

## **Passports: You Can't Travel Without One**

By Natalie LaRosa

Obtaining your passport is one of the most important things to consider before going out of the country. You'll not get beyond the check-in counter at the airport without a valid passport. Travelers must have a passport if visiting a country outside the United States of America. New rules require a passport even when traveling to Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean. Obtaining a passport, or even renewing an old one, can take some time. The average delivery time is 4 to 6 weeks. It is a good idea to always hold a valid passport, however most Americans do not consider it a necessity. Be sure to apply for a passport as soon as you know you will be traveling outside the United States.

### **How to get a passport**

Before you try to get a passport you'll need a few items for the application process.

1. **Proof of citizenship:** You'll need an original birth certificate or a certified copy of the birth certificate (a photocopy won't work).
2. **Two passport photos:** These are special sized photos required by the passport agency. You can have taken at many places like Wal-Mart, Walgreens, and CVS.
3. A valid form of **photo identification** such as a driver's license or official I.D. card is needed.

There are many places you can go to get a passport. Some include:

- Federal, state and probate courts,
- Post offices, and
- Some public libraries.

For a complete list check [http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport\\_1738.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html)

You must apply for a passport in person. A parent cannot apply for their child unless the child is present. Cash, major credit cards, debit cards, and personal checks are accepted (payments must be for the full amount).

## **Renewing your passport**

Adult passports are good for 10 years. Most countries require that your passport be valid for at least 6 months beyond the dates of your travel. This is important. You can renew your passport at the same locations listed above or in certain cases it can be done by mail. For complete details on how to renew your passport in person or by mail visit: [http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/renew/renew\\_833.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/renew/renew_833.html) .

## **You have your passport, so now what?**

Once you have received your passport there are a few things you should consider.

1. Make copies of the first couple of pages of your passport. Give one copy to someone at home and bring another copy with you on tour. I usually put it in the outside pocket of my suitcase.
2. When traveling, keep your passport with you at all times. The safest and best way to do this is to keep it in your moneybelt. I put mine in a small plastic sandwich bag to keep it dry. Keeping your passport safe is very important. If it is lost while out of the country you'll be stuck for several days trying to get a replacement. Replacing lost passports requires a trip to the U.S. Embassy which will take precious time away from your tour experience.