

Below are our 24 Most Frequently Asked Questions. Scroll down to find the answer. If your inquiry is not covered below or elsewhere on the website, you may email it to consularbelfast@state.gov.

- 1. Do I need a visa to travel to the United States?**
- 2. I am unsure how to answer a question on the ESTA application?**
- 3. My ESTA application was denied. Can you tell me why and what do I do now?**
- 4. I am not eligible to travel visa-free under the Visa Waiver Program. How do I apply for a visa?**
- 5. I have an arrest/caution/conviction. Do I need a visa and if so, how do I apply?**
- 6. I have a "spent" arrest/caution/conviction. Do I need a visa and if so, how do I apply?**
- 7. I have a visa. Do I also need to apply for ESTA?**
- 8. I am having a problem completing the online visa application form DS-160. Can you help?**
- 9. I cannot find Belfast on the list of processing locations on the online visa application form DS-160. What should I do?**
- 10. I selected "England, London" as the processing location on my DS-160 visa application form but I want to apply in Belfast. Is this a problem?**
- 11. Will I have to leave my passport at the Consulate after the visa interview? And if so, how can I fly home?**
- 12. Can I bring a mobile phone / key fob / small bag with me to my visa interview?**
- 13. How will my passport be returned to me after visa processing?**
- 14. Does my passport need to be valid for at least six months for travel to the U.S.?**
- 15. I have a valid visa in an expired passport. Can I continue to use this visa to travel to the United States?**
- 16. My visa is valid on the date of travel to the U.S. but expires before I depart the U.S. Will this be a problem?**
- 17. I have a J1 exchange visitor visa or an F1 student visa. How long before my program begins can I enter the U.S. and how long can I remain after the program ends?**
- 18. I did not hand in the Arrival/Departure Card I-94/W when I last left the U.S. What should I do?**
- 19. My visa application was denied pending Additional Administrative Processing. How long will this take and how can I find out the current status of my case?**
- 20. My visa application was denied pending approval of a "waiver of ineligibility" from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). How long will this take and how can I find out the current status of my case?**
- 21. I left my passport at the Consulate pending the completion of Additional Administrative Processing of my visa case OR pending the processing of a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) waiver of ineligibility. I now need my passport for urgent travel. Can I retrieve my passport without affecting the ongoing processing of my visa application?**
- 22. I want to contact the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) directly about the length of time it is taking to process my "waiver of ineligibility" and to find out what I can do to have my case expedited?**
- 23. I would like to work in the U.S. What visa do I require and how do I apply?**
- 24. I would like to immigrate to the U.S. How do I apply?**

1. Do I need a visa to travel to the United States?

If you have a Canadian, Bermudan or Mexican passport, refer to <http://london.usembassy.gov/niv/noreg.html>.

Otherwise use the Visa Waiver Wizard at <http://london.usembassy.gov/root/visa-wizard/pages/index.html> to determine if you are eligible to travel visa-free.

If you are eligible to travel visa-free, you will need to apply online for ESTA advance Department of Homeland Security (DHS) travel authorization at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>. The fee for ESTA is \$14.

If you are not eligible to travel visa-free, you will need to apply for a visa. A step-by-step guide to the visa application process can be found at <http://belfast.usconsulate.gov/apply.html>.

Please obtain ESTA authorization to travel without a visa OR a visa as appropriate before making non-refundable travel arrangements.

2. I am unsure how to answer a question on the ESTA application?

ESTA is a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) system so we cannot assist you with completing your application. You can use the [Help](#) function or the [FAQs](#) on the ESTA site. The site also provides the opportunity to [email a question directly to the DHS](#).

3. My ESTA application was denied. Can you tell me why and what do I do now?

ESTA is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) system. We are unable to provide you with any information about why your ESTA application was denied by the DHS.

ESTA is DHS authorization to travel to the U.S. without a visa. If your ESTA application was denied and you still want to travel to the U.S., you will need to apply for a visa. We represent the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and we are responsible for issuing visas in the UK. You will find information about the visa application process on our website at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

4. I am not eligible to travel visa-free under the Visa Waiver Program. How do I apply for a visa?

You will find a step-by-step guide to the visa application process on our website at <http://belfast.usconsulate.gov/apply.html>.

