

### Role of Sister Cities International

Welcome to the Inbound Visa Toolkit section of the Sister Cities International Visa Toolkit. In hopes of making the daunting visa process more understandable, the following document breaks down the different visas that are needed to enter other countries how to go about getting them.

### 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 attaining visas for inbound and outbound travelers.

- Online Visa Toolkit which includes:
  - Inbound visa application process
  - Outbound visa application process
  - Visa Types for inbound travelers
  - Important links and resources for visa questions
  - Necessary Forms
  - Frequently Asked Questions
- J-1 High School Visa program:
  - A partnership with American Cultural Exchange Service to help international students in the sister cities network to get their J-1 visa for one year or semester of study in a US public high school
- 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 Jennelle Root in the DC office at 202-347-8630 x 4003 or by email at [jroot@sister-cities.org](mailto:jroot@sister-cities.org). She will be able to get you the information you need.
- American Immigration Council (AIC)
  - This new partnership between Sister Cities International and AIC gives members access to immigration lawyers across the country and opportunities for educational conference calls and staff expertise to help make the visa process more manageable.
- Letters of Invitation
  - For programs organized by the DC office, Sister Cities International can write letters of invitation for inbound visitors to help with the application process. For programs run by local sister city associations, letters of invitation must be written by the official responsible for the event. Sister Cities International can write letters of support for the exchange but a local letter will also be necessary.

### Table of Contents

Role of Sister Cities International.....	1
Visa Resources and the Role of Sister Cities International in the Visa Process.....	1
Background Information and Visa Waivers .....	4
Visa Waiver Program: .....	4
Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI): .....	5
For Countries NOT in the Visa Waiver Program: .....	5
The Schengen Zone:.....	5
US Passport Information.....	5
For First Time Passport Applicants: .....	6
Renewing Your Passport: .....	6
Fees:.....	6
Expedited Passport Service:.....	6
Getting a Visa to Travel Abroad.....	7
Arriving Abroad:.....	7
Country Specific Travel Information .....	8
Argentina: .....	8
Brazil: .....	8
Cameroon: .....	8
China .....	9
Cuba .....	9
Egypt .....	9
Ghana.....	9
Greece.....	10
Hong Kong.....	10
India .....	10
Israel.....	10
Morocco.....	10
Nigeria.....	11
Poland .....	11



Poland .....	11
Romania .....	11
Russia .....	11
South Africa .....	12
Taiwan .....	12
Turkey .....	12
Ukraine .....	13



### 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 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.

Conditions to being accepted by the Visa Waiver Program include:

- You need to have a valid passport from the participating country.
- You have complied with the visa conditions of any previous trip to the United States.
- You must never have been arrested for a crime given over 5 years of total sentence in prison. Also, the crime must not involve “moral turpitude”.
- You must not have been denied entry into the United States (for any reason) over the previous 5 years.



- You must not be entering the United States for reasons other than short-term business and pleasure. Because of this, journalists must obtain a visa prior to entering the United States no matter where they are from.

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](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](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/> or you can contact Sister Cities International in DC. If you have questions on what is needed to travel, please contact Jennelle Root at [jroot@sister-cities.org](mailto:jroot@sister-cities.org) or by phone at 202-347-8630 x 4003.

### **The Schengen Zone:**

The Schengen Zone is a coalition of countries in Europe who agreed to drop all border restrictions between themselves to promote travel. While traveling between these countries, just make sure you have your passport available for identification purposes. These countries are:

- |                      |              |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| – Austria            | – Greece     | – the Netherlands |
| – Belgium            | – Hungary    | – Norway          |
| – the Czech Republic | – Iceland    | – Poland          |
| – Denmark            | – Italy      | – Portugal        |
| – Estonia            | – Latvia     | – Slovakia        |
| – Finland            | – Lithuania  | – Slovenia        |
| – France             | – Luxembourg | – Spain           |
| – Germany            | – Malta      | – Sweden          |

### **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](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](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 [http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel\\_1744.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.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 avert 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;
- will be traveling to a country experiencing any civil or political unrest;
- 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.

Also, find out if there is a third country that may represent the United States' interests in the country that you are visiting. The foreign Embassy may be able to provide you some of the services that the American



Embassy or Consulate typically provides. For example, the Swiss Embassy represents the United States' interests in Iran and any American traveling there should seek the Swiss Embassy if they encounter any problems.

