Greetings from the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki, Finland!

For those of you who were able to attend our town hall, thank you for your participation. We greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet so many of you, to hear your questions and concerns firsthand, and to learn about your experiences with the Embassy’s American Citizen Services section. We take your feedback very seriously and are constantly striving for ways to improve our services.

For those who were unable to attend, we hope to have the opportunity to meet you at a future event. As always, if you need to reach us or would like to provide feedback, please send an email to HelsinkiACS@state.gov.

Kind regards,
Jeremy R. Wisemiller
Consul, U.S. Embassy Helsinki

Are you going on a trip this summer? Check out our summer travel tips on page 5

Are you registered to vote? More information on page 7

Register with U.S. Embassy Helsinki Enroll in STEP at step.state.gov

Inside this Issue
- Safety & Security Messaging 2
- International Financial Scams 2
- Passport Check! 3
- Passport Photos 4
- Summer Travel Tips 5
- Schengen Fact Sheet 6
- Voting Information 7
- Embassy Holiday Closures 7
- IRS Taxpayer Abroad 8
- Social Security Number Info 8

U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs Announces Improved Consular Safety and Security Messaging

The mission of the Department of State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs is to protect the lives and serve the interests of U.S. citizens abroad. We provide information to help you assess for yourself the risks of international travel and what steps to take to ensure your safety when you decide to go abroad.

The U.S. Department of State has made it easier for U.S. citizens abroad to get clear, timely, and reliable safety and security information about every country in the world and access it at home or on the go via our mobile-friendly Smart Traveler app.

(Continued on page 2)
Improved Safety and Security Messaging

Before You Travel
You can now access all of our safety and security information on our country specific pages. Before you travel, check the Travel Advisory and Alerts for your destination(s) at travel.state.gov/destination. Be sure to read country-specific details that could affect your travel, such as entry/exit requirements, local laws and customs, health conditions, transportation, and other relevant topics.

Travel Advisories
Travel Advisories have been issued for each country of the world. Travel Advisories follow a consistent format and use plain language to help U.S. citizens find and use important security information. Travel Advisories apply up to four standard levels of advice, give a description of the risks, and provide clear actions U.S. citizens should take to help ensure their safety.

To see a complete list of Travel Advisories for every country in the world, see travel.state.gov/traveladvisories. Click on the color-coded world map for a global view. Click here for information on Finland.

Alerts
U.S. embassies and consulates abroad issue Alerts to inform U.S. citizens of specific safety and security concerns in a particular country, such as demonstrations, crime trends, and weather events. A standard, easy-to-read format makes them easy to access, understand, and take action.

International Financial Scams
Don’t become a victim of financial scams when traveling abroad.

Wallet/Money Drop Scam:
If you see a wallet or cash on the ground, leave it alone. Scammers are waiting to make a claim that you stole the wallet or money. The ultimate goal is to get you to furnish your wallet or money to then grab and flee.

Teahouse/Restaurant/Bar Scam:
A person posing as a student will offer to show a tourist around and take them to a restaurant or bar for drinks. Once at the bar or restaurant, the victim may be provided with a hard to read menu and possibly drinks tainted with substances that further impair their vision or judgement. When the bill comes, the “student” leaves the traveler with an exorbitant bill.

Art/Rug Sale Scam:
An art student or rug salesman may invite a tourist to their studio to look at their artwork or rugs. They may supply tea and snacks as the tourist reviews their items for sale. They then demand compensation for their hospitality.

Airport/Bag Watching Scam:
A friendly person asks a tourist to watch their belongings while they go to the restroom. The bag may have drugs or other illegal contraband. The person then returns with someone posing as a police official who then threatens jail if they are not given a bribe.

Shell/Card Game:
There may be three shells or cups with a small ball under one. There are often accomplices in the audience that make the game seem fair. They then let tourists win several rounds, especially as the stakes get higher. The scammer then palms the ball and the tourist loses - often hundreds of dollars.

For more information about international financial scams visit travel.state.gov.
Spring is a great time to pull out your passport and check its expiration date. Remember, as a general rule, passports should be valid for at least six months when traveling internationally.