5. I have an arrest/caution/conviction. Do I need a visa and if so, how do I apply?

Please read the advice at [Arrest/Caution/Conviction](#). If having read the advice, you are still not sure whether you need a visa or not, the only way to resolve this question is to apply for a visa. You will find a step-by-step guide to the visa application process on our website at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

6. I have a "spent" arrest/caution/conviction. Do I need a visa and if so, how do I apply?

The UK Rehabilitation of Offenders Act does not apply to U.S. visa law. Please read the advice at [Arrest/Caution/Conviction](#). If having read the advice, you are still not sure whether you need a visa or not, the only way to resolve this question is to apply for a visa. You will find a step-by-step guide to the visa application process on our website at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

7. I have a visa. Do I also need to apply for ESTA?

ESTA is authorization to travel without a visa. If you have a visa, you should NOT apply for ESTA.

8. I am having a problem completing the online visa application form DS-160. Can you help?

We cannot help you with completing the online visa application form. Please refer to [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for assistance.

9. I cannot find Belfast on the list of processing locations on the online visa application form DS-160. What should I do?

You will find it listed as "Northern Ireland, Belfast".

10. I selected "England, London" as the processing location on my DS-160 visa application form but I want to apply/I have already applied in Belfast. Is this a problem?

You must complete a new DS-160 selecting "Northern Ireland, Belfast" as the processing location at least 24 hours prior to the date of your visa interview to avoid any problems.

If you have already booked a Belfast appointment with a London DS160, you do not need to concern yourself with changing the DS160 number on your account at <https://ais.usvisa-info.com/en-gb/niv>. It will not affect your application in any way.

11. Will I have to leave my passport at the Consulate after the visa interview? And if so, how can I fly home?

If your application is successful, you will need to leave your passport at the Consulate for visa processing. If you are flying to Belfast for your visa interview, you should check with your airline to determine what alternate form of ID will be acceptable to check-in for your return flight. We have an arrangement with Easyjet, Flybe, Aer Lingus and Manx2 whereby we can provide a letter for check-in for the return journey from Belfast if no other form of acceptable ID is available. If you require such a letter for a return journey with one of these airlines, you should request it at your visa interview.

12. Can I bring a mobile phone / key fob / small bag with me to my visa interview?

If you MUST bring a mobile phone or key fob or a small bag with you to the interview, our security guards can store these items for you while you have your visa interview. Some items are [prohibited](#).

13. How will my passport be returned to me after visa processing?

Refer to Step 6 in the [How to Apply for a Visa](#) guide.

14. Does my passport need to be valid for at least six months for travel to the U.S.?

The requirement that a passport is valid for travel for six months beyond the holder's stay in the United States is waived for British and Irish passport holders. If you have a British or Irish passport, your passport needs to be valid for the duration of your stay. The requirement is also waived for [certain other nationalities](#).

15. I have a valid visa in an expired passport. Can I continue to use this visa to travel to the United States?

If the passport containing your visa has expired, you may continue to use the valid visa provided you are traveling for the same purpose as when the visa was issued and you also carry a valid passport of the same nationality. If, however, the passport authority clipped the corners of the passport when canceling it and, in so doing, damaged the visa in any way, that visa is no longer valid and cannot be used for travel to the United States.

A change of name will not affect the validity of the visa. We recommend that when traveling, you carry a copy of the document showing the name change.

16. My visa is valid on the date of travel to the U.S. but expires before I depart the U.S. Will this be a problem?

The date of expiry of the visa is the last date on which you can use it to enter the U.S. It does not represent the date by which you must leave the U.S. How long you can remain in the U.S. is at the discretion of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port-of-entry. Generally a B1/2 (business/tourist) visa holder will be admitted for up to 6 months.

17. I have a J1 exchange visitor visa or an F1 student visa. How long before my program begins can I enter the U.S. and how long can I remain after the program ends?

Admission to the U.S. is at the discretion of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port-of-entry. A J1 or F1 visa holder will usually be admitted to the U.S. up to 30 days before their exchange visitor or academic program begins. J-1 visa holders are usually admitted for the duration of their exchange visitor program plus 30 days, and F1 students for the duration of their academic program plus 60 days.

