



AMERICAN CONNECTIONS

AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES NEWSLETTER

La Paz, Bolivia

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Contact Us

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Web Page:

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Hours of Operation

LA PAZ

Monday - Thursday
08:00 to 12:30
13:00 to 15:30
Friday
08:00 to 12:00

COCHABAMBA

Monday, Tuesdays, Thursday
and Friday
8:00 to 12:00
Wednesday
13:30 to 17:30

SANTA CRUZ

Monday - Tuesday
8:30 to 15:00
Wednesday - Thursday
8:00 - 15:00
Friday
9:00 - 12:00

(except U.S. and local holidays)

New Hours of Operations

The U.S. Embassy in La Paz and the Consular Agencies in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz have implemented new hours of operation. The new hours are:

U.S. Embassy, La Paz

Monday – Thursday: 8:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Friday: 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

U.S. Consular Agency – Cochabamba

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday: 08:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 1:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

U.S. Consular Agency – Santa Cruz

Monday and Tuesday: 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Wednesday and Thursday: 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Friday: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Closed to The Public for Non-Emergency Consular Services

This message is to advise the general public that the Consular Section and the Consular Agencies in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz will be closed on February 10 and 11, 2014, for consular training. We will resume normal operations on Wednesday, February 12, 2014. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

Meet the New Vice Consul

Brian Commaroto-Roverini is the Immigrant Visa Chief at the U.S. Embassy in La Paz. This is his second assignment with the State Department. He served from 2010 to 2013 in Nouakchott, Mauritania as a Political Officer assisting the Mauritanian government in its efforts to protect human rights, promote democratic institutions, and counter terrorist threats. Prior to joining the State Department, Brian worked as a Senior Financial Analyst for JetBlue, an American airline based out of New York City. Brian earned a BA in Italian Studies and Business Economics from Brown University and an MSC in International Economics from Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi. Brian is married and hails from New Jersey.

IRS CORNER - 2014 Tax Season Is Now Open; e-file and Free File Can Speed Refunds

The Internal Revenue Service encourages taxpayers to use [e-file or Free File](#) as the fastest way to receive refunds.

The new opening date for individuals to file their 2013 tax returns will allow the IRS adequate time to program and test its tax processing systems. The annual process for updating IRS systems saw significant delays in October following the 16-day federal government closure.

The government closure meant the IRS had to change the original opening date from January 21-31, 2014. The 2014 date is one day later than the 2013 filing season opening, which started on January 30, 2013, following January tax law changes made by Congress on January 1, under the American Taxpayer Relief Act (ATRA). The extensive set of ATRA tax changes affected many 2012 tax returns, which led to the late January opening.

The IRS noted that several options are available to help taxpayers prepare for the 2014 tax season and get their refunds as easily as possible. New year-end tax planning information has been added to www.irs.gov this week.

The IRS cautioned that it will not process any tax returns before January 31, so there is no advantage to filing on paper before the opening date. Taxpayers will receive their tax refunds much faster by using e-file or Free File with the direct deposit option.

The April 15 tax deadline is set by statute and will remain in place. However, the IRS reminds taxpayers that anyone can request an automatic six-month extension to file their tax return. The request is easily done with Form 4868, which can be filed electronically or on paper.

IRS Filing Season Tax Tips

The Internal Revenue Service has made available a special series of daily Tax Tips beginning January 28, to help people prepare their tax returns.

More than 60 IRS Tax Tips will be available through a free email subscription or by visiting www.irs.gov. The tips, one available each business day through the April 15 tax deadline, offer single-topic briefs on tax topics affecting millions of people.

The easy-to-read tips cover a wide range of topics to help people with the 2014 filing season, which began January 31. Many tips offer information on money-saving tax credits and deductions that can be easy to overlook and could affect your refund.

Topics for 2014 include:

- How to avoid tax scams
- Help available through IRS.gov
- Who can claim the Earned Income Tax Credit
- Free File
- Free volunteer tax help
- Fastest and safest way to get your refund
- How to choose a tax preparer
- Tax help 'en Español'
- Tax return errors that slow down your refund



The Social Security Administration has expanded the services available with a *my Social Security* account, a personalized online account that people can use beginning in their working years and continuing throughout the time they receive Social Security benefits. More than 60 million Social Security beneficiaries and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients can now access their benefit verification letter, payment history, and earnings record instantly using their online account. Social Security beneficiaries also can change their address and start or change direct deposit information online.