Many countries will refuse entry unless a traveler’s passport is set to expire at least six months after the final date of travel. Some countries also require a specific number of empty visa pages or may refuse to accept a traveler’s passport. Take a few minutes, collect your passport, and look at those expiration dates and visa pages! County specific entry/exit guidelines are available on travel.state.gov/destination.

If you do find that you are in need of passport renewal, follow these easy steps and you will be ready to travel in no time.

**Renew your Passport in Person:**

To renew your passport in person, you will need:
1. Your most recent U.S. passport (book or card):
2. Proof of identity (at least two original or certified copies of the following): valid passport of any country, driver’s license; national ID; U.S. or State ID; U.S. military ID.
3. Completed Form DS-11 passport application.
4. One new 2×2 inches (5x5cm) U.S. sized passport photograph that meets the standard requirements.
5. Passport Fee.
6. A registered, self-addressed, stamped envelope with correct postage to return your passport.
7. Schedule a passport appointment. ACS Appointment System.

Review all passport services and requirements on our website.

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**Important Notice:**

**US Passport Execution Fee Increase**

Effective April 2, 2018, the passport execution fee will increase from $25 to $35 for U.S. passport applicants using Form DS-11, including first-time applicants over age 16, children under age 16, and applicants who reapply after reporting their previous passport lost or stolen. Accordingly, the total passport fee for such applicants will increase by $10. For more details, please visit the Embassy website or travel.state.gov.

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**New!! Thursday morning passport appointments are now available.**

The American Citizen Services (ACS) unit offers passport services on Tuesday afternoons and Thursday mornings. You can schedule an appointment through the ACS Appointment System.

**Renew your Passport by Mail**

This information applies if you are 16 or older and replacing a 10-year passport that was issued less than 15 years ago.

1. Your most recent U.S. passport,
2. One new 2×2 inches (5x5cm) U.S. sized passport photograph that meets the standard requirements,
3. A completed and signed Form DS-82,
4. A registered, self-addressed, stamped envelope with correct postage to return your passport.
5. Consular Fee: Payment must be made in person at the Embassy. Please see Fees and Payment Methods.

Send the DS-82 to:
U.S. Embassy Helsinki,
American Citizen Services
Itäinen Puistotie 14B
00140 Helsinki
Bad photos are the number one reason passport applications get held up during the application process. In 2015, the State Department received more than 215,000 unacceptable passport photos. Submitting a passport application with a bad photo will delay processing of your application and could interfere with planned travel. The following are some of the most common reasons photos are rejected:

1. **Glasses** - As of November 2016, customers applying for or renewing their passport must remove glasses for their passport photo.

2. **Overexposed or Underexposed** - Photos that are too bright or that show shadows on your face will cause problems. Ensure photos are clear, reflecting your true skin tone. Do not use photo filters.

3. **Old Photo** - The photo needs to be taken within 6 months of submission.

4. **Image Size** - The photo should be 2 x 2 inches (5 x 5 centimeters). No selfies. Photos that are taken too far away or too close can not be accepted. You can use the smart photo tool on travel.state.gov to help with picture selection.

5. **Low Quality Image or Paper** - Photos that are blurry, grainy, pixelated, or printed on the wrong paper. Photos should be high resolution and not damaged.

6. **Wrong Background Color** - Passport photos should have a plain white or off-white background.

7. **Hat or Head Covering** - Both are permitted with a signed statement identifying religious or medical purposes. Your face and hairline must also be visible with no shadows on your face.

Now that the most common photo mistakes have been covered, go to the photo requirement page on travel.state.gov to learn more about submitting the correct passport photo.
Summer Travel Tips

Stay Connected. Register with STEP
Enroll in the U.S. Smart Traveler Enrollment Program to receive current safety information on your destination country. STEP also allows the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs to notify you quickly when there is an incident such as a natural disaster or family emergency. Follow them on Facebook and Twitter. Remember to stay connected with loved ones while abroad so they know you are safe.

Security Screening
Arriving to the airport early will ensure that you get through security checks in a timely manner. However, U.S. government entities want to further improve your experience with security through several innovative programs such as TSA Pre✓® and Mobile Passport Control. Both initiatives are designed to save you time and frustration when going through security in the United States. Another service that is worth considering is Global Entry from U.S. Customs and Border Protection. This program is designed to further streamline the entry process into the United States and get you through immigration and customs as quickly as possible.

