

## **General advice from the Museum's immigration attorney for foreign nationals planning travel to the US**

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- We advise that everyone travel with caution and carefully consider the risks.
- International travel always carries some risks, including unpredictable travel restrictions and consular operations.
- Consular interviews always include the possibility of 'administrative processing' delays, where a case could be delayed for months without feedback from the State Department. U.S. Consulates operate with limited capacities and can develop significant backlogs; delays should be anticipated. Interview waivers (aka dropbox appointments) are not guaranteed to avoid an interview. You may still be asked to attend an interview after submitting documents.
- Having a non-immigrant visa does not guarantee entry to the U.S.
  - In general, you may experience more aggressive interactions at U.S. ports of entry.
  - Be prepared to answer detailed questions about your work/studies that you may have not been asked at prior U.S. entries (when you had the same visa/job/studies that you have now).
  - Be mindful of what you have on your phone or other electronic devices, as they may be subject to search.
  - If you have had any interactions with law enforcement in the U.S., you should discuss this with an immigration attorney before traveling.
  - Although the right to free speech is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, the government appears to be subjecting people to scrutiny if they have participated in political protest. If you have participated in political protest, either in person or via social media, you may want to re-consider traveling at this time.

## **Tips for foreign nationals entering the U.S. at ports of entry**

These tips were assembled by the Museum's General Counsel and the Museum's immigration attorney. They will be of possible relevance to some employees, and many visiting scientists. Please share with anyone who may be affected or have concerns.

- Immigration and customs enforcement may be inconsistent; some agents have stepped up scrutiny, while others are operating as they have been.
- When possible, it is preferable to book flights that arrive in the U.S. during business hours, so that if something goes wrong, relevant Museum staff or immigration counsel can intervene quickly.
- Visitors should tell one or two people at the Museum their itinerary and when to expect them, and let them know when they have successfully entered the U.S.
- Officials may ask to see travelers' social media accounts. They seem to be interested in evidence of political activism, particularly pro-Palestinian and anti-Trump administration content. In practice, if travelers are asked to show their accounts, there isn't much room to object—they may be denied entry if they refuse.
- Academics are sometimes being asked to describe their research. We recommend keeping descriptions high level (and kind of "boring"). Travelers should also be prepared to answer questions about where they traveled and why.
- All travelers should carry **printed** copies of their original visa determination letter, and, for employees, two recent pay stubs to document their employment. HR can also provide a letter confirming the reason for travel to employees.

- Students and researchers should carry the original visa determination letter, and the invitation letter from the Museum. J-1 visa holders should always carry the DS-2019 form that was signed and stamped by the consulate, in addition to their passports.
- If a problem arises and it appears the visitor will be denied entry:
  - Employees (with H1-B visas, Green Cards, in some cases J-1 visas) should contact our immigration counsel, Gretchen Ekerdt, at 312-341-9730 x110 or [gretchene@klc-ltd.com](mailto:gretchene@klc-ltd.com). Regina Bey in HR should be the second call (312-665-7276).
  - Visiting scientists (with J-1 visas) should contact Mark Alvey (Responsible Officer for the J-1 program—[malvey@fieldmuseum.org](mailto:malvey@fieldmuseum.org), 847-987-5962). They should still have Gretchen Ekerdt's contact info, so she can help over the phone if legal advice is necessary.
  - If things are moving quickly and the traveler does not have time to call, they should call or text a coworker or Museum contact who can notify Gretchen or someone at the Museum on their behalf.

There is no guarantee that staff or outside counsel will be able to resolve the issue. The ICE officers at ports of entry have wide discretion. For most short-term visitors, the best solution may be returning to their country of origin if they are denied entry into the U.S. Even so, they should contact Gretchen if something goes extremely wrong with an overzealous port of entry officer and legal counsel is needed.

Recent J-1 holders entering or re-entering the country have reported no problems. It is possible that J-1 visitors may have an easier time than most, because the vetting and visa approval would have been done shortly before travel. But the situation is fluid, enforcement inconsistent, and the port of entry officers have complete discretion. All we can do is try to prepare for some worst-case scenarios.

This website may also be helpful.

[ACLU Know Your Rights: US Airports](#)

### **Finally, for J-1 visa applicants in initial stages of process:**

Announcement of Expanded Screening and Vetting for Visa Applicants  
Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Dept. of State  
June 18, 2025

The State Department is committed to protecting our nation and our citizens by upholding the highest standards of national security and public safety through our visa process. A U.S. visa is a privilege, not a right.

We use all available information in our visa screening and vetting to identify visa applicants who are inadmissible to the United States, including those who pose a threat to U.S. national security. Under new guidance, we will conduct a comprehensive and thorough vetting, including online presence, of all student and exchange visitor applicants in the F, M, and J nonimmigrant classifications.

To facilitate this vetting, all applicants for F, M, and J nonimmigrant visas will be instructed to adjust the privacy settings on all of their social media profiles to "public."

[Overseas posts resumed processing visas later in June.]

Every visa adjudication is a national security decision. The United States must be vigilant during the visa issuance process to ensure that those applying for admission into the United States do not intend to harm Americans and our national interests, and that all applicants credibly establish their eligibility for the visa sought, including that they intend to engage in activities consistent with the terms for their admission.