

TRAVEL ADVISORY FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS

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MELTZER HELLRUNG
IMMIGRATION SOLUTIONS

International Travel Guidance for Foreign Nationals in the U.S.

(Updated, July 20, 2026)

TRAVEL ALERT: On May 18, 2026, the U.S. imposed entry restrictions on non-citizens who had recently been in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, or Uganda, and suspended all visa operations at embassies in those three countries, in response to Ebola outbreaks in East and Central Africa. While there is still no information on when the entry restriction will be lifted, typically it will remain in effect until the underlying outbreak is contained.

TRAVEL ALERT (March 9, 2026): Recent developments in the Middle East have significantly disrupted U.S. consular services across the region. Following a security alert issued by U.S. Department of State (DOS) on February 28, 2026, several U.S. embassies have closed temporarily, suspended routine services, or limited operations to emergency assistance only. As noted in our [recent blog](#), consular services, including visa interviews, passport services, and other routine appointments, have been suspended or limited at many posts across the region. In several locations, embassy personnel have been instructed to shelter in place, which further restricts normal operations.

Because the situation remains fluid, HR and mobility teams should regularly monitor official embassy website announcements and U.S. government updates for the most current information regarding consular operations.

TRAVEL ALERT (July 20, 2026) Effective August 1, 2026, DOS will realign routine visa services at posts across roughly two dozen African countries — including Abuja, Bamako, Bujumbura, Freetown, Gaborone, Harare, Juba, Lilongwe, Lusaka, and others — to regional processing hubs, consolidating operations rather than closing them outright. Currently valid visas are unaffected, and applicants can generally complete required medical exams either in their home country (if a panel physician exists) or at their designated hub.

Posts that will serve as regional visa hubs (routine visa services consolidated here): Abidjan, Accra, Addis Ababa, Cape Town, Dakar, Dar-Es-Salaam, Djibouti, Johannesburg, Kampala, Kigali, Kinshasa, Lagos, Lome, Luanda, Malabo, Monrovia, Nairobi, Port Louis, Praia, and Yaoundé.

Posts losing routine visa services (will keep American Citizen Services and limited NIV services only): Antananarivo, Asmara, Bamako, Bangui (emergency ACS only), Banjul, Brazzaville, Bujumbura, Conakry, Cotonou, Durban, Freetown, Gaborone, Harare, Juba, Libreville, Lilongwe, Lusaka, Maputo, Maseru, Mbabane, N'Djamena, Niamey, Nouakchott, Ouagadougou, and Windhoek. There are no consular operations in Bangui or Khartoum.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) continues to enhance its vetting of all foreign nationals, both in the U.S. as well as those applying for admission at U.S. ports of entry. Similarly, the Department of State (DOS), which operates U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide, has implemented applicant screening procedures that subject nonimmigrant and immigrant visa applicants to significant additional scrutiny. Because these procedures have resulted both in denials of visas and applications for admission, and because they are changing frequently, it is important that foreign nationals living and working in the U.S. understand the risks associated with international travel in the current climate.

The following summary is an overview of the issues foreign nationals should consider when considering travel outside the United States.

This page is continuously updated to reflect current guidance. We recommend checking this page

prior to any potential foreign travel.

