



US Coast Guard Auxiliary

International Affairs and Interpreter Support Directorate

US Passport Requirements now include Canada, Caribbean and Mexico

And recently, with the tightening of Homeland Security, your passport isn't just a ticket to places—it's your ticket back. If you're finally taking that romantic trip to [Europe](#) or you've bought tickets for an Asian adventure, your passport is mandatory for travel to most foreign countries. And beginning on Jan. 23, 2007, the document will become even more essential for zipping around North America. The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will require that anyone who takes a flight to [Canada](#), [Mexico](#) or the [Caribbean](#) must have a passport or other approved identity card.

Such a powerful document needs protection—these days especially. Identity theft is a constant danger, and the last thing anyone wants is his or her name attached to gun-running or international fraud. More important, your passport is the most effective proof that you are, in fact, you. A passport makes life very easy, but a stolen passport can make life very, very hard. If you've never had a passport before, here are some tips on how to obtain one, how to carry it, and what to do if—heaven forbid—someone nabs it while you're leaning over a table of souvenirs.

How to get a passport

If you've never applied for a passport, the process can be intimidating—after all, it's not often you're dealing with the U.S. Department of State. Really, though, it's pretty straightforward: First, you have to get an official passport photo of yourself. This can be done in lots of places: Camera stores, pharmacy chains, FedEx Kinko's outlets—any company outfitted to develop film is usually authorized to take a passport photo. Next, you have to track down a copy of your birth certificate, fill out your passport application (inelegantly called the DS-11), and turn in your materials along with the \$97 fee at the nearest passport facility (<http://iafdb.travel.state.gov>). Do this as soon as you can—it can take several weeks, sometimes longer, to receive your passport. You can request expedited service, but faster delivery costs an extra \$60.

Getting a passport may seem like an annoying process, but there are no tests to pass, and adult passports are valid for 10 years—which means a full decade of carefree travel by air, sea and rental car

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