

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 more than three million 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. We are committed to providing prompt, courteous, and effective assistance.

Any additional guidance not specifically addressed in this publication may be obtained from the Bureau of Consular Affairs in the Department of State or from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate if you are living overseas.

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BEFORE YOU GO

LEARN ABOUT THE HOST COUNTRY

Read as much as possible about the country where you plan to reside. Learning 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 as well 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 nation 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 advice from U.S. citizens already residing 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 give you information on living in that country. In countries with fewer U.S. residents, you may be able to meet fellow expatriates 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

The Department of State publishes Background Notes on countries around the world. These are brief, factual pamphlets with information on each country's people, culture, geography, history, government, economy, and political conditions. They are available for about 170 countries worldwide and often include a reading list, travel notes, and maps. To purchase copies, contact the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 or call (202) 512-1800. Select issues are also available from the Bureau of Public Affairs, fax-on-demand by calling (202) 736-7720 from your fax machine or on the Department of States homepage on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>.

Consular Information Program

The U.S. Department of State issues fact sheets on every country in the world called Consular Information Sheets. The sheets contain information on crime and security conditions, areas of instability 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/or because the U.S. has no diplomatic relations with the country and cannot assist an American in distress. Public Announcements are issued as a means to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-

term and/or transnational condition which would 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 may be heard any time by dialing the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at (202) 647-5225 from a touchtone phone. The recording is updated as new information becomes available. They are also available at any of the 13 regional passport agencies, and U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, or, by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope and indicating the desired country to the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Room 4811, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520-4818.

By Fax

From your fax machine, dial (202) 647-3000, using the handset as you would a regular telephone. The system prompts you on how to proceed.

By Internet

Information about travel and consular services is now available on the Internet's World Wide Web. The address is <http://travel.state.gov>. Visitors to the web site will find Travel Warnings, Public Announcements and Consular Information Sheets, passport and visa information, travel publications, background on international adoption and international child abduction services, international legal assistance, and the Consular Affairs mission statement. There is also a link to the State Department's main site on the Internet's World Wide Web that provides users with current foreign affairs information. The address is <http://www.state.gov>.

Consular Affairs Bulletin Board - CABB

If you have a personal computer, modem and communication software, you can access the Consular Affairs Bulletin Board (CABB). This service is free of charge. To view or download the documents from a computer and modem, dial the CABB on (301) 946-4400. The login is **travel**; the password is **travel**.

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 for \$1-1.50 each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, D.C. 20402. (Availability and prices are subject to change without notice. Please check with the GPO before ordering at (202) 512-1800.)

Tips for Travelers to Sub-Saharan Africa

Tips for Travelers to the Caribbean

Tips for Travelers to Canada

Tips for Travelers to Central and South America

Tips for Travelers to the People's Republic of China

Tips for Travelers to Mexico

Tips for Travelers to the Middle East and North Africa

Tips for Travelers to Russia and the Newly Independent States

Tips for Travelers to South Asia

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.

Applying in Person for a Passport

In the United States, application for a U.S. passport may be presented in person at a passport agency or at one of the several thousand Federal or state courts or post offices which accept passport applications. If you are overseas, you may apply at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. U.S. citizens who cannot apply by mail (see requirements below) must appear in person and need to bring proof of U.S. citizenship such as a certified copy of their birth certificate, a Consular Report of Birth Abroad of a U.S. Citizen, a Certificate of Naturalization, or a previous U.S. passport. This should be accompanied by a completed DSP-11, Passport Application, two recent 2x2 inch identical photographs, proof of identity (a valid driver's license or other valid photo ID will suffice), and the appropriate application fee. [Click here](#) to see a chart of passport fees.

For more information on obtaining a U.S. passport, obtain a copy of the publication *Passports: Applying for Them the Easy Way*. This brochure provides basic information on applying for a U.S. passport, and is available for 50 cents from the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009.

Passports-by-Mail

You can apply for a passport by mail (without a personal appearance) if you meet the following requirements:

- You have had a passport issued within 12 years prior to the date of a new application;
- You are able to submit your most recent U.S. passport with your new application; and
- Your previous passport was issued on or after your 16th birthday.