Social Security beneficiaries and SSI recipients with a *my Social Security* account can go online and get an official benefit verification letter instantly. The benefit verification letter serves as proof of income to secure loans, mortgages and other housing, and state or local benefits. Additionally, people use the letter to prove current Medicare health insurance coverage, retirement or disability status, and age. People can print or save a customized letter.

Social Security processed nearly nine million requests for benefit verification letters in the past year. This new online service allows people to conduct business with Social Security without having to visit an office or make a phone call, and very often wait for a letter to arrive in the mail. It also will reduce the time spent by employees completing these requests and free them to focus on other workloads.

People age 18 and older can sign up for an account at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount. Once there, they must be able to provide information about themselves and answers to questions that only they are likely to know. After completing the secure verification process, people can create a *my Social Security* account with a unique user name and password to access their information.

People age 18 and older who are not receiving benefits can sign up for a *my Social Security* account to get a personalized online Social Security *Statement*. The online *Statement* provides eligible workers with secure and convenient access to their Social Security earnings and benefit information, and estimates of future benefits they can use to plan for their retirement. In addition, the portal also includes links to information about other online services, such as applications for retirement, disability and Medicare.

For more information, please go to www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount.

SSA Services Available Online:

- Apply for Retirement
- Apply for Disability
- Apply for Medicare
- Estimate Your Future Benefits
- Request a Replacement Medicare Card
- Apply for Extra Help With Prescription Drug Costs
- If you Receive Benefits: Start or Change Direct Deposit, Change Your Address, Request a Proof of Income Letter
- Find Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

To learn more on what you can do online click [HERE](#).

FEDERAL BENEFITS CORNER - Foreign Enforcement Questionnaire (FEQ) Season

The Social Security Administration (SSA) contacts beneficiaries with foreign addresses on their SSA records either annually or biennially to verify their status. Selected beneficiaries receive the form with an envelope to the SSA facility in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania.

In October, SSA mailed a follow-up notice to selected beneficiaries that did not respond to the original questionnaire sent in July 2013. SSA will suspend the benefits if they do not receive a completed and signed Foreign Enforcement Questionnaire (form SSA-7162 or SSA-7161) by January 13, 2014.

If you received form SSA-7162 or SSA-7161, but have failed to complete and mail it, please schedule an appointment to visit the American Citizens Services unit through our web page at <http://bolivia.usembassy.gov> so we can assist you in completing and mailing the form for you. Please be sure to bring a valid ID so it can be copied and attached to the form.

If benefits are interrupted for failure to return the questionnaire, it may take the SSA 45- days or longer to resume your payments.

Affordable Care Act and U.S. Citizens Abroad

U.S. citizens living abroad are generally subject to the same individual shared responsibility provisions as U.S. citizens living in the United States. Starting in 2014, the individual shared responsibility provision calls for each individual to have minimum essential health care coverage (MEC) for each month, qualify for an exemption, or make a payment when filing his or her federal income tax return. However, U.S. citizens or residents living abroad for at least 330 days within a 12-month period are treated as having MEC during those 12 months, and thus will not owe a shared responsibility payment for any of those 12 months. Also, U.S. citizens who qualify as a bona fide resident of a foreign country for an entire taxable year are treated as having MEC for that year.

For general questions about the Affordable Care Act (ACA), see the dedicated ACA website operated by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) <https://www.healthcare.gov/>.

What is the Health Insurance Marketplace?

The Health Insurance Marketplace, sometimes known as the Health Insurance Exchange, is a new way to find quality health coverage. It can help if you do not have coverage now, or if you have it but want to look at other options. With one Marketplace application, you can learn if you can get lower costs based on your income, compare your coverage options side-by-side, and enroll. When you use the Health Insurance Marketplace, you will fill out an application and see all the health plans available in your area. You will provide some information about your household size and income to find out if you are eligible for a tax credit to reduce your share if the monthly premium for private insurance plans. You will also learn if you qualify for lower out-of-pocket costs. Furthermore, the Marketplace will tell you if you qualify for free low-cost coverage available through Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Am I eligible for coverage in the Marketplace?

Most people will be eligible for health coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace. To be eligible for health coverage through the Marketplace, you:

Cont.—Affordable Care Act and U.S. Citizens Abroad

- must be a U.S. citizen or national (or be lawfully present)
- can't be currently incarcerated

U.S. citizens living outside the U.S.

