

**NOAA TRAVEL REGULATIONS (NTR) Chapter 306 Foreign Travel**

***Prepared by the Financial Policy & Compliance Division, Chief Financial Officer***

**FOREWORD**

The Temporary Duty (TDY) NTR supplements the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104790> and Department of Commerce (DOC) Regulations.

This handbook rescinds all previously issued NOAA Travel Transmittals and Advisories and is intended to help guide employees through the many Federal and Departmental travel regulations to ensure overall travel policy compliance. This handbook is applicable to all DOC bureaus serviced by the NOAA Finance Office and covers but is not limited to an exhaustive or detailed exposition on the subject. The guidance documented herein provides more bureau specific detailed travel policies and business processes.

Chapter 301, TDY Allowances, and Chapter 302, Relocation Travel, are not included in this update and can be found at the following website: <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/TR.NOAAreg.html>.

Please visit <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/Travel_policy.html> for more travel information.

 \*This link will require you to leave a United States Government website for an external website.

 This link does not constitute an endorsement of any information, product, or service on the

 external site.

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# CHAPTER 1. Administrative Requirements for Foreign Travel.

1. **Foreign Travel** **Requirements and Documents** can be found on the NOAA Travel Office (NTO) website: <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/FT.html>
2. **The NTO is responsible for:**
	1. Sending Line/Corporate Office Financial Management Centers (FMC) a *Passport/Counter Threat Awareness Training (CTAT) report* to review monthly to ensure employees are kept up to date on their official passport(s) and CTATs;
	2. Processing foreign travel authorizations (TAs) in E2 as long as there is an up to date CTAT and official passport on file at the NTO;
	3. Processing official passports; and
	4. Processing official visas.
3. **FMCs are responsible for:**
	1. Reviewing the *Passport/CTAT report* sent to them annually from NTO to ensure that their employees are up to date on their official passport(s) and CTATs;
	2. Submitting up to date CTATs to the NTO for employees who have an expired one on file. CTAT are required for all employees traveling abroad. The “Counter Threat Awareness Training” can be taken on the Commerce Learning Center (CLC). The entire presentation must be viewed by the employee and the certificate of completion must be submitted to the NTO. CTAT Certificate is good for 6 years to the date of the certificate.
	3. Uploading an up to date CTAT into E2 each time a foreign TA is created to ensure that the TA is approved timely for ticketing. If there isn’t an up to date CTAT on file at the NTO, **the TA may be rejected in E2 and sent back to the travel arranger**. Once this occurs, the travel arranger will need to upload the up to date CTAT into E2 and reroute the TA;
	4. Ensuring that a country clearance cable is processed for each employee traveling abroad; and
	5. Assembling a ‘complete’ foreign travel package and submitting it to the NTO for final processing.
4. **A Complete Foreign Travel Package** consists of the following:
	1. A completed “foreign travel checklist” can be found on the NTO website: <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/FT.html>). Please ensure that the travel arranger’s name, phone number and complete address are annotated on the checklist so that the NTO knows who to contact if there are any issues and where to return the package when it’s complete;
	2. One photocopy of the approved TA. An unapproved TA is acceptable if it is not approved at the time the package is sent to the NTO for processing. However, an approved TA must be submitted to the NTO immediately following approval. **The NTO requires either or to accompany ALL foreign travel packages**;
	3. Either an up to date official passport or a ‘passport application package’ (<http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/FT.passport.html>) which consists of the expired passport, a passport application form, one passport photo, and a passport letter;&
	4. Applicable visa applications, when a visa is required, along with visa photos and/or letters of invitation. Please visit the NTO Foreign Travel Website and review “Official Visa Requirements/Applications” found on the NTO website: <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/FT.html>. Please note, employees should not follow the Department of State visa requirements since they apply to personal passport holders and not official.
5. **Incomplete Foreign Travel Packages** will cause delays in the processing of a foreign travel package which may result in the trip being delayed or canceled. Whenever there is missing information/documentation, both the employee and the document preparer will be notified via email and the **foreign travel package will not be processed until the missing information/documentation is received by the NTO**.
6. **Foreign Travel Process**. All foreign travel packages are initiated by the travel preparer, and upon internal approvals, it is then sent to the NTO for processing. Once the NTO processes the foreign travel package, the official passport with any necessary visas will be returned back to the travel preparer. Upon receipt of the official passport, the travel preparer and the employee should verify that the demographic information in the passport is correct in cases where a new official passport was obtained, and/or verify that the visa information is correct, in cases where visas are obtained. All inquiries on the foreign travel process should be directed to the servicing Foreign Travel Contact (FTC). Please see the current FTC Listing <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/FT.html>) for your servicing FTC.
7. **Providing Adequate Lead Time** will ensure that foreign travel packages are completed in time for travel. Travel preparers should always:
	1. Determine what documentation will be necessary prior to submitting the foreign travel package to the NTO. For example:
		1. An up to date CTAT (certified every 6 years);
		2. An up to date official passport. Official passports must be valid least 6 months from date of entry; and
		3. Visa paperwork when visas are required.
	2. Allow adequate lead times necessary to process passport/visa paperwork. For example:
		1. Seven business days are required to process foreign travel packages that do not require any action by the NTO, i.e., the official passport is up to date and no visas are required. In these cases, the NTO will only need to send the travel arranger the official passport.
		2. Six to eight weeks are required to process an official passport;
		3. Ten to fifteen days are required to process most visas. However China, Cuba, India, Russia, Spain and Vietnam all require longer lead times. Please review the Foreign Travel Lead Times on the NTO website <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/FT.html>) for more information on lead time requirements; and
		4. Your Line or Corporate Office may have additional internal requirements that will add additional time.
8. **Foreign Travel for Invitational Travelers** is not processed by the NTO, nor is it routed to the NTO for approval. Invitational travelers will:
	1. Obtain their own personal passport/visas;
	2. Include the following statement in the Remarks section of the TA: “The individual named above is traveling at the invitation of the U.S. Government. Although not a formal representative of the U.S. Government, this individual is considered of sufficient character and qualification to participate on this mission”; and
	3. Be authorized to claim any passport/visa fees incurred as a direct result of being invited to travel on NOAA’s behalf. In order for NOAA to reimburse these fees, they must be authorized on the TA.

