

Deciphering The Visa Code

This article provides a guide to the basics of the visa process, as well as a glossary of specialized terms, and sidebars which provide information about biometrics, recent rules affecting travelers, and some statistics about travel to the United States.

Like any host country, the United States needs basic information about its guests: who they are, when they are arriving and when they will depart. This information is obtained by issuing visas. Most citizens of foreign countries need visas to enter the United States, but the vast majority of the people who wish to visit the United States are able to do so.

- In 2004, nearly three-fourths of all applicants for a U.S. visa were successful. An even greater majority of those seeking student visas—about 80 percent—received approval.
- In addition, the United States had a 12-percent increase in the number of business and tourism travelers and a four-percent increase in the number of students who came as nonimmigrant visitors last year.

Visas

A visa is a permit allowing you to apply for entry into a country's borders. Under U.S. law, the Department of State has responsibility for issuing visas. One of its consular officers, after looking at your documents and conducting a short interview, decides whether you qualify for a visa—a process called “adjudication.” Consular officers have the final say on all visa cases.

Just as an application does not guarantee you will get a visa, a visa does not guarantee entry to the United States. It simply indicates that a consular officer has reviewed your application and determined that you are eligible to travel from your country to a U.S. port-of-entry for a specific purpose.



AP/Wide World Photo by Marcio Jose Sanchez

At the port-of-entry, an immigration officer decides whether to grant you admission to the United States. Only a U.S. Department of Homeland Security immigration officer has the authority to permit you to enter. It is highly unusual, however, for a traveler holding a valid visa to be

denied entry.

The Process

To obtain a visa and enter the United States, you must begin by completing an application form, DS-156 [<http://evisaforms.state.gov>]. Contact the U.S. Embassy in your country [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/embassies/embassies_1214.html] to make an appointment. Take your application, passport, a photograph, and supporting documents to the embassy or consulate, where you will be interviewed about the purpose of your visit. You must also pay an application fee, currently \$100. The visa allows you to travel to a U.S. port-of-entry where an official will again look at your travel documents before granting you permission to enter the country.

There has been little change in that straightforward process since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, although there have been changes in various procedures in order to address increased security concerns:

- All males between the ages of 16 and 45 are required to complete an additional form, DS-157, to provide a detailed history of their previous travel and their affiliation with various institutions. Consular officers can request that this form be filled out by other applicants as well.
- All student and exchange visitors, regardless

of nationality, must complete a supplemental application form and be enrolled in SEVIS (see page 10) by their sponsoring institution.

- Almost all persons requiring visas must have a face-to-face interview with a consular officer. Previously, consular officers could waive the requirement for an applicant's personal appearance, and some travel agents could submit applications for their clients. Because this is no longer the case, over the past three years the State Department has greatly increased the number of its consular officers and worked to improve appointment scheduling systems.
- Technological systems have been put in place to electronically share visa files and law enforcement and watch-list information, as well as to track student enrollments. Since 2004, the technology, the consolidation of databases, and the correction of problems within these systems have been dramatically improved and backlogs reduced.
- Since 2004, embassies have been instructed to expedite the processing of visas for students and business travelers. As a result, consular posts have set up special appointment times and now give priority to scheduling and processing these visas.
- The United States and many other countries are moving toward tamper-resistant machine-readable visas, passports, and other entry-exit documents that contain digital photographs and biometric indicators, such as fingerprints. For instance, finger scans are taken during the visa application process and again on arrival in the United States.
- Information on the identity of all passengers is provided to U.S. immigration officials by all commercial ships and airplanes en route to the United States.
- Passengers who would normally require a visa to enter the United States must now have one even if they are just in transit, traveling on a carrier that



AP/WWP Photo by Stephen J. Boitano

stops in the United States on its way to another destination.

The requirements and costs for a U.S. visa are similar to those of other democracies; and the need for a visa, additional fees charged, and any restrictions imposed are based on reciprocity with other nations—that is, they match the requirements that other countries place on U.S. citizens wishing to travel there.

