

ACS NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2011 – FEBRUARY 2012

Digital Town Hall Meeting with American Citizen Services on Wednesday, December 7th 8pm-9pm IST; Add Questions Now!

American Citizen Services wants to hear from you! Ask questions, provide feedback, give suggestions for improvement, and learn more about the services available at the New Delhi Embassy by tuning into the Digital Town Hall Meeting with American Citizens Services on Wednesday, December 7th. Do you appreciate the services for American citizens provided by the New Delhi embassy? Do you think there is a lack of any particular services? Do you have suggestions for how American Citizen Services can improve and expand? What do you want and need from the New Delhi Embassy?

Login as guest at <https://statedeptasia.connectsolutions.com/programsdelhi>

You can add questions at any time to be answered during the meeting.

Scheduling an Appointment with the Embassy

Appointments are required for most routine American Citizen Services for passports (applying, renewing, or adding pages), reporting the birth of American citizens abroad, and notarial and document services. Appointments are available Monday to Friday from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm. The New Delhi Embassy is closed on the last Wednesday of every month and on American and Indian holidays. Applicants should plan to spend at least an hour at the Embassy. Each family member seeking a service related to passports or birth registration should make an individual appointment.

Please arrive fifteen minutes before your appointment to clear security. Many items are not allowed in the Embassy during your interview, including mobile phones, other electronic devices, large bags, bottles, and food. Other items may be prohibited based on security staff discretion. Finally, please print and prepare all required documents before coming to your appointment.

Please visit the following links for more information and assistance in scheduling appointments with the Embassy:

1) General info on scheduling, required documents, prohibited items, and holiday closures:

<http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/appointment-and-contact-info.html>

2) Schedule an appointment online:

<https://evisaforms.state.gov/acs/default.asp?postcode=NWD&appcode=1>

3) American Citizens Services fees:

<http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/u.s.-citizen-services-fees.html>

Social Security Administration Update:

Good News! We are happy to inform you that the United States Treasury has established International Direct Deposit (IDD) in India for recipients of SSA, VA, OPM and RRB payments. IDD will allow the beneficiaries to receive their payments via direct deposit to a financial institution in India.

During the month of May 2011, the United States Department of the Treasury mandated that all benefit payments to India be sent electronically. Therefore, Social Security benefit payments will no longer be sent via paper checks.

You need to sign up for direct deposit in order to continue receiving your Social Security benefits. Your benefits will be sent electronically to your chosen bank on or before the third of every month.

What Are The Benefits Of Direct Deposit?

It is the safest, most convenient and reliable method of receiving your Social Security benefits. The payment is electronically transmitted to your bank account and you have immediate access to your funds by the date of payment. There are no more delays and missing or stolen checks. Furthermore, you will not need to visit the bank anymore just to cash a check. Make sure the account number in India should be a savings rupee account and the bank account number should not exceed 15 digits.

How Do I sign Up For Direct Deposit?

- Complete the form SF-1199 available at <http://www.ssa.gov/> **OR** contact the embassy to forward the form to you electronically.
- Send the completed form to the Social Security office in Manila **OR** send this form to the U.S. Embassy, American Citizen Services Unit, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021.

If You Have Any Questions

Please call (+63)2-301-2411 or (+63)2-301-2467 and ask for Erwin Gonzales or Pamela Palma. You may also send an email to FBU.Manila@ssa.gov. Also, the American Citizen Services Unit, New Delhi can be reached at 011-2419-8000.

Spotlight on an American Citizen in India: Rajiv Mohabir

According to our most recent report, there are over 30,000 American Citizens living in our consular district of North India. This section of our newsletter will be dedicated to spotlighting one American Citizen and their story of how and why they came to India. If you would like your story included in our newsletter, write us at acsnd@state.gov

Recapturing the Remnants of Identity; How I became an American Citizen

"Some were kidnapped, some were in debt, but usually they were fraudulently given 5-year labor contracts and told that they could return to India once the contract was up," recalled Rajiv Mohabir, explaining the tenuous circumstances his family and many 19th-century Indians that became unwillingly locked in labor contracts as indentured servants in Guyana. Rajiv continued, "There was even a profession, called Arkotiya, which consisted of people lured into fraudulently signing labor contracts. All these people would end up as indentured servants in Guyana."

Rajiv's ancestors were taken to Guyana from eastern Uttar Pradesh in the late 19th century. Thousands of women were also eventually taken to Guyana to serve as wives and domestic laborers for the working men. Racial tension and violence between Africans and Indians in Guyana created

distinct, insular communities, helping Rajiv's family to strongly maintain its Indian identity over five generations and across four continents.