### Country Specific Travel Information

Below are 20 countries that are not a part of the Visa Waiver Program but that are frequent destinations for our members. This gives an overview of the requirements these countries have. However, requirements are always changing so make sure to check with the country's embassy before you travel to make sure you have everything covered. This information is current as of October 1, 2008. Countries listed below include:

- Argentina
- Brazil
- Cameroon
- China
- Cuba
- Egypt
- Ghana
- Greece
- Hong Kong
- India
- Israel
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Peru
- Poland
- Romania
- Russia
- South Africa
- Taiwan
- Turkey
- Ukraine

### Argentina:

As long as you are visiting Argentina for less than 90 days, you do not need a visa. However, if you arrive with an expired or damaged passport, you may be deported at your own expense. Americans who have a dual-citizenship with Argentina may stay 60 days with an American passport. They will not be permitted to leave after that 60 day period unless they have an Argentine passport. Obtaining an Argentine passport is a long and arduous process and the American Embassy is relatively powerless in accelerating the process.

### Brazil:

Americans traveling to Brazil will require a visa and a valid passport, no matter how long their stay will be. You also must use your Brazilian visa within 90 days of issuance, or it will become invalid. Additionally, you may be required to provide proof of inoculation to Yellow Fever or you may not be able to board the plane or enter the country. A final difficult complication with Brazilian travel is that children under the age of 18 traveling alone, with a third party, or with a single parent MUST provide written documentation granting permission to travel to Brazil with the guardian, single parent, or alone. This document must be notarized and authenticated by the Brazilian Embassy or Consulate. Please note that Americans with Brazilian nationality will not be issued a visa and must enter the country under a Brazilian passport. Visa fees are \$130 which must be paid in person at the Brazilian Embassy or Consulate.

### Cameroon:

Those wishing to enter Cameroon will need a valid passport, visa, documentation of receiving the Yellow Fever vaccination, and current immunization records must be up to date. Visa fees are \$98 for up to a three month visit, \$196 for a three to six month stay, and \$294 to receive a visa valid for up to one year.



### China

You must have a valid passport and a visa obtained from the Chinese Embassy or a Chinese Consulate to enter China. Without the appropriate documentation, you will be deported immediately at your own expense. If you are entering China with a child, it is important to have documentation that you are the child's parent or guardian. China has recently stiffened procedure because of problems with international child abduction. While the documentation may not be required, it could help facilitate your departure. Permanent U.S. residents should renew and update any residential documentation prior to entering China to prove to Chinese officials that you plan to return to the United States at the conclusion of your visa. Visa fees are \$130 per individual applicant and \$110 for a group visa. There also an additional expedited service fee if you need a Chinese visa very quickly.

### Cuba

The United States government heavily restricts travel to Cuba. You may NOT engage in tourist related activities while in Cuba. Failure to adhere to this policy could result in civil penalties and possible criminal prosecution upon your return to the United States. First and foremost, you must receive a license from the United States government prior to seeking a visa to go to Cuba.

A license though, will be granted under several circumstances. Several cases where the government will permit travel to Cuba are to visit immediate family members, participate in humanitarian projects, engage in possible educational exchanges, and several other reasons. Check the Cuba country information section at the State Department's website for more information on the types of travel permitted in Cuba if you still are unsure. If you do receive a license from the United States Government, you must have a valid passport and a visa obtained from a Cuban Consulate or Interests section in the United States. Contact the Cuban Consulate (202-797-8609) for more information on obtaining a visa.

### Egypt

A passport and a visa are required to enter Egypt. However, a 30 day tourist visa can be obtained upon arrival for a \$15 fee. However, if you arrive overland or have previously encountered trouble entering Egypt, it is best to obtain a visa prior to arrival. You must have a completed AIDS test if you will be staying in Egypt longer than 30 days to study or work. If arriving from Israel, it is important that you obtain a visa beforehand. If not, a free 14 day visa that is only valid in Sinai will be issued to you. To receive a 30 day tourist visa, you need a letter of support from a travel agency. These can also be obtained in Egypt, but the prices vary and usually are quite costly. The fee for an Egyptian visa is \$15 and does not depend on whether you obtain one prior to departure or upon arrival.

