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DECISION



**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES**
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548

FILE: B-103315

DATE: AUG 3 1978

MATTER OF: National Institute on Aging

DIGEST:

The use of a travel agency arranged tour package via foreign-flag air carrier is approved where American-flag carriers are not available.

The Public Health Service of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare requests advance approval for four Commissioned Officers of the National Institute on Aging to use a foreign-flag carrier on a tour arranged by Foreign Tours and sold by travel agencies.

The tour was arranged in connection with the XIth International Congress of Gerontology which will be held in Tokyo, Japan, on August 20-25, 1978. The tour package includes air transportation, local transportation between the airport and the hotel, hotel accommodations and American breakfasts.

Four Commissioned Officers from the National Institute on Aging plan to attend the Congress and chair symposia and present major research findings. The Congress affords the gerontologists an opportunity to exchange views and ideas on a broad range of topics of common interest.

When the four Government officers signed up for the tour, they were scheduled to fly via Northwest Orient Airlines. Due to the prolonged strike, that carrier is not available. Efforts to reschedule the tour via Pan American Airlines have failed.

If a foreign-flag carrier can be used, the four officers plan to leave the United States on the 17th or 18th of August, and arrive in Tokyo prior to the beginning of the conference. On those departure dates, commercial air transportation is not available via American-flag carriers. Return transportation also is not available via American-flag carriers until August 29th, which is four days later than the employees could otherwise return by foreign-flag carrier to the United States.

American-flag air carrier service thus is not considered available for the return portion of the trip under 56 Comp. Gen. 216 (1977). The four employees cannot avail themselves of the foreign-flag air carrier return flight on the 25th of August without purchasing the round-trip package to and from Tokyo.

The cost of the tour from either San Francisco or Los Angeles, California, is \$1,429 per person. The round trip coach fare is \$2,122 per person. The tour fare thus is \$693 less per person than coach fare. And the tour fare includes other services including hotel accommodations. The total savings for four persons is in excess of \$2,772 when the additional services are given consideration.

In 47 Comp. Gen. 204 (1967), the use of travel agents was authorized where it was administratively determined that group travel arrangements made by travel agencies offer substantial savings over regular air fares between points in the United States and points in foreign countries. In the decision it was stated that Government Transportation Requests are not to be used and that the transportation costs are to be paid for by the traveler, who may claim reimbursement. Appropriate travel advances were authorized to cover the costs of such procurement.

Since American-flag air carriers cannot furnish the required transportation services, the use of a foreign-flag air carrier is approved.

R. F. KELLER

'Deputy' Comptroller General
of the United States