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# CHAPTER 2. Country Clearance Cables

1. **Electronic Country Clearance Cables** (ECCs) are a means of communication within the foreign diplomatic network. Department of State (DOS) policy requires embassy clearance for any official travel to a foreign country. Country clearance cables notify the Department of State officials in Washington, D.C., and embassy and post officers abroad, of an employee’s presence in a foreign country. Please visit the eCountry Clearance website <https://ecc.state.gov/security/EccLogin.aspx> more information.
2. **The Purpose of an ECC is to:**
	1. Alert embassies about all scientific activities conducted during official foreign travel. In some cases, the embassy will provide a contact at the embassy for the employee. The embassy may request a meeting or report from the employee upon their return. In addition, the embassy may have knowledge of reasons or situations which would prohibit the employee from traveling to their country during the proposed period, and may therefore refuse to provide clearance. In such cases, the employee would need to reschedule their visit to accommodate embassy recommendations.
	2. Provide safety for employees in situations including, but not limited to, political unrest, health emergencies, and crime; and
	3. Provide consular assistance to employees who have either lost their official passport or had it stolen; and
3. **The servicing FTC or International Affairs Office (IAO)** **is required** to prepare all country clearance cables for their employees and require a 2-week lead time. Employees should contact their servicing FTC or IAO immediately if 2 weeks processing-time is not possible.
4. **The following information is required for all ECCs:**
	1. Employee’s name, title, and affiliation;
	2. Purpose of travel (**all acronyms must be spelled out**). Include:
		1. Names of workshops/meetings;
		2. Titles of all papers and presentations;
		3. Names of institutional affiliations.
	3. Travel destination and flight itinerary. Specify dates in each city within each country;
	4. Name of the inviting office, a contact name in the foreign country, hotel name and address and relevant phone numbers;
	5. Indication of whether embassy assistance is requested. In most cases, there is no need to ask for embassy assistance and a simple closing paragraph that states that “no embassy assistance is requested” will suffice. However, if required (usually for high-level officials), the cable should be clear and specific about what is needed. The employee should be aware that there may be an embassy charge for some of their services.
	6. Current official passport information; and
	7. Emergency contact information.
5. **MED-Evac Insurance**. MED Evac insurance is required for contractors and any private citizen performing an assignment at a Post. However, federal employees assigned to a Post or who are in a temporary duty (TDY) status are automatically covered for MED-Evac insurance under their TDY travel authorization. Therefore, MED-Evac Insurance is not reimbursable to employees.

