

General Travel Tips

General Traveling Tips and Concerns

Read as much as possible about the countries in which you plan to travel. Informing yourself about a nation's history, culture, customs and politics will make your stay more meaningful. Such information can be found in most libraries, bookstores and tourist bureaus. Although English is spoken in many countries, it is a good idea to learn what you can of the language of the country in which you will be traveling.

To avoid being a target, dress conservatively. A flashy wardrobe or one that is too casual can mark you as a tourist. As much as possible, avoid the appearance of affluence.

Always try to travel light. If you do, you can move more quickly and will be more likely to have a free hand. You will also be less tired and less likely to set your luggage down, leaving it unattended.

Carry the minimum amount of valuables necessary for your trip and plan a place or places to conceal them.

Your passport, cash and credit cards are most secure when locked in a hotel safe.

Bring travelers checks and one or two major credit cards instead of cash.

Put your name, address and telephone numbers inside and outside of each piece of luggage. Use covered luggage tags to avoid casual observation of your identity or nationality and if possible, lock your luggage.

Consider getting a telephone calling card. It is a convenient way of keeping in touch.

Don't bring anything you would hate to lose (jewelry, irreplaceable family objects, all unnecessary credit cards).

Leave a copy of your itinerary with family or friends at home.

Miscellaneous websites:

Hotels, motels, airline information - www.fedtravel.com

U.S. weather - www.nws.noaa.gov

Assistance from the Consulate (www.embassyweb.com):

There are U.S. embassies in more than 160 capital cities of the world . Each embassy has a consular section. Consular officers in consular sections of embassies do two things:

- they issue visas to foreigners;
- they help U.S. citizens abroad

Replacing a Passport - If you lose your passport, a consul can issue you a replacement, often within 24 hours. If you believe your passport has been stolen, first report the theft to the local police and get a police declaration.

Help Find Medical Assistance - If you get sick, you can contact a consular officer for a list of local doctors, dentists, and medical specialists, along with other medical information. If you are injured or become seriously ill, a consul will help you find medical assistance and, at your request, inform your family or friends. (Consider getting private medical insurance before you travel, to cover the high cost of getting you back to the U.S. for hospital care in the event of a medical emergency.)

Help Get Funds - Should you lose all your money and other financial resources, consular officers can help you contact your family, bank, or employer to arrange for them to send you funds. In some cases, these funds can be wired to you through the Department of State.

Help In An Emergency - Your family may need to reach you because of an emergency at home or because they are worried about your welfare. They should call the State Department's Overseas Citizens Services at (202) 647-5225. The State Department will relay the message to the consular officers in the country in which you are traveling. Consular officers will attempt to locate you, pass on urgent messages, and, consistent with the Privacy Act, report back to your family.

How to Access Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements

Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements may be heard at any time by dialing the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, American Citizens Services and Crisis Management, Bureau of Consular Affairs, at **(202) 647-5225** from a touch-tone phone. The recording is updated as new information becomes available. Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements may also be obtained from any regional passport agency, from most airline computer reservation systems, from U.S. embassies or consulates abroad, or by sending your request, (indicating the desired country on the lower left corner of the envelope), in a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the **Office of Overseas Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Room 4811, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520-4818**. Please view www.state.gov on the internet for more travel information and updates.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

A Valid Passport

A U.S. citizen needs a passport to depart or enter the United States and to enter and depart most foreign countries. Exceptions include short-term travel between the United States and Mexico, Canada, and some countries in the Caribbean, where a U.S. birth certificate or other proof of U.S. citizenship may be accepted. Your travel agent or airline can tell you if you need a passport for the country that you plan to visit. Information on entry requirements is available at <http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/>. The embassy or consulate of the country where you plan to travel can also advise you about its entry requirements.

Even if you are not required to have a passport to visit a foreign country, U.S. Immigration requires you to prove your U.S. citizenship and identity to reenter the United States. Make certain that you take with you adequate documentation to pass through U.S. Immigration upon your return. This documentation includes: A U.S. passport, an expired U.S. passport, a certified copy of your U.S. birth certificate, a Certificate of Naturalization, a Certificate of Citizenship, or a Report

of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States. To prove your identity, either a valid driver's license or a government identification card that includes a photo or a physical description is adequate

How to Apply for Your Passport in Person

Hennepin County Information

The address and hours for Hennepin County passport service centers can be found at <http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/taxsvcs/gstxctr.htm>, or you can call the main Service Center information line at (612)348-8240. The addresses of passport acceptance facilities in your area are also available on the Internet at travel.state.gov/passport_services.html.

First-time applicants must appear in person before a Passport Agent at one of the 13 U.S. passport agencies or at many Federal and state courts, probate courts, at some county/municipal offices and submit a completed passport application (**Form DSP-11**). If you have had a previous passport and wish to obtain a new one, you may be eligible to apply by mail. Contact your local passport agent for more information.

