

Tips for Traveling Abroad

For detailed information about steps you can take to ensure a safe trip, see [How to Have a Safe Trip](#). Meanwhile, here are some quick tips to make your travel easier and safer:

- **Sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program so the State Department can better assist you in an emergency:** Let us know your travel plans through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.
- **Sign passport, and fill in the emergency information:** Make sure you have a signed, valid passport, and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport.
- **Leave copies of itinerary and passport data page:** Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends, so you can be contacted in case of an emergency.
- **Check your overseas medical insurance coverage:** Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas, and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.
- **Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws:** While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The State Department web site at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit.
- **Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime:** To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.
- **Contact us in an emergency:** Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at <http://travel.state.gov>. Also note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs may be reached for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747, if calling from the U.S. or Canada, or 202-501-4444, if calling from overseas.

How to Have a Safe Trip

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 - **Be Prepared for Emergencies**
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How to Have a Safe Trip

Sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program So We Can Contact You in an Emergency

Why It's Important

The State Department strongly encourages American citizens planning travel abroad to sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program. The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program makes it possible to contact a traveler if necessary, whether because of a family emergency in the United States or because of a crisis in the place the traveler is visiting. It is a free service provided by the State Department, and is easily accomplished online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>.

Note that, in accordance with the Privacy Act, the Department of State may not release

information about those registered without their express written authorization.

If your family needs to reach you because of an emergency, they can pass a message to you through the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, which can be contacted from within the United States at 1-888-407-4747 (toll free), and from overseas at 202-501-4444. The Office of Overseas Citizens Services will contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the country in which you are traveling in order to pass the message to you.

The State Department also advises leaving a detailed itinerary and copies of your passport biographical-data page with a friend or relative in the United States.

How to Sign Up (It's Easy)

- You can either sign up online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>.
- or-
- If you would like to contact an embassy or consulate you can go to <http://usembassy.state.gov/> for access to U.S. Embassy and Consulate web pages.

Planning Your Trip: Know Before You Go!

Information Resources

Travelers should familiarize themselves with their destinations, both to get the most enjoyment out of the visit and to avoid known dangers. Travelers should also be aware of restrictions on items that may be taken overseas (see "[Bringing Medications or Filling Prescriptions Abroad](#)," below) and even on items that may be brought into the U.S. upon return (see "[Customs and Import Restrictions](#)," below). More information resources follow:

The Consular Information Program

The Consular Information Program consists of three main components that provide information to the American public about travel to specific countries: Country Specific Information, Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts. The U.S. Department of State issues fact sheets called Country Specific Information on over 200 countries. The sheets contain information on entry requirements, crime and security conditions, areas of instability, road safety and other details relevant to travel.

The Department of State also issues Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts.

Travel warnings are issued when the State Department recommends deferral of travel by Americans to a country because of civil unrest, dangerous conditions, terrorist activity and, in some cases, because the U.S. has no diplomatic relations with the country and may have great difficulty in assisting Americans in distress. Travel Alerts are issued as a means to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term or transnational conditions that could pose significant risks to American travelers.

How to Obtain Country Specific Information, Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts

Country Specific Information, Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts are updated regularly and are accessible through the State Department's travel information website at <http://www.travel.state.gov>. For specific questions regarding an emergency involving an American citizen overseas, contact the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at (202) 647-5225.

There are three ways to access Country Specific Information, Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts:

- **On the Internet:** [http:// travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov).
- **By Fax:** on a fax machine, dial 202-647-3000 and follow the voice prompts.
- **By Telephone:** dial (888) 407-4747 from within the U.S., or, from overseas, (202) 501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

Background Notes

Background Notes are factual publications that contain information on countries with which the United States has diplomatic relations. They include facts on each country's land, people, history, government, political conditions, economy, and relations with other countries and the United States. Background notes can be accessed via <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn>.

Other Resources

For more information that can help you plan a wonderful (and trouble-free) trip, go to http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/resources/resources_1244.html, and to http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/plan/plan_1169.html.

Customs and Import Restrictions

Customs Restrictions of Foreign Destinations – What You Cannot Take to Other Countries

Many countries have restrictions on what may be brought into the country, including food, pets (see "Taking a Pet Overseas" under "Passports and Other Travel Documents," below), and medications. Even over-the-counter medications may be prohibited in some countries. Check with the embassies of your destination countries as to prohibited items. A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available on the Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found on the Country Specific Information for each country.

U.S. Customs Restrictions – What You Cannot Bring Back With You

Some items may not be brought into the U.S., or may only be brought in under certain

restrictions. For information on U.S. customs regulations and procedures, see the Customs and Border Protection booklet "Know Before You Go," available at <http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg>. For further information, see http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/prohibited_restricted.xml on the same website.