# CHAPTER 3. Official Passport Requirements

1. **Official Passport/Visa Requirement**. The DOS requires employees performing official TDY travel abroad to obtain and use an official passport and official visas, when required since:
	1. A visa will not be granted for entry into a foreign country when the reason for travel to that country is stated as official business and the personal (tourist) passport is presented. In addition, a diplomatic or official visa cannot be stamped in a personal passport;
	2. Some countries will deny entry at the border to someone seeking to enter on official government business who presents a personal passport. In addition, employees may encounter problems (some are even detained) departing a foreign country when they use a personal passport for official business;
	3. Use of a personal passport when traveling in an official capacity misrepresents the true purpose for which the employee has entered the country. This can have serious and adverse effects on our reciprocal relations with foreign countries. Employees of foreign governments must use official passports when they come to the U.S. on behalf of their governments. This is a traditional practice among governments and an internationally recognized policy; and
	4. The official passport provides quicker access to officials of the host country and greater protection in the event that the employee experiences issues while visiting the host country.
2. **Exception to Official Passport Requirement**. Employees performing official TDY travel to:
	1. Taiwan must travel on their personal passport; and
	2. U.S. territories may travel using their certified birth certificate. However, if the employee has a passport (personal or official), they are required to use their passport instead of their birth evidence; Us territories include American Samoa, Guam, Midway Islands, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, and Wake Island.
3. **Official Passport Application.** Please visit the NTO Passport Application/Instructions website <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/FT.passport.html> and **NOT** the DOS website when applying for an official passport since NOAA has requirements not outlined on the DOS website. When applying for an official passport, employees must:
	1. Complete the passport application on line and print it out so it can be signed and dated. Each on-line passport application contains a 2-D Barcode, which enables the DOS to populate encrypted data, filled out by the applicant, into their system;
	2. Print passport applications on one-sided sheets of paper and not on one sheet of paper back-to-back;
	3. Annotate “CROA” in the “Mail Passport to” section of the application; and
	4. Indicate their home address in the “Permanent Address” section of the application.

1. **Official Passport Processing Times.** The processing-time for official passports is 6 to 8 weeks and is dictated by the DOS. Passport applications submitted with less than 6-8 weeks processing-time must include:
	1. An emergency justification statement on the passport letter; and
	2. An itinerary.

Please note that by including the emergency justification and itinerary with the passport application package **does not guarantee the passport will be issued in time for travel**.

**NOTE:** Official passport application packages submitted under the 6 to 8 weeks lead time that do not include the emergency justification and itinerary will be rejected and the employee will not be authorized to travel on that particular trip.

1. **Official Passport Fees.** The DOS charges Government agencies a $110.00 fee for each official passport they process (renewals and first time). In order to charge the appropriate accounting, travel preparers must include their Line/Staff Office accounting on the applicable space provided on the foreign travel checklist. Please note that the passport application fee will not be charged to the employee directly.
2. **Official Passport Repository.** Since official passports are considered government property, the DOS requires each Agency to store all of their official passports in one central location where they can be stored in locked, fireproof cabinets, accessible to the office responsible for their care. The DOS appointed the NTO as the official passport repository for NOAA official passports. Therefore, all official passports must be returned to the NTO upon completion of foreign travel. **Official passports must never be kept at home, in a car, or in a desk.**
3. **Departing Federal Service.** **Employees who possess an official passport must return their official passport to the NTO prior to their departure**. Employees who wish to have their official passport returned to them for souvenir purposes must include a memorandum when sending their passport to the NTO for cancellation. Employees will need to include their address in the memo so that the NTO knows where to send the canceled passport once DOS returns it. Please note that it is within DOS discretion whether or not to return canceled passports back to the NTO for souvenir purposes.

# CHAPTER 4. Official Visa Requirements

1. **A Visa** is a stamp affixed in a passport which allows one to enter and exit a foreign country. While most countries require a visa for official government travel, there are some that do not. Therefore, it is important to note that each country has different requirements that could change often. Employees are responsible for submitting the correct visa documentation and should check the NTO’s Official Visa Requirements/Applications (<http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/FT.html>) each time they travel. Employees should bookmark the Foreign Travel webpage, and NEVER bookmark the actual “Official Visa Requirements/Applications” document to ensure the most up to date information. Employees should never use the “Foreign Entry Requirements” listing published by the DOS since it contains visa requirements for personal and private industry travel and differs from the visa requirements for official travel.
2. **Obtaining a Visa**. Employees will need to include their official passport and any applicable visa documentation in their foreign travel package when submitting it to their servicing FTC for processing. While most visa requirements vary for each country, the following information is standard and required for all countries:
	1. The passport must be valid at least 6 months from date of entry before a visa can be issued;
	2. Visa applications must contain wet ink signature and cannot contain electronic signatures; and
	3. Visa pictures must:
		1. Be recent;
		2. Be in color;
		3. Be 2”x2”;
		4. Be on a white background;
		5. Be on photo paper (should not be photocopied);
		6. Not show the applicant wearing eye wear; and
		7. Not show the applicant smiling.