Crossing the Border

Crossing the border by land, sea or air can be a time-consuming and tedious process. But proper preparation, and knowing what to expect when crossing the border, can go a long way toward making the experience as swift and painless as possible. Tighter security screenings at border checkpoints were phased in following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

United States citizens, lawful permanent residents and citizens from other countries all must present a passport and/or some other approved travel document when entering the U.S. Border crossing checkpoints also involve a series of questions, baggage inspections and other security procedures.

FindLaw’s "Border Entry Rules" subsection provides general and in-depth resources related to crossing the border into the U.S. Below is a general overview of the process of crossing the border into the U.S., with links to FindLaw articles and government resources.

1. **Green Card Holders (Lawful Permanent Residents)** - Air travelers (including children) must show a valid passport or secure travel documentation, while green card holders entering the U.S. by land or by sea may use their Permanent Resident (“green”) Card instead of a passport.
   - FindLaw’s "Basic Elements of the Border Entry Rules" provides a general overview of rules and procedures for entering the U.S.
   - See "Advance Parole, Reentry Permit, and Refugee Travel Documentation for Returning Aliens Residing in the U.S." on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website for more details.
   - Visit "I-90, Application to Replace Permanent Resident Card" (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) if your green card has been lost or stolen.

2. **Canadian and Mexican Citizens** - Most Canadian citizens (as well as those from Bermuda) do not need a visa to enter the U.S., but must present an approved travel document. Mexican citizens (including children) must present a passport and a visa for entry.
   - The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) webpage "Crossing U.S. Borders" outlines the border entry requirements for Canadian, Bermudian and Mexican citizens.
   - See the CBP’s "GetYouHome.gov" for an interactive map to help you determine your documentation and visa requirements for crossing the U.S. border.

3. **Citizens from Other Countries** - The Visa Waiver Program allows citizens of 36 participating countries to visit the U.S. for up to 90 days without a visa. Citizens of countries not involved in the program are required to obtain a travel visa to enter the U.S.
   - The Department of State’s "Visa Waiver Program (VWP)" frequently asked questions page provides useful information about the program, and how it relates to border entry.

4. **Trusted Traveler Programs** - Foreign citizens who are determined to be low-risk travelers may apply for CBP’s Trusted Traveler Program, which allows expedited border entry through dedicated kiosks and lanes.
   - See "Trusted Traveler Programs" on the CBP website for more details.

5. **Additional Border Entry Information** - The following links will take you to government websites covering everything from the CBP inspection process and traveler entry forms to border wait times and prohibited items.
   - See "Clearing CBP" for a wide variety of resources pertaining to border entry.
   - See "Wait Times" for estimated wait times at airports and land border checkpoints.
• See "Know Before You Go" to learn more about the rules for bringing items into the U.S.
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