



Tips for Americans Residing Abroad

FOREWORD

The Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs has prepared this publication for Americans considering residence abroad as well as for the millions of U.S. citizens who are currently residing in a foreign country. Our primary goal is to provide assistance to and protect the welfare of American citizens who live abroad.

Before taking up a foreign residence, there are many details that you will need to consider. This brochure will acquaint you with the wide range of services provided to American citizens by U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide.

Any additional guidance not specifically addressed in this publication may be obtained at <http://travel.state.gov>.

BEFORE YOU GO

LEARN ABOUT THE HOST COUNTRY

Learn as much as possible about the country where you plan to reside. Finding out about a nation's culture, customs, people, and history will make your stay more meaningful. Libraries, bookstores and tourist bureaus are good resources for this information. Keep abreast of the international news for the latest political developments in the country where you will live. Although English is spoken in many countries, learning the language of the region in which you plan to reside will make the transition to your new environment easier.

One of the best ways to learn about living in a foreign country is to get information from U.S. citizens who already live there. Countries with large numbers of U.S. expatriates often have a U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a bicultural organization, or clubs for Americans that could provide information on living in that country. In countries with fewer U.S. residents fellow expatriates may be available through a local international club. The Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy or Consulate may be able to assist you in finding these organizations.

Background Notes

Background Notes are factual publications that contain information on all the countries of the world with which the United States has relations. They include facts on the country's

land, people, history, government, political conditions, economy, and its relations with other countries and the United States. Selected *Background Notes* also are available **for sale in print** by annual subscription (http://www.state.gov/www/supdocs_order_form.html) or individually from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office.

Consular Information Program

The Consular Information Program consists of three main components that provide information to the American public about travel to specific countries: Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements. The U.S. Department of State issues fact sheets called Consular Information Sheets, on over 200 countries in the world. The sheets contain information on entry requirements, crime and security conditions, areas of instability, road safety and other details relevant to travel in a particular country.

The Department of State also issues Travel Warnings and Public Announcements. Travel warnings are issued when the State Department recommends deferral of travel by Americans to a country because of civil unrest, dangerous conditions, terrorist activity and in some cases because the U.S. has no diplomatic relations with the country and may have great difficulty in assisting Americans in distress. Public Announcements are issued as a means to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term and/or transnational conditions that could pose significant risks to American travelers.

How to Access Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements

[Consular Information Sheets](#), [Travel Warnings](#) and [Public Announcements](#) are available at U.S. Embassies and Consulates, or by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope and indicating the desired country to the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, Room 4811 Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520. They are also available on the Department's Web site at <http://travel.state.gov/>. In addition, on this site you can find information on passports and visas, international adoption, international child abduction services, and legal assistance abroad. For information on current foreign affairs, you can consult the Department of State's main Web site, <http://www.state.gov/>.

Up to date information on travel and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States, or, for callers outside the United States and Canada, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

Tips for Travelers Series

The Department of State publishes a series of pamphlets on travel to specific regions of the world. The brochures cover topics such as currency and customs regulations, import

and export controls, dual nationality, and photography restrictions. The following publications are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, D.C. 20401. (Availability and prices are subject to change without notice). Please check with the GPO before ordering at (202) 512-1800.

Tips for Travelers to Canada

Tips for Travelers to the Caribbean

Tips for Travelers to Central and South America

Tips for Travelers to China

Tips for Travelers to Mexico

Tips for Travelers to the Middle East and North Africa

Tips for Travelers to Nigeria

Tips for Travelers to Russia

Tips for Travelers to South Asia

Tips for Travelers to Sub-Saharan Africa

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

U.S. Passports

U.S. citizens should have a valid passport before taking up residence abroad. Once living overseas, Americans should continue to maintain a valid passport. For information on obtaining a passport, or other passport services the Department of State's Web site at <http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/>.

Visas

All governments require foreigners to have an appropriate visa to reside in their country. A visa is an endorsement or stamp placed in your passport by a foreign government that permits you to enter that country for a specified purpose. If you are planning to reside in a country for an indefinite period of time, most countries will require you to seek residence status. See the section on Citizenship to learn how this may effect your U.S. citizenship.

Applying for a Visa

In most instances you must obtain the necessary visa before you leave the United States. Apply for your visa directly from the embassy or nearest consulate of the country in which you plan to reside. A listing of foreign Embassies and Consulates in the U.S. should be available at your local library or by ordering the publication *Foreign Consular Offices in the United States* is available on the Department of State's Web site at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/fco/>. Embassy and Consulate contact information can also be found on the Consular Information Sheet for each country.

Work Permits

A work permit is usually required and is often a separate document from your visa or residency permit. It is necessary if you plan on working in a foreign country. It may be obtained either before you leave the U.S. or after you arrive in the foreign country, depending on the laws of the particular country. You should apply for the permit at the same time you apply for the residency permit or visa. (Note: The Department of State cannot help you obtain visas or work permits.)

