

Essential tips to protect your passport and understand routine security checks while traveling

Why Passport Safety Matters

Traveling abroad opens the door to new experiences—but it also brings responsibilities, especially when it comes to safeguarding passports. While every traveler’s situation is unique, being proactive about safety can prevent disruptions and help keep the journey running smoothly.

A passport is the most important travel document. Losing it can disrupt the entire trip, delay travel plans, or require emergency embassy assistance. Travelers are advised to consider the guidance below to reduce risks and travel confidently.

Important Note:

Ultimately, the decision to carry a passport is at the discretion of each traveler. Travel environments are dynamic and subject to numerous factors that may result in stolen or lost passports, as well as unanticipated security searches. The following outlines key risks associated with carrying a passport, identifies high-risk areas for passport theft, and highlights considerations that may affect the likelihood of a security search.

Enroll with Your Embassy: It is recommended that travelers register their trip details with their respective country's embassy or consulate online. United States (U.S.) citizens can use the U.S. Department of State's [STEP](#) Program, which helps provide support during emergencies and assists with passport replacement.

High-Risk Locations to Carry a Physical Passport

Carrying a passport is sometimes necessary, but certain environments increase the risk of theft, loss, or damage. Whenever possible, travelers are advised to avoid carrying their passport in these environments unless required by law or activity.

Higher-Risk Situations Include:

- Crowded tourist areas: landmarks, markets, festivals, metro systems
- Transportation hubs: airports, train stations, ferry ports, bus terminals
- Nightlife districts: bars, clubs, late-night events
- Outdoor & adventure activities: beaches, boating, rain-heavy regions, hikes

Carrying or Storing a Passport to Reduce Theft

When You Don't Need It

- Store it in a hotel safe or secure, lockable location.
- Email a digital copy to yourself or store it on a secure cloud service so it can be accessed from anywhere.
- Carry a paper copy stored separately from valuables and keep multiple copies in different places (e.g., in your checked luggage, your carry-on).
- Leave a copy with a trusted emergency contact back home.

When Carrying a Passport

- Travelers are advised to use a concealed travel option. Hoodies or sweatshirts with a hidden midriff compartment can aid in protecting valuables. Slim fanny packs/waist belts worn under the shirt can help deter pickpockets.
- Passports should be kept in zipped, internal pockets such as a jacket—never in an outer or open pocket. Passports should never be stored in a back-pocket as this is the easiest target for pickpockets.
- If using a bag, a slash proof, sturdy crossbody bag that is worn in front of the body at all times is advised. Passports should be kept in a secure inner compartment of that bag. Travelers are advised to never leave purses or crossbody bags on the backs of chairs as they can get stolen. It is advisable to refrain from using backpacks, as their positioning makes it difficult to monitor for potential tampering. Additionally, backpacks are frequently considered attractive targets for pickpockets.
- Passports should be protected with a waterproof sleeve such as a Ziplock bag if weather or activities may expose it.
- Travelers are advised to only access their passport when needed and to avoid storing it in a bag compartment that is often opened to pay for things.

What Can Trigger a Random Security Stop or Search?

- Security checks are conducted globally and are typically routine, rather than personal in nature. Travelers may be perceived as suspicious or nervous, which is often attributable to factors such as first-time travel anxiety, unfamiliarity with the area, or appearing disoriented, leading law enforcement officers to intervene or offer assistance.
- Travelers might inadvertently violate local regulations, for instance by trespassing in restricted areas or photographing prohibited sites. It is advisable for travelers to remain vigilant about their surroundings and pay close attention to signage indicating restrictions on photography or entry. Researching local laws regarding photography of landmarks and government buildings prior to travel is strongly recommended to prevent unintentional infractions during sightseeing or exploration.

- In certain instances, interactions with security personnel may be influenced by individual circumstances, including the demeanor of the officer involved.
- Elevated geopolitical tensions and foreign policies can lead to increased random searches, enhanced security measures within cities, or additional checkpoints. It is essential to comply with authorities' instructions at all times to minimize the risk of suspicion or detention.

Travelers may be selected based on:

Randomized Screening

- Public transit stations, festivals, border-adjacent zones
- Random ID checks in high-traffic urban areas

Entering High-Security Spaces

- Monuments, government buildings, transportation hubs
- Events with heightened security or crowd control

Bag Size or Visible Items

- Large backpacks, professional camera gear, or bulky items may prompt review

Behavioral Factors

Not wrongdoing necessarily—simply normal triggers for attention:

- Appearing lost or disoriented
- Moving against crowd flow
- Linger in restricted or controlled areas

How to Respond

- Stay calm and cooperative
- Present ID when requested by official authorities
- Ask politely for clarification if unsure about a request
- Avoid sudden movements or confrontational language

Quick Best-Practice Checklist

- ✓ Keep your passport secure and out of sight
- ✓ Carry only when legally needed
- ✓ Maintain digital and physical backups
- ✓ Use concealed storage while in public

- ✓ Stay aware in crowded or high-theft environments
- ✓ Respond respectfully to routine security checks