

Ready for arrival: U.S. entry insights

Entering the United States in 2025 requires extra preparation due to stricter immigration policy enforcement and heightened border scrutiny. Travelers should be prepared for more thorough screening processes and ensure they have the right information and documentation in place.

This guide offers key tips to support a smoother entry experience and help travelers navigate potential challenges with greater confidence.



Entry reminders for U.S. and foreign travelers

All travelers entering the United States should be prepared for enhanced screening procedures. U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents will encounter facial recognition technology at international airports, as part of the fully implemented U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) [Simplified Arrival program](#) designed to streamline identity verification.

Foreign visitors should ensure their passport is valid for at least six months beyond their intended stay. It's essential to obtain the correct [U.S. visa](#) or [ESTA](#) and verify that all personal information is accurate. Following Executive Order 14168, visa applicants must select either male or female on their application; non-binary travelers are encouraged to consult their local U.S. embassy for guidance prior to applying. Additionally, some travelers may be affected by rapidly changing travel bans related to health, security, or other risk factors, so it's important to stay informed before departure.

Digital privacy at U.S. borders

All travelers, including U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and foreign visitors, should be aware that U.S. CBP officers have broad authority to search electronic devices at ports of entry. There have been cases where foreign visitors were denied entry based on content found on personal devices, including private messages. Travelers are encouraged to be mindful of what may be visible during a basic search, as certain content can lead to additional scrutiny. Consider limiting devices to only those necessary, disabling fingerprint or facial recognition features, as biometric unlocking methods can be more easily compelled by CBP. **Power off devices before arrival to limit access and help protect your digital privacy during a basic inspection.**



Speaking with CBP Officers

Travelers should be prepared to answer questions from U.S. CBP officers about their travel purpose, visa status, and eligibility for entry. Under current policies, these questions may be more detailed than in the past. **Respond truthfully, clearly, and limit your answers to what is asked; there's no need to offer additional information.** Providing false information can have serious consequences. If you have difficulty understanding English during the inspection process, you may request an interpreter.

Secondary inspection

While uncommon, travelers may occasionally be referred to secondary inspection at a U.S. port of entry. This additional screening falls within the discretion of U.S. CBP. It may include more detailed questioning, a review of travel documents and history, and an inspection of belongings. If selected, the traveler will be escorted to a separate area and may have limited access to mobile phones or communication until the process is complete.

Essential contacts

Before traveling, prepare a list of key contacts and save it in a format accessible offline in case your device is unavailable. Include your employer's Human Resources department, Travel Risk team, and third-party assistance provider, as well as emergency contacts like family or trusted individuals. Make note of your country's consulate or embassy near your U.S. arrival city. If applicable, also note your employer's passport and visa service or immigration attorney, be sure to include any after-hours contact details.

Pre-departure & arrival checklist: Below is a checklist summarizing key steps. Use this as a printable or digital-friendly reference to make sure you've covered all your bases before your trip and upon arrival:

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST:

- ✓ **Travel documents:** Valid passport (with at least six months validity remaining) and appropriate U.S. visa. Photocopies of your passport ID page and visa (stored separately in case of loss). Any required travel authorization (ESTA) approval printout if visa exempt.
- ✓ **Itinerary & reservations:** Printed flight itinerary reflecting confirmed return flight, U.S. address of stay, and contact information of host/employer. Hard copy of hotel bookings or event registrations (if applicable).
- ✓ **Emergency contact information:** Prepare critical phone numbers: your country's consulate, your employer's passport & visa service or immigration attorney, a family member, and your employer's emergency contact offline. Keep this in hand luggage (not just on your mobile device).
- ✓ **Electronics preparation:** Prepare your devices for inspection, review what may be visible during a basic inspection and consider offloading content that may prompt additional scrutiny or concern. Consider disabling TouchID/FaceID.
- ✓ **Medications & personal items:** Carry prescription medicine in original packaging with your name, and bring a doctor's note or prescription to avoid questions. (Also pack necessities in your carry-on in case you are held for many hours or miss connecting flights.)
- ✓ **Know the rules:** Confirm the latest U.S. travel guidance and policy updates. For example, verify there are no newly implemented travel bans or policies that could affect entry into the United States.

ARRIVAL CHECKLIST:

- ✓ **Phones off & stowed:** Before you exit the plane, power off your phone and other devices. Stow them away unless asked to present them.
- ✓ **Documents in hand:** Approach the CBP booth with your passport, visa, and declaration form in hand. Be ready to also show your flight ticket/boarding pass if asked. Greet the officer politely.
- ✓ **Answer clearly:** Respond to the officer's questions with concise, honest answers. If you don't understand something, politely ask them to repeat it. You can request an interpreter if needed.
- ✓ **Biometric procedures:** Be prepared for routine fingerprinting and photograph at the booth (standard for most visa holders). Follow the instructions (place fingers on the scanner and look at the camera).
- ✓ **Remain calm if delayed:** If directed to secondary inspection, cooperate and remain calm. You may be asked to wait in a seating area. It's normal to wait an hour or more for secondary inspection during busy times. Do not use your phone while waiting unless given permission. When called, calmly provide any information asked.

Are you looking for a customized risk strategy?

Contact us to learn more about our fully customized U.S. Entry Toolkit and how a Travel Security Program Assessment can help you identify gaps and potential areas to reduce risk across your travel program.



Christine Connolley

Senior Crisis Program Manager,
Global Crisis Management, BCD Travel



Lise Levesque

Senior Crisis Program Manager,
Global Crisis Management, BCD Travel



Jorge Mesa

Senior Director Travel Risk Management,
BCD Travel