

FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE ADVICE

- The US Government remains concerned about continued threats. Since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the US Government has issued a number of warnings of potential further terrorist attacks in the US.
- You should continue to expect more stringent security checks at airports and in other public buildings.
- You should be alert to the dangers of car and street crime in cities.
- The US is a hugely popular destination for British travellers and most visits are trouble-free.
- The US will be introducing changes to its entry requirements, with effect from 26 October 2004, for those wishing to enter the US under its Visa Waiver Programme. By that date, all those travelling on the Visa Waiver Programme must have their own machine-readable passport.
- We strongly recommend that you obtain comprehensive travel and medical insurance suitable for any activities planned before travelling.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Crime

You should use common sense and take basic precautions.

- If staying in a hotel, do not leave your door open at any time.
- Avoid wearing expensive jewellery and walking in run-down areas.
- Make a photocopy of the information pages of your Passport and leave it in a safe place separate from your real Passport.

Local Laws and Customs

Do not make off-the-cuff or flippant remarks about bombs or terrorism, especially when passing through US airports.

Laws vary from state to state, including speed limits and the age of consent. So does the age at which you may legally buy and consume alcohol, but this is usually 21 years.

The plant Khat (or Qat) is an illegal narcotic in the US. You will be arrested and detained with the possibility of a prison sentence if you are caught trying to take Khat into the US.

If, for any reason, you get into any difficulties with US Authorities, you should explain to them that you are a British national and ask to speak to a UK consular officer.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Visa Waiver Programme

The US operates a Visa Waiver Programme (VWP), available to most British Citizen passport holders travelling on business, pleasure or transit from where they normally reside and who intend to stay in the US for less than 90 days. The VWP is not available to other categories of British nationals and you should check the data/photograph page of your passport to see whether you are described as a British Citizen. If you are not, you should consult the information on the Visa Waiver Programme on the US Embassy website (details below) for further information.

Some travellers may not be eligible to enter the United States visa free under the VWP. These include people who have been arrested, even if the arrest did not result in a criminal conviction, those with criminal records, (the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act does not apply to U.S. visa law), those with certain serious communicable illnesses, those who have been refused admission into, or have been deported from, the United States, or have previously overstayed on the VWP. Such travellers must apply for special restricted visas. If they attempt to travel without a visa, they may be refused entry into the United States.

From 26 October 2004, all British passport holders, including children, travelling to the USA under the VWP will need their own machine-readable passports (MRP). From 26 October 2004, anyone without a MRP, including children who are currently on a parent's passport, will need a visa to travel to the USA. See paragraph below

on UK passports to find out if you hold a MRP.

Travellers to the United States who are HIV positive are not eligible, under current US law, to travel visa free under the Visa Waiver Programme. They are required to apply for a visa and a waiver of the ineligibility before travelling. Applicants' details will remain confidential and an applicant's HIV status will not be declared on their passport.

For further details on entry requirements for the USA, visit the US Embassy website at: www.usembassy.org.uk or telephone 020 7499 9000, option 1.

UK Passports

All British Passports currently issued in the UK and at British Missions overseas, are machine-readable. However, some older passports issued by British Missions overseas are not. Before travelling to the US and seeking entry under the VWP, you should check your passport. A British Passport is machine readable when the foot of the personal information page (at the back of the passport) bears 2 lines of text as letters, numbers and "<"s. If there are no lines of text, then the passport is not machine-readable. You are advised to check the remaining validity of your passport as soon as you know that you are travelling to the US. Although the US and the UK have an agreement that allows people travelling from one country to the other to enter with a passport that only has six months validity or less, you should nevertheless try to renew your passport beforehand.

On arrival/departure

On 5 January 2004 the US Authorities introduced the US-VISIT Programme. This means that all those aged between 14 and 79 travelling to the US with visas will be finger-scanned and digitally photographed on arrival at passport control. With effect from 30 September 2004, US-VISIT will be extended to all travellers, including those travelling under the Visa Waiver Programme (see above). Special arrangements are in place for travellers with disabilities.

Dual Nationals

A recent change to US law has important implications for dual nationals. If you (or your children, e.g. those born in the US whether or not they have ever held a US passport) are a dual US-UK national travelling between both countries, you should carry both passports with you. US law now requires dual US nationals to enter and depart the USA carrying a valid US passport. They are not entitled to US visas or to travel to the US on the Visa Waiver Programme. US citizens who attempt to travel to the US from the United Kingdom on foreign passports risk being denied boarding pending acquisition of a valid US passport. Further US dual national information can be obtained from the US State Department's website: www.travel.state.gov/travel/uk.html.

US Criminal Records

US Criminal Records are closely linked to databases held by US Immigration Offices at Ports of Entry. If you have a previous conviction in the US, if you have violated the terms of a probation agreement, or if you think you may have a US arrest warrant against you, we strongly advise that you consult the US Embassy in London before you travel to see if you need to obtain a visa. Failure to do so may result in detention and/or deportation. Exclusion periods for aliens with previous convictions are as follows:

3 years - After being found inadmissible as an arriving alien.

10 years - Being ordered removed/excluded.

20 years - After being found inadmissible and having previously been excluded, deported or removed (i.e. illegal re-entry).

Life - Aggravated Felonies.

CONTACT DETAILS

British Embassy
3100 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington DC 20008
(1)(202) 588 6500 Embassy
(1)(202) 588 7800 Consular
(1)(202) 588 7830 British Council