


Getting a Visa




"Don't take life too seriously...no one comes out alive!" - Elbert Hubbard

Do I need a visa?

 A visa is a stamp or sticker that goes inside your passport and allows you access into a country. Some countries, many in Europe, do not require one at all, while other countries are strict enough to require one in advance of you arriving on their soil. A country can even detain you in the airport and put you back on the plane if you did not obtain proper permission to enter a country (in the form of a visa). Don't bank your trip on it, do a little research!


Do I need a visa?

 Unfortunately there is no cut and dry answer to this question. To make matters worse, visa requirements can change for countries every year or so, so make sure your source of information is reliable. The best way to find out is to go to your first destination's embassy website to see the requirements for your country of citizenship. Different countries of origin may have different requirements, so you cannot always take another traveler's word for it.

Visa Resources:

 Contact information for [lots of embassies](#) can be found here.

 [Visa requirements for US citizens](#) can be found here.

 You can get a third party company to help with expediting your visa [here](#).

Visa on arrival

📖 Many friendly countries offer a "visa on arrival". This means that you may obtain the necessary visa once you arrive at their airport or border crossing. The length of these visas are typically 30 days, but can be as little as 2 weeks or as long as 1 year! Many times you will be asked to provide at least 1 passport sized photo of yourself, which is why it is a good idea to carry extras in your money pouch.

📖 Sometimes it may be advantageous to obtain the visa in your home country before arrival at your destination, even if they offer it on arrival. This will help you avoid long lines in the airports, and may grant you a longer stay before it expires and you have to make a border crossing. To do this, you have to mail your passport (a frightening concept) along with the completed forms to the country's embassy. They will stamp it, collect a fee, and mail it back to you. If you choose this option, pay the extra for certified mail with tracking options. If nothing else, it will give you a peace of mind if your passport is a few days late coming back.

Rules and regulations

📖 The visa requirements in some countries can be daunting. In many cases, many of the rules are not enforced. One such rule is the "onward ticket" requirement. The claim is that you must show proof of a means to exit the country before you are allowed in. This is rarely enforced and many travelers buy a one way ticket then exit via a border crossing overland to visit neighboring countries. Many times this law is in place to give the officials a mechanism to deny who they want. If you are asked, showing adequate proof of funds, which may simply be a valid credit card or US \$100 cash, will do the trick. For more peace of mind, check the [backpacking forums](#) to hear from other travelers and their experiences.

Border etiquette

📖 Some border officials are grumpier than others. If you catch one on a bad day, they DO have the option of throwing some outdated law at you or making your life difficult. Believe it or not, appearance does matter, and simply cleaning up before you cross a border can make your life easier. Remember that their twitchy stamp hand could change your entire trip so smile, be polite even in the face of their insensitivity, and follow directions closely, including on the forms.

📖 You will often be asked routine questions at the border such as "**what is your business here?**" and "**what is your occupation?**". These guys are hardly interested in your life story or even an accurate answer, so just give honest, yet short answers. Save yourself some effort by not mentioning that you are "**vagabonding**" which will probably create a blank stare. Simply state that you are visiting on holiday as a tourist. If you are unemployed, say that you are a student. We are all students of life. :)

Miscellaneous

📖 Getting a visa stamp in your passport for Israel may make it difficult to enter Arab countries in the Middle East. Jordan and Egypt are still allowing entry at this time, but other Arab countries will discriminate against you! It may be possible to have them put the stamp on a piece of paper that is stapled inside your passport, then tear it out later. Do not try to remove or mutilate the stamp if it goes into your passport, the entire thing could be declared invalid!

📖 Border officials are legendary wasters of passport pages. In fact, I am certain that they are sent to a special school that teaches them how to place a stamp just right to take up maximum room in your passport. Although having every page in your passport stamped is certainly a goal to aim for, it can also mean having to get a new passport before your next trip!

📖 China, while doing an OK job at trying to change their image, is still a communist country and they have some twitchy visa requirements. When filling out the application, avoid mentioning Tibet or other areas of controversy. Also, "journalists" may require a special visa for fear that you will spread the un-edited and non-government approved truth about the interior of the country.

📖 Beware of "administrative boundaries" in countries. For instance, traveling from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong or Macau, counts as leaving the country and uses your one entry on a visa. You have to pay more for multiple entries if you wish to return back to the mainland.

In conclusion

📖 Relax! Crossing a border, especially if it is your first trip, can be a nervous experience. There may be guards with machine guns and lots of guys in uniform. Unless you are carrying a backpack full of drugs (don't even think about it!) you have nothing to worry about and will most likely be welcomed into a new country.

