

From Our Constituent Services Desk...

Spring breaks and summer will be here before we know it, and with them will come family vacations. While some of us will enjoy our staycations and U.S. travels, many will travel abroad. Whether going in a group or alone, for business or pleasure, it's always best to plan ahead when traveling to a foreign country.

First, if you need a Passport...apply early! Current average processing times are 6 to 9 weeks for routine processing and 3 to 5 weeks for expedited processing. If you find yourself needing to travel in the next two weeks, and you can provide proof of travel with confirmed travel arrangements, we can assist you by requesting a same-day passport appointment at the Atlanta Passport Agency.

If you are not in a rush and need to apply in person, you can go to an approved acceptance facility such as your local courthouse. A simple renewal can be done by mail. Click [here](#) to find out how to apply for or renew your passport. You may have read about the new Online Passport Renewal Process. Note: Our office has recently learned, there are still several glitches to the online system, so we strongly recommend not renewing online at this time - renew by mail instead. Our office has no way to track online renewal applications, so it's far harder for us to assist.

Second, learn about your destination on the Department of State's [Country Information](#) site. This site will provide you with entry and exit requirements, local laws and customs, vaccination requirements, and any travel advisories which may be in effect. You can also read [Crisis Abroad: Be Ready](#) and make appropriate evacuation plans should the need arise. The *most common misconception* for American travelers is, in the event of an emergency, the United States will evacuate you free of charge. While the State Department does have [loans available](#) should U.S. citizens need evacuating, you will have to repay these. Therefore, it always a good idea to purchase travel insurance for any trip outside the continental United States. There are many reputable companies, and the quotes are based on the total cost of your trip and the level of coverage you'd like to have. Basic coverage should include evacuation, death abroad, and medical (if not covered by your health insurance).

Finally, enroll in the Department of State's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). This is a free service which allows U.S. citizens traveling abroad to receive the latest security updates from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. This allows you to make informed decisions about your trip and enables the embassy or consulate to contact you in an emergency. This will also allow the State Department to contact a family member or friend back in the U.S. should you have an emergency and can't reach them yourself.

Additional tips:

- Make sure you have at least six month's validity remaining on your passport whenever you travel abroad.
- Notify your bank and credit card companies before you travel abroad. They will know to not freeze your account for transactions made where you are traveling, and might have lower exchange rates than if you wait until in country to exchange your money.
- Make a copy of your passport, travel itinerary, and travel insurance information to leave with a trusted family member or friend. In the event your passport is lost or stolen, it will be easier for you to obtain a temporary one if you have access to a copy of your valid one.

- Some countries require you to obtain a visa before you arrive. Make sure you apply for the visa several months prior to departure. Every country has its own visa requirements, and it can take a few weeks or even months for the country to issue your visa.
- More detailed information on unique travel circumstances can be found online at [Before you Go, Traveler Information](#).

If you have any questions or a specific problem with the U.S. Department of State, please contact our office at caseworkga11@mail.house.gov or 770-429-1776. We look forward to serving you should you need our assistance.