

# Applying for Your U.S. Passport

**Do I Need to Get a Passport?** Traveling to another country can be a wonderful experience. In most cases, you'll need a to get a passport either to enter your destination country or to return home.

If you're an American citizen planning to travel outside the United States by air, you will need a U. S. passport in order to return home. As of June 1, 2009, if you are taking a cruise that does not include air travel, or if you are traveling on land, you will need a passport to return to the U.S. It's a good idea to get a passport in any case, because most countries require either a passport or, at the very least, a government-issued photo ID and a certified copy of your birth certificate for entry.

You may wish to apply for a passport card instead of the traditional passport book if you only travel to Bermuda, the Caribbean, Canada and Mexico by sea or land. The passport card costs less, but is not valid for air travel or travel to any other international destinations.

**When Should I Apply?** Apply for your passport early. The State Department estimates that it will take four to six weeks to process your passport application. You can renew passports by mail, but you will need to apply in person for your first passport.

**Where do I Apply for My U.S. Passport?** You can apply for your U.S. passport at many post offices, selected regional federal buildings and at some circuit court offices. The easiest way to find your closest passport application acceptance facility is to go to the State Department's website and search by ZIP code. The search form allows you to select handicap access sites and find nearby locations where you can have passport photographs taken.

You can download passport application forms and find out which documents you will need to bring at the State Department's website. Typically, American citizens must present a certified birth certificate copy or a valid U.S. passport as proof of citizenship. Requirements vary for citizens without birth certificates and naturalized citizens. You'll also need a government-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license.

## What Is a U.S. Passport Card?

The U.S. passport card is a credit card-sized identification document. It was designed for people who travel frequently between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda or the Caribbean by land or sea. The passport card contains a radio frequency identification chip as well as the traditional photograph and personal information found in a passport book. The chip links your passport card to records stored in government databases; it does not contain any of your personal information.

**Where Can I Travel With My Passport Card?** You can use your passport card for travel by land or sea to and from Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and the Caribbean. You cannot use the passport card for air travel, nor can you use it for travel to other international destinations. If you plan to travel by air, apply for a passport book instead.

**How Much Does a Passport Card Cost?** A passport card is less expensive than a traditional passport book. Your first-time passport card will cost \$45 (\$35 for children under 16) and will be valid for ten years (five for children). Renewals cost \$20.

**Can I Carry Both Types of Passports?** Yes. If you already hold a valid U.S. passport that was issued after you turned 16, you can apply for a passport card as a mail-in renewal and pay only the \$20 renewal fee.

**How Do I Apply for My Passport Card?** First-time passport card applicants must go in person to a passport application facility and submit a completed passport application form, proof of U.S. citizenship, two passport photos and the required fee.

**WEBSITE:** <http://seniortravel.about.com/od/seniortravelbasics/a/passport.htm>