Universal Travel Guidelines

- Always travel with original immigration documents.
- Maintain a valid visa and passport.
- Update your U.S. address with USCIS within 10 days of moving using [Form AR-11](#) to ensure you are not denied entry in the future after travel abroad.
- U.S. consular officials as well as USCIS and CBP officers may review social media activity and group affiliations of most nonimmigrants for national security purposes. In particular, applicants for F, J and M visas will undergo a comprehensive vetting of their online presence, including all social media, and will be required to adjust the privacy settings on their social media profiles to “public” as part of the visa application process. As of **December 15, 2025**, all H-1B (and H-4) visa applicants must also make their social-media profiles public so that consular officers can review them.
- Avoid affiliations with any group that is known for extremist or controversial political activity.
- Be thoughtful in posting information online that may be interpreted as supporting violence, extremism, or anti-U.S. positions.
- Foreign nationals applying for entry pursuant to parole, including applicants for adjustment of status pursuant to an approved grant of advance parole, may be subject to additional screening and vetting and should therefore anticipate a longer entry process. To the extent possible, individuals with an approved advance parole may wish to maintain a valid nonimmigrant status (e.g., H-1B or L-1) in order to facilitate entry.
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has the authority to require biometric data collection (e.g., facial recognition, fingerprints) for *all* non-U.S. citizens entering or leaving the U.S. This requirement will expand and standardize biometric screening across all points of entry/exit.
- When applying for admission, [CBP is authorized](#) to search any electronic device, including personal and company-issued phones, laptops, and tablets, at any U.S. port of entry, without a warrant or prior notice. These searches are becoming increasingly common, and the consequences of a search vary depending on the traveler's immigration status. U.S. citizens may have their devices confiscated but cannot be denied entry. Lawful permanent residents face the same risk plus a potential threat to their permanent residency if they refuse to cooperate. Foreign nationals or visa holders who refuse to comply may be denied entry into the United States. Given these risks, employees traveling internationally should avoid carrying company devices with sensitive or confidential data stored locally and may want to use clean loaner laptops or other options that do not retain data.
- A criminal history may affect ability to enter the U.S., even for lawful permanent residents.
- Under U.S. law, convictions for certain serious crimes, including those involving controlled substances, may result in a finding of inadmissibility. Also, foreign nationals who have had prior arrests that did not result in a conviction may be denied entry. If you have been arrested or convicted of a criminal offense, please contact your Melzer Hellrung attorney to discuss legal options before traveling.
- Secondary inspection, extended questioning and/or denial of admission may be likely for foreign nationals from countries designated by the U.S. as state sponsors of terrorism, such as Cuba, Iran, Syria, and North Korea. Individuals who have been previously subject to Secondary Inspection have a greater likelihood of being selected in the future. For more information, please review our [overview](#) of what to expect if you are selected for Secondary Inspection.

Travel Bans and Restrictions

The Trump Administration has implemented [country-specific travel bans](#), suspending all entry and visa issuance as either immigrants or nonimmigrants, of nationals of the following countries:

- Afghanistan
- Burkina Faso*
- Burma
- Chad
- Republic of Congo

- Equatorial Guinea
- Eritrea
- Haiti
- Iran
- Laos**
- Libya
- Mali*
- Niger*
- Individuals holding Palestinian Authority-issued travel documents
- Sierra Leone**
- Somalia
- Sudan
- South Sudan*
- Syria*
- Yemen

* Effective January 1, 2026

** Elevated from partial to full restrictions as of January 1, 2026

The travel ban also implements a partial suspension of entry (suspends entry on immigrant visas, and B, F, M, and J nonimmigrant visas) of nationals from the following countries:

- Angola
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Benin
- Burundi
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Cuba
- Dominica
- Gabon
- The Gambia
- Malawi
- Mauritania
- Nigeria
- Senegal
- Tanzania
- Togo
- Turkmenistan***
- Tonga,
- Venezuela
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe.

***Immigrant visa restrictions only as of January 1, 2026.

In addition, consular officers are authorized to reduce the validity for any other nonimmigrant visa issued to nationals of the countries listed above to the extent permitted by law. Moreover, nationals from the listed “countries of concern” may face re-examination of previously granted immigration benefits (green cards, asylum, etc.), not just new applications, and should consider the impact of this review on their international travel plans.

Several exceptions to the travel ban exist, and the limitations described above do not apply to:

- Individuals previously granted lawful permanent resident status;
- Dual nationals traveling on a passport from a non-designated country;
- Diplomats and NATO personnel;
- Athletes, coaches and support staff, and immediate relatives of athletes participating in “major

sporting events,” including the Olympics and the World Cup;

- Refugees, asylees, individuals granted Withholding of Removal and persons granted SIVs for former U.S. government employees;
- Immigrant visa applicants who are ethnic or religious minorities facing persecution in Iran; and
- Individuals who the U.S. Attorney General or Secretary of State deemed their entry in the national interest.

Consular Immigrant Visa Pause

The U.S. State Department announced it will indefinitely suspend consular immigrant visa processing for nationals of 75 countries, **effective Jan. 21, 2026**. This policy targets applicants filing for immigrant visas at U.S. consulates abroad from a [wide range of countries](#). Applicants will continue to be scheduled for interviews, but no immigrant visas will be issued. The pause is expected to create significant delays and uncertainty in immigrant visa processing for foreign nationals from the listed countries.

The State Department has indicated the pause is intended to support enhanced screening and vetting and to ensure applicants from the affected countries meet U.S. eligibility standards before immigrant visas are issued. The Administration is also citing concerns related to national security and the likelihood that certain applicants could become a “public charge” as part of the rationale for the temporary halt.

Foreign nationals who plan to process their green card applications at a U.S. consulate abroad should contact their immigration counsel to determine available options.