What is needed:

1. Proof of U.S. citizenship (Certified copy of record of birth in the United States, or original Naturalization Certificate. If the applicant is not applying for the first time, the most recent previous U.S. passport is the preferred proof of citizenship.).
2. Current Identification (usually a driver's license with signature and photograph).
3. A state issued identification card is not acceptable ID. Please call 612-348-8240 for further information.
4. Social Security Number (the Social Security Card itself does not need to be presented, only the number is required).
5. Two identical passport pictures.

Fees:

- Adults (age 16 and over): \$60.00 (valid for 10 years);
 - Minors (age under 16): \$40.00 (valid for 5 years)
- Minors under age 13 do not sign the passport application, yet must be in the United States when the application is processed. A parent executes the application on the minor's behalf. Parent's identification can be presented on behalf of a minor under age 18, when the minor does not possess his or her own identification.

Receipt of passport averages four to six weeks from time of application. Expedited service is available for an additional fee of \$35.00. Express mail delivery both to and from the Passport Agency is also available, at current Postal rates.

Passport Pictures

Two identical 2" x 2" photographs, meeting a variety of specific requirements, are required in order to obtain a passport. These instant passport photos are available at passport agent offices.

Fee: \$9.60, plus tax.

How to Obtain Visas

A visa is an endorsement or stamp placed in your passport by a foreign government that permits you to visit that country for a specified purpose and a limited time - for example, a 3-month tourist visa. It is advisable to obtain visas before you leave the United States because you may not be able to obtain visas for some countries once you have departed. You should apply directly to the embassy or nearest consulate of each country that you plan to visit, or consult a travel agent. **Passport agencies *cannot* help you obtain visas.**

Foreign Entry Requirements The Department of State publication M-264, [Foreign Entry Requirements](#), gives entry requirements for every country and tells where and how to apply for visas and tourist cards. It can be ordered for 50 cents from the **Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009; telephone: 719-948-4000; Internet <http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/>**

The Express Visa Service is an option for obtaining a Visa for travel and business abroad. It is a full-service travel documentation procurement service that obtains passports, visas, legalizations, authentications and translations in a very quick and convenient way. There are seven offices around the country that can be contacted. Please view www.expressvisa.com for more information regarding this service.

Important Issues to Consider:

Travel Insurance

You may not need travel insurance, if you are already adequately covered by other insurance policies. Depending on the travel insurance plan, travel insurance usually promises to cover you for cancellation or interruption of your trip, some form of emergency medical care while you are traveling, lost or stolen luggage, and various other troublesome occurrences.

Money

Traveler's Checks

It is wise **not** to carry large amounts of cash. You should take most of your money in traveler's checks and remember to record the serial number, denomination and the date and location of the issuing bank or agency. Keep this information in a safe and separate place so, if you lose your traveler's checks, you can quickly get replacements.

Credit Cards

Some credit cards can be used worldwide, even for cash advances. Keep track of your credit card purchases so that you do not exceed your limit. Travelers have been arrested overseas for mistakenly exceeding their credit limit! Leave all unnecessary credit cards at home. Record the numbers of the credit cards that you do bring, and keep the list separately from the cards.

You should immediately report the loss or theft of your credit cards or traveler's checks to the credit card companies and to the local police

Driver's License/Auto Insurance

If you intend to drive overseas, check with the embassy or consulate of the countries where you will visit to learn about requirements for driver's license, road permits, and auto insurance. If possible, obtain road maps of the countries that you plan to visit before you go.

Many countries do not recognize a U.S. driver's license. However, most countries accept an international driver's permit. Before departure, you can obtain one at a local office of an automobile association. The U.S. Department of State has

authorized two organizations to issue international driving permits to those who hold valid U.S. driver's licenses

U.S. Customs Pre-Registration

It is a good idea to be informed about U.S. Customs regulations. Foreign-made personal articles taken abroad are subject to U.S. Customs duty and tax upon your return, unless you have proof of prior possession such as a receipt, bill of sale, an insurance policy, or a jeweler's appraisal. If you do not have proof of prior possession, items such as foreign-made watches, cameras, or tape recorders that can be identified by serial number or permanent markings, may be taken to the Customs office nearest you, or to the port of departure for registration, before you depart the United States. The certificate of registration provided can expedite free entry of these items when you return to the United States. Minneapolis Customs Office can be reached at 612-348-1670.

Health

Information About Physicians and Hospitals Abroad

U.S. embassies and consulates abroad usually keep lists of physicians and hospitals in their area. Major credit card companies also can provide the names of local doctors and hospitals abroad. Many HMO medical plans have international partner hospitals in case there is a need for medical attention when traveling. Please check with your provider.

