



Traveler's Checklist

A trip requires careful planning. Listed below are important steps you can take to prepare for a safe trip anywhere outside the United States. In addition, you can search for your destination to view more specific information about that country or area.

Getting There

- *Be Aware of Any Travel Alerts and Warnings for Your Destination*

The State Department issues Travel Warnings to recommend postponing travel to a country because of widespread civil unrest, dangerous conditions, terrorist activity or, in some cases, because the U.S. has no diplomatic relations with the country and may have great difficulty in assisting U.S. citizens in distress. Travel Alerts disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats or other relatively short-term or transnational conditions that could pose significant risks to you and affect your travel plans. U.S. embassies and consulates send out security or emergency messages to alert U.S. citizens to fast-breaking events, such as demonstrations, coups, approaching storms, and crime.

The Department of State urges U.S. citizens living overseas or planning to travel abroad to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). When you enroll in STEP, we can update you with important safety and security announcements. Enrolling will also make it easier for the embassy or consulate to contact you in the event of an emergency. You should remember to keep all of your information in STEP up to date; it is particularly important when you enroll or update your information to include a current phone number and e-mail address.

- *Do You Have All Required Travel Documents?*

Most U.S. citizens must use a U.S. passport to travel overseas and reenter the United States. A passport is an internationally recognized travel document that verifies your identity and citizenship. Only the U.S. Department of State has the authority to issue U.S. passports.

Most foreign countries require a valid passport to enter and leave. Some countries may allow you to enter with only a birth certificate, or with a birth certificate and a driver's license, **but all persons, including U.S. citizens, traveling by air, must present a valid passport to reenter the United States.**

If you are traveling by **land or sea**, you must provide evidence of **both** your U.S. citizenship and your identity when you reenter the United States. For many land or sea trips this means you can travel using the new U.S. passport card instead of the normal passport book. Read more

about [U.S. passport requirements](#).

What about your children? Some countries have instituted requirements to help prevent child abductions and may require travelers to present proof of relationship to the children and evidence of consent from any non-accompanying parent(s). Visit our [child abduction country information pages for information about your destination](#).

When does your passport expire? Some countries require that a traveler's passport be valid for at least six months beyond the dates of the trip. Contact the [embassy of your foreign destination](#) for more information. Foreign embassy and consulate contact information can also be found in our [Country Specific Information](#) pages.

- *Are You Prepared for an Emergency?*

Make sure you have the contact information for the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate where you are going. 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. Contact information for U.S. embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas may be found in our [Country Specific Information](#) pages. If your family needs to reach you because of an emergency at home or if they are worried about your welfare, they should call the Office of Overseas Citizens Services in Washington, D.C. at 1-888-407-4747 (during business hours) or 202-647-5225 (after hours). The State Department will relay the message to the consular officers in the country where you are. The consular officers will then try to locate you, pass on any urgent messages, and, if you wish, report back to your family on your welfare.

You can read more about [what the Department of State can and can't do for you in an emergency](#) [here](#).

- *Do You Plan to Drive Overseas?*

If you plan to drive overseas, you may need to obtain an International Driving Permit (IDP). Many countries do not recognize U.S. driver's licenses without an accompanying IDP, and it is illegal to drive without a valid license and insurance in most places. You should check with the [embassy of the country where you plan to travel](#) to find out more about driver's license and car insurance requirements. If you will be residing overseas for an extended time, it is a good idea to obtain a local driver's license as soon as possible, since IDPs have a limited validity. Foreign countries may also require that persons considered resident obtain a local driver's license if they are going to drive. To renew a U.S. driver's license while abroad, contact the Department of Motor Vehicles in your home state.

For more information, please review our page on [Driving Abroad](#).

- *Pack Smart!*

- Pack light so you can move more quickly and have a free hand when you need it.
- Carry a minimum number of valuables and plan places to conceal them.

- Check your bags, clothing, and vehicle to make sure you are not carrying any banned items or substances, such as weapons or ammunition, into your destination country. Use covered luggage tags to avoid casual observation of your identity and nationality.
- Avoid packing IDs, tickets and other vital documents in backpacks or other locations you won't be able to see at all times.

- *Do You Have Photocopies of Your Itinerary and Travel Documents?*

Make two photocopies of all your travel documents in case of emergency or if your documents are lost or stolen. Leave one copy with a friend or relative at home. It is always a great idea to let at least one person know exactly where you will be staying and how to contact you in an emergency. Carry the other copy with you stored separately from the originals. Documents to make copies of include:

- Passport ID page
- Foreign visa (if applicable)
- Itinerary
- Hotel confirmation
- Airline ticket
- Driver's license
- Credit cards brought on the trip
- Traveler's check serial numbers

Your Safety

- *Prepare to Handle Money Overseas*
 - Check and understand the exchange rate before you travel.
 - Before you leave, notify your bank, credit card company, or other financial institutions that you are going overseas.

- Avoid carrying cash and consider using traveler's checks or major credit cards instead (but make sure they are accepted at your destination before departing on your trip).
- Change traveler's checks only as you need them.
- Do not flash large amounts of money when paying a bill.

- *Learn about local laws and customs*

While traveling, you are subject to the local laws even if you are a U.S. Citizen. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different from our own and it is very important to know what's legal and what's not. If you break local laws while abroad, your U.S. passport won't help you avoid arrest or prosecution, and the U.S. Embassy cannot get you out of jail.

Your Health

- *Do You Need Any New Vaccinations?*

Vaccinations Are Required for Entry to Some Countries

Some countries require foreign visitors to carry an International Certificate of Vaccination (aka Yellow Card) or other proof that they have had certain inoculations or medical tests before entering or transiting their country. Before you travel, check the Country Specific Information and contact the foreign embassy of the country to be visited or transited through for current entry requirements.

Health Experts Recommend Vaccinations for Travel to Some Countries

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) can provide you their recommendations for vaccinations and other travel health precautions for your trip abroad.

- *Do You Know How to Find Medical Help Abroad?*

Get Help With a Medical Emergency Abroad:

- Find a Doctor/Hospital Abroad
- View **ALL** information about Your Health Abroad

- *Does Your Health Insurance Cover You Outside the U.S.?*

Learn what medical services your health insurance provider will cover overseas. Although some health insurance companies will pay "customary and reasonable" hospital costs abroad, very few

will pay for a medical evacuation back to the United States, which can easily cost up to \$100,000, or even more, depending on your condition and location. Regardless of whether your insurance is valid overseas, you may be required to pay for care when you receive it.

If your insurance policy does not cover you abroad, consider purchasing a short-term policy that does. Many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas including emergency services such as medical evacuations.

NOTE: Social Security and Medicare do not provide coverage outside of the U.S.

[Learn More](#)

- *Are You Taking Any Prescriptions or Other Medications?*

If you take prescription medication:

- Pack enough to last your entire trip, including some extra in case you are unexpectedly delayed.
- Carry your medications in their original labeled containers, and pack them in your carry-on bag since checked baggage is occasionally lost or delayed.
- Ask your pharmacy or physician for the generic equivalent name of your prescriptions in case you need to purchase additional medication abroad.
- Get a letter from your physician in case you are questioned about your carry-on medication; some countries have strict restrictions on bringing prescription or even non-prescription medications into the country without proper medical documentation.