Rajiv's maternal grandfather made a fortune in Guyana selling steel and moved his entire family to England when Rajiv's mother was just 14. In 1971, Rajiv's father was rewarded an apprenticeship in accounting in England and also relocated. Rajiv's parents met and married there in 1973. At the time of Rajiv's birth in 1981, England was experiencing the peak in popularity of the National Front, a far right, white-only political party. Rajiv's mother was attacked by National Front members on the street, resulting in Rajiv's parents' decision to leave the country. In 1983, when Rajiv was just 18 months old, they immigrated to the U.S., first to New York City, then Niagara Falls, and eventually to Florida. At the age of 15, Rajiv officially became a U.S. citizen.

While in New York State, Rajiv often visited his grandmother, Gangadai, who had relocated to Canada. She spoke Creole and Bhojpuri (which she referred to as Hindi), but Rajiv understood enough Creole to absorb countless stories, Ramayana tales, and folk songs about India. During these years, Rajiv developed a strong connection to India, which he imagined as a far off, magical place full of wonder and amazement.

Rajiv started to learn Hindi at the age of 15, through his grandmother's informal teaching and a friend who spoke Hindi. He quickly noticed differences between his grandmother's supposed Hindi and his friend's genuine Hindi, but Rajiv did not discover the full truth until seven years later. Using leftover scholarship funding, Rajiv arrived in Varanasi and made the most fascinating discovery. The Varanasi locals spoke his grandmother's "Hindi," which was actually Bhojpuri, one of India's local languages. Furthermore, his grandmother's "India" was alive and well – Rajiv discovered folk songs that were nearly identical to the songs he heard growing up. These folk songs had traveled through five generations and across three continents, and had remained almost completely unchanged.

Rajiv is currently studying Hindi at the American Institute of Indian Studies in Jaipur. You can read his poetry at rajivmohabir.com, and read his blog, including reflections on his current stay in Jaipur, at rajivmohabir.wordpress.com.

Voting Corner

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS: The first presidential primary elections take place in January 2012. Plan to submit a new [Federal Post Card Application \(FPCA\)](#) as early as possible in 2012 so your local election officials have time to send you an absentee ballot, and you have time to vote and return it.

To vote in U.S. elections, citizens must have a legal voting residence address in a State or territory. The issue of voting residence can be complex, depending on individual circumstances. Even in States where laws clearly define criteria for determining voting residence, the final determination is generally up to each local election office.

Here are some questions to help you determine your state of residence:

- Where have you registered to vote or voted?

- What State or territory has issued you a driver's license, any other license or identification card?
- Where is your motor vehicle registered?
- Where is your home or home of record?
- What State or territory are you from?
- Where did you live before coming abroad?
- Where did you live immediately before leaving the United States?
- Where does your family live?
- Where do your parents live?
- Where do you own property?
- What State do you claim for tax residency?

For more information and resources see the U.S. Embassy website at <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/other-citizen-services/voter-registration2.html>

Fraud Alert

During the busy tourist season, we want to make you aware of the possible crime that can sometimes happen in India. This text is from our Country Specific Information that is located on our website.

You should exercise care when hiring transportation and/or guides and use only well-known travel agents to book trips. Some scam artists have lured travelers by displaying their name on a sign when they leave the airport. Another popular scam is to drop money or to squirt something on the clothing of an unsuspecting traveler and during the distraction to rob them of their valuables. Tourists have also been given drugged drinks or tainted food to make them more vulnerable to theft, particularly at train stations. Even food or drink purchased in front of the traveler from a canteen or vendor could be tainted. To protect against robbery of personal belongings, do not to accept food or drink from strangers.

Some vendors sell carpets, jewelry, gemstones, or other expensive items that may not be of the quality promised. Deal only with reputable businesses and do not hand over your credit cards or money unless you are certain that goods being shipped are the goods you purchased. If a deal sounds too good to be true, it is best avoided. Most Indian states have official tourism bureaus set up to handle complaints.

There have been a number of other scams perpetrated against foreign travelers, particularly in Goa, Jaipur, and Agra that target younger travelers and involve suggestions that money can be made by privately transporting gems or gold (both of which can result in arrest) or by taking delivery abroad of expensive carpets, supposedly while avoiding customs duties. The scam artists describe profits that can be made upon delivery of the goods, and require the traveler to pay a "deposit" as part of the transaction.

In another common scam, family members in the U.S., particularly older people, are approached for funds to help grandchildren or relatives who claim to be in jail or without money to return home. Do not send money without contacting the U.S. Embassy or Consulate to confirm the caller's situation. You can also call our office of Overseas Citizens Services at 888-407-4747 (from overseas: 202-501-4444). Review our information on [Emergency Assistance to Americans Abroad](#).

Don't buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal in the United States, if you purchase them you may also be breaking local law.

