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Contributing Writer

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Nothing could be more frustrating than to think that you have finished all the arrangements for a trip, and then suddenly realize that you do not have the proper documentation or paper work required to travel.

It is necessary that you check every aspect of the requisite documents before you make the assumption that you are ready to go, particularly into a foreign country.

The U.S. State Department has recently changed its' travel credentials policy and there are now new legal requirements for those who are either entering or exiting the country. Although the economy is in shambles and the frequency of vacationing overseas has lessened, people are still traveling to foreign countries, and particularly to our neighboring boarders of Canada and Mexico.

The Departments of Tourism for both of these countries report that travel has increased significantly, which is mainly from the U.S. and growth is expected to continue over the next several years.

It used to be that entry and re-entry in to the U.S. by land, from these two bordering countries only require proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate along with a government issued photo ID, such as a driver's license, or a state identification card, etc.

However, as of 2009, the U.S. government implemented its' full enforcement policy that "anyone entering a point of access into the U.S. by land, air or sea must have a valid passport."

A passport is an internationally recognized document that verifies the identity and nationality of the bearer.

This new regulation is called " The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative and is a result of Sept. 11,2001, "911" disaster which prompted the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

By requiring standardized documentation, the goal of this initiative is to strengthen boarder security while accommodating legitimate foreign visitors, which allows the Department of Homeland Security to quickly check, and reliably identify every traveler.

When traveling there are a few areas in foreign countries that may be considered "high risk" and regardless to whether you are traveling as a vacationer or in an business capacity it would be best to register your travel plans with the State Department in case of an emergency or if a crisis were to occur while traveling or visiting one of these areas.

In a case of serious emergency this information can be promptly released to only family or persons authorized to receive such facts concerning your welfare and whereabouts.

The U.S. Department of State is the only agency that has the authority to grant and issue a United States passport.

To obtain a passport (DS-82) for the first time, you'll need to apply in person at any designated U.S. Official office to process passport applications.

In order to begin your process you will need, a few things: a completed written application, two recent, 2x2 inch passport photos of your self, an original certified birth certificate, or an official substitute document along with a $ 100.00 money order for all applicants 16 years and older.

For applicants under age 16 years old, the cost is $ 85.00 per person. There are special requirements for an emergency or expedited passport; however there is an additional cost, so check with your passport officials for the particulars.

Documentation rules for a cruise somewhat differ and the regulations and requirements will solely all depend upon your port of embarkation and debarkation, however it is best that you ask and get clarification from your cruise representative as to what documents you will need.

Additional information can be obtained on the Internet @: www. usgov/passport.com or your travel agent.