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**16 Tips to Prevent Passport Problems**

**By William Manor**

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Carelessness is the number one reason for a passport application being rejected or delayed or for a passport being lost, stolen, or damaged.

What steps are necessary to prevent these things from happening? How can you take care of your passport? Below are 16 practical tips you can follow to acquire your passport, keep it in your possession, and preserve it in good condition.

**Before You Leave On Your Trip**

1. Check to see if you even need a passport.

Countries can, and often do, change foreign entry requirements. If you arrive at the airport without the required documents, you'll be denied boarding privileges. And, of course, This isn't covered by travel insurance.

Currently, more than 80% of the world's countries require a valid passport for entrance. It's important to verify the foreign entry requirements for the country you plan to visit as early as possible.

2. Apply for your passport early.

You should apply for a new passport at least 90 days before your departure date. For a renewal, begin the process 8 to 11 months before your passport expires. Why so early? Many countries require that your passport have six to eight months of validity remaining before they will issue a visa.

3. Fill out the correct form correctly.

## 16 Tips to Prevent Passport Problems

Each type of passport service has specific criteria that must be met. Make sure you get the right application form, and then fill it in carefully. Double-check each entry. Ask a friend or relative to verify it as well. Errors made on the application form can lead to delays, or even rejection of your passport request.

4. Follow the specifications for the required documents exactly.

When applying for a new passport, the most frequently used documents are a certified birth certificate for proof of citizenship along with a valid driver's license for proof of your identity.

Your birth certificate must be a certified copy with a registrar's raised, embossed, impressed, or multicolored seal, registrar's signature, and the date the certificate was filed with the registrar's office, which must be within 1 year of your birth. No photocopies are accepted. Your driver's license must be more than six months old.

For a passport renewal, your previous passport serves as both proof of citizenship and proof of identity. To be valid, it cannot be mutilated, altered, or damaged in any way.

You must send two identical passport photos taken within the last 6 months. These passport photos must be 2 x2 with a plain white or off-white background. They have to be a full-face view with the head being from 1 to 1 3/8 inches from the chin to the top of the head. The photos can be either color or black and white.

5. Sign both the passport application form and your check.

Surprisingly, many people forget to sign either the passport application form or their check to Passport Services. Once again, check everything twice, or even three times.

6. Request additional pages.

Are you a frequent flyer? Request a 48-page passport (at no additional cost). It will allow you to travel longer before having to replace it.

7. Sign your passport and fill out the emergency information.

When your passport arrives, check to see that all the information contained in it is correct. If it is, sign it and fill in your current address and the name of a person to contact in case of emergency. If not, return it to the State Department for correction.

8. Make two copies of your passport and photos.

Give one copy of your passport to a friend or relative who can be easily contacted in case of an emergency. Take the other copy and the extra photos with you on your trip. If you use an online document storage service, you can scan your passport and upload a copy. That way, you can access it from almost anywhere in the world.

## 16 Tips to Prevent Passport Problems

### While You're Away

9. Always keep your passport in a safe place!

Never leave your passport in your baggage, backpack, purse, car, hotel room, or anywhere else! When you must carry your passport, keep it in a money belt or inside coat pocket. Upon arrival at the hotel, put your passport in the hotel safe.

10. Never lay your passport down anywhere.

Passports placed on a counter, phone booth or table can be easily forgotten or stolen. Practice the habit of immediately putting your passport away after using it.

11. If you travel as a family or as part of a group, don't let one person carry all the passports.

The odds are much greater for one person carrying all the passports to lose them or have them stolen than for all the passports to be stolen or lost if each individual owner carries them.

12. Never let anyone leave your presence with your passport.

When you're checking in at the airport, passing through customs, exchanging currency, or doing anything else that requires you to show your passport, never allow the person examining your passport to leave your presence. If the person starts to leave, call their attention and request to accompany them.

Law enforcement records show that U.S. passports are sometimes used for unlawful entry into the United States or by criminals abroad seeking to establish another identity. You would be pretty embarrassed if your name were associated with illegal activities.

13. Immediately report the loss of your passport.

If you are careful and follow the tips above, you shouldn't have any problem with the loss of your passport.

If it does occur though, immediately notify the local police and then proceed to the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Take the copy of your passport and extra photos with you. You will be issued a temporary passport that you can replace upon returning to the United States.

### After You Return

14. Schedule your passport renewal.

Check the expiration date and make a reminder to renew your passport at the proper time. Remember, you should begin the process 8 to 11 months prior to the expiration date. Put the reminder somewhere where it won't be forgotten.

## 16 Tips to Prevent Passport Problems

### 15. Check the number of blank pages remaining.

Some countries require a blank page for their visa. If you plan a future trip on which you will visit various countries, you might need the same number of pages as countries to be visited.

If you do not have an adequate number of pages but your passport is not due for renewal, you can request additional pages.

### 16. Store your passport in a safe place.

If you have a safe in your home, keep your passport there. If not, consider a safety deposit box at your local bank.

Follow the practical tips above and you can easily avoid passport problems and more fully enjoy your international travels.

William Manor is the owner of U.S. Passport Service Guide, a very useful and comprehensive resource for U.S. citizens who travel internationally.

## **Get Your U.S. Passport Fast**

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Where do you turn when you need to get your passport in a hurry? The U.S. Department of State Passport Services claims to process passports in six weeks for regular services and in two weeks for expedited services. Neither is guaranteed and it often takes longer, especially during peak travel season.

To get your passport processed and returned to you within 10 business days to as little as 24 hours, you have to rely on a private passport expeditor.

The National Association of Passport and Visa Services says that there are approximately 100 expeditors operating in the United States. If you plan to use one of these services, choose one that has an easy-to-follow application process, online tracking, money-back guarantee and reasonable fees.

To read reviews of online expeditors and get helpful tips for getting your passport, visit our web site <http://www.us-passport-service-guide.com>

William Manor is the owner of U.S. Passport Service Guide, a very useful and comprehensive resource for U.S. citizens who travel internationally.

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