



American Citizen Services News

U.S. Independence Month Issue

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

On July 4, 1776, the drafting of the United States’ Declaration of Independence was completed. While a bitter war of independence was still ahead and much fighting and negotiation would take place before the U.S. became an independent republic, this date is the one commemorated by the American people each year.

Why do we celebrate July 4th if that date was only the beginning of the American Revolution? Perhaps because of the American core belief that words matter. The Declaration was distributed in the colonies to encourage people to join the fledgling army led by George Washington, and these words had power—power to convince people that they could be part of determining their own future.

When the Constitution of the United States

was finally drafted, it included strong protections for freedom of expression. The First Amendment protects freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and freedom of petition.

The Founding Fathers may not have imagined that the documents they drafted and signed would someday be used as justification to extend these rights to men of other races, to women, and to people of diverse sexual orientations. Today, cases are still decided in the courts of the United States, including the Supreme Court, based on the premise that the founding principles of our country and the protection of the basic rights of human beings who find themselves within its borders remain valid.

The fight for independence and for fair governance continues within the United States as we struggle to interpret how the principles upon which our republic is based apply to new situations. That struggle also continues worldwide. Other peoples living in countries that are not democracies are demanding fair representation and the right of self-determination.

As this newsletter goes to press, a few major changes in our embassy operations have gone into effect. After a series of violent

demonstrations against the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, we have suspended most visa services at the embassy in order to concentrate on our core mission, safeguarding the welfare of Americans in Syria.

We realize that many members of our American community have family members and friends who are not U.S. citizens but may want to travel to the U.S. In fact, many of you have sent inquiries regarding visa services in Damascus going forward. We have reprinted some of these to share with the entire American community in our “Dear Consul” column on Page 2.

In addition, on Page 4 of this issue you will find a guide to scheduling visa services at other embassies and consulates. We will be conducting some scheduled immigrant visa interviews in Damascus.

There has been much attention directed towards our embassy and its staff of late, most recently a Foreign Policy profile of Ambassador Ford titled, “Our Man in Damascus.” We remain focused on the people of Syria and their aspirations for their country. We are receiving many letters of support from Americans such as yourselves, and we thank you very much for your words. The encouragement is mutual as we all work towards a better and more democratic future for all peoples.

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*****New Feature*****

“Dear Consul...”

Thank you for sending in your questions about services at the embassy going forward. We’ve reprinted some we hope others will find useful (without identifying details) and we hope to continue this advice column in future issues.

Q: Dear Consul,

I have an immigrant visa interview appointment scheduled for my spouse. The interview is supposed to be at the beginning of August, but now I hear that you are stopping visa services. What should we do?

A Loving Husband

A: Dear Loving Husband,

The Immigrant Visa Section will reopen in July and August for already-scheduled interviews for the following visa categories: IR1 (spouse), CR1 (conditional spouse), IR2 (children of American citizens under 21) and IR5 (parents of American citizens). You will be contacted by NVC or the embassy to schedule your appointment.

Q: Dear Consul,

My parents were planning to visit my brother in the U.S. this summer, and they had interviews for B1/B2 non-immigrant visas scheduled on July 13. Can they still have their interviews? If not, what about the money they paid?

A Worried U.S. Citizen Daughter

A: Dear Worried Daughter,

It is indeed unfortunate that your parents were not able to complete the interview process. There are currently only limited visa services at U.S. Embassy in Damascus. We have arranged with Bank Bemo to have a process to refund your parents’ application fees, as they will have to start the application process from the beginning on the website of a different embassy or consulate, and they will have to take the first available appointments at that new location.

Q: Dear Consul,

I am a U.S. citizen, but my sister is not. She had her inter-

view for an H1B visa to begin her residency in September, and the consul gave her a blue sheet that said that her visa was subject to administrative processing. Now, I see you are closed for visa services. What happens to her visa? Can she get her visa printed in Beirut, where she is now?

Surgeon’s Sister

A: Dear Surgeon’s Sister,

Your sister is in luck. We are still processing the visas of applicants who have completed their interviews at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus. Her visa will go through the normal administrative processing, and once that is done we will contact her and instruct her to send us her passport by DHL as usual.

Visas approved in Damascus have to be printed in Damascus, so your sister will either have to come to Syria or send her passport via DHL from Lebanon. In some circumstances, a person may interview in another location and have the results of the administrative processing already completed in Damascus used by that post.

Q: Dear Consul,

We are the parents of U.S. citizen children, and we want to apply for tourist visas to travel with them to the U.S. because the situation in Syria is not safe. Can you make an exception and allow us to interview in Damascus?

