

International Travel Tips

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When traveling for business overseas, there are visa and health requirements to consider, national holidays to avoid, trade events to schedule, and troubled areas to avoid. When planning a business trip abroad, the best place to start is with the local embassy or consulate of your destination country. Officials that work in embassies and consulates can provide you with essential requirements for entry and information regarding the local economy, holidays, and more.

Documentation Requirements

Passport Basics

U.S. citizens need a passport to travel internationally. Passports can be obtained from various U.S. government centers, and most easily from post offices. To apply for a passport, applicants must present proof of U.S. citizenship, proof of identity, two passport photos, and any applicable fees. Passports take an average of six weeks to be processed by mail; however, expedited applications are possible for additional fees. For more information, visit the [U.S. Department of State's website](#).

Visas

Visa requirements vary depending on the country you are visiting. The easiest way to check the requirements for your trip is to contact the local consulate or embassy for the country you plan to visit.

It is important to remember that visa requirements for many countries are different depending on the purpose of the visit. While a trip for recreation may only require a tourist visa or no visa at all, a business trip may require a different class of visa. For more information, check out our [Export Guide on Visa Requirements & Work Permits](#).

Passport Protection Tips

- Leave your passport in a safe place, like a safe in your hotel room
- If carrying your passport with you, keep it separate from your cash
- If you do not have to have your official passport with you, carry a photocopy of the information page for identification
- Make an extra copy of the data page to leave at home with a friend or family member
- Never pack your passport in luggage
- If your passport is lost or stolen, immediately report it to the nearest U.S. embassy and local police
- Know the contact information of a local U.S. embassy before you travel

Health issues

Insurance

Before going abroad, find out what medical services your current health insurance covers overseas. If you have coverage abroad, be sure to carry your policy identification card as proof of coverage. Coverage is often limited to hospital and emergency treatment, and generally does not cover emergency evacuation, which may be needed in some emergencies.

Many international travel health insurance companies allow travelers to purchase short term supplemental policies and medical evacuation insurance.

Vaccinations and Illnesses

Many countries are adopting regulations that require visitors to obtain vaccinations to common illnesses before entering a country. The following are the most common requirements:

- **HIV/AIDS Testing:** A growing number of countries require that visitors present results of HIV/AIDS tests before entering. For more information, check with the consulate/embassy of your destination country
- **Malaria:** In countries that have a high rate of malaria contraction, visitors should consider being vaccinated before traveling. Allow at least six weeks before travel for vaccinations, and be sure to check entry requirements for vaccinations with your destination country
- **Yellow Fever:** Many countries in South America and Africa require proof of this vaccine prior to entry for visitors who have traveled from an area with a high rate of infection. Vaccinations last up to ten years, and can be administered at yellow fever vaccination centers

Medications

Before leaving for an international trip, travelers should check that their prescribed and over-the-counter medications are not illegal in their destination country. Be sure to bring the medications in their original bottles with attached labels. Because U.S. brands of medications are often not available abroad, be sure to bring extra supplies of your preferred brands. If you have allergies or a severe medical condition, consider wearing a medical alert bracelet. For more information, visit the U.S. Department of State's [Medical Information for Americans Abroad](#).

Safety Tips

Avoiding Theft and Injury

- Make copies of travel documents including your passport, airline tickets, and driver's license
- Double check your credit card limits; in some countries, exceeding the limit qualifies as fraud
- Remember that you are subject to all laws of your destination country; avoid illegal drugs, firearms, border areas, and civil demonstrations
- Carry copies of personal and business papers with you, and leave originals in a safe place
- Try to arrange direct flights and avoid lingering in public transit areas like airports and train stations

- Prior to leaving, contact your auto, health, property, and travel insurance companies to check what claims are covered while you are abroad
- Contact your banks and credit card companies before leaving the country to avoid having cards and accounts frozen due to international charges that are deemed suspicious

Food Safety

- Drink plenty of water, and avoid contaminated ice and water by drinking bottled water whenever possible
- Be aware of and avoid contaminated water when brushing teeth, bathing, or swimming
- In countries with high occurrences of food-borne diseases, be careful of accepting food that has not been washed, peeled, or is reheated

Customs and Immigration

Goods Entering a Foreign Country

Many countries prohibit or restrict the quantity of cash and goods that can legally enter the country. Always check regulations before leaving the United States. Customs regulations can be found through a local embassy or consulate.

ATA Carnet: Temporary Admission of Goods

This merchandise passport is an international customs document. It simplifies customs procedures by allowing the temporary import of commercial samples, professional equipment, and goods for trade shows. This documentation does not cover consumable goods, disposable or hazardous items, or postal traffic. An ATA Carnet allows for a single document to be used for all customs transactions and for import arrangements to be made in advance at a predetermined cost. For more information, contact the [U.S. Council for International Business](#).

Value Added Taxes (VAT)

Many countries have a Value Added Sales Tax that can be refunded to visitors. Travelers often forfeit the right to a refund after they leave the country. To receive a refund, be sure to do the following:

- Check with an embassy or consulate for your destination country to find out if there is a VAT, and whether travelers are eligible for refunds
- Save all applicable VAT receipts for documentation
- Fill out a refund form prior to departure at an airport or customs agency to present to a foreign customs officer

Virginia Economic Development Partnership - International Trade offers a number of export-related services to Virginia businesses, including trade missions and market research by our Global Network of in-country consultants. These services are available to all Virginia exporters.

For more information, please visit our website, ExportVirginia.org.

Additional Resources

Passport Information and Assistance

[U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs](#)

Visa Information

[U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs](#)

ATA Carnet Export

[U.S. Council for International Business](#)

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