Plan Ahead: Waiting Times

Although the average amount of time it takes to get a visa has been noticeably reduced recently, it is still

very important to plan ahead and start the visa application process as soon as you begin your travel planning. It takes time to fill out the forms, assemble the documents you will need to show the consular officer, and get an interview appointment.

Because your and every applicant's circumstances are unique, the process—and the time involved—varies. Individuals wishing to study or work in the

United States, for example, need to fill out additional forms and provide more documentation than tourists.

Similarly, the average waiting time to get an interview appointment varies by country. U.S. embassies post their estimated wait times at http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/tempvisitors_wait.php. If you are a student or business traveler, check for expedited appointments.

The State Department is committed to making the visa application process easier to understand, and a list of important resources can be found at the end of this journal.

The Interview

It is extremely important that you be well prepared for your visa interview.

Not only must you bring a completed application form, the paid application fee receipt, your valid passport, and a photograph that meets certain criteria (see page 12), you must provide documentation showing that you intend to return to your home country at the end of your stay.

If you are applying for a student visa, you must also have a receipt showing that your SEVIS I-901 fee [<http://www.ice.gov/graphics/sevis/i901/faq2.htm>] has been paid.

The consular officer will conduct a short interview,

during which you will be asked to explain your reason for wanting to visit the United States, and review your documents. In addition, your two index fingers will be recorded by a special, inkless digital scanner as part of the US-VISIT program's (see page 10) security precautions, and your identity will be checked against databases containing the names and records of people who are ineligible for visas or whose applications require additional review.

You will be told whether your application has been approved or denied at the end of the interview. Most approved visas are delivered within one week. If there are security concerns, however, it may take a few weeks to resolve the issue through additional screening.

Should you be denied a visa, you can always re-apply with additional documentation, but each time you do so, you will have to pay the non-refundable \$100 visa application fee.

Visa Denials

The consular officer is required to look at each applicant's individual circumstances and apply U.S. immigration laws accordingly.

The most common reason for being denied a visa is the inability to show that your ties to your home country are so strong that it is highly unlikely you would try to illegally stay in the United States. This refusal is commonly known as 214(b). "Ties" are the various aspects of your life that bind you to your country of residence. This requirement to prove that you have a residence abroad and which you have no intention of abandoning is part

of U.S. law, the Immigration and Nationality Act [<http://www.ufafis.org/visa/visadenials.asp>].

You can demonstrate your intent to return home by showing things that would compel you to leave the United States at the end of a temporary stay: a job or enrollment in an academic program in your home country; family members still living there; substantial property holdings such as a house or money in a local bank account, etc. There is no distinct group of documents that you must present to the consular officer or set of circumstances that will guarantee visa issuances, but the facts of your case must be convincing. The law places the burden of proof for meeting this residence abroad requirement on you.

If you are refused a visa for failure to prove you will return home, and your circumstances later change, or you have gathered further evidence of your ties, you may reapply, but you will be charged another application fee.

Consular officers are aware of the cultural and social differences that can define ties in different countries and understand that younger applicants may not have had an opportunity to form many significant financial attachments. They consider all these circumstances when adjudicating visas.

Other reasons for visa denials include having a contagious disease, a criminal history, or association with terrorist activities.

Following are some terms you may find helpful in deciphering the visa code. Links to more comprehensive explanations are provided at the end of each definition.

Glossary of Visa-Related Terms



AP/WideWorld Photo by Sergey Ponomarev

Biometrics: Biometrics are the means of identifying a person by biological features that are unique to each individual, such as fingerprints or eye scans of the complex patterns in one's iris.

Biometric identifiers protect you by making it extremely difficult for anyone else to assume your identity, even if your travel documents are stolen or duplicated. They guarantee that the person carrying a passport or visa is the person to whom it was issued.

