

Frequently Asked Questions About U.S. Visas

What is a U.S. visa?

A citizen of a foreign country who seeks to enter the United States generally must first obtain a U.S. visa, which is placed in the traveler's passport, a travel document issued by the traveler's country of citizenship.

Certain international travelers may be eligible to travel to the United States without a visa if they meet the requirements for visa-free travel. The Visa section of this website is all about U.S. visas for foreign citizens to travel to the United States.

(Note: U.S. citizens don't need a U.S. visa for travel, but when planning travel abroad may need a visa issued by the embassy of the country they wish to visit.)

How do I read and understand my visa? What do the dates mean?

As soon as you receive your visa, check to make sure all your personal information printed on the visa is correct. If any of the information on your visa does not match the information in your passport or is otherwise incorrect, please contact the issuing authority (i.e. the U.S. Embassy) immediately.

The expiration date of your visa is the last day you may use the visa to enter the United States. It does not indicate how long you may stay in the United States. Your stay is determined by the Department of Homeland Security at your port of entry. Be aware, however, that staying significantly longer than you indicated at the time of your application can negatively affect your ability to receive another U.S. visa.

Further information about interpreting your visa can be found at the Department of State's [Consular Affairs website](#).

How much time does it take to get a visa?

Successful applications are usually processed within 2 – 5 working days. If you were advised at your interview that your application was refused under Section 221(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) pending additional processing, you should allow approximately 60 days from the date of the **visa interview** for your application to be processed. In some cases, however, processing can take six months or longer. Please see "Administrative Processing" for further information.

Please note that we cannot guarantee visa issuance or visa processing times in advance. All processing periods quoted are estimates only. If you require a visa, we recommend that you apply well in advance of your intended travel date and do not make non-refundable travel arrangements until you have been issued a visa and are in receipt of your passport.

How long does the interview last?

The interview typically lasts just a few minutes. Prior to the interview staff will collect, data-enter and review your application and a set of your fingerprints will be electronically scanned.

Do I need a notarized letter of invitation in order to apply?

Letters of invitation are not required.

What additional documents do I need to qualify for a visa?

Review this information on [Visa Types](#) for details on documentary requirements for your type of visa. For most applicants, the only documents you are required to bring to your interview are a printed copy of your appointment letter, your DS-160 confirmation page, one 5x5cm photograph taken within the last 6 months, your current passport and all previous passports (if available).

You may choose to bring whatever other evidence you believe will help to establish your strong ties to Belarus. However, more important than any document are your answers during the visa interview. Give clear and honest answers about your planned trip to the United States and your reasons for returning to Belarus.

If you have education or work experience in a specialized scientific field (including applied sciences like engineering or computer science), it may also be helpful to bring a current resume and a list of your scientific publications.

Finally, we advise you to familiarize yourself with the list of items you should NOT bring to your visa interview. This list includes cell phones or other electronics, large handbags or luggage, food, and weapons of any kind.

Why are visas to Belarusians issued only for one year?

The U.S. bases its maximum period of **visa** validity for Belarusian on the basis of the visa validity offered to American citizens who wish to visit Belarus. Please note that a visa valid for 12 months means the visa holder may use the visa to request entry the U.S. at any time during the 12 month validity period. It does not mean the visa is valid for a twelve month stay. It is the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (www.cbp.gov) officials at ports of entry determine if a person can enter the U.S. and, if so, for how long they may remain.

How much to I have to pay for a U.S. visa?

The processing fee for tourist, business, and student visas is \$160. For petition based visas, the fee is \$190. The fee is payable in cash, U.S. dollars only, on the day of your appointment. Please note

that the fee is not refundable, regardless of whether your application is approved. Please also note that the visa fee is non-transferrable (it can only be used for one person) and that a fee paid in one country cannot be used in another country.

Which tourist agencies work with the Embassy?

The U.S. Embassy does work with any tourist agencies. Every application, whether filed by an applicant him/herself or with the assistance a travel agency, is considered individually based on the individual applicant's own merits.

Can someone NOT from Belarus apply for a visa in Minsk?

Any foreigner permanently residing in Belarus may apply for a visa in Minsk if he/she meets the criteria outlined under "First Time Applicants" and "Applicants renewing their visas" on our website at <https://by.usembassy.gov/visas/>.

My passport has expired, but the U.S. visa in it is still valid. Do I need to apply for a new visa?

If your visa is still valid you can travel to the United States but you must take both passports (old and new). Both of the passports must indicate the same nationality, and your name must be identical. Please note: A valid visa is not guarantee of entry into the United States. Final determination of entry is at the sole discretion of the CBP Officer reviewing the documentation.

