

Danesfort Dispatches

A Quarterly Newsletter from the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

June 2009



Vol. 4, Issue 3

Dear American Community,

Springtime always brings a flurry of activities to the U.S. Consulate General. On St. Patrick's Day I accompanied First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness on their visit to Washington. I was honored to be invited to their meetings with President Obama, National Security Advisor Jones, and Secretary Clinton. I also attended the annual St. Patrick's Day reception at the White House. During the First and Deputy First Ministers' meeting with him, President Obama emphasized continuing support for Northern Ireland. Since March I have attended many interesting events including the opening of the new Corrymeela Volunteer Center in Ballycastle, a reception honoring the 30th anniversary of Cooperation Ireland, an assembly at Drumlins Integrated Primary School, and a debate among candidates for the European Parliament at Queens University – just to name a few. I also was pleased to host several groups of U.S. university students who are visiting Northern Ireland this summer for training and volunteer opportunities.

As we head into the summer months, many of you will be making plans for your holidays. With that in mind, we have included articles in this quarter's newsletter about the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), the UK visa policy and the Electronic System of Travel Authorization (ESTA) for visa-waiver passport holders traveling to the United States.

This month's submission will be my last, as I depart Belfast in late June for my next posting in Moscow, Russia. My time in Northern Ireland has been extremely rewarding and I will cherish many of the friends and colleagues I have met over the last two years. Northern Ireland continues to grow in so many ways and I feel confident that with the Northern Ireland Executive working together, the province will see even more stability and economic benefits in the future.

July 4th is just around the corner. I wish you and your family a safe and enjoyable Independence Day celebration!

Sincerely,

Susan Elliott

Consul General

Update to Country Specific Information: United Kingdom

The State Department's Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management (ACS) administers the Consular Information Program, which informs the public of conditions abroad that may affect their safety and security. Country Specific Information, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings are vital parts of this program.

For the Country Specific Information on the United Kingdom, visit

http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html

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Summer Travel: Plan Ahead!



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As the summer approaches, you may be thinking about summer travel plans. Please also think about ensuring your travel documents are in order. Refer to <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nipass.html> for a complete guide to Belfast's Passport Services. Please also note below:

Passport validity: Some countries require a traveler to have a passport that is valid for at least six (6) months beyond the date of travel. You should check with the Embassy/Consulate/High Commission of the country to which you are traveling for details.

Extra visa pages: If your passport is still valid but full, we can add extra visa pages. See <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nipassmail.html> for details.

Passports for Minors: When applying to renew a U.S. passport for a child under the age of 16, mother, father and child need to visit the Consulate. See our website at <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nipassper.html> for more information.

Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative - Implementation June 2009

The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) is a result of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA), requiring all travelers to present a passport or other document that denotes identity and citizenship when entering the United States. The goal of the initiative is to strengthen U.S. border security while facilitating entry for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors by providing standardized documentation that enables the Department of Homeland Security to quickly and reliably identify a traveler.

On **June 1, 2009**, the U.S. Government will implement the full requirements of the land and sea phase of the WHTI. This will require most U.S. citizens entering the United States at sea or land ports of entry to have a passport, passport card or other travel document approved by the Department of Homeland Security.

For more information, visit:

U.S. Customs & Border Protection - http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/ready_set_go/, U.S. Customs & Border Protection, Get You Home - http://www.getyouhome.gov/html/eng_map.html, Department of State, WHTI - http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html

ESTA Program for British and Irish Passport Holders

The Department of Homeland Security's Electronic System of Travel Authorization (ESTA) is now live. As of January 12, 2009, citizens of Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries - this includes UK and Ireland - are required to obtain travel authorization prior to traveling to the United States visa-free.

Travelers should first ensure that they meet the criteria of the VWP by referring to the "Visa Waiver Wizard" at http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/visa_wizard.html. Travelers who are eligible should then apply for travel authorization free of charge at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

Those who are not VWP eligible or who are denied ESTA authorization (a tiny percentage) should apply for a visa following the instructions on <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nivisa.html>.

ESTA is only required for those traveling without a visa. Anyone traveling with a visa should not apply for ESTA authorization.

Beware of ESTA Scams:

Be aware that applying for travel authorization through ESTA is **free** on the official website. The official U.S. Government website is <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>. Only the website of the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General in the UK, and domestic U.S. government sites (which always end in the ".gov") should be trusted. For a **Fact Sheet, How-To guidance, and further info about ESTA** refer to http://london.usembassy.gov/dhs/esta_info.html and http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/esta/.