For further information and to obtain Form DSP-82, Application for Passport by Mail, contact the nearest U.S. passport agency or, if you are overseas, consult the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Not all embassies and consulates abroad are authorized to accept passport applications by mail or via a third party courier. Contact the U.S. embassy or consulate in your consular district to find out if it accepts passport applications by mail or via a third party courier.

Your previous passport, two identical photographs (2"x2"), and the appropriate passport fee must accompany your application. [Click here](#) to see a chart of passport fees. Since it may take several weeks to prepare and mail your new passport to you, do not wait until it expires to apply for a new one.

Visas

All governments require foreigners to have an appropriate visa to reside in their country. This endorsement or stamp placed in your passport by a foreign government 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 what effect this may have on 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* from the U.S. Government Printing Office. You can write or call them at Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402; telephone (212) 512-1800 to check pricing and stock information.

Work Permits

A work permit is usually required and is 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. It is usually applied for at the same time as 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 if you are a veteran with a service-related disability.

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 good 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, learn 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 cannot pay for hospital or medical services for Americans overseas and cannot 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.

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. 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 few countries still require a certificate of cholera immunization as well. A helpful guide to immunizations and preventive measures for international travel is the booklet, Health Information for International Travel. It is available for \$14 from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Specific information may also be obtained from local and state health departments, physicians, or travel clinics that advise international travelers. You may also reach the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention on (404) 332-4559 or via their Internet address at <http://www.cdc.gov> for immunization recommendations.

AIDS /HIV Testing

Many countries require long-term foreign residents and students to submit proof that they are free of the HIV virus. 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. If not, 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.

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: There are U.S. government regulations forbidding evacuation or emergency assistance to pets during a crisis abroad)

LIVING OVERSEAS

HELP FROM THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

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.

Registration at U.S. Embassies or Consulates

As soon as you arrive at your permanent residence abroad, you should register in person or by telephone with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency. 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 at the embassy or consulate, thereby making it easier for you to apply for a replacement passport should it be lost or stolen.

Missing Persons

When a U.S. citizen abroad loses contact with friends or relatives in the United States, the U.S. consul is often requested to 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 citizen's 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 fund 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 attorneys 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, 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 one of the following sentences:

-- Two to ten years in most countries.

-- A minimum of six years' hard labor and a stiff fine.

-- The death sentence in some countries.

Learn what the local laws are and obey them.

Marriage Abroad

Consular officers abroad cannot perform a marriage for you. Marriages abroad are generally performed by local civil or religious officials. Once your marriage is performed overseas, U.S. consular officers can advise you on how your foreign marriage document can be authenticated. 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.

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, civil law 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 for a small fee (currently \$10). There are also individual requirements which vary from country to country, i.e. 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.

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.

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 relative or next of kin 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

Federal agency monthly benefits checks are generally sent from the Department of the Treasury to the U.S. embassies or consulates in the countries where the beneficiaries are residing. When you move overseas, report your change of residence to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. The usual procedure is for the embassy or consulate to then forward the check through the local mail system to you. It may be possible to make arrangements to have your check deposited directly into a bank account located in the United States or in the country where you reside. Check with the benefits paying agency or the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for further information.

If your check does not arrive or you have other questions about your 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 appropriate paying agency, such as the Social Security Administration, and make inquiries on your behalf. If you move, notify the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate at least 60 days before the move. This will enable the Federal agency to update its records so your checks are sent to the correct 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 for the ballot as early as possible from the state of your last domicile. Should your state ballot not arrive in sufficient time, you may be eligible to use a Federal write-in ballot known as a F.W.A.B. You should consult the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for additional information.

Selective Service Registration

Section I-202 of the Presidential Proclamation of July 2, 1980, reinstituting 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 pitfalls. The U.S. embassy or consulate can offer you advice on what problems you might encounter.

Foreign children adopted overseas by U.S. citizens can gain U.S. citizenship if the adoptive parents 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 Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) 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 the United States with your adopted child, you will need to petition the INS for your child's immigrant visa. For further information on adoption procedures, obtain INS 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, Room 4818, Washington, D.C. 20520, telephone (202) 736-7000 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

For parents involved in a child custody dispute, there are limits on the assistance that U.S. authorities can provide. In cases where an American child is abducted overseas by a parent, the U.S. Government's role is confined to helping the remaining parent locate the child, monitoring the child's welfare, and providing general information about child custody laws and procedures in the country where the abduction took place. Consular officers overseas can issue a U.S. passport to a child involved in a custody dispute if the child appears in person at the U.S. embassy or consulate and there is no court order issued by the foreign court of that country which bars the child's departure from the country.

