

# Travel Talk

## by Chase Binder



### TRUSTED TRAVELERS PROGRAM

*Editor's Note: After eight years anchoring the Concord Monitor's Sunday Travel Section Chase Binder's column will now only appear in this paper. We are proud to have Bow resident Binder's Travel Talk as a regular feature.*

If it's planned well and you're a bit lucky, traveling abroad is the stuff of dreams. The Eiffel Tower, a pride of lions in Kruger National Park, the Pyramids, fjords in Norway or New Zealand—the world awaits! All too often, though, returning home begins with interminable and frustrating lines at Passport Control, especially if your plane arrives in a tangle of five or six other international flights.

So how about whizzing right through the mess, celebrity-style, via a dedicated lane or kiosk? All you need is to be enrolled in Global Entry, one of the US Customs and Border Protection's Trusted Traveler Programs. There are several, each one providing expedited travel for pre-approved, low-risk travelers with specific travel needs. Some are designed for commercial land traffic, but others are designed for the international leisure or business traveler. The most valuable for speedy re-entry at major airports is called Global Entry, and is available for \$100 per person.

For those of us in the Northeast who anticipate travel to/from Canada via land, air or even private boat, the NEXUS program is available for \$50 per person. Strangely, NEXUS includes Global Entry at half the price, though the Global Entry doesn't include NEXUS. It does take a bit longer, since your information is processed through Canadian officials as well as US officials—but what a bargain!

Explore your options and begin the application process at the Customs and Border Patrol website, [cbp.gov](http://cbp.gov).

Be warned, though. The website form is lengthy and not particularly user-friendly. Sit down at your computer with a cup of coffee or a glass of wine and start slogging through it. You'll need your current passport, your driver's license and a good memory—you're asked to list all the countries you've visited in the past 5 years. The good news is that once you begin (you'll need a user ID and password—write them down and don't lose them!), you can back out and return to finish later and all your info is saved. Once you hit the submit button, you are in the initial application process. This takes 2-3 weeks. If CBP doesn't find anything of concern, you move to the Conditional Approval status (you'll get an email, or you can check your application every few days—ours took 3 weeks). This allows you to make an appointment for a personal interview at one of the approved CBP stations across the country. Most are in major airports.

And there's the rub—scheduling the interview. Bud and I got conditional approval in mid-July, but the first available interviews at Boston's Logan Airport (the closest facility) weren't until the end of October. A good 3 ? months! I called to see if we might have access to last-minute cancellations. The agent said no—the scheduling system is a closed system, accessible only to the individual applicants. If people with upcoming appointments do cancel and reschedule (which does happen), their slots will indeed show up on the website as "first available", but you have to keep checking several times a day—and get really, really lucky.

Nonetheless, I tried. Happily, as I was perusing the drop-down list of interview locations, I noticed one at Derby Line, VT—right up 93 and 91 on the Canadian border. One click and I was able to get appointments the very next week! Bud and I made the 2 ? hour trip for our morning appointments and were home by early afternoon. We got our Global Entry cards in the mail 5 days later. As it turns out, people fly in from Florida, California and all over the country and drive to Derby Line—just to be able to complete the process in a timely fashion. Who knew?

The interview itself was a snap. The handsome young agent just pulled up our applications on his computer and read the questions right off his screen. He took our pictures and fingerprinted us (digitally—no ink!), pushed a button and within a few minutes the word came back. We were approved and could start using our numbers (these are assigned when you get your Conditional Approval letter) immediately.

I now have our Global Entry numbers entered into all our online airline frequent flyer accounts—sometimes the numbers are called Known Traveler Number or Trusted Traveler Number. This means we will frequently (though it's not guaranteed) get TSA Pre-check when we print out boarding passes even for domestic flights. The whole process took some time and a bit of gasoline, but I am certain it will be one the best things we've ever done to make travel a bit (heck...a lot!) easier.

*Bow residents Chase Binder and her husband, Bud, have traveled to 94 countries around the globe—Vietnam, Cambodia, Egypt, Kenya, Australia and New Zealand, Argentina and Chile as well as many European and Scandinavian countries, just to name a few. Since 1986 her travel features and photographs have appeared in the Boston Globe, US Airways Inflight Magazine, Concord Monitor and other publications.*