



United States Embassy Belize

Press Release

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VISA WAIVER TRAVEL REQUIRES MACHINE-READABLE PASSPORT

Starting October 1, 2003, travelers entering the United States under the Visa Waiver Program must have a machine-readable passport. Any traveler without a machine-readable passport will be required to obtain a visa before coming to the United States.

The 27 countries currently in the Visa Waiver Program are:

Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Belize is NOT under the Visa Waiver Program.

The Visa Waiver Program allows for citizens from these 27 countries to enter the United States for general business or tourist purposes for a maximum of 90 days without needing a visa. After October 1, 2003, they will be required to use machine-readable passports for visa-free entry. It applies to both adults and children. Citizens of Belgium have been required to present a machine-readable passport for visa-waiver entry since May 15, 2003. This requirement is mandated by the USA Patriot Act of 2001. Immigration inspectors may deny entry to any traveler attempting to enter on a visa-waiver basis without a machine-readable passport after October 1, 2003.

A machine-readable passport can generally be identified by the presence of two typeface lines printed at the bottom of the biographical page that can be read by machine. These lines electronically provide some of the information contained on the upper part of the biographical page. The machine-readable passport requirement applies to all categories of passport: regular, official or diplomatic. If a traveler has any doubt about whether a passport qualifies as machine-readable, he or she should check with the passport issuing authority for that country.

Machine-readable passports enhance security as they can be scanned at entry and exit points to verify the integrity of the passport data. Because machine-readable passports facilitate rapid and precise identification, they enable faster processing of travelers at ports of entry. They also provide for advance passenger information, so border inspectors can do much of their processing before a flight arrives.

A traveler who uses a non-machine-readable passport, even if from a Visa Waiver Program country, will have to apply for a non-immigrant visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate. The worldwide US-visa application fee is US\$ 100. The U.S. non-immigrant visa contains machine-readable biographical data.

The Visa Waiver Program requirements can be found at the Department of State's Visa Services web site, <http://travel.state.gov/vwp.html>.

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