

Brenda Elwell writes a popular monthly Single Parent Travel Newsletter available on e-mail through her Web site, www.SingleParentTravel.net. Her new book entitled, "The Single Parent Travel Handbook," is now available and may be ordered through her Web site. A veteran of over thirty years in the travel industry, she has traveled to over 60 countries and 45 states, half of them with her two kids in tow. Brenda may be reached via e-mail at Brenda@SingleParentTravel.net.

Don't Leave Home Without It!!

No, not your American Express card - proper documentation to leave the country. Most people are aware that you need a passport for yourself and your child as well as a visa to enter some countries, but many people are not aware that you also need additional documentation when entering foreign countries as a single adult traveling with a minor child. Not only is this an issue for single parents, but ANY parent or adult traveling out of the country alone with a minor child or children.

So what is the required additional documentation? The answer is, it depends. Not only do documentation requirements change based on your destination and how you enter the country (sea, land, or air), but also it changes based on the whim of the airline, cruise and customs officials. Our advice: err on the side of over-documentation. We recommend a notarized letter of consent from the other parent of your child. (We include an example with this article.) Some countries, like the UK, do not require it for arrival by air, but laws may change at the last minute, so double check before departure. Call the consulate of your destination. Remember to tell them how you are entering the country: by air, sea or land. It makes a difference.

What if you have special circumstances like many single parents? Perhaps you are unable to locate your child's mother, maybe you never knew the father, or the mother is deceased? Once again, your first stop should be to contact the consulate of your planned destination and ask them what documents they require for your situation. They may require some form of legal documentation stating your situation. Some examples of special documentation a destination country may require are:

- A death certificate
- A court order of sole custody
- A notarized letter from a government or religious official confirming your situation. (For example, if you never knew who your child's father was or cannot find the mother, get documented proof of that from an official.)

Once you have contacted the destination's consulate and determined what you need, contact your tour operator, cruise line and/or airline to make sure that they will accept your documentation, particularly with special situations. Get their names, titles and

phone numbers, so if a gate agent stops you at the airport you can tell them to whom you spoke and hopefully that will smooth your ride.

Happy Travels!!