Obey Local Laws
An arrest or accident during your time abroad can result in a difficult legal situation. Your U.S. citizenship does not make you exempt from full prosecution under another country’s criminal justice system. Many countries impose harsh penalties for violations that would be considered minor in the United States or Finland. If you find yourself in a legal jam, contact the closest U.S. consulate, U.S. consular agency, or the U.S. embassy for assistance. Keep in mind, U.S. consular employees cannot arrange for local officials to release a detained American citizen.

Health
Travel.State.Gov and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offer information about your health while traveling. The CDC has a travelers’ health webpage that provides vaccines, medicine, and travel advice. You can also download their apps TravWell and Can I Eat This? to your phone. Interested in learning about travel insurance or what to do in case you experience an emergency or illness? Travel.state.gov provides information on insurance providers for overseas coverage and your health abroad to better assist with pre-travel preparation. Travel websites also recommend carrying copies of travel insurance and passports on your person or in a money belt so they can be found easily by medics or emergency personnel.

Visa Question?
Do you have a friend or family member with questions about U.S. visas? The Department of State hosts a “First Fridays” Facebook chat, held the first Friday of each month, to answer visa questions. Chats address a different visa topic each month. Check the First Friday Facebook page to learn about the next scheduled chat.

Be Prepared
Make sure your credit cards and telephone work at your final destination. Inform your card carrier of your upcoming trip and inquire about international fees. It might be also useful to download apps, like Google Maps, Google Translate, or iTranslate, that will help you get around on your trip. Make copies of your passport and other identification in case they are lost or stolen. Don’t forget to check travel.state.gov for important travel information before you go on your trip. They offer a traveler’s checklist and country specific information to assist with travel planning.

Don’t forget to check the expiration date on your passport. #TravelSafetyGoals
There are 26 European countries that are party to the Schengen agreement, which eliminates internal border controls between them. Once you enter one Schengen country you may travel continuously for up to 90 days among the member countries.

If you are traveling for business or tourism:

- You don’t need a visa for the initial entry into the Schengen area, but you must have a passport valid three months beyond the proposed stay. For example, for a two-week business trip, the passport must be valid for four months; for a two-month holiday the passport must be valid for five months.

Note: Travelers for business or tourism are permitted to stay in the Schengen area for 90 days within a six month period. Once the 90 day maximum is reached, leaving for a brief period and reentering the area does not entitle a traveler to 90 more days within the Schengen states. The traveler would need to remain outside of the Schengen zone for 90 days before reentering without a visa.

If you are traveling for reasons other than business or tourism (employment, study, internship, etc.):

- You may need to obtain a visa before you leave the U.S. depending on the host country. Check with the embassy or consulate of the country or countries to which you are traveling for their specific requirements.

Although European Union regulation require that non-EU visitors obtain a stamp in their passports upon initial entry to a Schengen country, many borders are not staffed with officers carrying out this function. If you want to be sure your entry is properly documented, you must ask for a stamp at an official point of entry. Without the stamp, you may be questioned and asked to prove how long you have been in the Schengen zone.

The 26 Member countries of the Schengen Agreement Zone are:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Liechtenstein
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Slovak Republic
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
Primary Elections Have Begun - Register and request your absentee ballots for all 2018 elections now at [FVAP.gov](https://FVAP.gov).

This year the entire House of Representatives and a third of the U.S. Senate are up for election. Don’t miss your opportunity to vote in your state’s primary election, as it will determine who is on the November 2018 general election ballot. To register and request your absentee ballot, visit [FVAP.gov](https://FVAP.gov) to complete a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA).

The following states have elections within the next 90 days.

**April – Within Next 30 Days:**
- April 8 - *Special Election*: Arizona Congressional District 8 Special General Election (Maricopa County).