[<http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=4542>]



AP/WideWorld Photo by Bobbie Hernandez

Border Crossing Card (BCC): The Mexican-U.S. border-crossing card, allowing card-holders to move easily through border immigration controls, is available to qualified travelers to use as a B1/B2 (business/tourist) visa. It contains many security features, is valid for 10 years, and is often called a "laser visa."

Even before the 2001 terrorist attacks occurred, U.S. law stipulated that all BCCs must contain a biometric identifier, such as fingerprint, and be machine-readable. The BCC program then became the model for subsequent U.S. secure entry/exit procedures.

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/info/info_1336.html]



AP/WWP Photo by Jan Bauer

E-Passport: An e-passport is a high-tech, machine-readable passport containing an integrated circuit (chip) that can store biographic and biometric information (see page 12) about you, as specified by the United Nations International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The U.S. electronic passport will contain only a digital image of the facial portrait of the bearer on the chip. That image, when compared to the actual bearer using facial recognition technology, will provide a formidable deterrent to passport fraud.

The chip, embedded in the back cover, will also contain biographical data that can be compared with the information found on the biographic data page of the machine-readable passport as a precaution against any attempt to alter it. A digital signature will protect the data stored on the chip from alteration.

The intelligent chip uses technology designed to be read from a distance of four inches (10 cm) or closer. To mitigate concerns relating to the possibility of secret skimming of data from the chip, the United States will include an anti-skimming feature in the passport that will reduce the threat of skimming when the passport is closed. The United States is also seriously considering the use of Basic Access Control (BAC) to reduce the possibility of skimming or eavesdropping when the passport is read at ports-of-entry. BAC is similar to a PIN system in that it will require that characters from the machine-readable zone on the data page of the passport be read first in order to be able to access data from the chip.

The United States intends to issue e-passports at all its domestic passport agencies by October 26, 2006 and will require all countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to also begin issuing e-passports by that date.

If you already have a VWP machine-readable passport issued before October 26, 2006, you need not replace it with an e-passport until its regular expiration date.

[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/import/commercial_enforcement/ctpat/fast/]

Free and Secure Trade (FAST): To expedite secure commercial traffic across borders, the United States, Mexico, and Canada participate in the electronic FAST program, coordinating common risk-management principles, supply-chain security, industry partnerships, and advanced technology to screen and clear business shipments.



AP/WWP Photo

This voluntary government-business program allows known, low-risk participants to receive faster land border processing of their shipments through dedicated travel lanes and reduced examinations, even during periods of high risk alerts. To qualify, trucks must be from an approved carrier, the goods must be from an approved importer, and the driver must hold a valid FAST commercial driver identification card.

In Mexico, there are two additional requirements: the goods must be made by an approved manufacturer and must adhere to high-security seal requirements as they move through warehouses, brokers and other handlers.

[http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/content_multi_image/content_multi_image_0021.xml]

Machine Readable Passports (MRPs): A machine-readable passport (MRP) is required to enter the United States without a visa if you are a citizen of one of the countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). These passports carry biographical data in two lines of encoded type that allow customs and border patrol officers to quickly identify you by using an electronic reader.

The data is the same information printed inside a regular passport: your name, gender, date and place of birth, passport number, and dates of issue and expiration.

In addition, MRPs follow the standards established by the United Nations International Civil Aviation Organization for passport size, photo requirements, and data field organization.

MRPs allow legitimate visitors to be processed swiftly, while alerting immigration officers to those individuals who may pose a potential threat by rapidly comparing the encoded information to law enforcement databases.

If you are a VWP traveler who arrives in the United States with-



Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Consular Affairs

out a machine-readable passport or a visa, do not expect to be granted entry. In fact, you will probably not be allowed to board a carrier to get to the United States without an MRP.

Check with your nation's passport agency if you are not sure if your passport is machine-readable.

[<http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=4499>]

NEXUS: Frequent travelers between Canada and the United States should consider applying for the existing NEXUS program designed to simplify land, air, and sea border crossings for pre-approved, low-risk travelers between the two nations.