H-1B \$100,000 Fee

[Update: In June 2026, a federal court in Massachusetts vacated the \\$100,000 fee as an unlawful tax, and in July 2026, an appellate court declined to reinstate it while the government’s appeal proceeds, so the fee is not currently in effect. While this is an interim ruling \(not a final decision on the merits\) and the fee’s status could change, employers may wish to consider filing petitions that would previously have been subject to the fee, in consultation with their Meltzer Hellrung attorney.](#)

In September 2025, President Trump issued a Presidential Proclamation that was labeled an entry ban but, unlike the travel bans listed above, it is in fact a targeted restriction on H-1B nonimmigrant workers. The proclamation would bar the entry and visa issuance of H-1B workers unless the H-1B petition is accompanied by a \$100,000 “labor market protection fee.” The proclamation is effective as of September 21, 2025, and will expire one year from that date unless it is extended.

While details regarding the implementation of the proclamation are still being determined, and pending litigation may enjoin the proclamation, current guidance indicates that it does not apply to:

- H-1B workers **already inside the U.S.**
- **Existing H-1B visa holders** issued before Sept 21, 2025, the effective date of the proclamation.
- H-1B workers granted a **change of nonimmigrant status or a change of H-1B employer.**
- Applicants granted a National Interest Exception.

H-1B workers are encouraged to contact their Meltzer Hellrung professional before traveling abroad for the latest updates on the implementation of the \$100,000 H-1B fee.

Additionally, there are other more traditional grounds for implementing travel restrictions on entry to the United States:

- National security: restrictions based on a determination by DHS or DOS that country supports terrorism or is otherwise a country of concern.
- Public health emergencies: restrictions based on the existence of a disease of public health

significance in a specific country or region.

- Diplomatic tensions: restrictions based on the existence of political tensions between the U.S. and a particular country.

Recommendations:

- Monitor the [U.S. Department of State](#) and [Centers for Disease Control](#) websites before travel internationally for updates to existing guidance.
- Consult with our Meltzer Hellrung attorney if travel is planned from or through countries with existing sanctions or past travel bans (e.g., Iran, North Korea, Syria).
- Maintain awareness of the latest developments with respect to the travel ban.

Pre-Flight Inspection Abu Dhabi

In February 2026, reports surfaced indicating that some travelers encountered erroneous decisions or significant misunderstandings of immigration rules during inspection at the CBP preclearance facility in Abu Dhabi. In several reported cases, travelers holding valid visas, including H-1B workers, were denied boarding or had visas cancelled after CBP officers questioned issues such as employer changes, remote work abroad, or extended travel outside the United States.

Because inspection occurs before departure and outside of the United States, travelers have limited ability to clarify factual or legal issues or consult counsel before a decision is made. While these situations appear to be more likely the result of inadequate training than a formal policy change, they highlight the heightened discretion exercised during preclearance inspections. Given these risks, foreign nationals may wish to avoid transiting through Abu Dhabi for U.S.-bound travel when feasible and ensure that they carry complete immigration documentation when preclearance through Abu Dhabi cannot be avoided.

International Travel by Lawful Permanent Residents (green card holders)

Generally, lawful permanent residents have secure reentry rights after travel, even if they are citizens of a country that may be subject to a travel restriction. Nevertheless, citizens of potential travel ban countries may wish to consider limiting international travel as implementation may happen quickly and the full scope of the restriction may only be known when the travel restriction is announced.

For permanent residents who are not from travel ban countries, the risks of international travel increase if:

- They have been outside the U.S. for more than 6 months.
- They have been convicted of certain serious criminal offenses.
- They have been outside of the U.S. for a continuous period of over one year and may be determined to have abandoned their permanent resident status.

Permanent residents returning after long trips abroad, especially over six months, should expect increased scrutiny, particularly regarding whether the resident abandoned U.S. residence. Specifically, green card holders returning after an extended absence should expect more detailed questioning, including a review of travel history, intent to maintain U.S. residence, and verification of ties to the U.S. (e.g., home, job, family).

Recommendations:

- Always travel with a valid permanent resident card and passport.
- If traveling internationally for an extended period (more than 6 months), carry proof of continued ties to the U.S. (e.g., copies of job confirmation letter, lease, tax returns).
- If traveling abroad for more than 1 year, contact your Meltzer Hellrung attorney to apply for a Reentry Permit prior to departure.

- Renew expired or soon-to-expire permanent resident cards before traveling.

International Travel with a Valid Nonimmigrant Visa

While foreign nationals traveling with a valid U.S. nonimmigrant visa (e.g. H-1B, L-1, TN, etc.) should normally be admitted if entering for the purpose for which the visa was issued, it is important to note that each entry is evaluated separately and that prior admission to the U.S. in a particular visa category does not guarantee future admission in that category.

