500 for a five man crew on a complicated tour to the West Coast. Sure it involves sometimes flying at 12 midnight or some other unholy time. But to save the 1500 bucks I had to spend close to \$80 in long distance calls and a whole day of phoning.

To Europe the picture is rather grim. If you can't go on a specific date determined three months in advance I'm afraid you're stuck with about \$630 per person. But for an extra \$220 you can go all the way to India on a 21 to 120 day basis. Of course there is a snag; you can't stop over anywhere and after 23 hours in a plane you won't feel much like shooting the same day, or the next

day for that matter.

But if you have a little time in advance, say 3 weeks notice, make use of the GIT fares to Europe. It can shave off a great deal of money.

What I haven't forgotten is the trouble you might have with your gear. Unfortunately, on those long trips to the East, to India or any of those places, equipment sent by Airfreight or Express tends to get lost very quickly. It is better to take it with you. And there is the rub. Excess baggage on overseas trips is calculated at such a high rate that a 300 lb. load (not so unusual) might cost more than a first class ticket. Or depending on the trip, even two first class tickets. That hurts. But the solution is quite simple, if dishonest. You see, *you* should go first class instead. You'll find that if you carefully choose the agent who will check you in (this takes at least an hour of observation) your chances are better than 98% he'll check the bags straight through. All it takes is a bit of guts. So you'll end up going there at a considerable saving.

If you travel with a high priced crew, or union crew in the Far East, it is much cheaper to travel First Class. For instance, first class fares tend to be more readily confirmed by telex than economy fares. If you lose a day because of a faulty confirmation, it'll cost you a fortune in crew costs and per diems.

That brings me to the use of credit cards. Regardless of what American Express seems to promise in their commercials, don't believe it all. Sure all the airlines will accept the card. But in the Far East they'll limit you to an arbitrary minimum, like say, \$300 or \$450 on any individual ticket. Again, they will telex for permission to spend more, but can you imagine how long it will take from Udaipur, or some other godforsaken place? And there is your crew, whooping it up in the hotel.

Your best solution is to buy more legs on your journey than you intend to take, you can cash in the surplus later and take a good wad of cash or American Express cheques along, carrying it in a good old-fashioned money belt. An international airlines travel card is also pretty good if you can get one. The strangest thing is that your Chargex card is pretty

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good anywhere, sometimes in places you couldn't get into with an Amex card. Diners Card is pretty useless, unless you're jet set and don't have to make films for a living. It only works in the most expensive rip-off shops and hotels.

Corruption is still a way of life in the Far East but it does not have the significance we put upon it. Salaries of government personnel are pitifully small and baksheesh is seen as a supplementary form of income. In Afghanistan for example, certain key positions in the customs structure are so sought after that the successful applicant may have to turn most or all of his salary over to his superiors.

Another example was with the CBC in 1967. I had been with the CBC in Edmonton for seven years and wanted to freelance in Toronto. An assignment editor in the Film Services demanded kickbacks from us and got them too, until some rental house blew the whistle on him because he got too greedy. He left rather hurriedly but was never prosecuted as far as I know and now runs a rather successful rental house in Mexico. Of course this is all rather small fry but don't think for a moment we haven't our share of undiscovered Watergates. But in the rather underdeveloped countries the system of baksheesh has been elevated to a great art and it is wise for the filmmaker to understand this system.

I might warn you however of one place in the world where you should be extremely careful. Don't try to get cute in Singapore. As a matter of fact, you would be wise to go to a barber first as you will be shorn rather forcibly at the airport if your hair covers even the tip of your ears. They won't even give you a proper hair cut, just cut great gobs off and if the scissors nick your ears, it is great cause for merriment. For a government official to accept even the smallest bribe might fetch him 10 years hard labour. You yourself might get three years in jail if you throw a cigarette butt on the street, so beware.

## Dissolve

You must visit the appropriate embassy or legation before you embark after your deathless masterpiece. For the States, you must fill out a Temporary Importation Bond and declare your gear as tools of trade. You will do well to have the list prepared by

a broker as each item has its own number in the excise tax law and it has to be properly recorded. The TIB is good for a year but make sure you cancel it promptly at the right time as the US Customs gets very, very sticky indeed. But more important is to get a green card, called the Y 38, affixed to the list of gear you bring back into Canada. This means another inspection by the Canadian Customs before you leave the first time so it is a good idea to get both American and Canadian Custom agents together so everything is checked out thoroughly. After the first time you're clear and easy for at least a year and then you'll have to go through the whole rigmarole again. And be sure you bring sufficient film stock. If you run out in the States you'll have to buy new stock there and the Canadian Customs are extremely unhappy about that because it means a lot of paperwork etcetera, so if you are in that predicament it is much better to have a broker meet you at the customs desk.

Regulations for other countries vary but it is always a good idea to have many, up to 30, lists of itemized gear with you, and also at least 30 passport photos of every person in your group. Of course you have all the necessary vaccinations for that part of the world you're going to, and it is a good idea to keep them up to date. Some shots make you rather violently ill for at least a week. You'll have your own pet medicines with you but be careful with any medicine containing codeine, like 222s. Some countries believe that's a narcotic, as it probably is, and give you no end of trouble. For the ladies in your crew it is most useful to bring a couple of granny dresses, as in Saudi Arabia a woman dressed in slacks might be refused entry.

If the lady uses birth control pills it might be a good idea to hide them in an ordinary pill bottle with a different name. Some countries, like Ireland for instance, might get uptight about it. No kidding.

For those of you who want to shoot film in Egypt or other Middle Eastern Muslim countries it is a good idea to get another passport if you happen to have an Israeli entry stamp in yours. This can be arranged with the passport office here before you leave, but if you have the proper credentials it is possible to get this done in Rome. Saves you a lot of hassle. Talking about hassles, that haircut I spoke about before is a good idea anywhere.

After all, you're there to make a movie and anything that will make you blend into the countryside helps. I understand it hurts you to part with a carefully cultivated Jesus head but can you imagine the uproar on Yonge and Bloor in downtown Toronto if a filmcrew dressed in dashiki's with mudstringed hair or the scriptgirl clad in a navelstring attempted to record the behavior of the Canadian urban native?

## Main track

In upcoming articles I intend to discuss the art of traveling well with your gear: how to pack it in such a way you won't receive a bucket of bolts at the other side of your voyage. How to safeguard your precious film at 140 degrees in the shade or 60 below. How to cope with the different voltage supplies and a whole lot of goodies which I found help in the purpose you set out on: to make a successful documentary film. For this I won't rely only on my own experiences, but will consult with the cameramen who are undoubtedly more expert in their own bailiwick: Ken Poste csc, who probably knows more about cold weather shooting than anyone I know, and Jim Mercer who always plans every trip so carefully that he has never failed to bring back the goodies as far as I know, and others, equally expert in their own fields. And of course you, my readers. If you have a singular experience that may help others in their endeavours, please write me c/o **Cinema Canada**, Toronto.

## Answer Print

And so another year is tippy-toeing to its end. 1975 is best forgotten quickly by the filmmakers, world. It has brought quite a few going concerns, labs, recording studios etc, to a quick and painful belly-up. I don't know the answers at all, what to do about it, how to change the dangerous equilibrium of this so fragile film industry. I can only hope and wish that you all, including me, will find that '76 will be a better year. If I have hurt some of you with my meanderings in these pages, rest assured that I will continue doing so. If you think you've found some gems of wisdom to help you in your pursuits it must have been unintentional 'cause I'm not aware of it. For my hostile friends, a Happy New Year. To my friendly enemies, I promise (as Shaw once said) to be blunt and come to the point. □