Applicants are interviewed, provide a biometric scan, and undergo a background check. Both countries must agree to a person's inclusion in the program. Once approved, NEXUS travelers are issued a photo-identification card that allows them to move quickly through border inspections via dedicated travel lanes.

This voluntary program has been in place since 2002. A single application is sufficient to meet both the U.S. and Canadian requirements for enrollment. Group travelers should be aware, however, that everyone traveling together must be a member of the program in order to use a NEXUS lane.

[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travell/frequent_traveler/]

Non-immigrant Visa (NIV): When you wish to travel to the United States for a temporary period—as a tourist, for business, or to take part in an academic program—you are classified as a nonimmigrant.

[<http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/visas.htm#non>]

National Security Entry/Exit Registration System

(NSEERS): NSEERS is a special registry for non-immigrant visitors who, based on intelligence criteria, are identified as posing an elevated security concern for a variety of reasons.

The program requires these visitors to check in periodically to verify their location, and to show that they are complying with the terms under which they were granted admission to the United States, such as attending classes if on a student visa, not engaging in illegal activities, and/or not staying beyond their visa expiration date.

Following the September 2001 terrorist attacks, NSEERS was put in place as a first step toward developing a full entry and exit record of non-immigrant visitors. With the SEVIS and US-VISIT databases now in operation, there is no longer a re-registration requirement for whole groups of visitors — such as those from certain countries. The Department of Homeland Security can, however, still require individuals to appear for additional registration interviews during their stays.

[<http://www.ice.gov/graphics/specialregistration/index.htm>]

Reciprocity: Certain aspects of visas—such as visa issuance fees or the length of time a visa remains valid—are based on reciprocity: that is, the United States matches the fees and restrictions that another country places on U.S. citizens for its visas.

Countries often work together to eliminate citizen exchange barriers. For example, in 2005, China and the United States reached agreements allowing qualified students, business travelers, and tourists to obtain 12-month visas that allow multiple entries. Previously, the standard had been six-month visas with a two-entry limit.

[<http://travel.state.gov/visa/reciprocity/index.htm>]

Secure Electronic Network for Travelers' Rapid Inspection (SENTRI): The international land border between Mexico and the United States is the busiest in the world. In 1995, as a way to ease the traffic wait time for frequent travelers,

THE MAJOR NON-IMMIGRANT VISAS

- B-1 Temporary visitor for business;
- B-2 Temporary visitor for pleasure/tourism;
- F-1 Academic student;
- F-2 Spouse or child of F-1
- J-1 Exchange visitors
- J-2 Spouse or child of J-1
- M-1 Vocation or non-academic student
- M-2 Spouse or child of M-1



AP/WWP Photo by David Maung

dedicated commuter lanes were created under the SENTRI program.

The number of SENTRI participants has grown dramatically in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks and, in response, the U.S. government recently took steps to process enrollments faster by adding personnel, employing new technologies, and extending the enrollment period from one to two years. Persons applying must provide electronic fingerprints for pre-screening, and pay a fee for themselves, their family members, and their vehicles. The vehicle and everyone in it must be enrolled in the

program to use a SENTRI lane.

[\[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travell/frequent_traveler/sentri.xml\]](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travell/frequent_traveler/sentri.xml)

Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS): All incoming international students must be registered by their host institutions in SEVIS, a database maintaining information on students and exchange visitors in the United States, before they can obtain a visa. The Web-based system, which replaced a paper-based system in 2002, enables U.S. academic institutions to maintain accurate and timely data on foreign students, exchange visitors and their dependents, and to communicate this information in real time to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State. SEVIS is administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), part of DHS.

[\[http://www.ice.gov/graphics/sevis/index.htm\]](http://www.ice.gov/graphics/sevis/index.htm)

United States Visitor and Immigration Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT): This automated entry/exit system collects biometric data on visitors to reduce the opportunity for fraud and prevent criminals from entering the country.



