

U.S. MISSION
GERMANY

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American Citizen News

QUARTER 1, 2008

Welcome!

From the Consul

Life can be as unpredictable and changeable as the weather in our Consular district these days. Be prepared for all eventualities and make sure that your passports are still valid, that your registration information is up-to-date and that you know how to reach us in an emergency.

Apart from battling another bout of wintry weather, Berlin is also currently affected by public transportation strikes. Please see page 5 for more information on this.

I hope you will enjoy this issue of the American Citizen Newsletter!

Increases to U.S. Passport Fees and New Parental Signature Requirements for U.S. Minors

On February 1, 2008, the U.S. Government increased its fees for certain U.S. citizen passport services. For adult applicants renewing a passport, the total fee has increased to \$75. For first-time applicants age 16 and over, the total fee increased to \$100. The fee for minors under 16 years of age is now \$85.

Effective February 1, 2008, passport applicants who are U.S. citizen minors under the age of 16 must appear personally with their parents to establish identity, proof of citizenship and proof of relationship. For parental application permission, both parents must appear together and sign, or one parent may appear to sign and submit the other parent's notarized statement, or one parent may appear, sign, and submit primary evidence of sole authority. Minors age 16 and 17 may apply in person with their own identification, but for security reasons, parental consent may be required. If your child does not have identification of his/her own, a parent will be required to accompany the child and present identification.

Please refer to the Department of State's website at www.travel.state.gov for complete information on all new requirements, including downloadable revised forms that must be used as of February 1, and the U.S. Embassy website at www.usembassy.de for complete U.S. passport application instructions.

In the near future, the U.S. Department of State will introduce a new travel document, the Passport Card. The wallet-sized passport card will be proof of citizenship, like all passports, but will only be valid for travel across U.S./Canada and U.S./Mexico land borders and travel to the U.S. from the Caribbean by sea. The passport card will NOT be valid for travel from the U.S. to Europe or other international destinations.

Fees in Euros are currently as follows: (Euro prices are subject to change based on current exchange rates.)

Initial Adult PPT	\$ 100.00	72.00 €
Adult renewal PPT	\$ 75.00	54.00 €
Minor PPT	\$ 85.00	61.20 €
Adult PPT Card	\$ 45.00	32.40 €
Minor PPT Card	\$ 35.00	25.20 €



The Consular Information Program provides vital information for travelers overseas with regards to security and safety.



What an Election Year!!

Are you registered to vote?

As the Presidential primary season draws to a close, its time to get ready for the main event! Now is the perfect time to register to vote and request an absentee ballot for the Presidential Election in November!

You can find out more about voting overseas at www.fvap.gov or you can come to your nearest Consulate or Embassy to look up absentee voting regulations for your home state.

The Consular Information Program

The State Department constantly reviews its overseas safety and security information. The State Department uses the Consular Information Program (CIP) to inform Americans of potential threats to their safety abroad. The CIP is a tiered travel advisory system, consisting of three levels: a Travel Alert, a Travel Warning, and the Worldwide Caution. Because a Travel Alert describes short-term conditions, its information is generally valid for the stated duration of the Alert, normally 90 days or less. Travel Warnings and the Worldwide Caution are reviewed continually and are updated every six months or earlier, as needed. They do not expire automatically.

In addition to the CIP, each post around the world maintains a warden system. This warden system includes all individuals, like you, who have registered the overseas residence or stay with their local Consulate or Embassy. Each post uses the warden system to distribute CIP information to its registrants in a timely manner.

What are the different tiers and what do they mean?

A Travel Alert describes short-term conditions affecting a country or region that pose imminent risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, election-related violence, and major international conferences or sporting events are examples of situations that might generate a Travel Alert.

A Travel Warning describes longer-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of its staff.

The Worldwide Caution reminds Americans to maintain a high level of vigilance and to bolster their personal security while overseas. It contains information about ongoing security concerns, including the continual threat of terrorist actions and violence against Americans and American interests overseas. The Worldwide Caution pays particular attention to regions of concern where there is a continued threat of terrorism.

The CIP also includes a Country Specific Information sheet with information for travelers regarding entry requirements, safety and security, crime, medical facilities and health information, traffic and aviation safety, criminal penalties, and other special circumstances. We recommend that travelers read the Country Specific Information sheets any time they plan a trip outside their country of residence.

For more information, go to http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html.

It's Tax Time Again!!!

Tax time is once again upon us. U.S. citizens who are resident overseas receive an automatic extension of the deadline to file, but not to pay, to 15 June. If you are a U.S. citizen or resident alien, the rules for filing tax returns are generally the same whether you are in the United States or abroad. Your individual circumstances generally determine whether you must file an income tax return. Many U.S. citizens resident overseas may be eligible for either the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion or the Foreign Earned Income Credit.

U.S. Mission Germany has an Internal Revenue Service office at the U.S. Consulate General in Frankfurt that will accept tax returns, tax payments, W-7 applications and taxpayer correspondence. Questions can be sent to the IRS via email at IRS.Frankfurt@irs.gov.

We have compiled a list of helpful links to find more information for international taxpayers and filing requirements.

U.S. Embassy Germany IRS office: <http://germany.usembassy.gov/germany/irs.html>

U.S. Embassy Germany – Where to find Accountants and Tax Preparers: <http://germany.usembassy.gov/germany/services/lists.html>

U.S. Embassy Germany Frequently Asked Questions – Taxes: <http://germany.usembassy.gov/germany/faqs/tax.html>

IRS Information for International Taxpayers: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/index.html>

IRS Information on Overseas Filing Requirements: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=96796,00.html>

IRS Information for U.S. Citizens and Resident Aliens Abroad: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=97324,00.html>

The IRS Tax Guide for U.S. Citizens and Residents Abroad, publication 54: <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p54.pdf>

IRS Information for U.S. Government civilians stationed abroad: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=97236,00.html>

Warning: IRS E-mail scams!

