

Ask the U.S. Embassy
August 6, 2014

Q: I'm a dual U.S. and Jamaican citizen. Can I still use my Jamaican passport when I arrive in Jamaica?

The short answer is: Yes. A dual citizen can present a Jamaican passport to immigration authorities when he or she arrives in Jamaica. Many Jamaican-Americans enjoy the freedom of using a Jamaican passport here for extended stays.

There are, however, strict rules about traveling with two passports that all dual citizens must follow.

U.S. federal law generally requires all citizens to travel in and out of the country using a valid U.S. passport or passport card with limited exceptions, such as travel on cruise ships. Failure to comply with this regulation can wreak havoc on travel plans. That means dual citizens should not get on a plane to the U.S. without a valid U.S. passport.

Lately, U.S. Embassy Kingston has seen an uptick in the number of dual nationals who find themselves temporarily stranded here because they left their U.S. passports at home or their U.S. passports expired. Airlines in Jamaica will not board a passenger on a U.S.-bound jet without a valid passport. Naturalization certificates cannot be used.

Fortunately, we offer passport services at the Embassy in Kingston as well as our Consular Agency in Montego Bay. It can, however, take seven to ten business days for a new passport to be processed (much faster than processing time for applications filed in the U.S., but still inconvenient for most travelers wanting to head home). It can take particularly long if a U.S. citizen is applying for a passport for the first time in Jamaica and doesn't have proper documentation.

During this time, the U.S. citizen may incur significant expenses from extra hotel nights and airline rebooking fees.

In extreme cases, embassy staff can issue a same-day emergency passport. Emergency passports are primarily meant to help people with an urgent medical need to travel or for crime or accident victims. Poor planning does not constitute an emergency.

Likewise, Legal Permanent Residents who arrive in Jamaica without a valid "green card" may also find themselves without a quick way home to the U.S. They will have to contact the Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers assigned to the U.S. Embassy to request a travel letter. It can take seven to ten business days to process a travel letter.

So, needless to say, U.S. citizens or residents should ensure that their passports or green cards are current before making any travel plans to or from Jamaica.

* For additional information about applying for a passport in Jamaica and other American Citizen Services, please visit U.S. Embassy Kingston's website, at <http://kingston.usembassy.gov>.

* For information about replacing a green card or obtaining a travel letter, please contact ICEKingston@state.gov.

Embassy staff will answer questions you may have regarding the U.S. Mission, including consular law, regulations and/or practice. In order to respect privacy, staff will not answer questions about specific visa or passport applications.

You can find more information about how to travel to the U.S. on our website, www.kingston.usembassy.gov. Keep on top of Embassy news on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Embassy-Jamaica> and by following @USEmbassyJA on Twitter. We also answer general visa questions on our Facebook and Twitter pages.