Spotlight : Death Of American Citizens Abroad

The U.S. Consulate General Belfast can assist family and friends in the event of the death of an American citizen in Northern Ireland. The Consulate can act as a liaison in arranging the disposition of remains and help with forwarding personal effects. The family or legal representative must pay all funeral home charges, shipping costs for remains and personal effects (if applicable). The Consulate will work with any funeral home selected by the family to ensure proper documentation for shipment of remains to the United States. We maintain a list of funeral homes we have worked with in the past.

Disposition of Remains

The following general information is provided to assist families in making initial decisions.

- Requirement for an autopsy in the event of a sudden death: Under British law, the coroner must order an autopsy be conducted when there is reasonable cause to suspect that the deceased died from: a) violent or unnatural death, b) sudden death, or c) in prison or in such place or in such circumstances as to require a coroner's inquest.
- Maximum period before interment: British law does not place a time limit within which a burial must take place. Remains can be held free of charge at a public mortuary pending receipt of next-of-kin's instructions.
- Registration of death: Under British law, if the coroner is not investigating a death, then the death must be registered within five days. If the death cannot be registered within five days, the registrar must be informed as soon as possible. In coroner's cases, the death will be automatically registered by the authorities once an inquest has been held.
- Embalming: there is no time limit within which remains must be embalmed, nor is there a requirement for embalming of remains for export from the United Kingdom or import into the United States. Next-of-kin are encouraged to consult their receiving funeral home to resolve any doubts about embalming, particularly if relatives wish to view the remains. Next-of-kin should advise the funeral home, if, for religious or other reasons, the body should not be embalmed. In cases of HIV/AIDS, or other highly contagious diseases, embalming may not be possible, and should be discussed with the selected funeral home.
- Cremation: There is no time limit within which remains must be cremated.
- Exportation of whole remains from the United Kingdom: To facilitate the export of whole remains from the United Kingdom to the United States, the Consulate prepares a Consular Mortuary Certificate, which provides flight and consignee details. Also required for transport are the local death certificate, an affidavit from the funeral director, an embalming certificate and the coroner's permission to remove the body from Northern Ireland.
- Exportation of cremated remains: Cremated remains may be exported if they are accompanied by a certified copy of the local death certificate, the cremation certificate and a statement from the crematorium or the funeral home confirming the urn contains only the ashes of the deceased. We recommend that airline passengers carrying cremated remains to the U.S. declare the nature of the package to the UK and U.S. customs. It is also advisable that the urn be wooden to allow security screening at the airport.

Report of Death of An American Citizen

- The consular "Report of Death of An American Citizen Abroad" is a report that provides the essential facts concerning the death of a U.S. citizen and is based on the UK death certificate or the Coroner's Interim Certificate of Evidence of Death. It can generally be used in U.S. courts to help settle estate matters.

Even if no assistance is needed in making funeral arrangements, the death of an American citizen, whether resident or tourist in Northern Ireland, should be reported to the Consulate so that a Report of Death of An American Citizen Abroad can be issued. The Consulate can issue up to 20 copies of the Report, which is usually sufficient in number to settle matters in the United States.

For more information or to report the death of an American citizen, contact the U.S. Consulate General at 02890 386104, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., GMT.



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UK Border Agency—New Regulations Are Now In Place

As a major overhaul of the UK's immigration rules continues, more Americans may find they require a visa, or entry clearance to enter the UK. These changes may affect, but are not limited to, all of the following: **spouses/fiances/partners/children of UK/Irish/EU nationals, students, interns, charity workers and volunteers, employees of UK companies and business travelers.**

Those who arrive in the UK without having first obtained the appropriate visa or entry clearance from a British Embassy or Consulate overseas will not be allowed to enter the UK and may be held by the UK immigration authorities in a detention facility until the next available flight back to the U.S. The U.S. Consulate General Belfast cannot interfere with or influence the decisions of the UK immigration authorities.

Please remind any U.S. citizen family or friends who are planning to travel to the UK for any reason other than a short-term visit for tourism, to refer to the UK Border Agency or their nearest British Embassy or Consulate for advice regarding entry requirements.

If you are involved with a church or a charitable/voluntary organization that accepts volunteers from overseas, please let them know that there have been extensive changes to the requirements for volunteers entering the UK and that they should refer to the UKBA for advice in this regard before recruiting any further volunteers from outside the UK.