If your name changed due to marriage, you can travel to the United States with both passports but you must carry a copy of your original marriage certificate translated into English by a certified translator.

My passport is more than 10 years old. Embassies of the Schengen Treaty countries will not accept passports that are more than 10 years old. Can I apply for a U.S. visa?

Yes. The only validity requirement to Belarusian passports we have is that they should be valid for another 6 months from the date of your departure from the United States.

Does the U.S. Embassy in Minsk issue immigrant visas?

No. Belarusian citizens applying for immigrant visas must do so at the [U.S. Embassy in Warsaw](#).

Can I work in the U.S.?

You may not work on a tourist or transit visa in the United States. If you wish to work in the USA, please see "[Work Visas](#)".

How much money can I bring into the United States?

You may bring into or take out of the country, including by mail, as much money as you wish. But if the total sum is more than \$10,000, you must note it on your customs declaration when you arrive. Ask the Customs officer for the Currency Reporting Form (CF 4790). The penalties for not complying can be severe.

If you have any questions about U.S. Customs regulation visit U.S. Customs Web Page <http://www.cbp.gov>.

How many bottles of vodka can I bring into the United States?

You may bring into the U.S. (without duty/tax charges) one liter (33.8 fl. oz.) of alcoholic beverages if you are 21 years old, if it is for your own use or as a gift, and if it does not violate the laws of the state in which you arrive. Federal regulations allow you to bring more than one liter of alcoholic beverage for personal use, but you will have to pay duty and Internal Revenue Service tax.

Can I take some sausage and 'salo' as a treat for my relatives in the United States?

Can I bring fruits and vegetables from my own garden to treat my relatives in the U.S.?

You MAY NOT bring fresh, dried or canned meats or meat products from most foreign countries. Also, you may not bring in food products that have been prepared with meat. It is best not to bring fresh fruits or vegetables into the United States. See <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/travel/> or www.aphis.usda.gov/ppg/permits for information.

How can I bring my cat/dog into the United States?

Cats and dogs must be free of evidence of diseases communicable to humans when they are examined at the port of entry. If the cat does not seem to be in good health, the owner may have to pay for an additional examination by a licensed veterinarian. Dogs may require rabies vaccination. If you are bringing your pet to the U.S. on an airplane, you should check with the airline about their requirements for transporting animals. Many airlines require a certificate of health from a veterinarian. Please visit the [U.S. Customs question and answer page](#) for more information.

I have just come from the U.S. where I was on an exchange program sponsored by U.S. Government. My J-1 visa says "Subject to a two-year residency requirement." Does that mean I cannot travel to the US for 2 years?

The two-year residency requirement means you are not eligible to for a work visa (H or L – see "[Work Visas](#)") or an immigrant visa until you have been physically present in your country of residence for at least two years after the completion of your J1 program. You may travel abroad, including to the U.S., as much as you would like, but you may not obtain a work visa or an immigrant visa until the two year requirement is met.

Can my American friends, relatives or business partners help me to get a visa?

Visa applicants must qualify for the visa according to their own circumstances, not on the basis of recommendations or sponsorship from an American relative, business associate, or other sponsoring organization.

Miscellaneous Questions

Does the U.S. Embassy assist people in finding their relatives in the U.S. or solving legal issues like tracing inheritance, etc.?

The U.S. Embassy in Minsk has neither the authority nor the means to perform such services. You may contact the Minsk city Bar Association (+375 17 285 2105, +375 17 285 2718, +375 17 233 9802), the Minsk Region Bar association (+375 17 200 6183, +375 17 200 7453) and/or the Belarusian Red Cross Office +375 17 327 1417, <http://redcross.by>)

Does the U.S. Embassy provide apostilles?

The Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Minsk does not provide apostilles. Please see our [page on apostilles](#) for more information.

I intended to renew my visa, and submitted my electronic visa application before the date on which it would be a year from my last visa expiration date, but when I came to the Embassy, my application was not accepted by the consular staff?

We can accept your renewal application if your visa expired fewer than 12 before the day you come to the Embassy to pay the fee and submit your application.

Visa Denial Questions

The Consular Officer spoke to me only for two minutes and then denied my application for a visa. How can one get any impression of a person in such a short time?

Unfortunately, due to the large number of applications, consular officers have a very limited time period in order to consider each individual application.

I had all the documents about my job, property and relatives. I think I have very strong ties. Why was I denied?

As each person's situation is different, there is no single reason that explains all refusals. While the most common reason for a visa refusal is a failure to demonstrate strong ties to your home country, another common reason for a refusal is that during the interview, you did not demonstrate to the officer's satisfaction that you meet the qualifications for the visa category, or that your planned activities in the U.S. are allowed by that category.