HEALTH MATTERS

Health Insurance

The Social Security Medicare Program does not cover hospital or medical services outside the United States. The Department of Veterans Affairs will only pay for hospital and medical service outside the United States under very limited circumstances.

When considering medical insurance, first find out how citizens of the country where you will reside pay their medical bills and if the same coverage is available to resident foreigners. Some countries have government-sponsored health insurance that may also provide coverage to foreign residents, while others have a dual system with national health supplemented by private insurance.

In countries where many American expatriates reside, such as Mexico, you may find that local private international health insurance companies will offer coverage to U.S. citizen residents. Once you arrive, check with organized groups in the American community to learn about these companies.

Wherever possible, try to get the best medical insurance available. If quality coverage is not available where you will live, you may have to rely on a U.S. medical insurance company. Before taking up residence abroad, find out which U.S. medical services or health insurance plans provide coverage for Americans living overseas. Check with the insurance company on whether the coverage offered abroad includes both routine and emergency medical treatment, hospitalization, and medical evacuation should it be necessary. Once you obtain health insurance, remember to carry your policy's identity card and to keep a supply of insurance claim forms handy.

The U.S. government does not pay for hospital or medical services for Americans overseas and will not pay to evacuate you for treatment in the United States. There are a number of emergency medical assistance companies operating internationally who offer urgent medical treatment for their member travelers. Although the service is designed primarily for tourists who encounter a medical or personal emergency while on vacation, some companies offer yearly memberships, which may be available to Americans residing overseas. Contact a travel agent to learn more about these emergency assistance companies.

For useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, obtain a copy of the Department of State's brochure, *Medical Information for*

Americans Traveling Abroad , available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html.

Medication

For your protection, leave all medicines in their original, labeled containers. If you require medication containing habit-forming drugs or narcotics, carry a copy of the doctor's prescription attesting to that fact. Have it translated if necessary.

Some countries may prohibit importation of over-the-counter medications or shipment of prescription medicines by mail or courier from the U.S. Check with the country's Embassy before you travel abroad. These precautions will make customs processing easier and also will ensure you do not violate the laws of the country in which you live. If you have allergies, reactions to certain medicines, or other unique medical problems, consider wearing a medical alert bracelet or carrying a similar warning at all times.

Immunizations

Under the International Health Regulations adopted by the World Health Organization, some countries require International Certificates of Vaccination against yellow fever from international travelers. A helpful guide to immunizations and preventive measures for international travel is the booklet, *Health Information for International Travel* published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It contains a global rundown of disease and immunization advice and other health guidance, including risks in particular countries. A hard copy of *Health Information for International Travel* can be ordered at <http://bookstore.phf.org/cat24.htm>.

The CDC also maintains the international travelers hotline at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747), an automated faxback service at 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299) and a home page on the Internet at <http://www.cdc.gov> .

For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the [World Health Organization's](http://www.who.int/en) (WHO) web site at <http://www.who.int/en>. The WHO also provides travel health information at <http://www.who.int/ith> .

AIDS /HIV Testing

Many countries require long-term foreign residents and students to submit proof that they are free of HIV. Some of the countries that require this proof may accept certified test results from the United States. Consult the Embassy of the country you will be residing in on whether an AIDS/HIV test is required and if test results from the United States are accepted. (A list of foreign embassies' consular is contained in the Department of State brochure, *Foreign Consular Offices in the United States* . This publication can be viewed at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/fco/>.)

If U.S. test results are not accepted, check on the type of test to be performed and if it is permissible to supply your own disposable needle.

If you are overseas, consult the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for information and advice, keeping in mind that you are in a foreign country and are subject to its laws and requirements. (Contact information for U.S. embassies' can be obtained at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/embassies/embassies_1214.html.)

Glazed Ceramic Purchases

Be careful when purchasing ceramic tableware and clay pottery while overseas. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has determined that there are dangerous levels of lead found in the glazes of some ceramic dinnerware and pottery sold abroad. Because there is no way of knowing whether a particular item is safe, the Food and Drug Administration recommends that you use such wares for decorative purposes only.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Federal Benefits

If you are receiving monthly benefits from a Federal or state agency (Social Security, Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Personnel Management, etc.), contact the appropriate agency prior to your departure from the United States to advise them of your residence abroad and to inquire about the procedures for having your benefits checks sent overseas.

Driver's License

Many countries do not recognize a U.S. driver's license. Some, however, will accept an international driver's permit, but it would be a good idea to qualify for an in-country driver's license as soon as possible. International driver's permits are not always valid in every country for the length of your stay. It is usually only a matter of courtesy that the holder of the permit is allowed to drive with it for any length of time. International driver's licenses are usually only valid if presented in conjunction with a valid U.S. or local license. To renew a license, contact the Department of Motor Vehicles in your home state. It is illegal to drive without a valid license and insurance in many countries. You should check with the Embassy of the country where you plan to reside, to find out more about driver's license requirements.

