



Holiday Travel Tips for Foreign National Employees in the U.S.

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It's Time for Foreign National Employees to Plan Holiday Travel

As the holiday season approaches, many foreign national employees in the U.S. are preparing for international travel. Whether you're on an H-1B, O-1, L-1, or other non-immigrant visa, the holiday rush can add layers of complexity to your plans. To ensure smooth travel, here are some essential tips that will help you prepare for the busy season and avoid potential complications.

Seek Employer Approval and Notify Legal Counsel

Some companies have internal protocols for international travel, but whether your company does or not, it is always a good idea to notify your employer and immigration counsel before making any travel plans. This communication will allow them to address potential delays and create a contingency plan should visa or travel issues arise. Your employer and legal team can also assist in navigating any time-sensitive concerns and assist with e.g. expedite requests or premium processing upgrades when necessary.

Confirm Visa Stamp Validity

A U.S. "visa" refers to the physical sticker in your passport which is obtained from a U.S. Embassy or consulate outside the U.S. The visa grants permission to enter the United States for a specific purpose. It indicates that you are eligible to apply for entry to the U.S. in a specific category. Travelers must ensure their visa stamp is valid before departing the U.S. If your visa has expired, you'll need to obtain a new visa stamp before reentering the country.

It is important to note that some visas such as L-1, H-1B and O-1 work authorization require a prior approval from the US immigration agency (USCIS), and then it is important to also check the validity period on the approval notice as a valid approval notice will be required to renew the visa. If the work authorization is currently pending extension, it may be necessary to upgrade to premium processing to have the approval in hand prior to the planned travel.

Check Your Passport Expiration Date



Ensure your passport is valid for at least six months beyond your authorized period of stay in the U.S. If your passport is set to expire within that window, renew it before your trip. Unless you are a citizen of a country that is exempt from the six-month rule, the consulate may prevent visa processing or Customs and Border Protection (CBP) may deny entry if your passport does not meet this requirement.

Plan Ahead for Visa Appointments

With the end of the year comes an increase in travel, leading to a surge in visa applications at U.S. consulates abroad. This can result in significant delays both in obtaining an interview appointment and in visa issuance after the interview. As a foreign national employee, it's crucial to factor this into your travel itinerary to avoid unnecessary stress. If you need to renew your visa stamp before returning to the U.S., book your consular appointment well in advance and before you leave the U.S. End-of-year visa appointments tend to fill up quickly, especially at busy U.S. consulates. Securing your slot early will give you peace of mind.

Explore Third-Country Visa Processing

In some cases, foreign nationals may seek "third-country national processing," which involves applying for a U.S. visa at a consulate in a country other than your home country. While some consulates allow this, it's important to confirm in advance whether the consulate will accept your application and understand their specific requirements.

Bring Essential Documents

When traveling internationally, carry the following documents in addition to your valid passport and visa stamp:

- Original approval notice from USCIS, if applicable
- A complete copy of the visa petition filed on your behalf
- A recent, signed employment verification letter from your employer
- Two or three recent pay stubs.

These documents may be requested by CBP or consular officers during your travels.

Stay Flexible and Informed

Regulations and procedures for international travel can change without notice. Always check the U.S. consulate's website in the country you plan to visit for the most up-to-date application procedures, required documents, and processing times. Maintaining flexibility will help you adjust quickly if any unexpected changes occur.



Review Your I-94 Status Upon Reentry

After reentering the U.S., check your I-94 record on the CBP website to ensure that your status has been properly updated at this link <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>. The I-94 form is essential as it indicates your class of admission and how long you are admitted to stay. Mistakes in your I-94 record could affect your legal status in the U.S., so it's critical to verify this information as soon as possible after returning.

Conclusion

By following these tips, you can better navigate the complexities of international holiday travel as a foreign national employee. Early planning, clear communication with your employer and legal counsel, and attention to detail will ensure a smoother travel experience and reduce the risk of visa-related issues during the holiday rush.

Happy travels and safe holiday season!