### Ghana

A valid passport and visa are required to enter Ghana. You also need to bring documentation that you have received a yellow fever vaccination. To receive a visa, you will need four copies of the application with four passport size photographs of yourself. Visa fees for Ghana are \$50 for a single entry visa, \$80 for a multiple entry visa, and an additional \$30 if you require a visa in less than 48 hours.

### Greece

You only need a valid U.S. passport to enter Greece for tourism or business for up to three months. However, this three month period starts once you enter the Schengen Zone. To obtain a student visa, you must have a letter from the school, college or university that you plan on attending in the upcoming semester. You will not be issued a student visa without this.

### Hong Kong

To travel to Hong Kong as a tourist, all you will need is a valid passport and evidence of onward or return transportation. You will be permitted to travel freely throughout Hong Kong for 90 days without needing a visa. However, if you plan on studying or working in Hong Kong, you must first obtain a visa from the Chinese Embassy or a Consulate in the United States. No visas will be given on arrival to American citizens. If you wish to travel to mainland China from Hong Kong, a visa can be acquired in Hong Kong, but it is best to obtain this visa beforehand as Americans have previously encountered problems with this. If you wish to stay longer than 90 days, you must receive an extension of stay from the Hong Kong Immigration Department. When departing, an "Airport Security Tax" and a "Departure Tax" must be paid, however these may be included in your airfare.

### India

Visitors to India must have a valid passport and Indian visa to enter the country. There are no means to obtain a visa in India so one must be acquired prior to arrival from an Indian Embassy or Consulate. Please pay special attention to the type of visa that you are applying for. If you plan on participating in religious activities, obtain a missionary visa as opposed to a tourist visa. Americans with a tourist visa have been deported before because they were engaging in religious activities. Fees vary depending on the type of visa that you are seeking.

### Israel

If you are a dual citizen of Israel or Palestine, Israeli officials request that you use your Israeli or Palestinian passport to enter the country. If you do not, you may not be allowed to enter the country. At the very least, you can expect major delays. To enter Israel, you must have a valid passport, proof of sufficient funds for the duration of your stay, and an onward ticket out of Israel. Upon arrival, you will be issued a three-month, renewable visa that permits you to travel freely within Israel. However, Americans have been denied entry to Gaza or the West Bank in the past and it is not uncommon for Israeli officials to institute this.

### Morocco

To enter Morocco, you must have a valid passport. Tourists will not be required to obtain a visa if you are planning on staying fewer than 90 days. If you wish to stay longer than the 90 day allotted period, you must apply for an extension with a valid reason to stay with a Moroccan Embassy or Consulate. You do not need any vaccinations to enter Morocco. It is important that you carry your passport with you at all times to prevent trouble if questioned by local authorities.



### **Nigeria**

You must have a valid passport and visa to enter Nigeria and visas are not available upon arrival. Please note that there have been many fraudulent schemes claiming that individuals may enter Nigeria without a visa. You need a visa prior to arrival to enter the country or you will be deported at your own expense. United States citizens cannot depart Nigeria without proof that they entered the country legally. As long as you maintain your entry visa, this will not be a problem. It costs \$100 for a single-entry visa and \$200 for a multiple entry visa. Expedited service is an additional \$65.

### **Poland**

You only need a valid passport and proof of outbound or return tickets to enter Peru. As long as you are traveling as a tourist or under short-term business, you will be issued a visa for up to 90 days upon entering the country. However, this visa will be issued for as long as the Peruvian officer sees fit based on your itinerary and possibility that you may stay longer than the permitted period of time.

You may apply to extend your visit an additional three months in Peru following your entrance but should inquire about this beforehand with the Peruvian Embassy or Consulate. There are no required immunizations prior to entry into Peru, but it is recommended that you are vaccinated for Yellow Fever. Peru has several small airport fees that are charged by most domestic airports prior to departure. Also, there is a small exit fee that you pay when departing Peru.

### **Poland**

You only need a valid passport to enter Poland because it is a member of the Schengen Zone. This permits you 90 days of unrestricted travel to any of the Schengen countries. However, you must also have sufficient financial resources to cover the totality of your stay while in Poland. The rule typically used is 100 zlotys (about \$50 per day). Be sure that you have your passport stamped upon arrival in case of questioning from Polish officials. If you do not have your passport stamped, it could cause you to show why you are in Poland. Failure to adequately prove this could result in fines or other repercussions like deportation.