U.S. citizens living in a foreign country are **not required** to get health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act. If you're uninsured and living abroad, you **don't** have to pay the fee that other uninsured U.S. citizens may have to pay.

Generally, health insurance coverage in the Marketplace covers health care provided by doctors, hospitals, and medical services **within the United States**. If you're living abroad, it's important to know this before you consider buying Marketplace insurance.

Questions? Call 1-800-318-2596, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. (TTY: 1-855-889-4325)

Bolivian Migratory Amnesty

SUPREME DECREE 1800 REGARDING MIGRATORY AMNESTY AND REGULARIZATION OF STATUS

Supreme Decree 1800 was issued by Bolivian President Evo Morales on November 20, 2013, as part of the enactment of Immigration Act No. 370.

This law seeks to regularize the entry, transit, stay and departure of persons in Bolivian territory, and establishes an institutional coordination that guarantees the rights of Bolivian and foreign migrants.

This represents an opportunity for American citizens living in Bolivia without a legal immigration status to obtain the documentation that will allow them to regularize their immigration status in Bolivia. The decree waives immigration fines for being present in the country illegally. Currently the fine for overstaying in Bolivia is 20 Bolivianos per day.

The law became effective on January 5, 2014, and the amnesty will last for six months until June 5, 2014.

In terms of procedure, foreigners living in Bolivia prior to May 8, 2011, i.e. two years before the date of enactment of the Migration Act, should go to the National Migration Office (DIGEMIG) in La Paz or in their departmental offices to register and fill out a form to start the process of immigration regularization. The total cost for this service is 2,000 Bolivianos. Once immigration has issued the final documents, the applicant is eligible to receive an official Foreign Resident Identification Card from the Personal Identification Service Office (SEGIP) and therefore become a legal resident in Bolivia. The cost to get an ID from SEGIP is 450 Bolivianos. For more information please visit the National Migration Office [website \(http://www.migracion.gob.bo/web/indexa.php\)](http://www.migracion.gob.bo/web/indexa.php)

The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)

Sign up for our free Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (formerly known as “Travel Registration” or “Registration with Embassies”) to receive the latest travel updates and information from the U.S. government.

When you sign up, you will automatically receive the most current information we compile about the country where you will be traveling or living. You will also receive updates, including Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts (where appropriate). You only need to sign up once, and then you can add and delete trips from your account based on your current travel plans!

By connecting with us on the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, we will be able to better assist you in the case of an emergency, such as if you lose your passport or it is stolen while you are abroad. The travel and contact information you enter into our Smart Traveler Enrollment Program will make it easier for consular officers in U.S. embassies and consulates around the world to contact you and your loved ones during an emergency—including situations where your family or friends in the U.S. are having problems trying to contact you with important news.

We believe that a well-informed traveler is a safer traveler. Our consular officers around the world compile country-specific information, travel alerts and warnings, fact sheets and emergency messages to provide you with timely and accurate travel information about every country where you may travel.

Click [HERE](#) to login now!

CONSULAR AGENCIES CORNER

We would like to inform the general public that:

- * The Consular Agency in Cochabamba has increased its number of daily appointments which means that appointments can be made up to 24 hours in advance for next day service. We hope this permanent change allows for more prompt and efficient services for our public.
- * Everyone coming to any of the Consular Agencies needs to have an appointment, regardless of whether you are the American citizen seeking the service or whether you are accompanying an American citizen. Only the names listed on the appointment list will be allowed to enter the Agencies. Appointments are done online through our website at <http://bolivia.usembassy.gov/service.html>.
- * We are unable to answer or assist anyone with any questions concerning visas (Tourist, Immigrant, or otherwise). If you have any questions regarding visas we ask that you please consult the US Embassy Website at: <http://bolivia.usembassy.gov/visas.html>. All inquiries related to non-immigrant visas should be sent to ConsularLaPazNIV@state.gov. All inquiries related to immigrant visas should be sent to ConsularLaPazIV@state.gov.

LIST OF UPCOMING HOLIDAYS TO BE OBSERVED BY THE U.S. MISSION

The U.S. Embassy and the Consular Agencies will be closed on the following holidays for Spring 2014:

President's Day	February 17	(U.S.)
Carnival	March 3 - 4	(Bolivian)
Good Friday	April 18	(Bolivian)
Labor Day	May 1	(Bolivian)
Memorial Day	May 26	(U.S.)
Corpus Christi Day	June 19	(Bolivian)
Winter Solstice/Aymara New Year	June 21	(Bolivian)