

Department of State Resources for Travel Professionals Supporting Travelers Abroad

Every year, tens of millions of U.S. citizens travel abroad, while at the same time the United States similarly welcomes tens of millions of international visitors. A significant percentage of all those domestic and foreign travelers use the services of travel agents and tour operators to book a part of, or their entire, trip. Many travelers elect to consult travel professionals for advice before and during their vacations. Now, thanks to the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs, those agents and tour operators can easily find information about Department of State services – from assistance provided for U.S. citizens traveling overseas to entry requirements for foreign visitors.

To make the search for answers easier, the Department has compiled the most frequently requested information in one useful page, designed specifically for travel professionals: <https://travel.state.gov/travelagents>. The page has two distinct parts: one, addressing relevant topics for travel professionals assisting U.S. travelers, and the other for those organizing trips for international visitors to the United States.

So, what should travel professionals know to better assist U.S. clients?

For any trip overseas, preparation is crucial. The Department of State has created a [Traveler's Checklist](#), which is available on the website as a [downloadable PDF document](#). It prints in a convenient wallet-sized format and can be included in the documents travelers carry with them. Encourage travelers to get informed on their destination: the "Learn About Your Destination" tool has a wealth of information on each country. Make sure travelers have required documents – passport, visas, and applicable documents if traveling along with children – for their destination. In particular, travelers should check that passports are valid for at least six months beyond their scheduled return date. The travel professionals' website also provides information on applying for a new passport, current processing times, and the status of pending passport applications. There are instructions on what to do if the client's passport has been lost or stolen, the latest photo requirements and fees, as well as guidance on ordering passport applications in bulk.

Your U.S. citizen clients should enroll in the Department's free [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive up-to-date safety and security messages and to allow the Department to reach them in case of an emergency while overseas. Tour operators traveling with groups overseas, in particular, are advised to sign up with STEP to stay informed about any potential issues during a trip.

Even with the best laid plans, things can go wrong. Recommend that travelers get medical and travel insurance appropriate to their trip and learn what the Department of State can and cannot do for a U.S. citizen in cases of emergencies overseas. For example, consular staff at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate can help your clients in situations such as a lost or stolen passport, hospitalization, arrest, death, missing person, or if they have been the victim of a crime.

The Department of State also stands ready to assist in the event of a crisis in the country where your client is traveling. The Bureau of Consular Affairs' uses its [Twitterfeed](#) and [Facebook page](#) to communicate timely, actionable information in emergencies.

Visit the [website](#) for more in-depth coverage of the range of services provided by U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad. There you will also find information on specialized topics like traveling with pets, cruises, TSA Pre-check, Global Entry, religious travel, and more.

Travel Professionals Supporting Visitors from Abroad

The site also has resources for travel professionals booking trips to the United States for international travelers. It provides an overview of the B1/B2 visitor and business visa, the online visa application process, and current visa appointment and processing wait times in any U.S. embassy or consulate around the world. Regardless of wait times, travel professionals should advise their clients to apply for a visa far in advance of travel, if a visa is required. There is also information on the Electronic System for Travel Authorization, also known as ESTA, for those from Visa Waiver Program countries who qualify, and on the Electronic Visa Update System (EVUS), which is required for Chinese tourists and business travelers. In addition, the site has several useful videos, explaining the visa application process in simple steps, showing what happens at a port of entry upon arrival in the United States, as well as how to use expedited automated entry systems at certain U.S. airports.

The new site is a treasure-trove of useful information that will assist you in better handling your clients' travel needs before and during their trip. Please incorporate these links on your own website for your clients' reference. After all – a better prepared and informed traveler is a safer traveler, who is much more likely to travel again, using your services.