### **Romania**

You may enter Romania with only a valid passport to enter Romania as a tourist for a period of up to 90 days within a six-month period. You can obtain a stay permitting you to stay longer than 90 days at the immigration office in Romania if you so choose. Overstaying the allowed timeframe can lead to potential fines and future difficulties entering the country.

### **Russia**

Visiting Russia is very difficult. First, you must obtain a Russian sponsor. This can be a hotel, relative, friend, tour company, employer, or university. Any requests to change the visa MUST come through the sponsor. You should have all of the contact information for your sponsor before arriving in Russia as they are the only people who can really help you if there is a problem with your visa. The Russian government does not allow the U.S. Embassy to provide much assistance to those stranded because of expired passports or invalid visas. The Russian government will only issue a visa for the requested length of stay. It has been known to

issue visas for as short of a timeframe as 4 days. Their visa will reflect exactly what activities that you will be participating in.

If your visa has an incorrect date, be sure to contact the embassy to get it fixed prior to arriving in Russia because the immigration officers will not let you into the country if there are any discrepancies between your visa and your itinerary. You must leave Russia prior to the expiration date on the visa. You will be detained by the Russian government if you fail to do so until a visa extension is filed on your behalf by your sponsor. Receiving the extension can take up to 20 days at your expense. It is important that all of your documentation is in order before arriving in Russia. You will also be given a migration card when you arrive in Russia. You must keep this form with you at all times while you are traveling. Many hotels will require it to check in and police officers can stop and question you at any time without cause. For this reason, you should always keep your original passport, your visa, and your migration card with you at all times. These are just several of the very strict rules regarding travel to Russia. There are also significant travel restrictions if you have dual Russian and American citizenship, or if you are a minor (or are traveling with a minor). If you going to visit Russia, it is not only important that you completely understand Russia's immigration process, but crucial to ensure that you are able to return to the United States in a timely fashion.

### **South Africa**

You do not require a passport to enter South Africa as a tourist or for short-term business for a period of up to 90 days. However, you must have at least two completely blank (unstamped) visa pages in your passport each time you would like to enter South Africa. You also must have at least two unstamped endorsement pages at the back of your passport as well. Without the necessary blank pages, you may be fined and deported at your own expense. Students, academics, and those seeking employment may need long-term visas. If you are coming from a country where Yellow Fever is present, you may need to present your World Health Organization vaccination record proving that you have been immunized to Yellow Fever. Failure to do so will force South African officials to inoculate you while at your point of transit prior to entry into the country.

### **Taiwan**

There is no visa required for American citizens entering Taiwan if you are staying for less than 30 days. If you plan on staying longer, you must obtain a visa from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office. They can be contacted for visa related information at 202-895-1814. The cost for a visa is \$100 if you apply before arriving in Taiwan. If your passport will expire in less than 6 months, you may apply for a landing visa for a stay of no more than 30 days or when your passport expires, whichever comes first. There will be a processing fee of approximately \$162 for this visa.

### **Turkey**

You need a valid passport and visa to enter Turkey. If traveling solely for tourist reasons, you may purchase one for \$20 at your location of entry. This visa is valid for 90 days. If entering for diplomatic, official business, or educational reasons, you may need to apply for a visa at the Turkish Embassy or Consulate prior to your departure. If you are conducting research, studying, or working for longer than the 90 day period, you may need to apply for a Turkish ID card within the first month of your arrival. Be sure to have



your passport stamped at your point of entry as previously, travelers have been severely delayed or detained when discovered that they lacked appropriate documentation of their time in Turkey. Entering Iraq from Turkey is very difficult as well. Be sure that your Turkish visa will permit re-entry and all of your documentation is up to date and correct.

### **Ukraine**

If your stay is for business, tourism, or private travel, you do not need a visa for up to 90 days. If you are planning to stay longer or have a different purpose for entering Ukraine, you must contact the Ukrainian Embassy or Consulate prior to leaving the United States to receive your visa. Ukrainian Officials will determine the required documents on a case-by-case basis depending on the reason of your visit, length of your visit, and the locations you will be visiting. Be very careful as to what type of visa you receive. Know if it is single or multi-entry and the dates. Be sure to contact the Ukrainian Embassy or Consulate with any corrections prior to departure as you will not be allowed to enter Ukraine if any of this information is incorrect.