Federal regulations provide that a consular officer or an authorized State Department official may revoke a valid nonimmigrant visa at any time if information arises showing the visa holder no longer qualifies for that visa category. Common triggers include:

- Evidence of fraud or misrepresentation in the visa application process.
- Criminal activity or security concerns.
- Unauthorized employment or violation of visa terms.

The Administration's policy emphasis on "continuous vetting" means that State Department and other agency officials are reviewing visa holders' information more frequently, and issues that were previously deemed immaterial are increasingly prompting visa revocations. Because visa revocations have occurred without notice to the visa holder, foreign nationals traveling outside the U.S. are recommended to conduct a nonimmigrant visa status check before traveling abroad at <https://ceac.state.gov/ceacstattracker/status.aspx> to determine whether their visa has been revoked.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that the visa to be used for admission will be valid on the date of reentry.
- Ensure that the applicant is in possession of a passport with at least 6 months of remaining validity.
- Conduct a nonimmigrant visa status check to confirm that the foreign national's visa has not been revoked.
- Carry copies of supporting documents relevant to the specific nonimmigrant status (e.g., Form I-797, employment verification letters or documentation confirming school attendance). Contact your Meltzer Hellrung attorney before traveling if there are recent immigration or criminal issues.

International Travel if a Visa Must be Obtained to Reenter the U.S.

If the foreign national's current U.S. visa has expired or if the individual is changing to a different nonimmigrant status, they will need to apply for a new visa at a U.S. consulate abroad before returning to the U.S.

The Department of State is now requiring applicants for U.S. nonimmigrant visas to schedule their visa interview appointments at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in their country of nationality or residence. Nationals of countries where the U.S. government is not conducting routine nonimmigrant visa operations must apply at the designated embassy or consulate, unless their residence is elsewhere.

- In-person interviews are **required** of almost all foreign nationals except for applicants seeking reissuance of certain diplomatic categories as well as B-1, B-2, Border Crossing Cards and H-2A

visas if the prior visa was issued for the full period of validity to an individual at least 18 years of age and expired less than 12 months ago.

- Most applicants for nonimmigrant visas will also be required to pay a \$250 Visa Integrity Fee that will be charged separately to each applicant and collected at the time of application.

Visa applicants should also check the State Department [visa reciprocity schedule](#) before submitting their application to confirm the maximum visa validity period and allowable number of admissions as this schedule has been subject to change without notice.

Consular officers are now required to ask two specific asylum-related questions during all nonimmigrant visa interviews that are not on the nonimmigrant visa application form. The directive mandates that consular officers more proactively prevent the misuse of nonimmigrant visas by individuals intending to seek asylum. The questions are:

1. "Have you experienced harm or mistreatment in your country of nationality or last habitual residence?"
2. "Do you fear harm or mistreatment in returning to your country of nationality or permanent residence?"

Answering "yes" or refusing to answer the questions may result in immediate visa denial, while applicants who answer "no" to obtain a visa and then later apply for asylum risk being found guilty of willful misrepresentation, potentially leading to denial of asylum, removal, and a permanent bar from reentry.

Recommendations:

- Our firm provides [professional support](#) to applicants preparing for nonimmigrant visa appointments abroad. Contact your Meltzer Hellrung attorney to determine current visa appointment processing times and expect delays to lengthen, especially in high-demand posts.
- Consider taking advantage of the range of [services](#) that Meltzer Hellrung offers related to consular visa processing.
- Apply well in advance; expect interviews and longer wait times.
- Bring detailed documentation proving nonimmigrant intent (if applicable).

International Travel for "Cap-Gap" Students (Changing Status from F-1 to H-1B)

There are additional procedural complexities for F-1 students in the U.S. pursuant to a "cap-gap" extension of stay as the foreign national is technically still in F-1 status while awaiting a decision on a pending petition requesting a change of status to H-1B nonimmigrant. Although international travel is technically possible during the cap gap period (i.e. the period before the change of status to H-1B takes effect) if the foreign national has a valid F-1 visa and the H-1B petition and request for change of status have been approved, it is important to remember that readmission during the cap gap period is at the discretion of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer at the port of entry.

Travel abroad while the H-1B petition is pending is not advisable because it will negate the cap-gap authorization and, even if the H-1B petition is approved, USCIS will likely deny the application for change of status, potentially triggering the \$100,000 supplemental fee.

Recommendations:

- Avoid international travel during cap-gap period unless absolutely necessary.
- If the international travel occurs while the H-1B petition is pending, leaving the U.S. will void the

cap-gap extension, necessitating a consular visa application and a potentially lengthy period of time outside of the U.S.

- If international travel is absolutely necessary, consult with your Meltzer Hellrung attorney before departure to discuss immigration options and timelines for returning to the U.S.