Concerned Parents

A: Dear Concerned Parents,

Unfortunately, you will have to apply for visas at a different embassy or consulate, and there are no exceptions. We will advise you of any changes to this by posting on our embassy website.

How the U.S. Budget Affects Social Security

Many of you may have been following the current budget crisis in the U.S. Congress over the raising of the debt ceiling and wondering how it might affect you. One possible impact, if an agreement is not reached by Congress, is that U.S. citizens who qualify for social security payments may not receive their checks in August, 2011. This is because without a means of creating more borrowing power (by raising the debt ceiling) or more readily-available cash (by raising taxes or by cutting spending) the Treasury will not be able to honor its financial obligations in the short term, which may include social security payments.

The Washington Post has published a handy primer explaining the different terms relating to the national debt, appropriations, etc. at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/political-economy/post/budget-debt-ceiling-glossary-a-cheat-sheet-for-understanding-the-debates/2011/04/15/AFdkB2FF_blog.html.

Do you have an opinion on this and other issues? Would you like your voice to be heard? Now is a good time to make sure you are registered to vote in federal and state elections and make sure you understand how to request your absentee ballot for this fall's elections. Visit the link below to make sure you and members of your family who are American citizens over 18 don't miss the opportunity to exercise your democratic rights:

<http://www.fvap.org>

WHY TRAVEL NOW: A FRANK ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

On April 25, 2011, the Department of State issued a Travel Warning advising Americans to leave Syria immediately. While many heeded the warning and have departed, many still remain. Remaining in Syria is risky!

In the aftermath of the July 11, 2011 attack on the U.S. Embassy, the Embassy closed for one day and then re-opened, with visa services temporarily suspended. The Embassy took this decision in order to better assess its ability to provide for the safety and security of all of its employees and visa applicants. If the security situation were to deteriorate further, the U.S. Embassy might be forced to limit its services further.

Even before the attack on the Embassy, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MFA) restricted the travel of diplomats in Syria, and at times denied authorization for consular officers to visit areas where our citizens reside. Sometimes our citizens felt threatened and wanted to leave. Sometimes our citizens simply wanted to see their consul for routine questions and services. We had intended to travel to Aleppo to provide consular services in July; however, when we notified the MFA of our intent to visit our citizens in Aleppo, the MFA refused to permit the travel. We regret the inconvenience the cancellation of our visit to Aleppo may have caused.

The U.S. government takes seriously its commitment to the welfare and protection of American citizens, and frequently the one thing that an Embassy will continue to do to the last possible moment is to attempt to safeguard the welfare of its citizens. However, we work within the constraints of the local environment. Syrian government constraints and the security situation in Syria have already limited our ability to provide consular services outside Damascus.

We again advise our citizens to take advantage of the availability of commercial air services and leave now .

Applying for Visas Outside of Syria

Visa services at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus are limited, yet you have family members who would like to apply for visas. Where should you go?

Non-Immigrant Visas

Not sure what embassy or consulate to go to in order to apply for your non-immigrant visa?

Travel.state.gov has a handy webpage where you can search for the average wait times for appointments at all visa-issuing posts at

http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html.

If you already know where you prefer to apply, visit the website of that embassy or consulate and follow the instructions provided. Even if you have already filled out the DS-160 for an appointment that was cancelled at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, we advise you to start from the beginning and fill out the form on the website of the embassy or consulate at which you will be applying. This will help eliminate confusion and ensure that your application is with the consular officer on the date of your interview.

If you have an emergency need to travel, e.g. you are having surgery in the U.S. or you are a student who has to be present for the beginning of classes, most embassies and consulates have a method for you to indicate the urgent nature of your application on their websites.

Immigrant Visas

The U.S. Embassy will complete interviews already scheduled for the months of July and August and will accept new applications for the immigrant visa categories that follow:

IR1 (spouse of a U.S. citizen)

CR1 (spouse of a U.S. citizen, conditional)

IR2 (children of a U.S. citizen under the age of 21)

IR5 (parents of a U.S. citizen)

We will be contacting people in these categories to confirm or reschedule their appointments in Damascus. We are also accepting the I-130 immigrant visa petition until August 15 (see page 7 for details.)

For all other immigrant visa categories, we are unfortunately not going to be able to conduct scheduled interviews. You can take a proactive step by contacting the immigrant visa section of an embassy or consulate nearby and requesting transfer of your case. The appropriate email should be available on that embassy or consulate's website in the immigrant visa section. If they accept transfer of your case, their staff will contact us to forward your documents and file. Otherwise, cases will be returned to the National Visa Center for reassignment to another nearby embassy or consulate.