The UKBA website is at: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk>.

UKBA information about entry requirements for Temporary Workers/Volunteers is at: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/tier5/>

For information about British Embassies/Consulates in the U.S. refer to: <http://ukinusa.fco.gov.uk/en>.

Please note: The U.S. Consulate cannot answer questions regarding entry requirements into the UK. Questions regarding UK visas, or UK entry requirements should be directed to the UK Border Agency.

Hurricane Season Arrives

The U.S. Department of State alerts U.S. citizens to the Hurricane Season in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico. The official Atlantic Hurricane season runs from June through November. U.S. citizens living in or traveling to storm-prone regions overseas should prepare for hurricanes and tropical storms by organizing a kit containing a supply of bottled water, non-perishable food items, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, and vital documents (especially passport or other identification) in a waterproof container. U.S. citizens should monitor local radio, local media, and the National Weather Service to stay aware of any weather developments in their area. U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to register with their nearest Embassy or Consulate through the Department of State's travel registration website, <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>.

For further information visit http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/hurricane_season/hurricane_season_2915.html

Tax Season is Here: Helpful Information

The U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has published a new flyer for U.S. taxpayers living abroad. The IRS developed this brochure as a resource to assist taxpayers in locating useful tax information to help in the preparation of their tax returns and/or in resolving tax account problems.

For a copy of the brochure, go to <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p54.pdf>.

You can reach the IRS at Embassy London, Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 12:00 noon: 0207 894 0477, or email them at irs.london@irs.gov. IRS London also provides over-the-counter assistance on a first-come, first-served basis on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, between 9:00 am - 4:00 pm. They do not take appointments. They cannot accept cash payments. They do not provide direct preparation of tax returns, but will assist with specific questions.

American Citizen Services—FAQ's



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Q: I'm getting married in the U.K. and in order to have the wedding in the parish church, the vicar requires a letter from the U.S. Consulate stating that the UK marriage will be recognized in the U.S. I have directed the vicar to your website regarding marriage, http://www.usembassy.org.uk/cons_new/acs/scs/marriage_and_civil_partnerships.html. This site states: "In general, regardless of nationality or religion of the person married, marriages legally performed in the United Kingdom are also recognized in the United States."

However, the vicar still requires a letter from the Consulate stating the marriage will be recognized. Is it possible for the Consulate to send a letter on Consulate letterhead stating, as the website does, that our marriage will be recognized?

A. Unfortunately, the Consulate is unable to provide the letter you require. Although some dioceses may ask a foreign national to obtain from the relevant embassy or consulate a letter saying their marriage will be recognized, U.S. Diplomatic and Consular officers and U.S. Ambassadors cannot issue any official certificate with respect to marriage laws, nor can they make any official certification about the status or eligibility to marry of U.S. citizens who propose to be married abroad, or about the laws of the United States or of any of the fifty States or Territories about eligibility for marriage or the solemnization of a marriage.

You might consider directing your vicar to the U.S. Department of State's Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM), which contains language regarding the role of Consulate Officers in marriages of U.S. citizens abroad.

Specifically, 7 FAM Exhibit 1454 states that:

"In general, marriages which are legally performed and valid abroad are also legally valid in the United States. Inquiries regarding the validity of a marriage abroad should be directed to the attorney general of the state in the United States where the parties in the marriage live."



Federal Trade Commission Warns Consumer over Stimulus Scams

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has released a warning to consumers about Federal Stimulus scams that are surfacing on the internet. The FTC is warning consumers about two kinds of stimulus scams - fake government websites claiming anyone can "receive free money" by joining a grant program and also, phishing emails attempting to get users to hand over their personal information and infect users with malware.

For more information on this, go to <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2009/03/stimulus scam.shtm>.

The FTC works for consumers to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices and to provide information to help spot, stop, and avoid them.

2009-H1N1 Influenza

For the most update-to-date information and guidance on dealing with H1N1 (Swine Flu) in Northern Ireland, go to the Department of Health website at <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk> or <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/health-and-well-being/swine-flu.htm> .

For international travel alerts, H1N1 Frequently Asked Questions and information on Pandemic Influenza, visit the Department of State website on H1N1:

http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_4493.html

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Culture Corner

The U.S. Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. This quarter, we encourage you to check out:

American Independence Celebrations, Evening Concert - July 5, 2009 - With a dash of Cajun and Zydeco spice, the Ulster American Folk Park celebrates Independence Day with an evening concert. Tickets for what promises to be an electric concert are available from the museum. Telephone 02882 243292 or visit their website at http://www.folkpark.com/whats_on/events/?article=167 for further details.