Customs Hints

The pamphlet *Know Before You Go* contains information about U.S. Customs regulations and procedures. Single copies are available from any U.S. Customs office abroad or by writing to U.S. Customs, P.O. Box 7407, Washington, D.C. 20044.

Taking A Pet Overseas

If you decide to bring your pet with you overseas, check specific requirements with the country's embassy. Many countries have strict health, quarantine, agriculture, wildlife, and customs requirements and prohibitions. (Note: U.S. government regulations do not permit evacuation or emergency assistance to pets during a crisis abroad)

LIVING OVERSEAS

HELP FROM THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

Registration at U.S. Embassies or Consulates

Before you move abroad, you can register with the Embassy or Consulate nearest to your new home. This can be done on the web at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/>. In order to register, you will be asked for your new address abroad, passport information and the name, address and phone number of an emergency contact.

After you move, you can either use the above Web site to register or register in person at the nearest Embassy or Consulate after you move. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare or whereabouts may not be released to inquirers without your expressed written authorization. If you register in person, you should bring your U.S. passport with you. Your passport data will be recorded, thereby making it easier for you to apply for a replacement passport should it be lost or stolen.

Assistance From American Consuls

U.S. consular officers are located in over 260 Foreign Service posts abroad. They are available to advise and help you, especially if you are in any kind of serious trouble. In addition, consular agents in approximately 46 foreign cities without U.S. embassies or consulates provide a limited range of emergency and other consular services.

Consular officers are responsive to the needs of Americans traveling or residing abroad. However, the majority of their time is devoted to assisting Americans who are in serious legal, medical, or financial difficulties. They can provide the names of local doctors, dentists, medical specialists, and attorneys, and give you information about any dangerous or unusual situations. Consular officers also perform non-emergency services, including information on absentee voting, selective service registration, and acquisition and loss of U.S. citizenship. They can arrange for the transfer of Social Security and other U.S. government benefits to beneficiaries residing abroad, provide U.S. tax forms, and notarize documents. They may also provide information on how to obtain foreign public documents.

Because of the limited number of consular officers and the growing number of U.S. tourists and residents abroad, consuls cannot provide tourism or commercial services. For example, consuls cannot perform the work of travel agencies, lawyers, information bureaus, banks, or the police. They cannot find you jobs, get residence or driving permits, act as interpreters, search for missing luggage, or settle commercial disputes.

Missing Persons

When family or friends lose contact with a U.S. citizen abroad, they often ask the consul to search for and give information about that individual's welfare and whereabouts. Similar requests often come from American private and official welfare organizations attempting, for example, to track down an errant parent who failed to make child support payments. The U.S. consul tries to comply with such requests after determining carefully the reasons for the inquiry. If the consul has the address of the U.S. citizen about whom the inquiry is being made, the consul will inform the American of the inquirer's interest in getting in touch with them and pass on any urgent messages. Consistent with the Privacy Act, the consul then reports back to the inquirer the results of their search efforts. Except in emergency situations, the consul will not release any details about a U.S. citizen's welfare and whereabouts without the citizens expressed consent.

Helpful Information for Americans Arrested Abroad

When living abroad, you are subject to local—i.e. foreign laws. If you experience difficulties with the local authorities, remember, American officials are limited by foreign laws, U.S. regulations, and geography as to what they can do to assist you. The U.S. government cannot pay your legal fees or other related expenses.

Should you find yourself in a dispute that may lead to police or legal action, consult the nearest U.S. consular officer. Although consular officers cannot get you out of jail, serve as your attorney or give legal advice, they can provide lists of local attorneys and help you find legal representation. However, neither the Department of State nor U.S. Embassies or Consulates can assume any responsibility for the caliber, competence, or professional integrity of these attorneys.

If you are arrested, immediately ask to speak to the consular officer at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Under international agreements and practice, you have a right to get in touch with the U.S. consul. If you are turned down, keep asking—politely, but persistently.

Consular officers will do whatever they can to protect your legitimate interests and ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law. Upon learning of your arrest, a U.S. consular officer will visit you, provide a list of local attorneys and, if requested, contact family and friends. In cases of arrest, consuls can help transfer money, food, and clothing from your family and friends to you. They also try to get relief if you are held under inhumane or unhealthy conditions or treated less equitably than others in the same situation.