There are special rules for products made from endangered wildlife. Many wildlife and wildlife products are prohibited either by U.S. or foreign laws from import into the United States, and you risk confiscation and a possible fine if you attempt to bring them into the U.S. when you return. Watch out for the following prohibited items:

- All products made from sea turtles
- All ivory, both Asian and African elephant, and rhinoceros
- Furs from spotted cats
- Furs from marine mammals
- Feathers and feather products from wild birds
- Most crocodile and caiman leather
- Most coral, whether in chunks or in jewelry

You may import an object made of ivory if it is an antique. To be an antique the ivory must be at least 100 years old, and you will need documentation that authenticates the age of the ivory. You may import other antiques containing wildlife parts under the same conditions: they must be accompanied by documentation proving they are at least 100 years old. Certain other requirements for antiques may also apply.

For more information, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Law Enforcement, P.O. Box 3247, Arlington, VA 22203-3247, or call 800-358-2104, or visit <http://www.fws.gov/>

Taking a Pet Overseas

If you decide to take your pet with you when you go abroad, you should check with the embassies of the destination countries as to specific requirements that must be met before a pet may be brought into the country. Many countries have strict health, quarantine, agriculture, wildlife, and customs requirements and prohibitions. A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available on the Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found on the Country Specific Information for each country.

Note: In a crisis in which chartered or military aircraft or ships are used to evacuate Americans from a danger area, pets will not normally be permitted on the carrier. The pet owner will need to make other arrangements in order to remove the pet from the area. (Service animals, such as guide dogs, are not considered pets and will be accommodated if possible.)

Places to Receive Mail

If you will be abroad for an extended period, you may want to arrange for the delivery of your mail. Some banks and international credit card companies handle mail for customers at their overseas branches. In addition, post offices in many countries will hold mail for travelers under their General Delivery (Poste Restante) services. U.S. Embassies and Consulates do not handle private mail. Check with the embassy of your destination country to see if that will be possible there. A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available on the Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found on the Country Specific Information for each country.

Health: What You Need to Know in Advance of Travel

All travelers should familiarize themselves with conditions at their destination that could affect their health (high altitude or pollution, types of medical facilities, required immunizations, availability of required pharmaceuticals, etc.). While some of this information may be found in the documents listed above, the key resource for health information is the Travelers' Health page of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>. The CDC website also provides general guidance on health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect-bite protection. The CDC also maintains an international travelers' hotline at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or, by fax, at 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299). See also the resources listed below.

Vaccination, Infectious Diseases, Pandemic Influenza, Foot & Mouth Disease, Chemical/Biological/Nuclear Incidents

General guidance on vaccinations and other health precautions may be found on the Travelers' Health page of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>.

Fact Sheets on foot and mouth disease, responding to chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incidents and other health issues, including pandemic influenza, may be found at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1215.html.

For information about pandemic influenza, see <http://www.pandemicflu.gov> or the website above. Information about infectious diseases abroad may also be found on the website of the World Health Organization at <http://www.who.int/en>, and further health information for travelers is available at <http://www.who.int/ith>.

Insurance, Medicare & Medicaid, Medical Evacuation

Obtaining medical treatment and hospital care abroad can be expensive, and medical evacuation to the U.S. can cost more than \$50,000. Note that U.S. medical insurance is generally not accepted outside the United States, nor do the Social Security Medicare and Medicaid programs provide coverage for hospital or medical costs outside the United States.

If your insurance policy does not cover you abroad, it is a good idea to consider purchasing a

short-term policy that does. There are health insurance policies designed specifically to cover travel. Many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas including emergency services such as medical evacuations. The names of some of the companies offering short-term health and emergency assistance policies are listed on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1215.html.

Bringing Medications or Filling Prescriptions Abroad

A traveler going abroad with a preexisting medical problem should carry a letter from the attending physician, describing the medical condition and any prescription medications, including the generic names of prescribed drugs. Any medications being carried overseas should be left in their original containers and be clearly labeled. Travelers should check with the foreign embassy of the country they are visiting to make sure any required medications are not considered to be illegal narcotics. (A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available on the Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found on the Country Specific Information for each country.)

If you wear eyeglasses, take an extra pair with you. Pack medicines and extra eyeglasses in your hand luggage so they will be available in case your checked luggage is lost. To be extra secure, pack a backup supply of medicines and an additional pair of eyeglasses in your checked luggage.