Following a recent increase in scam emails, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) reminds individuals in Germany to be on the lookout for bogus emails claiming to be from the U.S. tax agency.

The IRS does not send out unsolicited emails. The IRS never asks people for the PIN numbers, passwords, or other secret access information for their credit card, bank or other financial accounts.

Also, U.S. taxpayers do not have to complete a special form or provide detailed financial information to obtain a refund. Refunds are based on the information contained on the federal income tax return filed by the taxpayer.

The only genuine Internal Revenue Service (IRS) web-site is : www.irs.gov.

For more information about these scams, please visit: http://germany.usembassy.gov/irs_warn.html

How to... Navigate the Immigrant Visa Process... A Guide for Applicants.

Immigrant petitions for relatives of U.S. citizens residing in Germany should be filed at the USCIS office at the U.S. Consulate General in Frankfurt. Petitions are accepted by appointment only. Appointments can be made online at www.uscis.gov.

Guidance for filing petitions in the U.S. can also be found on www.uscis.gov.

Information on the status of petitions already filed can also be found online at the above website.



In last quarter's newsletter, we talked about how to file an immigrant petition for immediate family members. Now that your I-130 Immigrant Petition has been approved, it's time to start the Immigrant Visa Process. There are slight differences in procedure if the petition was filed in Germany or in the United States. This primer only covers the procedure for petitions filed with and approved by the USCIS office in Germany.

Once your petition has been approved by USCIS, the application is then forwarded to the Immigrant Visa Unit at the U.S. Consulate General Frankfurt. You will receive an information packet, including the Instructions for Immigrant Visa Applicants, Form DS-230 Part I—Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration, Form I-864—Affidavit of Support, and instructions on the medical examination.

Step 1: The DS-230 Part I should be completed for each individual applying for an immigrant visa, regardless of age. Once completed, you should immediately return the form by mail to the Immigrant Visa Unit at the U.S. Consulate General Frankfurt. Delays in returning this form will result in delays in processing the immigrant visa.

Step 2: Once this form has been completed and returned, you'll need to gather documents in preparation for the immigrant visa interview. After you have gathered all necessary documents, you'll need to submit the Notification of Applicant's readiness to the Immigrant Visa Unit at the U.S. Consulate General Frankfurt. Don't send any of the documents with this form!! You'll need to bring all the original forms with you to the immigrant visa interview!! Documents you'll need are listed below:

- A passport for each individual receiving an immigrant visa (valid for at least 6 more months)
- Original birth certificates for each member of the family, including petitioner and all children 21 years old or younger, regardless of whether they are immigrating with you.
- Adoption certificates issued by a public authority, listing the names of the adoptive parents.
- Police certificates for all applicants over the age of 16
- Court and prison records for any applicant that has ever been convicted of a crime. Translations are required.
- Certified copy of military records for any applicant who has served in any country's military
- 3 color photographs (visit <http://germany.usembassy.gov/root/pdfs/visa/photoinstructions.pdf> for more information)
- Affidavit of Support, Form I-864
- Original marriage certificates and proof of termination of any previous marriages.
- Certified English translations of any documents not originally produced in English or German

Step 3: The Immigrant Visa Unit will do administrative processing on your application and notify you of your appointment date and time approximately 1 month prior in writing. The appointment letter will also include instructions on the medical examination. There is a fee for the medical examination.

Step 4: The Interview—all applicants will be required to appear in person at the Consulate for the immigrant visa interview. There is a visa processing fee of \$400 per applicant, which you will need to pay on the day of the interview. If your visa is approved, you'll receive the visa approximately 10 days after your interview via registered mail.

Notes from the Berlin Consular Section

Public Sector Strikes in Berlin (and possibly beyond)

Service Trade Union Ver.di has effected a 10 day strike of transportation workers in Berlin, starting at 3 a.m. Wednesday, March 5 and until at least midnight Friday, March 14. The strike affects Berlin's U-Bahn, bus and tram networks. S-Bahn and regional train services, which are run by Deutsche Bahn, are not yet affected. However a separate labor dispute between Deutsche Bahn and the train engineers' union may result in additional disruptions in public transportation as early as next week. Ver.di action may also affect day-care centers, hospitals and waste management.

The website of the Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (BVG) has more detailed information about public transportation cancellations and emergency schedules. Please check www.bvg.de.

Additionally most Berlin newspapers and news media are publishing lists of emergency schedules and routes:

BZ www.bz-berlin.de

Bild www.bild.de

Morgenpost www.morgenpost.de

Berliner Kurier <http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-kurier/>

Tagesspiegel www.tagesspiegel.de

Berliner Zeitung www.berlin-online.de/berliner-zeitung/

N24 www.n24.de

RBB www.rbb-online.de

Holiday Closures

Friday, March 21st: Good Friday

Monday, March 24th: Easter Monday

Thursday, May 1st: International Labor Day

Monday, May 26th: Memorial Day

Opening Hours and Contact Information

U.S. Embassy Berlin
 Consular Section
 Clayallee 170
 14195 Berlin

Contact information and opening hours
<http://germany.usembassy.gov/>

American Citizen Services:

Open to the public from 8:30am to 12:00pm
 Monday to Friday

Email: ACSBerlin@state.gov
 Fax: (030) 8305-1215

After-Hours Emergencies: (030) 8305-0

Telephone inquiries:

2:00pm to 4:00pm Monday to Friday
 Tel.: 030-832-9233

Please note that we are unable to answer visa-related questions at this number.

