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**SCI - OUTBOUND VISA TOOLKIT**

**Overview**

The following document breaks down the different visas that may be needed to enter the other countries and how to go about getting them in hopes of making the daunting visa process more understandable.

# Visa Resources and the Role of Sister Cities International in the Visa Process

As an organization, Sister Cities International is unable to process visas directly through the Department of State. However, there are several resources that Sister Cities International offers that can help answer questions and educate members on the process of obtaining visas for outbound travelers.

Online Outbound Visa Toolkit (this Toolkit) which includes:

* + Outbound passport and visa application process
  + Important links and resources for visa questions
  + Necessary Forms

Sister Cities International staff resources:

* + If you have any questions or cannot find information on a particular aspect of the visa application process, please do not hesitate to contact the DC office at (202)347-8630 or by email at [info@sistercities.org](mailto:info@sistercities.org).

J-1 High School Visa program:

* + A partnership with American Cultural Exchange Service to help U.S. students in the sister cities network to get their J-1 visa for one year or semester of study in a public high school in one of their sister cities.

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# Background Information and Visa Waivers

When traveling outside the United States, it is important to know as much information as you can about the visa process for the country to which you are traveling. Being informed will help prevent difficulties and will make your travel arrangements run much more smoothly. Many countries require different protocols when obtaining a visa and some countries do not require a visa at all. You must check the visa requirements before you begin to make your travel plans.

## Visa Waiver Program

The Visa Waiver Program allows American citizens to travel to certain foreign countries (as a tourist) for a period of up to 90 days without having to obtain a visa. Participating countries usually have a very high Human Development Index. As of January 1, 2010, eligible countries include:

* Andorra
* Australia
* Austria
* Belgium
* Brunei
* Czech Republic
* Denmark
* Estonia
* Finland
* France
* Germany
* Greece
* Hungary
* Iceland
* Ireland
* Italy
* Japan
* Latvia
* Lichtenstein
* Lithuania
* Luxemburg
* Malta
* Monaco
* the Netherlands
* New Zealand
* Norway
* Portugal
* San Marino
* Singapore
* Slovakia
* Slovenia
* South Korea
* Spain
* Sweden
* Switzerland
* United Kingdom

However, if you are applying as a student or as part of an exchange trip, you still may find difficulties. Be sure to apply as early in advance as you can with all of the appropriate documents readily available.

Before leaving, be sure to check with the American Consulate or Embassy to see if this policy has changed and if you will need additional documentation. The United States government reserves the right to withdraw this permit at anytime if it feels that you will likely work without a permit or overstay your 90 day visitation limit. If you do not meet these requirements, you must obtain a visa for the country that you are to visit.

# Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)

Americans traveling to Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, or some Caribbean countries currently need to only present a passport, a passport card, a WHTI-compliant document, OR a valid government issued photo ID (driver’s license) AND proof of citizenship (birth certificate). Check country specific information of where you plan on traveling to at State Department’s website at <http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html>

to see if the country that you are traveling is part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

# For Countries NOT in the Visa Waiver Program

For all the countries not listed above, it is most likely a visa is needed for entry. If a visa is not necessary, a reciprocity fee of $131 will be charged at the port of entry for each US visitor. This information can be found on the US Department of State’s website at <http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html>. If you are unsure of what is required to enter your destination country, you can call its DC Embassy which can be found at <http://www.embassy.org/embassies/>

# US Passport Information

No matter what country you are traveling to, you will need a valid passport. In addition, this passport must be valid for over six months following your visit to the country. If it is not going to be valid for up to six months after departure from that country, you must renew your passport or you may be refused entry to the country or detained and not permitted to depart as scheduled. This can be a lengthy process taking up to four to six weeks. However, it is important that you apply early to avoid any last minute troubles with visas or the passport service.

**For First Time Passport Applicants**

* It is necessary to go in person to a US Passport Acceptance Facility (usually can be found at US Post Office buildings) with two 2x2 photos of yourself (these need to be done officially and this can often be taken at the location where you are going to get your passport), proof of citizenship (i.e. birth certificate), and a valid government issued photo ID (i.e. driver’s license). You will also need to fill out the D-11 form found at <http://travel.state.gov/passport/forms/ds11/ds11_842.html>
* The process illustrated above also applies if:
* Your expired U.S. passport is not in your possession
* Your previous U.S. passport has expired and was issued more than 15 years ago
* Your previous U.S. passport was issued when you were under age 16
* Your previously valid U.S. passport has been lost or stolen
* You may apply by mail if:

Your most recent passport is available to submit and it is not damaged;

You received the passport within the past 15 years

You were over age 16 when the passport was issued

You still have the same name, or can legally document your name change

# Renewing Your Passport

To renew your passport you can go by any US Passport Acceptance Facility and fill out the required forms. You will also need two new 2x2 passport photos of yourself and your old passport for reference. If you want to apply by mail, fill out the D-82 form found at <http://travel.state.gov/passport/forms/ds82/ds82_843.html> and send it in with your photos, the application fee, your old passport, and a marriage certificate or court order if your name has legally changed.

## Fees

There is a $75 fee for any passport application.

If you need the passport in less than four weeks, there is a $60 additional fee for the expedited service plus costs for overnight delivery.

## Expedited Passport Service

If you apply for your passport today and request Expedited Passport Processing, you can expect to receive your passport in 2 weeks door-to-door. Again, there is an additional fee for expedited service. If you need a passport in less than 14 days, contact the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-4USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778).

# Getting a Visa to Travel Abroad

For every country there is a different set of rules and regulations for attaining a visa. Be sure to check on the specific country that you are traveling to prior to departure to be sure that you have everything that is needed to legally enter that country. This information on each country can be located at the travel section of the State Department’s website at [https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-checklist.html/](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-checklist.html/https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-checklist.html/)

These country pages provide insight on the political and economic conditions of the country, specific entry/exit requirements, safety and security, and other important aspects and situations that an American visitor may face while abroad.

The site also provides new travel alerts regarding political or social turmoil to warn travelers that they may either need to change their plans or avoid certain locations during their foreign travels.

For many countries, visas are a source of income so make sure to check the country-specific fee and include a check, money order, or cash with your application.

In many cases you can fill out the required information and send your passport, fee, and forms, to the country embassy in Washington, D.C. If you are in the DC area, it might be more time efficient if you stop by the embassy with all the required information and they can give you the visa while you wait. This may involve sending the passport on and picking it up at the embassy to reduce wait time. Call ahead to see what their protocol is before you stop by.

## Arriving Abroad

Once you arrive in the foreign country, it is important that you register with the nearest U.S Embassy or Consulate. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in the event of an emergency. While the consulate office cannot lend you money, serve as your attorney, or cash checks, they can assist you in obtaining emergency funds from your family, help you find an attorney, assist you in finding medical assistance, and replace your lost or stolen passport.

Registration is even more important if you:

* Are planning on staying in the country longer than a month;
* You will be traveling to a country experiencing any civil or political unrest;
* You are traveling to a country that may possibly experience a natural disaster (earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, etc.) during your stay;
* If the country that you are traveling to does not have a US Embassy or Consulate, register with a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in an adjacent country. For instance, if you are traveling to Iran (Iran does not have a U.S. Consulate or Embassy), be sure to visit a United States Consulate or Embassy in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Afghanistan.