If you have allergies, reactions to certain medications, foods, or insect bites, or other unique medical problems, consider wearing a "medical alert" bracelet. You may also wish to carry a letter from your physician explaining required treatment should you become ill.

Information on filling a prescription abroad and other health issues may be found at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1215.html.

Doctors and Hospitals

If an American citizen becomes seriously ill or injured abroad, a U. S. consular officer can assist in locating medical services and informing family or friends. If necessary, a consular officer can also assist in the transfer of funds from the United States. (Note, however, that payment of hospital and all expenses is the responsibility of the traveler.) For more information, go to http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1215.html.

Special Planning Considerations

Student Travelers

Many college students travel during school breaks. While most students will have a safe and enjoyable adventure, for some the trip will become a nightmare with a serious impact on the

rest of their lives. Students planning travel may want to review http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/safety/safety_2836.html. American students planning travel to Mexico may want to review the following as well: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/spring_break_mexico/spring_break_mexico_2812.html.

Older Americans

Older American travelers should review this [information sheet](#), discuss their trip with a physician, and read the section [Planning Your Trip: Learn About the Places You Will Visit](#). If you are planning to retire abroad, please read this [information sheet](#). Remember the following tips:

- **Local conditions:** Be aware of any effects the local topography or climate may have on you: If you are sensitive to altitude or to humidity, or to other attributes of your destination, consult with your physician.
- **Don't over-program:** The additional physical activity undertaken during travel can be quite strenuous, and sudden changes in diet and climate can have serious health consequences for the unprepared traveler.
- **Pack wisely:** Don't pack so much that you will end up lugging around heavy suitcases. Dress conservatively—a wardrobe that is flashy may attract the attention of thieves or con artists, while clothing that is very casual may result in being barred from some tourist sites overseas. Include a change of clothing in your carry-on luggage.

Traveling With Disabilities

Individual countries have their own standards of accessibility for disabled travelers. Some countries have nondiscrimination laws that help to protect travelers with disabilities, while other countries do not. Preparation before you go can help ensure that your planned destination will be accessible, safe and enjoyable. Travelers with disabilities should review our [information sheet](#) and the Department of Transportation pamphlets *New Horizons for the Air Traveler with a Disability* and *Plane Talk: Facts for Passengers With Disabilities*. Both of these publications are available at the Department of Transportation's website <http://www.dot.gov>. In addition, travelers with disabilities should review the information contained in the section above entitled [Planning Your Trip: Learn About the Places You Will Visit](#), consider the following tips, and discuss the trip with a physician:

- **Plan:** Consider the level of health care available and whether your health needs and any emergencies can be met. If you take prescription medicine, make sure you have enough to last the duration of the trip. Make sure any equipment you use is in good working order before you leave.
- **Travel Smart:** The additional physical activity undertaken during travel is strenuous, and sudden changes in diet and climate can have serious health consequences for the unprepared traveler. Allow ample personal time, whether to adjust to the current time zone or to enjoy another travel site.

- **Accommodations and Access:** Learn about planned stops and ask questions about services available. Inquire about accessibility and available assistance at the airport, your hotel, on public transportation and at all travel sites. Be sure your needs are clearly understood by those who will assist you.

Required Travel Documents and Other Important Documentation

Passport Requirements & How to Apply for a Passport

A passport is an internationally recognized travel document that verifies the identity and nationality of the bearer. Only the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Embassies and Consulates have the authority to grant, issue or verify U.S. passports. For travel overseas and to facilitate reentry into the U.S., a valid U.S. passport is the best documentation available.

A valid passport is required to enter and leave most foreign countries. Some countries may allow you to enter with only a birth certificate, or with a birth certificate and a driver's license.

Note, however, that rules established under the U.S. Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, require that all persons, including U.S. citizens, traveling by air, must present a valid passport to reenter the United States. (Until September 30, 2007, U.S. citizens who have applied for but not yet received passports can enter and depart the United States by air to Western Hemisphere countries with a government-issued photo identification and official proof of application for a passport. The proof may be obtained at <http://travel.state.gov>. This accommodation does not affect entry requirements of other countries, and U.S. citizens who are traveling to a country that requires a visitor to have a passport must still obtain one.)

If you are traveling by **land or sea**, make certain that you can return to the United States with the proof of citizenship that you take with you. U.S. regulations require that you document **both** your U.S. citizenship and your identity when you reenter the United States. For more information about U.S. passport requirements, see http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html.

Some countries require that a traveler's U.S. passport be valid at least six months or longer beyond the dates of the trip. In addition, with the number of international child custody cases on the rise, several countries have instituted passport requirements to help prevent child abductions. (Mexican law, for example, requires a child traveling alone, or with only one parent, or in someone else's custody, to carry written, notarized consent from the absent parent or parents if the child is not in possession of a U.S. passport.) Contact the embassy of the foreign destination for more information. A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available on the Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found on the Country Specific Information for each country.