International Visitors on the Visa Waiver Program and B-1/B-2 Visitor Visas

Traveling to the U.S. on the [Visa Waiver Program](#) (VWP) or a B-1/B-2 visitor visa comes with strict limitations in terms of the activities that the foreign nationals may undertake, and the length of time allowed they are allowed to remain in the United States. Foreign nationals admitted pursuant to the VWP may travel to the U.S. for up to 90 days for tourism or business visitor purposes. VWP entrants are generally precluded from extending their stay or changing their nonimmigrant status.

[Visa Bond Program now permanent. Certain nonimmigrants applying for a B-1 or B-2 visa may be required to post a bond before their visa will be issued. What began as a 12-month pilot announced by the State Department in August 2025 has now been made permanent. Under the permanent program, bond amounts range from \\$10,000 to \\$20,000 \(default bond amount of \\$15,000\). The requirement applies only to nationals of countries the State Department identifies on its website. Visa Waiver Program countries are automatically excluded. Bonds are paid electronically in U.S. dollars via the government's Pay.gov website. Bonded travelers must enter and depart through a commercial airport or CBP Preclearance location and the full bond is forfeited for substantial violations such as overstaying or filing for asylum. There is no formal waiver application, though consular officers retain limited discretion to recommend one.](#)

Note that certain nonimmigrants applying for a B-1 or B-2 visa may be required to post a visa bond before their visa will be issued. The bond, in an amount ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000, is the result of a 12-month pilot program announced by the State Department in August 2025. It is expected that the pilot program will be extended or made permanent. Only citizens of countries listed on the [State Department website](#) are subject to the bond requirement, which will be imposed as part of the visa application process and collected via the government's [Pay.gov](#) website.

The "ESTA" fee for individuals traveling to the U.S. pursuant to the VWP has been increased to \$40.

Recommendations:

- Strictly avoid activities outside those permitted as a business visitor or tourist (e.g., no work or study).
- Foreign nationals applying for admission to the U.S. should have proof of return plans, financial means of self-support, and ties to their home country.
- Individuals from VWP eligible countries who have traveled to North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, or Yemen will be ineligible to travel under the VWP.
- Overstaying the authorized period of admission on [Form I-94](#) can severely jeopardize future entries and preclude future VWP eligibility.

General Notes and Enhanced Screening Risks

- A criminal history may affect ability to enter the U.S., even for lawful permanent residents.
- Under U.S. law, convictions for certain serious crimes, including those involving controlled substances, may result in a finding of inadmissibility. Also, foreign nationals who have had prior arrests that did not result in a conviction may be denied entry. If you have been arrested or convicted of a criminal offense, please contact your Melzer Hellrung attorney to discuss legal options before traveling.
- U.S. consular officials as well as USCIS and CBP officers may review social media activity and group affiliations for a national security purposes.

- Avoid affiliations with any group that is known for extremist or controversial political activity.
- Be thoughtful in posting information online that may be interpreted as supporting violence, extremism, or anti-U.S. positions.
- Secondary inspection, extended questioning and/or denial of admission may be likely for foreign nationals from countries designated by the U.S. as state sponsors of terrorism, such as Cuba, Iran, Syria, and North Korea.
- Domestic air travel also carries increased risk: TSA is reportedly sharing domestic flight manifest data with ICE in real time, and foreign nationals whose underlying visa status or Form I-94 has expired while a timely filed extension, change of status, or adjustment application remains pending with USCIS have faced increased questioning and gate-side stops at airports, even where the individual has an otherwise clean record. Employees in this “bridge status” period should avoid non-essential domestic air travel where possible and, if travel is necessary, should carry physical copies of the USCIS receipt notice (Form I-797) for the pending application, evidence of prior lawful status, and recent pay stubs confirming continued employment.

Final Recommendations for All Travelers:

- Upon admission to the U.S., foreign nationals should promptly review the information listed on their Form I-94, Departure Record to ensure that the appropriate visa category and period of admission are listed.
- While foreign nationals traveling within the U.S. are generally not subject to review of their immigration documentation, they are required by law to always carry proof of immigration status, including proof of compliance with the registration requirement (if required).
- In addition, it is important to note that travel near U.S. land borders, particularly within 100 miles of the U.S. border, increases the possibility of being subject to inspection at a CBP interior inspection checkpoint.
- Finally, foreign nationals should be aware that several states, such as Florida, Iowa and Texas, cooperate closely with ICE with respect to immigration enforcement activity.
- If you have any concerns about international travel, consult with your Meltzer Hellrung attorney before making travel plans.