

# Embassies and Consulates Abroad

## What you can expect from government agencies

So you've booked a vacation to another country and you're about to travel into the unknown. It's always nice to have a bit of support while you're away. There are American Embassies in more than 10 capital cities worldwide and each has a consular section attached that helps out U.S. citizens abroad. All consulates have local employees assisting the American staff, so they're a great place to get expert local knowledge. Read on for the Cheapflights guide to what you can and can't expect them to help out with.

## Before You Go

**Tourist Registration:** It's important to register with the embassy in the country that you're planning on traveling to, especially if you're likely to be there for more than a month or the country is in anyway unstable. You can register before you go with the Department of State. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/registration/registration\\_4789.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/registration/registration_4789.html)

**Consular Information Sheets (CIS):** These are issued by the consulates and are available for every country in the world. They contain information on entry requirements, crime and security, areas of instability and other relevant details for your chosen destination - a "must-read" before traveling. You can find them from the individual consulates abroad, from the Consular Affairs automated fax system (tel: (202) 647-3000), from the Office of Overseas Citizens Services travelers' hotline (tel: (202) 647-5225), or online at the Dept. Of State - <http://travel.state.gov/>

**Travel Warnings:** Are issued by the embassies and are available from all the same sources. They contain up-to-the-minute warnings about destinations, including recommendations of when to defer travel if the country is unstable and / or the U.S. has no relationship with the country and you would not be able to receive support if you went there.

**Embassy Web sites:** Check out the Web site of the embassy in the country where you're traveling. As well as warnings and information that you can get from the CIS and travel warnings alerts, many of the sites contain local information, details on relations with the U.S., history, cultural news and more, which can help you to learn what to expect from a country before you get there. [A full list of embassies around the world](#) is available from the Department of State at <http://www.usembassy.gov/>

## While Abroad

If you've registered with the embassy before you go, they can help you out once you're on your trip. The main aim of the consulate is to help American citizens in emergencies, and they cover the problems you could experience, including:

**Replacing lost passports:** If you've lost your passport or it has been stolen, the consulate can replace it, usually within 24 hours. Report the loss or theft as soon as you can to the consulate and they will arrange a replacement. If your passport has been stolen, you need to report the theft to the local police and get a reference of the crime before you go to the consulate.

**Help with medical assistance:** If you become ill, the consulate can provide you with a local list of English-speaking doctors and medical facilities. In serious cases of illness, they can also alert family and friends back home if you need them to do so.

**Help getting money:** It could be a nightmare running out of money overseas, or having your wallet and credit cards stolen. Sadly, the consulate cannot simply give you money, but they can help contact family to wire money (and, in many cases, receive the money for you) or contact your bank or employer to send you a loan.

**Visiting you in jail:** Of course, you hope it's never going to happen, but if you are arrested and put in jail while abroad, the consulate will help. The consulate will provide you with a list of local recommended attorneys, inform you of local laws and contact family and friends to alert them of the situation. A consular representative can never get you out of jail, but they can help with legal arrangements and make sure you avoid discrimination.

**Missing persons:** If someone you know has gone missing when traveling, contact the embassy of the country and they will try to locate them. This is considerably easier if the person has registered in advance with the embassy.

**Assistance in case of death:** This is, of course, the worst-case scenario imaginable. In the case of an American death abroad, the embassy will contact family and friends, arrange for the return of the body to America and prepare a Report of Death to be sent to the next of kin for insurance and estate matters. Note however, that the consulate cannot pay for the costs of the return or disposition of the body and that this can be a lengthy and expensive process.

**All other emergencies:** If there has been an emergency at home and family need to contact you, or there has been a disaster or emergency in the country in which you are traveling, the consulate will attempt to relay messages between the family and the traveler. To pass messages on to travelers, contact the State Department Overseas Citizens Services (tel: (202) 647-5225) who will pass on the message to the appropriate consulate abroad.

But even for the large majority of vacations where everything runs smoothly, the consulate can still be a useful resource. Services that they can provide for non-emergencies include:

**The latest news from the U.S.:** Though it is possible to get American newspapers and TV programs in many countries abroad, if you're having difficulty finding out what's going on back home, the embassy and consulate will be up to date with the latest news.

**Birth Registration:** A Report of Birth Abroad of a U.S. Citizen can be issued by the consulate, which is proof of citizenship for all purposes.

**Cultural programs:** Many, though not all, embassies and consulates have programs that detail important cultural events of the country, which can be a great way for travelers to learn about and participate in local cultures. Details will often be available on the Web site, so check before you go.

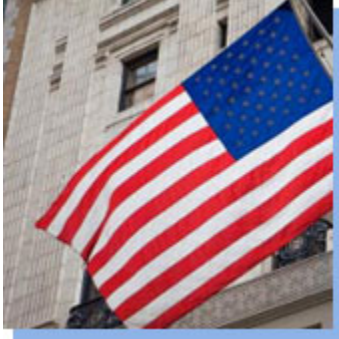
**Local information:** Consulates can provide details of local holidays and festivals, as well as in-depth information about the country, which you're unlikely to find in any guide book.

**Voting:** You can register to vote by absentee ballot at the local embassy or consulate.

## What They Can't Do

Don't expect the embassy or consulate to be your best friend, mom, bodyguard, travel agent or personal bank.

Consulates cannot loan money, arrange travel, get you out of trouble with the law, act as an interpreter, or help you find a job.



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