How to Apply for a U.S. Passport

Apply for your passport several months before your planned trip, and, if you will need visas from foreign embassies, allow even more time. Even if you don't have specific travel plans, but have family living abroad or are waiting to find a bargain trip, it is a good idea to apply as early as possible. Information about applying for a U.S. passport may be found at http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html.

If You Need to Obtain a New Passport While Abroad

For information on obtaining a new passport if yours is lost or stolen abroad, see "How to Get Your Passport Replaced" below, under "Emergencies: Consular Assistance and Crises Abroad." Also visit the Department of State website at http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/lost/lost_848.html. Additional information is available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1197.html.

Adoption Abroad

If you plan to adopt a child overseas, be aware that, in order to bring the child to the U.S. to live, the child must be issued a U.S. immigrant visa in the country of adoption. In addition to other requirements that must be met before a visa may be issued, U.S. law must be satisfied as to the legality of the adoption process that took place. Persons interested in adopting abroad should consult the State Department website at <http://adoption.state.gov/>.

The U.S. Government considers foreign adoptions to be a private, legal matter within the judicial sovereignty of the nation in which the child is residing. U.S. authorities have no right to intervene on behalf of American citizens in the courts of the country where the adoption takes place, and prospective parents must comply with the laws of that country.

Entry Requirements of Foreign Countries

The following links lead to information about entry requirements of foreign countries:

- **To view information about entry requirements maintained on the website of the country** you plan to visit, go to its embassy's or consulate's website, which may be found at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>.
- **To view the "Entry/Exit Requirements" section of the State Department's Country Specific Information** for the country you plan to visit, go to http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html.

If a visa is required by the country you will visit, obtain it from the appropriate foreign consular representative before proceeding abroad. Allow sufficient time for processing your visa application, especially if you are applying by mail. Most foreign consular representatives in the

U.S. are located in principal cities, and, in many instances, a traveler may be required to obtain the visa from the consular office in the area of his/her residence. As soon as you receive your visa, check it to make sure no mistakes were made. Processing and visa fees vary, and fees may not be refundable.

Work Authorization, Residence Permits

If you plan to work or reside at your destination, check with that country's Embassy or Consulate in the U.S. to learn about any special documentation requirements (such as work authorization or a residence visa). A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available on the Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found on the Country Specific Information for each country.

Additional Fees

All international flights are subject to U.S. immigration and customs fees, paid in advance when the ticket is purchased. In addition, many countries have departure fees that are collected at the time of ticket purchase or upon exiting the foreign country. Expenses usually are greater than expected, and travelers should plan to have at least enough cash handy at the end of the trip to pay any unexpected departure fee. Credit cards may be difficult to use in the country you are visiting, or at the airport at which you need to pay a fee.

What to Take With You on the Trip, and What to Leave Behind

Valuables

Don't bring anything you would hate to lose. Leave at home:

- Valuable or expensive-looking jewelry
- Irreplaceable family objects
- All unnecessary credit cards
- Social Security card, library card, and similar items that may be in your wallet.

Do bring medical necessities (see the health sections above regarding medications and insurance).

Leave Copies of Documents and Itinerary With Relatives in the U.S.

Leave a copy of the itinerary with family or friends at home in case they need to contact you in an emergency.

Make two photocopies of the passport identification page, airline tickets, driver's license and the credit cards you plan to take. Leave one copy of each with family or friends at home, and pack the other copies separately from the originals. Leave a copy of the serial numbers of your travelers' checks with a friend or relative at home. Carry your copy with you in a separate place and, as you cash the checks, cross them off the list.

Plan for the Unexpected

Take with you items that you will need if your trip is unexpectedly extended. These items may include extra money or medications. See the section on "Additional Fees," above.

Emergencies: Consular Assistance and Crises Abroad

Assistance from American Consuls

U.S. consular officers are located in over 260 Foreign Service posts abroad. In addition, consular agents in approximately 46 foreign cities without U.S. embassies or consulates provide a more limited but still important series of emergency and other consular services.

Providing assistance to Americans during a crisis abroad, such as political upheaval or a natural disaster, is one of the most critical tasks consular officer perform. During a crisis, consular officers look for missing Americans and help Americans return to the U.S., among many other duties to assist Americans. The State Department strongly encourages American citizens planning travel abroad to sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program so that we may find you during a crisis. It is free, it's confidential, and it's easily accomplished online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>.

