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How to Get A Visa From A U.S. Consulate.

By Christopher A. Kerosky

Many of my clients believe that the primary criteria for getting a tourist visa from a consulate there is whether the consul deciding their application had a good breakfast that day. Despite the all-too-frequent appearance that the process is arbitrary and capricious, there are a few steps that applicants can take to increase their chances of walking out of the consulate with a visa instead of a denial. For those citizens of countries that do not qualify for a visa waiver, it is necessary to follow these simple steps to increase the chances that your tourist visa will be granted.

Applications should be *supported by documentation* that supports the purpose for the visa. If you are coming for a wedding, submit a wedding invitation or at least a statement from the bride or groom. If it's medical care you are coming to receive, obtain a doctor's letter stating the special need for medical care in America. If you intend to travel throughout the U.S. and visit certain tourist spots, come prepared with itineraries, reservations, hotel bookings in hand. The documentation should be authentic and substantial.

The applicant must show the consulate proof of their own money or other *financial resources* to support themselves or a relative who agrees to support them while here. This should be documented by bank statements or receipts or proof of salary. If it's a relative in the U.S. who is offering support, bring his tax returns or bank statements, or both. It's helpful to have him fill out and sign before a notary the Affidavit of Support form (I-134 form). [See Immigration Forms section from my website to download the form.]. Be prepared to explain how you will support yourself in the U.S. for the entire length of your visa.

It is also important to show "ties to the home country", in other words, property, employment or immediate family left behind that would cause you to return. Bring proof of your house or flat ownership. Bring a letter from your employment or other proof that you are employed. If you have family such as a spouse or children that are not coming to the U.S., bring proof of that such as marriage and birth certificates.

If you have traveled to the U.S. or other Western countries before, it's wise to point that out; it shows a propensity to return home after a visit abroad. Of course, this is only helpful if one returned in accordance with the time limits in their visa.

I find it helpful for the applicant to write a cover letter -- laying out exactly why he or she wants the visa, citing the financial and other ties to the home country, setting forth the basis for his financial support in the U.S. and referencing the documents attached. This gives the consul a summary of the whole package that he or she can read quickly.

Finally, I recommend that my clients consider whether a business (B-1) visa may be more appropriate than a visitor (B-2) visa for their particular needs. If one is coming to meet potential business partners, investors, distributors or suppliers, ask for a B-1 visa. Even if you are coming to consider investment in the U.S., a B-1 visa is the proper visa. Persons coming for professional programs or conventions, to meet colleagues in one's field or for other professional opportunities, a business visa is more appropriate. Again, the importance of documenting the business purpose of the trip cannot be overemphasized. Bring to the Consulate proposed contracts, letters with potential business partners, proof of one's own business activities in your home country, business cards or if possible, letters or statements from the business associates you will be visiting in the U.S. as to the business purpose of your trip. As tourist or visitor visas are difficult to get in this part of the world, presenting a well-documented application for a business visa is often a better choice.

We live in a time when U.S. consuls give even less time to visa applicants than U.S. doctors governed by managed care give their patients. You need to make it simple for consular officials to understand the basis for your visa request and easier for them to grant it.

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