

American Citizen Services News

Informing the American community in Syria

Welcome Message from U.S. Charge D'Affaires

Welcome to the first issue of the U.S. Embassy Damascus ACS Newsletter! The purpose of this publication is to provide the U.S. citizen community in Syria with information about consular services and programs and to pass on important messages regarding health and security issues. I hope this initiative contributes to making your stay in Syria as safe and pleasant as possible. Whether you are a short-term visitor enjoying the rich history of the region, a student of Arabic or a long-time resident, I wish you and your family the very best for 2010.



Charge D'Affaires,
Charles (Chuck) Hunter

Stay tuned in

Next Month's issue:

- Marriage
- Immigrant Visas
- New changes to ACS to better serve you...

Additional Screening Requirements Required for Travelers

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On January 4, 2010, the Transportation Security Administration issued new security directives to all United States and international air carriers with inbound flights to the U.S. effective January 4, 2010. The new directive includes long-term, sustainable security measures developed in consultation with law enforcement officials and TSA's domestic and international partners.

Because effective aviation security must begin beyond U.S. borders, and as a result of extraordinary cooperation from its

global aviation partners, TSA is mandating that every individual flying into the U.S. from anywhere in the world traveling from or through nations that are state sponsors of terrorism or other countries of interest will be required to go through enhanced screening. The directive also increases the use of enhanced screening technologies and mandates threat-based and random screening for passengers on U.S. bound international flights.

As a result of these new security directives,

American travelers are to be advised that they will be subject to additional screening when returning to the United States from travel to Syria, currently listed as a designated state sponsor of terrorism.

As such, it is suggested that travelers make additional time allowances for clearing security at both their point of departure, any transit locations, as well as the first point of entry into the United States, as passengers coming from Syria may be subject to additional screening.

It's National Influenza Vaccination Week ...

National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW) January 10-17, 2010 was established to highlight the importance of continuing influenza vaccination, as well as fostering greater use of the flu vaccine after the holiday season into January and beyond.

While the Embassy is not in a position to provide private citizens with pandemic-related supplies, medications or medical treatment, we would like to inform you about local and internet resources that are available to you if you have questions about either the seasonal flu, or more specifically about H1N1.

First and foremost, we urge you to contact your local health care provider for any specific questions pertaining to your health. For general questions, either in Arabic or English, the Syrian Ministry of Health has established the following telephone number, staffed 24 hours a day to respond to public inquiries concerning H1N1 Influenza: +963-11-331-0401. They also have information about the availability of vaccine providers in Syria.

The World Health Organization's website <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/> also serves as an excellent resource for H1N1 related questions pertaining to Syria or anywhere you will be travelling.

And last, but not least, the U.S. Federal government hosts a website, www.flu.gov dedicated to latest flu news.



For further information consult the Department of Treasury at: <http://www.ustreas.gov>

Financial Reporting Requirements– Did you know?

Each United States citizen or resident of the United States who has a financial interest in, or signature authority, or other authority over any financial accounts, including bank, securities, or other types of financial accounts in a foreign country, if the aggregate value of these financial accounts exceeds \$10,000 at any time during the calendar year, must report that relationship each calendar year by filing **Form TD F 90-22.1, the Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts**, with the **Department of the Treasury**. This is a separate document that needs to be mailed independently from your tax return.

Does the IRS take into account my family's financial difficulties?

The Internal Revenue Service recognizes that many people may be having difficult times financially. There can be a tax impact to events such as job loss, debt forgiveness or tapping a retirement fund. If your income decreased, you may be newly eligible for certain tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit. Most importantly, if you believe you may have trouble paying your tax bill contact the IRS immediately at www.irs.gov.

Tax Season is here– and “2009 Tax Tips” from the IRS are now available on the Embassy website.

Tax Season is here, and the U.S. Embassy would like to remind American citizens who earned taxable income in 2009 to pay their taxes. In order to assist you with the most updated information, we direct you to a very useful “2009 Tax Tips” publication from the IRS Regional Office in Frankfurt which is made available at the bottom of our webpage at <http://damascus.usembassy.gov/taxes.html>.



If you are a U.S. citizen or resident alien, the rules for filing income, estate, and gift tax returns and for paying estimated tax are generally the same whether you are in the United States or abroad. Your income, filing status and age determine whether you are required to file a return. Generally, you must file a return if your gross world-wide income for 2009 is at least the amount shown for your filing status shown in the following table:

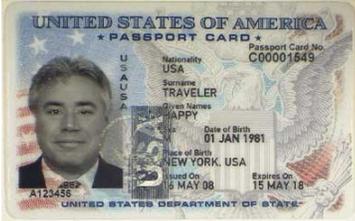
See IRS Publication 54, *Tax Guide for U.S. Citizens and Resident Aliens Abroad*, and Publication 514, for further tax filing information.