Consuls also advise and help Americans who are in serious legal, medical or financial trouble, including health emergencies, arrests, deaths, missing persons, and destitution. For information about emergency assistance to Americans in trouble abroad, see http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1205.html#general#general. In addition, note the following information for assistance in emergencies:

- Finding a hospital or doctor abroad: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1195.html
- Victims of crime: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1748.html.
- Financial emergencies or destitution: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1198.html
- Obtaining funds from the U.S. (OCS trust): http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1224.html
- Missing persons: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1195.html
- Arrests: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1199.html
- Deaths: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1205.html#death

- Passport replacement: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1197.html

Consular officers also perform non-emergency services, including providing information on absentee voting, selective service registration, and acquisition and loss of U.S. citizenship. They can arrange for the transfer of Social Security and other U.S. government benefits to beneficiaries residing abroad, provide U.S. tax forms, and notarize documents. They can also provide information on how to obtain foreign public documents. Note, however, that because of the limited number of consular officers and the growing number of U.S. tourists and residents abroad, consuls cannot provide tourism or commercial services. For example, consuls cannot perform the work of travel agencies, lawyers, information bureaus, banks, or the police, nor can they obtain work, residence or driving permits, act as interpreters, search for missing luggage, or settle commercial disputes for U.S. citizens. For information about routine consular services performed by consuls abroad, see http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html.

How to Contact the Embassy or the State Department in an Emergency

Consular duty personnel are available for emergency assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at U.S. embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas and in Washington, D.C. To contact the Office of Overseas Citizens Services in the U.S. call 1-888-407-4747 (during business hours) or 202-647-5225 (after hours). Contact information for U.S. embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas may be found at <http://www.state.gov/countries>.

When the family of an American traveler needs to reach him or her because of an emergency at home or because family members are worried about the traveler's welfare, they should call 1-888-407-4747. The State Department will relay the message to the consular officers in the country in which the traveler is thought to be, and the consular officers will try to locate the traveler, pass on urgent messages, and, consistent with the Privacy Act, report back to the inquiring family.

What You Should Know If You Are a Victim of Crime

Consular officers are committed to assisting American citizens who become victims of crime while abroad. Familiar with local government agencies and resources in the country where they work, consular officers can help American crime victims to:

- replace a stolen passport;
- contact family, friends, or employers;
- obtain appropriate medical care;
- address other emergency needs that arise as a result of the crime;
- provide information about the local criminal justice process and about the case itself;
- obtain information about local resources to assist victims, including foreign crime victim compensation programs;
- obtain information about U.S. crime victim assistance and compensation programs, and

- obtain a list of local attorneys who speak English.

For more information about consular assistance for victims of crime abroad, see http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1748.html.

Passport Fraud

Passport fraud is attempted by U.S. citizens and non-citizens for a variety of criminal purposes – money laundering, narcotics trafficking, illegal entry into the U.S., terrorism, etc. In processing lost/stolen passport cases, the Department of State must take special precautions that may delay the issuance of a new, full validity passport. If you suspect a U.S. passport is being used fraudulently, do not hesitate to contact the nearest American embassy or consulate or in the U.S., the nearest Passport Agency.

Scams

Financial scams originating from overseas are a real and growing problem. Individual American citizens have lost considerable sums of money on these scams, ranging from a few hundred dollars to hundreds of thousands of dollars. While confidence schemes have long existed, the advent of the internet has greatly increased their prevalence, and the Department of State receives daily inquiries from victims. Scams may involve internet dating, inheritance, work permits, overpayment, and money-laundering.

For information about these scams and what you can do to protect yourself (or what to do if you are the victim of a scam), visit the Department of State website at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/financial_scams/financial_scams_3155.html.

International Child Custody Disputes

There are legal limits to the assistance that U.S. authorities can provide to parents involved in a child custody dispute. When an American child is abducted overseas by a parent, the U.S. Government's role is to help the remaining parent by locating the child, monitoring the child's welfare, and providing information about child custody laws and procedures in the country where the child has been taken. Consular officers overseas can issue a U.S. passport to a child involved in a custody dispute, if the child appears in person at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate, and if there is no court order from the foreign court of that country barring the child's departure from the country.

Parents who are involved in a custody dispute overseas should find out whether the foreign country to which the child has been taken is party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. Under the Hague Convention, a child who has been wrongfully removed from a parent may be returned to his or her place of habitual residence.