Drug Arrests

Despite repeated warnings, drug arrests and convictions of American citizens are still a problem. If you are caught with any type of narcotics overseas, you are subject to local—

not U.S.—laws. Penalties for possession or trafficking are often the same. If you are arrested, you will find the following:

- Few countries provide a jury trial.
- Most countries do not accept bail.
- Pre-trial detention, often in solitary confinement, may last many months.
- Prisons may lack even minimal comforts—bed, toilet, and washbasin.
- Diets are often inadequate and require supplements from relatives and friends.
- Officials may not speak English.
- Physical abuse, confiscation of personal property, degrading or inhumane treatment, and extortion are possible.

If you are convicted, you may face sentences ranging from fines and jail time to years of hard labor and perhaps even death. Learn what the local laws are and obey them.

Marriage Abroad

Consular officers abroad cannot perform a marriage for you. Local civil or religious officials abroad generally perform marriages. Once your marriage is performed overseas, Consular officers may authenticate foreign marriage documents. Note that this authentication simply signifies that your foreign marriage documents are real; it does not necessarily mean that your marriage will be recognized by your home state in the U.S. A marriage, which is valid under the laws of the country where the marriage was performed, is generally recognized by most states in the United States. If you are married abroad and need confirmation that your marriage will be recognized in the United States, consult the Attorney General of your state of residence in the United States. For current information on authentication fees, consult the Website: <http://intranet.ca.state.gov/cainternet/marriage.html>.

Marriages abroad are subject to the residency requirements of the country where the marriage is performed. There is almost always a lengthy waiting period. Some countries require that the civil documents, which are presented to the marriage registrar abroad, be translated and authenticated by a foreign consular official in the United States. This process can be time-consuming and expensive.

Unlike in the United States, some countries require proof of legal capacity to enter into a marriage contract. If it is necessary to obtain this proof overseas, you can execute an affidavit of eligibility to marry at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate. There are also individual requirements, which vary from country to country, e.g., parental consent and blood tests. Before going abroad, check with the Embassy or tourist information bureau of the country where you plan to marry to learn of any specific requirements.

In addition, the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, Room 4811 Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520 has some general information on marriage in a number of countries overseas. If you are already abroad, consult with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. To find out how much the service fee is for a marriage abroad, feel free to

consult the Website at:

http://www.travel.state.gov/family/family_issues/marriage/marriage_589.html .

Divorce Abroad

The validity of divorces obtained overseas will vary according to the requirements of an individual's state of residence. Consult the authorities of your state of residence in the United States for these requirements.

Birth Abroad of a U.S. Citizen

Most children born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents acquire U.S. citizenship at birth. As soon as possible after the birth, the U.S. citizen parent should contact the nearest American Embassy or Consulate. When it is determined that the child has acquired U.S. citizenship, a consular officer prepares a Consular Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America (Form FS-240). This document is recognized by U.S. law as proof of acquisition of U.S. citizenship and is acceptable evidence of citizenship for obtaining a passport, entering school, and most other purposes. Failure to document a child promptly as a U.S. citizen may cause hardship for the parents or child later on when attempting to obtain a passport or register for school.

Death of a U.S. Citizen Abroad

When a U.S. citizen dies abroad, the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate should be notified as soon as possible. Upon notification, the consular officer, in accordance with local laws, may do the following:

- Require proof of the decedent's citizenship (for example, U.S. passport, birth certificate, or naturalization certificate).
- Report the death to the next of kin or legal representative.
- Obtain instructions and funds from the family to make arrangements for local burial or return of the body to the United States.
- Obtain the local death certificate and prepare a Report of Death of an American Citizen Abroad (Form OF-180) to forward to the next of kin or legal representative. (This document may be used in U.S. courts to settle estate matters.)
- Serve as provisional conservator of a deceased Americans estate and arrange for disposition of those effects.

Because the costs for local burial or transporting a deceased body back to the United States can be quite expensive, you may wish to obtain insurance to cover this cost. Otherwise, your next of kin or other relatives must bear these expenses. The U.S. Government cannot pay to have your body buried overseas or returned to the United States.

Federal Benefits Services Abroad

Prior to your move abroad you should contact the federal agency (Social Security Administration, Veterans Affairs, Railroad Retirement Board, or Office of Personnel Management) from which you receive a monthly check to report your change of address. It is very important that you advise that agency of your address change so that your checks will not be lost or delayed. Even if your payments are being sent to a bank, you must provide the federal agency with your new address. You should also contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate nearest your place of residence upon your arrival and advise them of your current address.

In many countries, you are able to have your monthly checks deposited directly into your account at either a financial institution in the country where you live or a U.S. financial institution. To determine if direct deposit is available in the country where you plan to reside, or to sign up for direct deposit, contact the federal agency from which you receive payment.

If your check does not arrive or you have other questions about your Federal Benefits, contact a consular officer at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If the consular officer cannot answer your inquiry, he or she will contact the regional federal benefits officer for your area and make inquiries on your behalf.