AP/WWP Photo by Gregory Smith

All non-immigrant visitors between the ages of 14 and 79 holding visas—regardless of race, national origin, or religion—participate in the US-VISIT program, as do visitors traveling under the Visa Waiver Program.

For most travelers, the process begins during the visa interview at a U.S. consulate, where applicants must provide a photo that meets certain guidelines and have an electronic scan taken of their two index fingers. When they arrive at a U.S. port-of-entry, another digital photograph and another two-finger scan will be taken for a comparison check.

In addition, the identity information is run through shared law enforcement databases to check for criminal records, aliases, or terrorist-related watch-list warnings. Information on stolen or lost passports is also being incorporated into these databases.

Nearly 30 million travelers have taken part in US-VISIT since it began operation at 115 airports, 13 seaports, and the 50 busiest land ports in 2004. The Department of Homeland Security, which operates the program, plans to have the entry procedures in place at all remaining land ports by the end of 2005, and is currently testing similar exit procedures at 12 airports and two seaports.

US-VISIT not only enhances security for everyone, it allows immigration officials quickly to identify and welcome legitimate travelers to the United States.

Most Mexicans and Canadians participate in other entry-exit programs and are exempt from US-VISIT enrollment.

[\[http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublicinterapp/editorial/editorial_0525.xml\]](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublicinterapp/editorial/editorial_0525.xml)

[\[http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublicinterapp/content_multi_image/content_multi_image_0006.xml\]](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublicinterapp/content_multi_image/content_multi_image_0006.xml)

[\http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublicinterapp/editorial/editorial_0435.xml (Multilingual Videos and Brochures)]

[\[US-VISIT Step-by-Step Entry Guide \(PDF, 1 page, 609 KB\)\]](#)

[\[US-VISIT Step-by-Step Exit Guide \(PDF, 1 page, 768 KB\)\]](#)

Visa Waiver Program (VWP): The Visa Waiver Program was instituted in 1986 to promote tourism and facilitate travel among U.S. allies by allowing business travelers and tourists visiting the United States for less than 90 days to enter without visas. Not all U.S. allies take part in the program and, depending on the purpose of their travel and legal bars to their admission to the United States, not all citizens from VWP countries are qualified to participate in this program.

The 27 countries participating in the VWP are Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand,

Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Some travelers from Mexico, Canada, and Bermuda enter the United States visa-free, but based on a different legal basis than VWP travelers. Passport requirements for VWP travelers do not apply to travelers from Mexico, Canada, and Bermuda.

To be included in the VWP, a country must meet legislative requirements that include, among other things, provision of reciprocal visa-free travel for U.S. citizens, production of machine-readable passports, prompt reporting of the theft of passports, a refusal rate of less than three-percent for U.S. visas, and a low overstay and immigration violation rate by visitors from that country. In addition, countries must have a biometric passport program and be able to demonstrate strong document and border security, immigration controls, and law enforcement cooperation, so that their participation in the program would not be a threat to U.S. security or law enforcement interests.

VWP travelers must have machine readable passports and, depending on when their passport is issued, may also be required to have biometric passports with digitized photos or e-passports. VWP travelers are screened prior to admission to the United States, and take part in the US-VISIT program.

[http://www.travel.state.gov/visaltemp/without/without_1990.html#1]

Western Hemisphere Traveler Initiative: By far, the largest number of nonimmigrant travelers to the United States come from our neighbors to the north and south, Canada and Mexico. In the past, our relationships with these countries, and with Bermuda, allowed for special passport-free, visa-free, or other border crossing programs.

In the new security environment, however, valid passports or other specified, secure documents will eventually be needed for all these citizens, including our own, to enter or re-enter the United States from any country in the Western Hemisphere. Travel between the United States and its territories is not affected by the new law.

Since the volume of travel between these nations is so high, new requirements will be phased in according to the following proposed timeline:

- December 31, 2006—A passport or another accepted document will be required for all air and sea travel to or from Mexico, Canada, and Bermuda, as well as Central and South America and the Caribbean;
- December 31, 2007—A passport or another accepted document will be required for all air, sea, and land border crossings into the United States from countries in the Western Hemisphere.