18. I did not hand in the Arrival/Departure Card I-94/W when I last left the U.S. What should I do?

If you have left the United States and are still in possession of the I-94 or I-94W it is in your best interest to forward it to the appropriate authorities so that your record is corrected and that you do not experience any problems on future travel to the United States as a result. If the card is no longer in your possession, it is still possible to amend your departure record. For more information, [click here](#).

19. My visa application was denied pending Additional Administrative Processing. How long will this take and how can I find out the current status of my case?

We cannot predict in advance how long the additional administrative processing of your case will take. It can take days, weeks, or several months in some cases. If you left your passport at the Consulate, we will process your visa application to conclusion as soon as the administrative processing of your case is completed. If you did not, we will contact you when the administrative processing of your case has been completed to request the return of your passport for visa processing. In the meantime, you will find case status information on our [Online Tracker](#).

20. My visa application was denied pending approval of a "waiver of ineligibility" from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). How long will this take and how can I find out the current status of my case?

You should allow at least 6 months for DHS waiver processing and it may take longer. We have no control over DHS processing times. Waivers for tourist travel cannot be expedited under any circumstances. You will find case status information on our [Online Tracker](#).

21. I left my passport at the Consulate pending the completion of Additional Administrative Processing of my visa case OR pending the processing of a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) waiver of ineligibility. I now need my passport for urgent travel. Can I retrieve my passport without affecting the ongoing processing of my visa application?

Send a prepaid self-addressed Royal Mail Special Delivery envelope together with a cover note requesting the return of your passport to Visa Section, U.S. Consulate General, Danesfort House, 223 Stranmillis Road, Belfast, BT9 5GR. This will not affect the ongoing processing of your visa application. When we have completed the Administrative Processing of your case OR the DHS have processed your waiver of ineligibility request, we will contact you to request the resubmission of your passport for visa processing.

22. I want to contact the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) directly about the length of time it is taking to process my "waiver of ineligibility" and to find out what I can do to have my case expedited?

The DHS receive many thousands of waiver applications each year. Due to a processing backlog, they are currently taking at least 6 months and may take longer to process waiver applications. I am sure you will understand that every applicant believes their own case to be particularly compelling and worthy of expeditious processing. In the interest of fairness, however, the DHS

process waiver applications strictly in the order in which they receive them. They will not expedite waiver processing for tourist travel under any circumstances. If you wish to contact the DHS, refer to their website www.dhs.gov for contact details.

23. I would like to work in the U.S. What visa do I require and how do I apply?

There is no visa that will allow you to travel around the U.S. picking up casual work as you go. Work visas for the U.S. are issued to allow the bearer to work for a specific employer for a specific limited period.

Exchange Visitor J-1 visas are issued to participants in authorized exchange visitor programs. Such programs include Au Pair programs, Camp Counsellor programs, Intern/Trainee programs, Summer Work/Travel programs for third level students, and programs for visiting physicians and scholars. For further information about these programs and a list of authorized program sponsors, refer to <http://j1visa.state.gov/programs>. The sponsor issues a Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Visa form DS-2019. Once in possession of a form DS-2019, the program participant can apply for a J1 visa by following the instructions at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

Temporary Worker H1 visas are issued to highly skilled individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher (or equivalent) who will perform services in a prearranged professional job for a U.S. employer. Skilled or unskilled workers traveling to the U.S. to perform a job which is temporary or seasonal in nature and for which there is a shortage of U.S. workers are issued H2 visas. The first step is to locate a prospective U.S. employer – we cannot assist you with this. The prospective employer must file a petition with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) in the U.S. The prospective employer can download a copy of the petition form I-129 together with filing and fee information from the USCIS website www.uscis.gov. If the USCIS approve the petition, they will issue a Notice of Approval. Once in possession of a Notice of Approval, the temporary worker can apply for an H-visa by following the instructions at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

For further information about the above and other visa categories and their qualifying criteria, [click here](#).

24. I would like to immigrate to the U.S. How do I apply?

You need to qualify for an immigrant visa. U.S. immigration law provides for the issuance of immigrant visas in four general categories: immediate relative, family based, employment based, and the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, known as the "green card" lottery. For more information, refer to [Immigrant Visas](#).