*****New “Discovering America” Feature*****

America’s Long-Distance Trails



When people travel to the United States from Syria, they often focus on well-known vacation spots such as Disney World and Las Vegas. Even those who venture out on their own on the classic American cross-country road trip unknowingly pass up some of the U.S.’s greatest outdoor gems in favor of tried-and-true tourist destinations such as the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls.

Yet economical, healthy adventure may be just a few miles from your doorstep if you live or vacation near one of North America’s long-distance trails. The United States has three major hiking trails that traverse most or all of the country north to south, and the American Discovery Trail (ADT) is a newer addition that crosses the U.S. from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

The Appalachian Trail

The oldest of America’s long-distance trails, the Appalachian Trail or “AT” is a series of longstanding walking trails between rural towns as well as added sections extending from the summit of Springer Mountain in Georgia all the way to the summit of Mt.



Katahdin in Maine. Every year, more than 4,000 people from different countries set out to “thru-hike” the Appalachian Trail (a thru-hiker is someone who hikes the trail end-to-end, without skipping any sections.) Only about 15% succeed! To date, 11,000 people have claimed to have completed the entire trail, either in a thru-hike or as a series of shorter section-hikes.

The Appalachian Trail is less rugged than its sibling trails to the west, boasting 250 shelters along its 2,181 mile length. Towns along the way are affectionately known as “trail towns” and offer services to hikers such as hosteling, resupply points and laundramats. Many hikers mail them-

selves food and supplies, addressing the packages to “Post Restante” so they can pick them up from the local post office.



The Continental Divide Trail

The Continental Divide Trail (CDT) is 3,100 miles long and some sections are still being completed. It begins at the Mexican Border in New Mexico and runs through Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho and Montana to reach the Canadian border. Much more rugged than its eastern cousin and with fewer amenities, the CDT attracts only a few dozen thru-hikers annually. However, sections of the CDT are stunning and attract many section hikers and day-trippers, especially the sections that run through the Rocky Mountains, Yellowstone National Park, and Glacier National Park. Another popular long-distance trail called the Colorado Trail overlaps with the CDT in the state of Colorado.

The Pacific Crest Trail

The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) is 2,663 miles long and traverses 25 national forests and 7 national parks on its meandering route from the Mexican Border in California to the border between the state of Washington and Canada. About 180 people are estimated to complete a successful thru-hike the PCT annually, out of 300 who attempt to do so.



The PCT differs from other long-distance trails in the ruggedness of its terrain—it is actually easier to hike because it doubles as an equestrian trail. Hikers who average 15 miles a day on the AT or CDT can average 20 miles a day during a thru-hike of the PCT due to the relatively easier grades. Nevertheless, the PCT is an intensely challenging experience. Many portions of the trail are tens of miles away from any road or town, and hikers must rely on the tents they carry on their backs to shelter them from the elements.

American Language Center Test Dates

<i>Test</i>	<i>July 2011</i>	<i>August 2011</i>	<i>September 2011</i>	<i>October 2011</i>
ITP	Wednesday, July 13 Thursday, July 28	Wednesday, August 10 Thursday, August 25	Monday, September 12 Wednesday, September 28	Thursday, October 20 Monday, October 31
GRE	N/A	N/A	N/A	Subject Test Saturday, October 15 General Test Saturday, October 22
SAT	N/A	N/A	N/A	Saturday, October 01
TOEFL	N/A	Saturday, August 13	N/A	Saturday, October 15
TOEIC	Wednesday, July 27	Wednesday, August 24	Tuesday, September 27	Sunday, October 30

ITP: Institutional TOEFL

TOEIC: Test of English for International Communication

For further info pls. call the American Language Center at 011- 3327236/ 011-3337936 (ext. 21 or 22)

**Reprint: Embassy to Stop Accepting Immigrant Visa Petitions on
August 15, 2011**

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that effective August 15, 2011, overseas petitioners will be required to file the Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative, by mail with the USCIS unless the petitioner lives in a country with a USCIS office.

What does this mean for you? If you are planning to file a petition for a fam-

ily member to immigrate to the U.S., you should make an appointment to do so before August 15, 2011 by emailing ivdamascus@state.gov. Petitions that are submitted before this date that are clearly approvable will be accepted in Damascus. **Petitions will not be accepted after this date.**



**American Citizen Services
Hours and Contact Information**

For appointments, please go to our website at :
<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/service.html>

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PO Box 29
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UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES

The Embassy was closed for Independence Day on Monday, July 4, 2011. There are no further planned closures in July.

"If you once forfeit the confidence of your fellow citizens, you can never regain their respect and esteem. It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Clinton, Illinois, September 8, 1854.