Source: <http://www.startbackpacking.com/visa-5.html>

Visa Information

Consulate Information

The K-State Study Abroad Program does not process or issue visas for students.

All travelers should check the embassy web page of countries they plan to visit for updated visa and travel requirements. Visas can be obtained either directly from the embassy or from a visa service. Submitted paperwork must be completed fully with attention to detail to prevent delays. A visa is usually just a stamp or slip of paper attached to a page in your passport and is the official permission by a government for you to visit or study in their country. There are different types of visas, the most common are study, work, and tourist visas. Be sure that you understand the type of visa you need. Be aware that the visa may require you to leave the country after a specified date or forbid you to work for money. The visa process can be quite lengthy as it requires you to gather supporting documentation including your actual passport (always required - you cannot apply for a visa until you have a passport), your acceptance letter (always required - like the passport, you cannot apply for a visa until you have an Acceptance Letter), financial records and guarantees, proof of health insurance while abroad, an application fee, and so on. Each country outlines their own requirements, including the application fee (the fee charged for the processing of your visa Application), so do not be surprised if your friend's visa requirements are different than yours. Even once you have gathered all of your documentation and completed the visa application, consulates generally require 4-6 weeks for

processing. Some consulates require up to 3 months for processing. Visa types include: tourist, business, and student. You should read carefully to determine which type of visa you need. Some European countries will allow US citizens to visit for short periods of time without a visa. Care should be taken to ensure students studying abroad are allowed this same privilege. First, you should determine whether or not you will need a visa to enter your country of choice before you apply, since not all countries require a visa. An excellent resource to determine whether or not you will need a visa is the U.S. Department of State's Foreign Entry Requirements website:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1229.html

Obtaining A Visa

In order to obtain a visa:

1. Check with the representative of your program to find out if you will need a visa for your study abroad experience. Most programs will aid you in obtaining a visa, supplying instructions and some of the supporting documentation for you; others may require that you obtain the visa yourself prior to departure. Remember, in all cases, you must wait to apply for a visa until after you have been accepted to your study abroad program.

2. If your program provider requires you to obtain your own visa, contact the Consulate or Embassy for the country in which you will be staying for exact details. One of the primary jobs of a consulate is the issuing of visas, and they see a large volume of visa applications everyday. All consulates work on a per jurisdiction basis, meaning that they divide the United States into regions. You must first figure out which consulate has jurisdiction over you. For instance, the French Consulate in Washington, DC is the consulate with jurisdiction over residents of Pennsylvania. A resident of California may not apply for a visa to the French Consulate in Washington. They must instead find the consulate that has jurisdiction over their region. It sounds confusing, but all of the regions of jurisdiction are clearly outlined on the consulates websites. Generally, they will have a line on their website to the following effect: "If you are a resident of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York and Maryland, please click here. All others, please visit the Main Consular Services Website to determine your consular jurisdiction."

To begin the visa process, we recommend that you use the consulate's website for information. You can also call a consulate of the country in which you wish to study. Tell them that you will be studying abroad, for how long, and ask them what the procedures are for obtaining the necessary visa. **Note:** Calling consulates can be very frustrating as they generally have an extremely large volume of requests per day. Because of the volume, most consulates have moved to automated-answering systems which may simply tell you to visit their website (where we recommend you start anyway). Most consular websites are

incredibly thorough and contain all of the information that you will need to obtain and application, complete it, and send it with all of the necessary supporting documentation.

A good way to avoid any frustration is to begin the application process as soon as you are accepted into your program. In most cases, obtaining a visa is a painless enterprise if you allow enough time. It can become difficult if you wait too long to apply. Patience is necessary as you are dealing with another culture. Remember though, you will not be allowed to apply for a visa until you are accepted, so simply wait until you have that Acceptance Letter in your hand and then worry about obtaining a visa.

3. Some consulates require that you apply in person, others will allow you apply by mail. If you apply by mail, it is always advisable to use some sort of Express Service (again, each consulate will outline their policies on which services you may use. Some consulates will allow you to use UPS, some will only permit Federal Express Mail). It is important to use a mail provider like the ones listed above because they offer package tracking, which allows you to check on the status and delivery of your package. Do not send your visa application through regular mail as you could risk losing your passport and other important documents. Below is a list of several consulate phone numbers and websites where you may learn about the visa requirements for that particular country as well as which consulate has jurisdiction over you. If your country is not listed here, you can call (212) 555-1212 for Directory Assistance in New York City, or (202) 555-1212 for Directory Assistance in Washington DC. Additional information is also available on the web at <http://travel.state.gov/foreignentryreqs.html>

Source: <http://www.k-state.edu/studyabroad/visa/index.html>