

Tips for U.S. Citizens Traveling Abroad

There are many good sources of information available to help you plan your trip. But, start with the basics.

When visiting another country, their laws and customs apply, not yours, particularly those relating to things like guns, alcoholic beverages and other items. Do not even think about putting a firearm of any type in your luggage without checking carefully in advance with both the airline and the consulates of the countries you will travel through.

You need a valid U.S. passport, even going to Canada. For some limited purposes a passport card is enough, but, don't risk confusion and problems, have a regular passport. Keep a photo copy in a secure place in the event of loss. For passport issuance or information, contact the US Department of State at: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>

Familiarize yourself with the country/s you're going to. Start with the US Department of State's country specific travel information: <http://travel.state.gov> and http://travel.state.gov/visa/americans/americans_1252.html

Visas: You do not need one for ordinary visitor travel to Canada, Mexico, Japan, the UK, most other European countries and other countries which are part of our reciprocal "Visa Waiver," program (http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html#countries). But, visiting does not mean living there for a year, or working for pay. Check the country's Washington D.C. embassy website to verify if a visa is required for your purpose, and how long a stay may be permitted. (If you want to go to Canada for a year to work on your Cousin Harriet's fish farm, you might need a visa, which you may or may not qualify for. Most members of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, "AILA", can provide you with referrals to qualified immigration attorneys in Canada and many other countries.)

Even if no visa is required, you may, if asked, still need to satisfy the host country's border inspectors that you:

- Have no disqualifying personal issue: prior criminal conviction/s, etc.
- Have the money to support yourself during your trip
- Intend to return to the U.S. when your permitted stay is over.