If you move while living abroad, you must also notify the U.S. Embassy or Consulate at least 60 days prior to your move. This will enable the federal agency to update its records so your checks are sent to your new address.

Assistance In Voting in U.S. Elections

Americans who reside abroad are usually eligible to vote by absentee ballot in all Federal elections and may also be eligible to vote in many state and local U.S. elections. Eligibility depends upon the laws and regulations of your state of residence in the United States. To vote absentee, you must meet state voter registration requirements and apply to the state of your last domicile for the ballot as early as possible. If possible, you should register for absentee voting before you move abroad. Check with your local voting authority for requirements and procedures.

After you have registered for an absentee ballot, and if your state ballot does not arrive in sufficient time, you may be eligible to use a Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB). You should contact the voting assistance officer at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for additional information.

Selective Service Registration

Section I-202 of the Presidential Proclamation of July 2, 1980, reinstating registration under the Military Selective Service Act, states: Citizens of the United States who are to be registered and who are not in the United States on any of the days set aside for their registration, shall present themselves at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate for registration before a diplomatic or consular officer of the United States or before a registrar duly

appointed by a diplomatic or consular officer of the United States. Check with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate if you need to comply.

FAMILY MATTERS

Adopting A Child Overseas

If you plan to adopt a child overseas, you should be aware that the U.S. Government considers foreign adoptions to be a private legal matter within the judicial sovereignty of the nation where the child is residing. U.S. authorities have no right to intervene on behalf of American citizens in the courts in the country where the adoption takes place. However, there are a number of ways that U.S. embassies and consulates can assist prospective parents.

The U.S. embassy or consulate can provide you with information on the adoption process in the country where you reside. Consular officers can make inquiries on your behalf regarding the status of your case in the foreign court and will assist in clarifying documentary requirements if necessary. Embassies and Consulates will also ensure that as an American you are not being discriminated against by foreign courts and will provide you with information on the visa application process for your adopted child.

Because children in foreign adoptions are considered to be nationals of the country of origin, prospective parents must comply with local laws. One way to achieve this is by dealing only with a reputable international adoption agency experienced in handling adoptions in the country where you are living. In the case of a private adoption, you should hire a local attorney with expertise in adoptions. Because of the potential for fraud in international adoptions, you need to be aware of the dangers. The U.S. embassy or consulate can offer you advice on what problems you might encounter.

Foreign children adopted overseas by U.S. citizens may gain U.S. citizenship automatically upon entry in the United States if the child meets the requirements of the Child Citizenship Act of 2000. Alternatively, the adoptive parents may apply for the child's naturalization after they return to the United States.

In most cases, the adoptive parents would merely apply for a Certificate of Citizenship from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services in the Department of Homeland Security (BCIS) after the adoption. However, until they return to the United States, the adopted child remains a national of their country of origin. Before returning to live permanently in the United States with your adopted child, you will need to petition the BCIS for your child's immigrant visa.

For further information on adoption procedures, obtain BCIS Form M-249 entitled, *The Immigration of Adopted and Prospective Adoptive Children*. You can also contact the Department of State, Overseas Citizens Services Office of Children's Issues, telephone 1-888-407-4747 to learn more about foreign adoption procedures and to order the booklet *International Adoptions*. This booklet is also available on the Internet at

<http://travel.state.gov> and contains useful information for U.S. citizens who plan to adopt a foreign child.

International Child Custody Disputes

American citizens residing overseas are subject to the laws of the country in which they are resident. If you find yourself involved in a child custody dispute and unable to reach an amicable settlement, your only recourse may be court action in the child's country of residence. If so, you will need to obtain a foreign attorney to represent you in court. You can obtain a list of such attorneys and general tips about retaining a foreign attorney from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Parents should be aware that custody decrees originating in the United States are not automatically recognized overseas; consult a local attorney or legal expert. Parents should also be aware that the United States Government is limited in the assistance it can provide. While U.S. authorities can provide general information pertaining to a country's legal system, assist in identifying any local resources available to U.S. parents, issue passports to American citizen children, and conduct welfare and whereabouts visits, U.S. officials cannot intervene in another country's legal process, including taking custody of a child, forcing the child's return to the United States, or attempting in any way to influence proceedings in foreign courts.

If a child has been abducted or wrongfully retained by a parent overseas, the left-behind parent should contact the closest U.S. embassy or consulate, or in the U.S., the Department of State's Office of Children's Issues for information on options available to you.

If both the country of the child's habitual residence and the country to which the child has been taken are signatories to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, it may be possible to file a Hague petition requesting the child's return or access for the left-behind parent to the child.

The U.S. Government can assist parents by helping to locate the child, monitoring the child's welfare, providing general information on laws and procedures where the abduction took place, and, where applicable, forwarding a Hague petition to the foreign country's Central Authority.