For further information on international child abduction and the Hague Convention, visit the Department of State website at http://www.travel.state.gov/abduction/abduction_580.html or contact the Office of Children's Issues at 202-647-7000. That office also has copies of the booklet, International Parental Child Abduction, which contains helpful information on what U.S. citizen parents can do to prevent their child from becoming a victim of parental child abduction. (The booklet is also available by autofax service at 202-674-3000.) If you are overseas and would like information on this subject, contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for guidance.

Arrests Abroad

When you are in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws, and American officials are limited as to how they can assist you. They cannot, for instance, represent you in legal proceedings or pay your legal fees or other expenses. They can, however, perform a variety of vital services, which include providing a list of attorneys, assisting in contacting your family in the U.S. if you wish it, helping you obtain money from family in the U.S., and monitoring your health and welfare and the conditions under which you are being held.

If you are arrested, immediately ask to speak to a consular officer at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Under international agreements, the U.S. Government has a right to provide consular assistance to you upon your request. If your request to speak to your consul is turned down, keep asking—politely, but persistently. For information on how consuls assist American arrestees, see http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1199.html.

Special Warning About Drug Offenses Abroad

Every year, several hundred Americans are arrested abroad on drug charges. Persons caught with illegal drugs in a foreign country are subject to the drug laws of that country, not those of the U.S.; as always, ignorance of the law is no excuse. In many countries, the burden of proof is on the accused to show that he or she is innocent of the charges.

Some Americans take advantage of an offer of an all-expenses-paid vacation abroad in exchange for carrying a small package in the luggage. When, to their surprise, they are caught, the fact that they did not know that there were drugs in that package will not reduce the charges against them.

Every aspect of a drug arrest abroad can be different from U.S. practice. For instance:

- few countries provide a jury trial
- many countries do not permit pre-trial release on bail
- pre-trial detention, often in solitary confinement, can last several months
- prisons may lack even minimal comforts, such as beds, toilets, and washbasins
- diets are often inadequate and require supplements from relatives and friends

- officials may not speak English
- physical abuse, confiscation of property, degrading treatment and extortion are possible.
- persons convicted may face sentences ranging from fines and jail time, to years of hard labor, and even the death penalty
- penalties for drug possession and for drug trafficking are often the same abroad, so possession of one ounce of marijuana could result in years in a foreign jail

As with any arrest of a U.S. citizen abroad, consular officers perform a variety of services (see Arrests Abroad, above). For more information about arrests abroad, see http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1199.html.

Death of a U.S. Citizen Abroad

Each year, over 6,000 Americans die abroad. Most of them are Americans who live overseas, but, each year, a few thousand Americans die while on short visits abroad. One of the most important tasks of U.S. consular officers abroad is to provide assistance to the families of U.S. citizens who die abroad.

When an American citizen dies abroad, consular officers:

- confirm the death, identity and U.S. citizenship of the deceased
- make notification to the next-of-kin if they do not already know about the death, providing information about disposition of the remains and the effects of the deceased, and provides guidance on forwarding funds to cover costs
- serve as provisional conservator of the estate, absent a legal representative in country
- prepare documents for disposition of the remains in accordance with instructions from the next-of-kin or legal representative, and oversee the performance of disposition of the remains and of the effects of the deceased
- send signed copies of the Consular Report of Death of an American Citizen Abroad to the next-of-kin or legal representative, for use in settling estate matters in the U.S.

For more information about consular assistance when an American citizen has died abroad, see http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1205.html#death.

Terrorism

Terrorist acts occur unpredictably, making it impossible to protect yourself absolutely. The first and best protection is to avoid travel to areas where there has been a persistent record of terrorist attacks or kidnappings.

Most terrorist attacks are the result of careful planning. Just as a car thief will first be attracted to an unlocked car with the key in the ignition, terrorists are looking for the most accessible targets. The chances that a tourist, traveling with an unpublished program or itinerary, would

be the victim of terrorism are slight. In addition, many terrorist groups, seeking publicity for political causes within their own country or region, may not be looking for American targets.

Nevertheless, the following pointers may help you avoid becoming a target of opportunity. These precautions may provide some degree of protection, and can serve as practical and psychological deterrents to would-be terrorists.