Immunizations

Under international health regulations adopted by the World Health Organization, a country may require international certificates of vaccination against yellow fever and cholera. Typhoid vaccinations are not required for international travel, but are recommended for areas where there is risk of exposure.

The Minnesota Department of Health can help with any questions about health related concerns of international travel. The Department website,

www.health.state.mn.us, can be utilized to find local international health clinics

and an international travel brochure that outlines the basic health concerns of traveling abroad.

The information is also available from **the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 24-hour hotline at 1-888-232-3228** or at their website

<http://www.cdc.gov>.

If vaccinations are required, they must be recorded on approved forms, such as those in the booklet PHS-731, *International Certificates of Vaccination as Approved by the World Health Organization*.

Documentation for Medications

If you go abroad with preexisting medical problems, you should carry a letter from your doctor describing your condition, including information on any prescription medicines that you must take. You should also have the generic names of the drugs. Leave medicines in their original, labeled containers. These precautions make customs processing easier. A doctor's certificate, however, may not suffice as authorization to transport all prescription drugs to all foreign countries. To ensure that you do not violate the drug laws of the countries that you visit, you may consult the embassy or consulate of those countries for precise information before you leave the United States.

Some Things to Leave with Your Family or Friends in the US

Your Itinerary

You should leave a detailed itinerary (with names, addresses, and phone numbers of persons and places to be visited) with relatives or friends in the United States so that you can be reached in an emergency. Also, include a photocopy of your passport information page.

Other Important Numbers

It is a good idea to make a list of all important numbers - your passport information as well as your credit card, traveler's checks, and airline ticket numbers. Leave a copy of the list at home, and carry a copy with you.

While You Are Overseas

How to Deal With the Unexpected

If you change your travel plans, miss your return flight, or extend your trip, be sure to notify relatives or friends at home. Should you find yourself in an area of civil unrest or natural disaster, please let your relatives or friends at home know **as soon as you can** that you are safe. Furthermore, upon arrival in a foreign country, you should contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate to register your presence and to keep the U.S. consul informed of your whereabouts.

Safety Tips

Protect Your Passport

Your passport is the most valuable document that you will carry abroad. It confirms your U.S. citizenship. Please guard it carefully.

When entering some countries or registering at hotels, you may be asked to fill out a police card listing your name, passport number, destination, local address, and reason for travel. You may be required to leave your passport at the hotel reception desk overnight so that it may be checked by local police officials.

These are normal procedures required by local laws. If your passport is not returned the following morning, immediately report the impoundment to local police authorities and to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Guard Against Thieves

Coat pockets, handbags, and hip pockets are particularly susceptible to theft.

Thieves will use all kinds of ploys to divert your attention just long enough to pick your pocket and grab your purse or wallet. Try to prevent theft by carrying your belongings in a secure manner. Do not make it easy for thieves!

Legal Tips

Obey Foreign Laws

When you are in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. It helps to learn about local laws and regulations and to obey them. **Do *not* deliver a package for anyone, unless you know the person well and you are certain that the package does not contain drugs or other contraband.**

Drug Arrests

About 3,000 Americans are arrested abroad each year. Of these, approximately one-third are held on drug charges. Many countries have stiff penalties for drug violations and strictly enforce drug laws. If you are caught buying, selling, carrying or using any type of drug, you will be arrested. You are subject to foreign laws overseas, **not U.S. laws**, and, if arrested, you will find that:

- Few countries provide a jury trial.
- Trials are often long, with delays and postponements.
- Most countries do not accept bail.
- Pre-trial detention, often in solitary confinement, may last for months.

If you are convicted, you face a possible sentence of:

- 2 - 10 years in many countries
- A minimum of 6 years hard labor and a stiff fine in some countries
- The death penalty in a number of countries (e.g. Malaysia, Pakistan, Turkey, Thailand, Saudi Arabia)

Legal Aid

Because you are subject to local laws abroad, there is little that a U.S. consular officer can do for you, if you encounter legal difficulties. A consular officer cannot get you out of jail. They can provide a list of local attorneys and help you find adequate legal representation. If you are arrested, you should ask the authorities to notify a consular officer at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. **Under international agreements and practice, you have the right to talk to the U.S. consul.** If you are denied this right, try to have someone get in touch with the U.S. consular officer for you.

When alerted, U.S. officials will visit you, advise you of your rights according to local laws, and contact your family and friends, if you wish. They will do whatever they can to protect your legitimate interests and to ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law. U.S. consuls can transfer money, food, and clothing to the prison authorities from your family or friends. They will try to get relief, if you are held under inhumane or unhealthy conditions or treated less favorably than others in the same situation.