

Dear US Consul,

I had a tourist visa to the United States and stayed just a month or two every year when I visited my cousin in New York. But now I'm hearing about people being refused for new visas because they travelled too much or stayed too long in the US. This doesn't make sense to me. Will I be able to get a new visa to see my cousins again?

Sincerely,

Charlie in Chaguanas

Thanks for a very good question. Much of this confusion arises because when a traveler arrives at U.S. immigration in the airport or at the border, a representative of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security informs the traveler how long he/she may stay in the U.S. for that particular visit. Often the period may be up to six months. Staying in the United States for a month or even several months during a visit is not a problem and does not make one ineligible for a new visa. It can become a problem, however, if you stay several months, and especially the full six months, often or on every visit.

If you read the first "Ask the US Consul" column, then you will remember that you need strong ties to your home country in order to qualify for a visa. Ties are the sorts of things that bring you back home after a short visit overseas. If you are spending a significant portion of a given year in the United States, then it will appear that you do not have strong ties and this may affect your next visa application. Basically, if you have strong ties, like a good job or family responsibilities, it is unlikely that you could spend several months away from your job or your

family and very unlikely you could do this on a regular basis. So a number of long stays in the U.S. demonstrates your *lack* of ties to your home country because you obviously are not compelled to stay in Trinidad and Tobago.

We understand that many people like to save vacation time from work and use it all at once and take a several-month vacation. But another consideration the Visa Officer must take into account is if you have the money to pay for a long visit and that you will not violate the terms of your visa while in the U.S. For instance, it is not cheap to stay for a long time anywhere including the U.S., even if you have relatives to stay with. You will need to pay for food, transportation, souvenirs, etc. The Visa Officer must see proof that you can pay for these expenses with money you already have and not by taking a loan or paying with credit cards. Also, many of our applicants care for relatives' children or ailing loved ones while in the U.S. Even if you do this without pay, these activities generally count as work. So if you are in the U.S. for several months, we may believe you are working in violation of the terms of your tourist visa. It is the applicant's responsibility to clarify any question in this regard.

Look at it this way: would you repeatedly spend three months in Antigua, or Brazil, or France? Many of our applicants have travelled to other islands in the Caribbean or other countries, but most of them only spend a few days or weeks. Much the same, it is not considered normal tourism to stay in the U.S. for many months without a specific reason. There are plenty of good reasons to stay in the U.S. for many months, but most of them require a different kind of visa like a work or a student visa. If you have a tourist visa, use it for tourism. Keep your stays to a reasonable amount of time and your travel history should not be a problem when you apply for a new visa.