What are other acceptable documents? The United States currently offers secure travel cards under the SENTRI, NEXUS, FAST, and BCC programs (see above), and is using new technologies to create other document options.

Persons traveling between countries in the Western Hemisphere should understand that Social Security cards and drivers licenses are no longer acceptable substitute documents for entry into the United States.

Another issue to note: single parents, grandparents, or guardians traveling with children may be asked for either proof of custody or a notarized letter from the absent parent authorizing the transportation of children across borders. This requirement evolved from international concern about child abduction. In addition, if you are under the age of 18 and traveling alone, you should carry a letter from a parent or guardian authorizing your trip across borders. Without such documentation, travelers could experience delays at their U.S. port-of-entry.

[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/lebygfwest_hem_init] ■

BIOMETRICS: FROM EYE COLOR TO EYE SCAN

The word “biometrics” is often misunderstood. It simply means a measurable biological characteristic that can be used for automated recognition. Early non-automated forerunners of biometrics have been used in travel control documents for a very long time.

At least as early as the 1700s, ship manifests dutifully recorded in writing such things as the age, height, weight, eye color, distinguishing marks, and complexion to describe each passenger. As the photograph came into being in the 1800s—and the color photograph in the 1900s—it replaced many of these more primitive descriptors as the general means by which to identify travelers.

It should not be surprising then, that with the advent of even more sophisticated technology, automated biometric indicators have replaced these forerunners as the norm—especially in this era of new threats.



AP/WWP Photo by Chuck Stoody

Digital photographs allow for mapping the contours of one’s face and skin texture. Scans of the eye measure the pattern of the iris that is unique to each person; and capturing finger scans no longer entails using a roller, wet ink, and fingerprint cards. You merely place your index fingers on an electronic reader, and verification of your identity occurs rapidly.

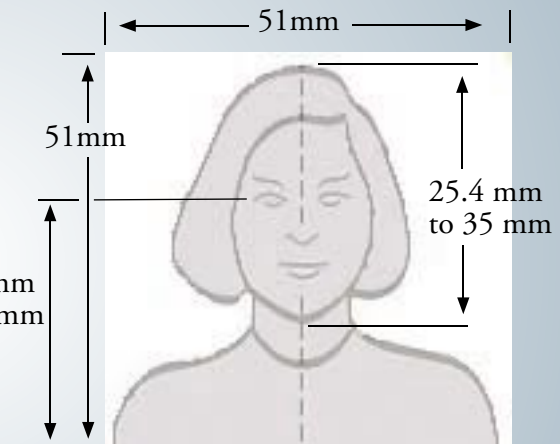
The United States is far from alone in plans to use biometrics in travel documents—members of the European Union and Association of Southeast Asian Nations are taking the same steps to make international travel safer for all.

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/info/info_1336.html] ■

VISA PHOTOGRAPH REQUIREMENTS

When applying for a visa, you must bring a single, unsigned photograph to the interview and the photograph must meet specific criteria:

- It must have been taken within the last six months and it must be the original. Copied or digitally scanned photos cannot be accepted.
- It may be in color or in black and white, but it may not be tinted.
- The size must be 51 x 51 mm square, with your face, centered, measuring not less than 25.4 mm nor more than 35 mm from the top of your head to the bottom of your chin. There should be 28.6 to 35 mm from the bottom of the photo to your eyes.
- The photograph must give a clear, front view of the full face, with eyes open and looking straight ahead, against a white or off-white background.
- Do not wear dark glasses unless you have a certificate showing that you need them for medical reasons. If wearing regular eyeglasses, the eyes must still be visible in the photograph.
- Wear normal street clothes. Do not wear a hat or other head coverings. Some exceptions can be made for religious attire, but nothing can obscure any part of the face.



For more details, check your U.S. Embassy website [http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/US_Embassies.html].