Belfast Taste and Music Fest - August 6 - 9, 2009 –Enjoy the best of Northern Ireland food with a Chicago twist at Botanic Gardens. The event will feature unique food, music and guests chefs from Chicago, Illinois. For information and admission information go to <http://www.belfasttasteandmusicfest.com> or phone 02890 661898.

18th Annual Appalachian and Bluegrass Music Festival - September 4 - 6, 2009 - Now entering its 18th year, the Bluegrass Festival is one of the most successful events of its kind in Europe. Annually it attracts over 10,000 visitors and encourages learning, enjoyment and interaction in the unique setting of an outdoor museum. For more information visit their website at <http://www.folkpark.com>.

American Citizen Services:
In the event of a genuine emergency involving a U.S. Citizen
in Northern Ireland, our after-hours phone number is
0844 736 9614.

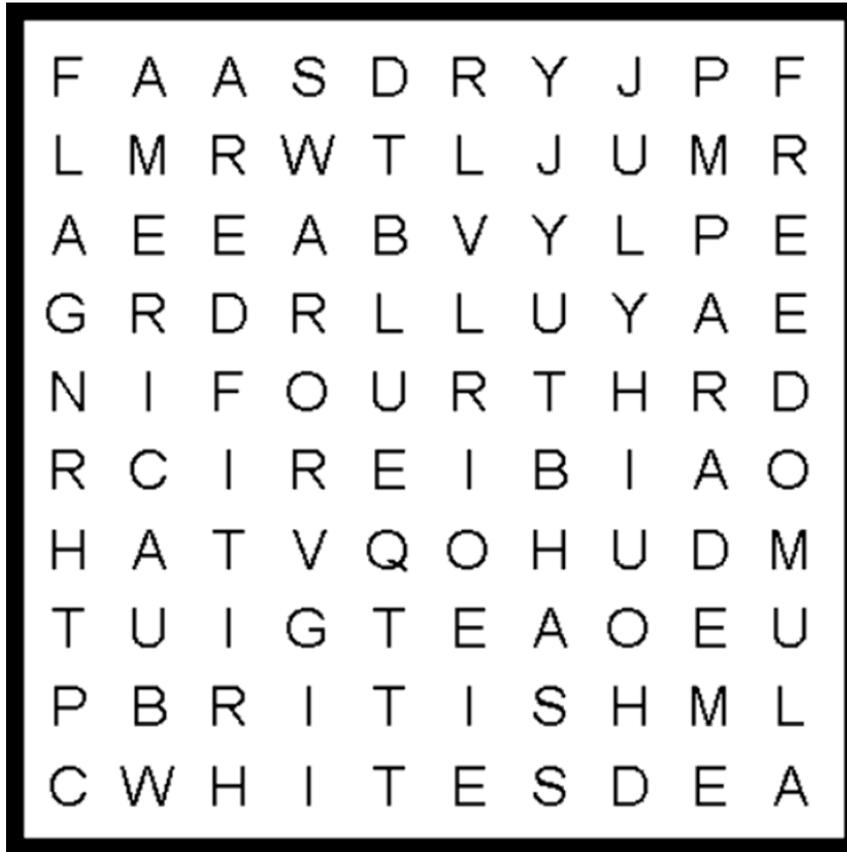
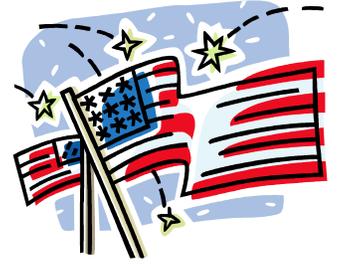
Consular Closure Dates

The U.S. Consulate General Belfast will be closed on the following dates:

Friday, July 3, 2009 - Independence Day
Monday, July 13, 2009 - Orangeman's Day
Tuesday, July 14, 2009 - Orangeman's Day
Monday, August 31, 2009 - Summer Bank Holiday
Monday, September 7, 2009 - Labor Day

Kids Corner

Independence Day Word Search



AMERICA	JULY	PARADE	BRITISH
BLUE	FREEDOM	RED	WHITE
FLAG	FOURTH	TEA	WAR