In an effort to prevent international child abduction, many governments have initiated procedures at entry/exit points. These often include requiring documentary evidence of relationship and permission for the child's travel from the parent(s) or legal guardian if not present. Having such documentation on hand, even if not required, may facilitate entry/departure. If you are concerned that your child is at risk of becoming a victim of international parental child abduction, you may visit http://travel.state.gov/family/abduction/prevention/prevention_560.html for information on precautions you can take, including how to enroll your child in the Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program, or contact the nearest U.S. embassy, consulate, or the U.S. Department of State's Office of Children's Issues in Washington, DC, telephone 202-736-9090.

PRECAUTIONS

Safeguarding Your Passport

Your passport is a valuable document, which should be carefully safeguarded. When living outside the U.S., the Department of State recommends that you keep your passport at home in a secure place. Although keeping your passport at another location, such as in a safety deposit box, might offer maximum security, it does not usually offer maximum availability. Keep in mind that in an emergency requiring immediate travel, quick access to your passport may be critical to your departure. In such a cases, it may not be possible to obtain a replacement passport in time to make your trip.

Loss or Theft of a U.S. Passport

Keep a photocopy of your passport's personal data page easily accessible but in a different place at home than your passport. If your passport is lost or stolen, report the loss immediately to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate and to local police authorities. Having the copy will facilitate issuance of a new passport. Remember, after your passport has been reported lost or stolen, it cannot be used, should you locate it later.

Passport Fraud

Passport fraud is attempted by U.S. citizens and non-citizens for a variety of criminal purposes - money laundering, narcotics trafficking, illegal entry into the U.S., etc. In processing lost/stolen passport cases, the Department of State must take special precautions that may delay the issuance of a new, full validity passport. If you suspect a U.S. passport is being used fraudulently, do not hesitate to contact the nearest American embassy or consulate or in the U.S., the nearest Passport Agency.

CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY

U.S. Citizenship and Residence Abroad

U.S. citizens who take up residence abroad or who are contemplating doing so frequently ask whether this will have any effect on their citizenship. Residence abroad, in and of itself, has no effect on U.S. citizenship and there is no requirement of U.S. law that a person who is a naturalized U.S. citizen must return to the United States periodically to preserve his or her U.S. citizenship. Contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate if you have any questions about nationality.

Acquisition and Loss of Citizenship

U.S. citizenship may be acquired by birth in the United States or by birth abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents. However, there are certain residency or physical presence requirements that U.S. citizens may need to fulfill before the child's birth in order to transmit citizenship to their child born overseas. A child born abroad in wedlock to one

citizen parent and one alien parent acquires U.S. citizenship only if the citizen parent was physically present in the United States for 5 years prior to the child's birth, at least 2 years of which were after the age of 14. Living abroad in military service or U.S. Government employment, or as an unmarried dependent in the household of someone so employed, can be considered as presence in the United States.

A child born out of wedlock to a U.S. citizen mother acquires U.S. citizenship if the mother was physically present in the United States for 1 continuous year prior to the child's birth. A child born out of wedlock to a U.S. citizen father must establish a legal relationship to the father before age 18 or be legitimated before reaching age 21, depending on the date of birth, if he/she is to acquire U.S. citizenship through the father. For further information on these legal requirements, consult the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Citizenship may also be acquired subsequent to birth through the process of naturalization. For more information about this process, contact the Bureau of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in the Department of Homeland Security at 1-800-755-0777.

Loss of citizenship can occur only as the result of a citizen voluntarily performing an act of expatriation as set forth in the Immigration and Nationality Act with the intent to relinquish citizenship. Such acts most frequently performed include the following:

- Naturalization in a foreign state;
- Taking an oath or making an affirmation of allegiance to a foreign state;
- Service in the armed forces of a foreign state;
- Employment with a foreign government; or
- Taking a formal oath of renunciation of allegiance before a U.S. consular or diplomatic officer.

If you have any question about any aspect of loss of nationality, contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate or the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, SA-29, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520.

Dual Nationality

A foreign country might claim you as a citizen of that country if:

- You were born there.
- Your parent or parents are or were citizens of that country.
- You are a naturalized U.S. citizen but are still considered a citizen under that country's laws.

If you fall into any of the above categories, consult the Embassy of the country where you reside. While recognizing the existence of dual nationality, the U.S. Government does not encourage it as a matter of policy because of the problems it may cause. Claims

of other countries upon dual-national U.S. citizens often place them in situations where their obligations to one country are in conflict with U.S. law. Dual nationality may hamper efforts by the U.S. Government to provide diplomatic and consular protection to individuals overseas. When a U.S. citizen is in the other country of their dual nationality, that country has a predominant claim on the person.

If you have any question about dual nationality, contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate or the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at the address in the previous section.

FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS MATTERS

U.S. Taxes

U.S. citizens must report their worldwide income on their Federal income tax returns. Living or earning income outside the United States does not relieve a U.S. citizen of responsibility for filing tax returns. However, U.S. citizens living and/or working abroad may be entitled to various deductions, exclusions, and credits under U.S. tax laws, as well as under international tax treaties and conventions between the United States and a number of foreign countries. Consult the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for further information.

For information on taxes and locations of IRS offices overseas, contact any office of the IRS or write to the Forms Distribution Center, Post Office Box 25866, Richmond, Virginia 23289. That office also has copies of Publication 54, (*Tax Guide for U.S. Citizens and Resident Aliens Abroad*) Publication 901, (*U.S. Tax Treaties*), Publication 514, (*Foreign Tax Credit for Individuals*), and Publication 520, (*Scholarships and Fellowships*).

The IRS has also put together a package of forms and instructions (Publication 776) for U.S. citizens living abroad. The package is also available through to the Forms Distribution Center. During the filing period, you can usually obtain the necessary Federal income tax forms from the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Most tax forms are also available on the IRS's Web site at <http://www.irs.gov>.

Foreign Country Taxes

If you earn any income while you are overseas, you may be required to pay tax on that income. You should check the rules and regulations with that country's Embassy or Consulate before you leave the United States, or consult the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Bank Accounts

Some countries will permit you to maintain a local bank account denominated in dollars or in another foreign currency of your choice. This may be a good idea if the U.S. dollar is strong and the local currency in the country you reside in is weak. If that country does not permit you to maintain U.S. dollar bank accounts, you can maintain an account in a U.S. bank. You could then convert dollars to the local currency, as you need them rather than all at once. This would protect you in the event that the country you are living in devalues its currency. In many developed and developing countries, ATM's are available that will allow you to access your U.S. bank accounts and make withdrawals in the local currency. Check with your U.S. bank to find out if this is available to you abroad.

Wills

To avoid the risk of violating foreign laws, if you own property or other assets both in the United States and overseas, consider the idea of having two wills drawn up. One should be prepared according to the legal system of your adopted country, and the other according to the legal system of the U.S. Each will should mention the other. Having two wills should ensure that your foreign property is disposed of in accordance with your wishes in the event of your death.

Property Investment

A major decision that you will have to face when you live abroad is whether or not to purchase a home or property. Because prices in many foreign countries may seem like a bargain compared to the United States, there may be some merit to investing in real estate. However, you will need to keep several things in mind. First, check to see whether the country where you plan to invest permits foreigners to own property. Many foreign countries do not permit foreigners without immigrant status to buy real estate. Also, there may be restrictions on areas in which you may buy property and on the total number of foreigners who may purchase property in any one year.

One way for a foreigner to purchase real estate overseas may be to set up a bank trust and then lease the property. For your protection, you should first consult with a local real estate agent and then hire a reputable attorney. Check with the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the country where you plan to purchase property to obtain a list of lawyers. A good lawyer will provide you with information about having your real estate contract notarized, registered, and if necessary, translated. Your attorney should also be able to advise you on protection against unscrupulous land deals.

Before you make a real estate purchase, learn the customs and laws of the foreign government with regard to real estate. In the event of a dispute, you will have to abide by local and not U.S. laws. A good rule to follow is that before you invest in any real estate take the same precautions which you normally would take before you make a sizeable investment in the United States.

RETURNING TO THE U.S.

U.S. Immigration and Customs

If you leave the U.S. for purposes of traveling, working, or studying abroad, and return to resume U.S. residence, you are considered a returning U.S. resident by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. When you go through immigration and customs at the port of entry, have your passport ready. Where possible, pack separately the articles you have acquired abroad to make inspection easy. Have your receipts handy in case you need to support your customs declaration. If you took other documents with you, such as an International Certification of Vaccination, a medical certificate, or a customs certificate of registration for foreign-made personal articles, have them ready also. If you are returning to the U.S. by car from either Mexico or Canada, a certificate of vehicle registration should be available.

Articles acquired abroad and brought back with you are subject to duty and internal revenue tax. As a returning U.S. resident, you are allowed to bring back \$400 (\$600, if you are returning directly from a Caribbean Basin Economy Recovery Act country) worth of merchandise duty free. However, you must have been outside the United States for at least 48 hours, and you must not have used this exemption within the preceding 30-day period. The next \$1,000 worth of items you bring back with you for personal use or gifts are dutiable at a flat 10% rate. (Your duty free exemption may include 100 cigars, 200 cigarettes, and one liter of wine, beer or liquor.)

Restrictions on Products Entering the U. S.