**May – Within Next 60 Days:**
- May 8: Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, West Virginia
- May 15: Idaho, Nebraska, Oregon, Pennsylvania
- May 22: Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Texas

**June – Within Next 90 Days:**
- June 5: Alabama, California, Iowa, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota
- June 12: Maine, Nevada, North Dakota, South Carolina, Virginia
- June 19: Arkansas, District of Columbia
- June 26: Colorado, Maryland, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) recommends that all U.S. citizens overseas send in a FPCA every January to ensure receipt of absentee ballots for all 2018 federal elections. Now is the time to update your mailing address and absentee ballot request information to reflect any changes since the 2016 general election.

To register and request your ballots, complete a FPCA using the online assistant ([fvap.gov/military-voter/registration-ballots](https://fvap.gov/military-voter/registration-ballots)). You may also use the fillable PDF ([fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fpca.pdf](https://fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fpca.pdf)) or pick up a hardcopy version from a Voting Assistance Officer at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate’s American Citizen Services Office.

Not voting in the states listed above? Find your state’s primary election dates at [FVAP.gov](https://FVAP.gov). To find your state's election website for specific information on candidates, elections, contact information, and links to your local election offices, visit FVAP's contact page ([fvap.gov/info/contact](https://fvap.gov/info/contact)).

**Remember, your vote counts! Be absent but accounted for!**

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**Embassy Holiday Closures**

U.S. Embassy Helsinki will be closed in observance of the following Finnish and U.S. holidays:

- **Monday, April 2, 2018**: Easter Monday  
  *(Finnish Holiday)*
- **Tuesday, May 1, 2018**: May Day  
  *(Finnish Holiday)*
- **Thursday, May 10, 2018**: Ascension Day  
  *(Finnish Holiday)*
- **Monday, May 28, 2018**: Memorial Day  
  *(U.S. Holiday)*
- **Friday, June 22, 2018**: Midsummer’s Eve  
  *(Finnish Holiday)*
We often receive inquiries regarding Social Security related services, especially about the requirements for obtaining a social security number.

For a first-time applicant:
First-time applicants must submit form SS-5, along with proof of citizenship, age, and identity. Citizenship may be established with a U.S. passport or birth certificate. The Federal Benefits Unit (FBU) in Oslo will accept a notarized copy of a Consular Report of Birth Abroad certified by a U.S. Embassy as proof of citizenship for children under age five. Identity of a child may be established through a notarized copy of a U.S. passport certified by a U.S. embassy. Proof of identity from the applying parent must also be submitted and can be established via a U.S. issued passport, state identification, or U.S. driver’s license.

First time applicants over the age of 12 must appear at the U.S. Embassy for an in-person interview. More information regarding documentation can be found on the required documents page of the SSA webpage.

For a SSN name change:
Applicants must mail form SS-5, original document of name change, and a notarized copy of their U.S. passport directly to the Oslo Federal Benefits Unit (FBU). More information about changing your name can be found on the change my name webpage through the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Contact Oslo FBU for further information at fbu.oslo@ssa.gov or visit the Oslo FBU webpage to learn more about their services.

U.S. Embassy Helsinki offers no fee notarized copies of U.S. passports and Consular Reports of Birth Abroad. Schedule a notarial appointment via our ACS Appointment System for this service.

Taxpayers Living Abroad
If you are a U.S. citizen or resident alien, the rules for filing income, estate, and gift tax returns and paying estimated taxes are generally the same whether you are in the United States or abroad. Your worldwide income is subject to U.S. income tax, regardless of where you reside.

When to File
If you are a U.S. citizen or resident alien residing overseas, or are in the military on duty outside the U.S., on the regular due date of your return, you are allowed an automatic 2-month extension to file your return without requesting an extension. For a calendar year return, the automatic 2-month extension is to June 15. Note that you must pay any tax due by April 15 or interest will be charged starting from April 15.

Where to File
If you are a U.S. citizen or resident alien (including a green card holder) and you live in a foreign country, mail your U.S. tax return to:
Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service Center Austin, TX 73301-0215

Electronic Filing (e-file)
Taxpayers with an AGI (Adjusted Gross Income) within a specified threshold can electronically file their tax return for free using Free File. Taxpayers with an AGI greater than the specified threshold can either use the Free File Fillable Forms or e-file by purchasing commercial software. A limited number of companies provide software that can accommodate foreign addresses. To determine which will work best for you, get help choosing a software provider.

For additional information visit the International Taxpayer webpage for the IRS.