- Schedule direct flights if possible, and avoid stops in high-risk airports or areas.
- Be cautious about what you discuss with strangers or what others may overhear.
- Try to minimize the time spent in the public area of an airport, which is a less protected area. Move quickly from the check-in counter to the secured areas. Upon arrival, leave the airport as soon as possible.
- As much as possible, avoid luggage tags, dress and behavior that may draw attention to yourself.
- Keep an eye out for abandoned packages or briefcases, or other suspicious items. Report them to airport authorities and leave the area promptly.
- Avoid obvious terrorist targets, such as places where Westerners are known to congregate.
- Watch for people following you or "loiterers" observing your comings and goings.
- Report any suspicious activity to local police, and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.
- Keep a mental note of safe havens, such as police stations, hotels, and hospitals. Formulate a plan of action for what you will do if a bomb explodes or there is gunfire nearby.
- Select your own taxicabs at random. Don't take a vehicle that is not clearly identified as a taxi. Compare the face of the driver with the one on his or her posted license.
- If possible, travel with others.
- Be sure of the identity of visitors before opening the door of your hotel room. Don't meet strangers at your hotel room, or at unknown or remote locations.
- Refuse unexpected packages.
- Check for loose wires or other suspicious activity around your car.
- Be sure your vehicle is in good operating condition.
- Drive with car windows closed in crowded streets. Bombs can be thrown through open windows.
- If you are ever in a situation where somebody starts shooting, drop to the floor or get down as low as possible. Don't move until you are sure the danger has passed. Do not attempt to help rescuers and do not pick up a weapon. If possible, shield yourself behind a solid object. If you must move, crawl on your stomach.

Hijacking/Hostage Situations

While every hostage situation is different, there are some general considerations to keep in mind.

- U.S. Government policy is firm: we do not make concessions to terrorists. When Americans are abducted overseas, we look to the host government to exercise its responsibility under international law to protect all persons within its territories and to bring about the safe release of hostages. We work closely with these governments from the outset of a hostage-taking

incident to ensure that our citizens and other victims are released as quickly and safely as possible.

- At the outset of a terrorist incident, the terrorists typically are tense, high-strung and may behave irrationally. It is extremely important that you remain calm and alert, and control your own behavior.
- Avoid resistance and sudden or threatening movements. Do not struggle or try to escape unless you are certain of being successful. Don't try to be a hero, endangering yourself and others.
- Consciously put yourself in a mode of passive cooperation. Talk normally. Do not complain, avoid belligerency, and comply with all orders and instructions.
- If questioned, keep your answers short. Don't volunteer information or make unnecessary overtures.
- Make a concerted effort to relax. Prepare yourself mentally, physically and emotionally for the possibility of a long ordeal.
- Try to remain inconspicuous, avoid direct eye contact and the appearance of observing your captors' actions.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages. Eat what they give you, even if it does not look or taste appetizing, but keep consumption of food and drink at a moderate level. A loss of appetite and weight is normal
- If you are involved in a lengthier, drawn-out situation, try to establish a rapport with your captors, avoiding political discussions or other confrontational subjects.
- Establish a daily program of mental and physical activity.
- Think positively and avoid a sense of despair. You are a valuable commodity to your captors, and it is important to them to keep you alive and well.

How to Access Funds in the U.S.

U.S. consuls can assist Americans abroad who are temporarily destitute due to unforeseen circumstances. Americans who find themselves in these circumstances should contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate (see <http://usembassy.state.gov> for contact information) or the State Department's Office of [Overseas Citizens Services](#) at 1-888-407-4747 (during business hours) or 202-647-5225 (after hours). Consular officers can help destitute Americans contact family, bank, or employer to arrange for transfer of funds. In some cases, these funds can be wired through the Department of State. For information on how a consular officer can help under these circumstances, see http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1198.html.

How to Get Your Passport Replaced

If your U.S. passport is lost or stolen while you are overseas, report it immediately to the local police and to the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. A consul can issue a replacement passport, often within 24 hours. Links to contact information for U.S. Embassies and

Consulates may be found at <http://usembassy.state.gov>. If your U.S. passport is lost or stolen in the U.S., report it to the Department of State by following instructions found at http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/lost/lost_848.html. More information is available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1197.html.

What You Should Know If You Are Residing Abroad or Are Planning to Reside Abroad

Whether you are planning to move abroad or are already residing outside of the U.S., you should review the information that appears above about safe travel and consular services available to you, since most of it applies equally to U.S. citizens residing abroad. The following is information about services you are more likely to need if you are residing abroad.

Marriage, Birth, Divorce and Death Abroad

Marriage Abroad

U.S. consular officers abroad cannot perform marriages. Depending on the law of the foreign country, local civil or religious officials generally perform marriages.

Procedures vary from country to country, and some require lengthy preparation.

- Many countries have requirements that the parties have been resident in that country for a specified period of time before a marriage may be performed there.
- There may be requirements for blood tests, etc.
- There may be requirements for parental consent.
- There are also, in many countries, a requirement that documents certifying the end of a previous relationship (such as a death or divorce certificate) be submitted, translated into the local language and authenticated.
- Some countries require an affidavit by the parties as proof of legal capacity to enter into a marriage contract. (This affidavit can be executed at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate.)