Fresh fruit, meat, vegetables, plants in soil, and many other agricultural products are prohibited from entering the United States because they may carry foreign insects and diseases that could damage U.S. crops, forests, gardens, and livestock. Other items may also be restricted, so be sure to obtain details of regulations before departing for your trip back to the U.S. These restrictions also apply to mailed products. Prohibited items confiscated and destroyed at U.S. international postal facilities have almost doubled in recent years. For more information and to request the pamphlet, *Travelers Tips on Prohibited Agricultural Products* contact the agricultural affairs office at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or write to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 4700 River Road, Unit 51, Riverdale, MD 20737. This pamphlet, as well as other information on traveling and agriculture, is available on the Department of Agriculture's Web site at http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_1OB?navtype=SU&navid=TRAVEL_RECREATION.

Importing A Car

If you plan to bring a car back with you make sure it conforms to U.S. emission standards established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) before purchasing it. If your vehicle does not conform to standards, it may be banned from entering the country. For further information, obtain the pamphlet, *Buying a Car Overseas? Beware!* from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Public Information Center, Mail Code 3406, 401 M

Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20460. Information is also available on the EPA Web site at:

<http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/toolbox/publications/travel/importexportcar.ctt/importingacar.doc> /

Wildlife and Wildlife Products

If you purchased any articles made from endangered animals and plants while you were overseas, or acquired any live wild animals to bring back as pets, you need to be aware that U.S. laws and international treaties make it a crime to bring many wildlife souvenirs into the United States.

Some prohibited items include those made from sea turtle shell, most reptile skins, crocodile leather, ivory, furs from endangered cat species, and artifacts from coral reefs. Do not buy wildlife souvenirs if you are unsure of being able to bring them legally into the United States. The penalties you risk are severe and your purchases could be confiscated. To learn more about endangered wildlife and guidelines governing restrictions on imports into the United States, you can obtain the pamphlet, *Buyer Beware!* For a free copy, contact the Publications Unit, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. The Fish and Wildlife Service also has information on their Web site at <http://international.fws.gov/>

Additional information on the import of wildlife and wildlife products can be obtained through TRAFFIC (North America) World Wildlife Fund—U.S., 1250 24th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037 or on their Web site at: <http://www.wwf.org/> .

OTHER IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS

U.S. Embassies and Consulates

Key Officers of Foreign Service Posts: Guide for Business Representatives contains names of key officers and addresses for U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and missions abroad. This is available on the Web at <http://www.foia.state.gov/MMS/KOH/keyoffcity.asp>.

Your Trip Abroad

Your Trip Abroad contains helpful tips on obtaining a passport, things to consider in preparing for your overseas trip, other resources for travel and customs information. To obtain a copy, see the Department of State's Web site at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1225.html.

Tips for Older Americans

Travel Tips for Older Americans provides general information on passports, visas, health, currency, and other travel tidbits for elderly U.S. citizens planning to travel overseas. Copies are available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1226.html.

A Safe Trip Abroad

A Safe Trip Abroad contains helpful precautions to minimize the chance of becoming a victim of terrorism and also provides other safety tips for Americans traveling overseas. This document is available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html.

Tips for Americans Residing Abroad

Tips For Americans Residing Abroad offers information for U.S. citizens living abroad on dual citizenship, tax regulations, voting, and other consular services.

Crisis Abroad

Crisis Abroad—What the State Department Does summarizes the work by the State Department during a crisis and its efforts to obtain reliable information from local authorities abroad for concerned relatives and friends of Americans located in the disaster area. Copies are available on the Web at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1223.html .

Overseas Citizens Services

Overseas Citizens Services contains information about the assistance that the office of Overseas Citizens Services provides, including information on deaths, arrests, welfare/whereabouts inquiries and financial and medical emergencies, copies can be found on the Web at http://travel.state.gov/travel/about/who/who_1245.html.

Other State Department Travel Brochures

All of the following Consular Affairs publications were designed to provide information to U.S. citizens who are planning to travel abroad.

Copies of the following publications are available for **\$1.00 each** from the **Federal Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009**. Internet: www.pueblo.gsa.gov

Advance Fee Business Fraud

Advance Fee Business Fraud contains useful information for persons engaging in business abroad.

Foreign Entry Requirements

Foreign Entry Requirements contains information on foreign countries' entry requirements for tourists.

Tips for Women Traveling Alone

Tips for Women Traveling Alone contains safety and travel information for women traveling alone in foreign countries.

Travel Smart/Travel Safe

Travel Smart/Travel Safe contains general safety tips and travel information.

Travel Tips for Students

Travel Tips for Students contains safety and travel information for students studying, residing and/or traveling abroad.

*Copies of the following publications can be purchased for **\$2.75 each** from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, tel: 202/512-1800, fax: 202/512-2250, Internet: <http://bookstore.gpo.gov/>.

*Prices and availability are subject to change without notice. Please check with the GPO for up-to-date information.

Consular Affairs' publications can also be obtained by accessing the Consular Affairs' Internet at <http://travel.state.gov>