If your filing status is...	AND at the end of 2009 you were...	THEN file a return if your <u>world-wide gross income</u> was at least....	
Single	under 65	\$ 9,350	
	65 or older	\$ 10,750	
Married filing jointly	under 65 (both spouses)	\$ 18,700	
	65 or older (one spouse)	\$ 19,800	
	65 or older (both spouses)	\$ 20,900	
Married filing separately	any age	\$3,650	
Head of household	under 65	\$ 12,000	
	65 or older	\$ 13,400	
Qualified widow(er) with dependent child	under 65	\$ 15,050	
	65 or older	\$ 16,150	
Please note that some exceptions may apply. See “Filing Requirement” in the 1040 instruction booklet for details.			

For more information and great tips on international travel to other destinations *outside* of Syria please visit: www.travel.state.gov



What is a passport card?



The new U.S. passport card

We've had some recent inquiries about Passport cards, so we thought we'd provide a brief description on what exactly this item is, and how it can and can't be used. The new wallet-size U.S. Passport Card is a travel document that can be used to enter the United States from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda at **land** border crossings or **sea** ports-of-entry. Note that it **cannot be used for interna-**

tional air travel. The passport card is more convenient and less expensive than a passport book, and is largely for use by U.S. residents along the Mexican and Canadian borders.

So while it **cannot be used for international air travel**, it can serve as a wallet-friendly way to carry around U.S. citizenship identification while you are overseas.

If you are interested in applying for a passport card, please make a passport appointment online, and we will request a card for you.

Adults who already have a fully valid passport book may pay a fee of \$20 to apply for the card as a passport renewal. The fee for children is \$35. The validity of the passport card is 10 years for an adult and 5 years for a child under 16.

New changes to the Tourist Visa process

“Syrian travelers wishing to visit the United States should apply at least 3 months in advance from their intended date of travel.”

If you have Syrian friends or family asking you about how to get a tourist, business or student visa to visit the U.S. – refer them to the Non-immigrant visa section on the U.S. Embassy Damascus website for the most up to date and complete details.

As of November, 2009, a number of changes have already been implemented

to streamline the visa process, and a number of additional changes are expected to be announced in upcoming months.

What hasn't changed however, is the need for travelers to plan well in advance of their trip. Please, let your friends, family and business associates know that they should still make an appointment for a visa

interview roughly 3 months before their intended date of travel. Once their travel dates are set, they will need to follow the online instructions and then schedule their appointment online.

Our website has a link showing appointment wait times so they better plan their trip.

Running out of visa pages in your passport?

If you have recently returned from a trip and noticed you are running out of room for all those exit and entry stamps – we can help! You may request additional visa pages for your passport up to 3 times during the life of your current passport, and the service is no-fee. Each supplement adds 26 pages to your passport.

In an effort to make this process even easier for

Americans outside of Damascus, we have now added a mail-in option. Now, you may either request this service by scheduling an appointment via our website, or by submitting your passport and the accompanying DS-4085 form via the Embassy's appointed courier service, DHL.

Complete details are available under the Passports tab on our American Citizen Ser-

vices website, however in general, all you need is your passport and a signed DS-4085, which is downloadable on our website.

Please note that the mail option will take a few days to be processed and returned to you, whereas appointments at the Embassy will result in your passport with extra pages often be returned to you in less than 1 business day.

Greetings from Consul General– M. Andre Goodfriend

Dear Fellow Americans,

It is my great pleasure to greet you as a relatively new member of the American community in Syria. For whatever brings us to Syria– be it family, work, or simply a twist of fate– we do not merely work or study here; we live here.

I hope that you have found the short articles in this newsletter interesting and useful. Please let us know if there are ways in which we can improve our communication with you.

We are your Embassy, a place that offers crucial U.S. government services to Americans in Syria– from registering the birth of American citizens overseas, to issuing U.S. passports, to keeping you informed about things that matter to you. We are here to serve as your link to America.

I encourage you to visit us at <http://damascus.embassy.gov> to learn more about the services we offer and to register with us at <https://travelregistration.state.gov> to ensure that you receive the notices and announcements that we send out periodically. (If you are receiving this newsletter directly from us, you are already on the mailing list!)

Safeguarding the welfare of American citizens abroad is one of the State Department’s most important missions. We look forward to working with you as partners on the issues that concern you as American citizens in Syria.



M. Andre’ Goodfriend, Consul General
U.S. Embassy Damascus, Syria



American Citizen Services Hours and Contact Information

U.S. Embassy Damascus
American Citizen Services
Consular Section
2, Al-Mansour Street, Abu Roumaneh
PO Box 29
Damascus, Syria
Phone: 963-11-3391-4444
Fax: 963-11-331-9678

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

UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES

Sunday, February 14: President’s Day (observed)
Monday, March 08: Revolution Day
Sunday, March 21: Mother’s Day
Sunday, April 04: Easter

“Assisting approximately 4 million Americans who reside overseas and nearly 60 million who travel abroad remains a top priority for the U.S. Government.

Though consular work is punctuated by extraordinary acts to help U.S. citizens during times of crisis or urgent need, it is built upon a foundation of services provided to an American public that increasingly lives, works, and learns in the global community.”

– Department of State and USAID Strategic Plan.