SHOES OFF, ARMS OUT?: NEW TRAVELLING RULES

If you have traveled at all in the past few years, you've probably already stood in security lines while your bags were x-rayed and you and your fellow passengers produced your identification papers numerous times, took cell phones and laptops out of their cases and turned them on, emptied pockets of coins and keys, stripped off your shoes, belts and jewelry, and then stood, arms outstretched, while an electronic wand was waved around your body, possibly to determine what caused all that beeping when you stepped through the metal detector.

Remember: This is a good time to keep your sense of humor, but it is not a good time to make jokes.

Comments about guns, bombs, box cutters, hijackings and anything else related to terrorist activities that have caused the deaths of thousands of innocent travelers will be taken seriously. At the very least, you will be detained—not a good way to start your journey.

It is important to arrive early at your departure site—90 minutes to two hours is the general rule. International travelers usually go through three lines—once at check-in, once for the examination of checked luggage, and once at the personal security check-through. Being late for your flight will not get you moved to the front of these security lines.

To make things move faster for yourself and for those waiting in line behind you, make use of the following tips:

- Read the permitted and prohibited items list: http://www.tsa.gov/publicinterapp/editorial/editorial_1012.xml. Some things that are not allowed in your carry-on baggage can be carried in your checked luggage. And, no, your fingernail clippers will not be taken away from you.
- Keep your passport and boarding pass readily available. You will be asked for these documents more than once, so there is no point in burying them in the bottom of a well-stuffed purse or carry-on bag.
- How you dress for an international flight can make a difference in how quickly you can move through security. Shoes with thick soles or metal stays will set off the metal detector. Since you may be asked to remove your shoes, intricate laces, long rows of clasps, buckles, or other fasteners that take time to get your footwear off and on will hold up the line. Smart travelers wear slip-on shoes, which are also convenient for getting comfortable on long international flights.
- Although you will not be asked to remove your clothes (other than coats, suit jackets, and blazers), clothing with metal

buttons and buckles will definitely cause the beepers to go off and you will need to be “wanded” which, again, uses up time for everybody. Wear comfortable clothing with a minimum of metal fasteners.

- Keep in mind that you will have to remove much of your jewelry if it contains metal, and you will also have to empty your pockets of coins, keys, cell phones, and other bulky items. Even full packs of cigarettes can set off the beepers. It takes time to take things off and put them back on, to empty each of your pockets and fill them up again. Dress accordingly. If you have lots of pocket items, put them in a clear plastic bag so you can pull it out for inspection in one easy go and are not patting yourself down repeatedly while your fellow travelers are glancing at their watches. Even better, put the plastic bag in your carry-on luggage and retrieve it after clearing the



AP/WWP Photo by Stewart F. House

inspection point.

- Pack your valuables and fragile items such as jewelry, cash, cameras, and laptop computers in carry-on baggage only. If you are traveling with a laptop computer, remember that you will have to remove it from its case and turn it on for inspectors. You may be asked to do the same with other electronic devices.
- Put all undeveloped film in your carry-on baggage because the checked-baggage screening equipment could damage it. Don't hold things up by trying to locate and remove it from your suitcase while in an inspection line.
- Do not pack wrapped gifts and do not bring wrapped gifts to the security checkpoint. This will assuredly cause you to be pulled aside for further inspection. And use common sense: if you bought Aunt Berta a great set of knives, pack them—unwrapped—in your checked, not your carry-on luggage. Items confiscated at security checkpoints are not returned, and you wouldn't want to disappoint Aunt Berta.
- If you wish to lock your baggage, use a Transportation Security Administration (TSA)-recognized lock [http://www.tsa.gov/publicinterapp/editorial/editorial_multi_image_with_table_0234.xml]; otherwise you may find the fastener on your bag broken when you arrive at your destination. Checked luggage may randomly undergo additional inspections before being loaded onto the carrier. If your bag is chosen, it will be opened—so it's best to allow unfettered access. ■