The process can be time-consuming and expensive, and, therefore, persons planning to marry in a foreign country should find out the requirements of that particular country before beginning travel. Contact the embassy or tourist information bureau of the country where you plan to marry to learn the specific requirements. A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available on the Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found on the Country Specific Information for each country. If you are already abroad, consult with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Once your marriage has taken place abroad, U.S. consular officers can authenticate your foreign marriage document. Note that this authentication simply signifies that your foreign marriage documents are real; it does not necessarily mean that your marriage will be recognized by your

home state in the U.S. If you are married abroad and need confirmation that your marriage will be recognized in the United States, consult the Attorney General of your state of residence in the United States.

For further information, visit the Department of State website at http://travel.state.gov/law/family_issues/marriage/marriage_589.html

Birth Abroad of a U.S. Citizen

Most children born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents acquire U.S. citizenship at birth. As soon as possible after the birth, the U.S. citizen parent should contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If the consul determines that the child has acquired U.S. citizenship, a consular officer prepares a Consular Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America (Form FS-240). This document is recognized in the United States as proof of acquisition of U.S. citizenship, and it is acceptable evidence of citizenship for obtaining a passport, entering school, and most other purposes. Failure to document a child promptly as a U.S. citizen may cause hardship for the parents or child later on when attempting to obtain a passport or register for school. For further information, visit the Department of State website at

http://travel.state.gov/law/family_issues/birth/birth_593.html

Divorce Abroad

The validity of divorces obtained overseas will vary according to the requirements of an individual's state of residence. Consult the authorities of your state of residence in the United States for these requirements. For further information about recognition of a divorce obtained abroad, go to the Department of State website at

http://www.travel.state.gov/law/info/marriage/marriage_641.html.

Death Abroad

One of the most important tasks of U.S. consular officers abroad is to provide assistance to the families of U.S. citizens who die abroad. For more information about consular assistance when an American citizen has died abroad, see "Death of a U.S. Citizen Abroad," which appears above under "Emergencies, Consular Assistance and Crises Abroad." Further information may also be found on the Department of State website at

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/death/death_1203.html

Federal Benefits Services Abroad

Prior to your move abroad you should contact the federal agency (Social Security Administration, Veterans Affairs, Railroad Retirement Board, or Office of Personnel Management) from which you receive a monthly check to report your change of address. This will help you avoid a lost or delayed check. Even if your payments are being sent to a bank, you must provide the federal agency with your new address. You should also contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate nearest your place of residence upon your arrival and advise them of your current address. Each time you

move while living abroad, you should notify the U.S. Embassy or Consulate at least 60 days prior to your move. This will enable the federal agency to update its records so your checks are sent to your new address.

In many countries, you are able to have your monthly checks deposited directly into your account at either a financial institution in the country where you live or a U.S. financial institution. To determine if direct deposit is available in the country where you plan to reside, or to sign up for direct deposit, contact the federal agency from which you receive payment.

If your check does not arrive or you have other questions about your federal benefits, contact a consular officer at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If the consular officer cannot answer your inquiry, he or she will contact the regional federal benefits officer for your area and make inquiries on your behalf.

Further information may also be found on the Department of State website at http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/living/living_1234.html.

Driver's License

It is illegal to drive without a valid license and insurance in many countries. You should check with the Embassy of the country where you plan to reside, to find out more about driver's license requirements. A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available on the Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found on the Country Specific Information for each country.

Many countries do not recognize a U.S. driver's license. Some, however, will accept an international driver's permit. It is nevertheless a good idea to qualify for a local driver's license as soon as possible, since international driver's permits are not always valid for the length of a stay abroad, and often are only valid if presented in conjunction with a valid U.S. or local license. To renew a U.S. driver's license, contact the Department of Motor Vehicles in your home state.

Absentee Voting in U.S. Elections

Please visit the [Voting Overseas page](#).

Selective Service Registration

Section I-202 of the Presidential Proclamation of July 2, 1980, reinstating registration under the Military Selective Service Act, states: "Citizens of the United States who are to be registered and who are not in the United States on any of the days set aside for their registration, shall present themselves at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate for registration before a diplomatic or consular officer

of the United States or before a registrar duly appointed by a diplomatic or consular officer of the United States. Check with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate if you need to comply.”

Be Prepared for Emergencies

The following link contains materials about being prepared for emergencies while residing abroad. It was written for persons assigned to American Embassies or Consulates abroad, but most of it is practical advice that would be useful to anyone living outside of their own country:

<http://www.state.gov/www/flo/paper10.html>.