Forced Marriage

The U.S. Department of State's highest priority overseas is the protection and welfare of American citizens. It considers the issue of forced marriage to be a violation of basic human rights and a form of child abuse. Often, victims are subjected to non-consensual sex, physical and emotional abuse, isolation, and threats of violence. International law and conventions also support an individual's right to self-determination, minimum marriage ages and the rejection of abuse of women and honor based violence.

The U.S. Embassy in New Delhi is willing to assist victims or potential victims of forced marriage. If you or someone you know is an American citizen in India who has been, is being, or fears being forced into marriage against your/their will, please contact the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi.

Use of U.S or Indian Documents in the Other's Country

The U.S. Embassy receives many queries about the use of U.S. documents in India, and the use of Indian documents in the United States.

To authenticate a U.S. document for use in India, you must obtain an apostille from the state which issued the document. It is then ready for use in India; you do not need to come to the U.S. Embassy or Ministry of External Affairs for further processing.

To authenticate an Indian document for use in the United States, the document needs authentication by the state where it was issued. Then the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Consular-Passport-Visa Division in New Delhi will issue an apostille sticker. This does not apply to commercial, customs, or diplomatic documents. These documents need to be authenticated first at the MEA, and then at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

See our website for further details: <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/other-citizen-services/notary-services.html>

Health Corner

All travelers should familiarize themselves with conditions at their destination that could affect their health (high altitude or pollution, types of medical facilities, required immunizations, availability of required pharmaceuticals, etc.).

The quality of medical care in India varies considerably. Medical care in the major population centers approaches and occasionally meets Western standards, but adequate medical care is usually very limited or unavailable in rural areas.

Good information on vaccinations and other health precautions is available from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) or by calling the hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747). Some vaccines such as Typhoid, Influenza, and Hepatitis A are recommended for all travelers and other vaccines such as Hepatitis B, Japanese Encephalitis, and Rabies are recommended for high-risk travelers.

Outbreaks of Avian Influenza (H5N1 virus) occur intermittently in eastern India, including West Bengal, Manipur, Sikkim, and Assam. For further information on avian influenza (bird flu), please refer to the Department of State's [Avian Influenza Fact Sheet](#), and the Government of India site on A1H1 at <http://mohfw-h1n1.nic.in/>

The Embassy website lists some doctors and hospitals in our district. Please see the list at <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/other-citizen-services/medical-information.html>

Dual Nationality

India does not permit its citizens to hold dual nationality. In 2006, India launched the "Overseas Citizens of India" (OCI) program, which has often been mischaracterized as a dual nationality program. It does not grant Indian citizenship. If you are a U.S. citizen and obtain an OCI card you will not become a citizen of India; you will remain a citizen of the United States. An OCI card is similar to a U.S. "green card" in that a holder can travel to and from India indefinitely, work in India, study in India, and own property in India (except for certain agricultural and plantation properties). An OCI card holder, however, does not receive an Indian passport, cannot vote in Indian elections, and is not eligible for Indian government employment. For more information on this subject, please see our website at: <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/acsduallnation.html>

International Parental Child Abduction

India is not a signatory of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Parental Abduction; therefore, left-behind parents must rely on other avenues to recover their children from India. Once a child has been abducted to India, remedies are very few. India does not consider international parental child abduction a crime, and the Indian courts rarely recognize U.S. custody orders, preferring to exert their own jurisdiction in rulings that tend to favor the parent who wants to keep the child in India. For these reasons, it is often very difficult for left-behind parents in the United States to obtain any access to a child who has been abducted to India. In the rare scenario that a case is resolved, it is usually due to an agreement between the parents, rather than the result of court orders or arrest warrants. The State Department can help by attempting welfare and whereabouts visits; however, these visits may only be conducted with the consent of the child's physical guardian.

Disaster Preparedness

Even when you are in the safety of your home, natural disasters can strike. Earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis are only some of the natural disasters threatening the safety of Americans abroad. When natural disasters occur abroad, the Department of State and U.S. embassies and consulates in the affected country stand ready around the clock to track and assist affected American citizens. Visit the following websites to learn more about how to prepare for natural disasters:

- Are You Ready? Guide – <http://www.ready.gov/are-you-ready-guide>

- Disaster Assistance – <http://www.disasterassistance.gov/>
- CDC Emergency Preparedness – <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/index.asp>
- NASA Disaster Reference – <http://gcmd.nasa.gov/Resources/pointers/hazards.html>
- FEMA Disaster Preparedness – <http://www.fema.gov/plan/index.shtm>
- FEMA Disaster Information – <http://www.fema.gov/hazard/index.shtm>

Visit the following websites to stay informed and stay safe AFTER a disaster:

- CDC Response, Cleanup & Safety – <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/workers.asp>
- ReliefWeb – <http://reliefweb.int/>
- International Association of Emergency Managers – <http://www.iaem.com/>
- UNHCR – <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>
- FEMA Bereavement and Loss – <http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/bereave.shtm>