U.S. consuls cannot take custody of a child, force the child's return to the United States, or attempt to influence child custody proceedings in foreign courts. If the parents cannot work out an amicable settlement of a child custody dispute, the only recourse is usually court action in the country where the child is residing. A custody decree originating in the United States is not automatically recognized overseas. On the contrary, foreign courts will decide custody in accordance with the laws of that country. If you are involved in a custody dispute, you will need to obtain a foreign attorney to represent you in court. You can obtain a list of such attorneys from the U.S. embassy or consulate in the country where your child has been taken.

Parents who are involved in a custody battle overseas should find out whether the country you are in is a party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. Under the Hague Convention, a child who has been wrongfully removed may be returned to his or her place of habitual residence. For further information on the Hague Convention contact the Office of Children's Issues in Overseas Citizens Services. That office also has copies of the booklet International Parental Child Abduction which contains helpful information on what U.S. citizen parents can do to prevent their child from becoming a victim of parental child abduction. If you are overseas and would like information on this subject, contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for guidance.

PRECAUTIONS

Safeguarding Your Passport

Your passport is a valuable document which should be carefully safeguarded. When living overseas, the Department of State recommends that you keep your passport at home in a safe, secure place. Although a passport kept at an available storage facility outside the home might offer maximum security, keep in mind that an emergency requiring immediate travel may make it difficult or impossible to obtain your passport before departure. In such a case, it may not be possible to obtain a replacement or temporary passport in time to make the intended travel.

Loss or Theft of a U.S. Passport

If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, report the loss immediately to the nearest foreign service post and to local police authorities. If you can provide the consular officer with the information in the old passport, it will facilitate issuance of a new passport. Therefore, you should photocopy the data page of your passport and keep it in a separate place for easy retrieval.

Passport Fraud

Multiple and fraudulent U.S. passports are used in many types of criminal activity, including illegal entry into the United States. In processing lost passport cases, the Department of State must take special precautions that may delay the issuance of a new passport. If you suspect a U.S. passport is being used fraudulently, do not hesitate to contact the nearest passport agency in the United States or American embassy or consulate overseas.

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, contact the Immigration and Naturalization Service 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, Room 4811, 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 are planning to reside or are presently living. 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.

If you have access to a personal computer and a modem, you can get forms and publications electronically from the IRS. The forms and publications are available through IRIS, the Internal Revenue Information Services on FedWorld, a government bulletin board. On the Internet, you can telnet to fedworld.gov. or for file transfer protocol services, connect to ftp.fedworld.gov. If you are using the Internet's World Wide Web, connect to <http://www.ustreas.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 abroad.

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, another idea would be to keep your dollars in a bank in the United States. That way you could convert them 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.

Wills

To avoid the risk of running afoul of 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 Service.

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 1 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.

Importing A Car

If you plan to bring a car back with you, before purchasing it, make sure it conforms to U.S. emission standards established by the Environmental Protection Agency. 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, D.C. 20460.

Wildlife and Wildlife Products

While you were overseas, if you purchased any articles made from endangered animals and plants or 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 those 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. Additional information on the import of wildlife and wildlife products can be obtained through TRAFFIC (U.S.A.), World Wildlife Fund--U.S., 1250 24th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

OTHER IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS

U.S. Embassies and Consulates

Key Officers of Foreign Service Posts: Guide for Business Representatives has names of key officers and addresses for U.S. embassies, consulates, and missions abroad. Updated 2 times a year; a 1-year subscription is \$5. Order from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, D.C. 20402, telephone: (202) 512-1800 or fax: (202) 512-2250.

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, contact the GPO for price and availability.

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 from the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov> or Consular Affairs automated fax at (202) 647-3000.

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. To obtain a copy, contact the GPO for price and availability.

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 free by sending a stamped, self-addressed business-size envelope (SASE) to CA/P, Room 6831, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520-4818.

Overseas Citizens Services

The booklet *Office of Overseas Citizens Services* contains information about the assistance that the office provides in four major categories: deaths, arrests, welfare/whereabouts inquiries, and financial-medical emergencies. The booklet is free by sending a SASE to CA/P at the address above.