



# Know Before You Go

U.S. Customs and Border  
Protection Regulations  
for U.S. Residents



U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection



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## U.S. Customs and Border Protection Regulations for U.S. Residents

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# Travelers Checklist

Do I have:

- U.S. Passport or other recommended ID for U.S. citizens? (Carry it; do not pack it)  
[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)
- Green Card or document for Lawful Permanent Residents? (Advance Parole if LPR status is pending)  
[www.cis.gov](http://www.cis.gov)
- Notarized travel permission letters for minors traveling without their parents?
- Entry documentation for the country(s) I will be visiting? (Is a Visa required?)  
[www.state.gov/misc/10125.htm](http://www.state.gov/misc/10125.htm)
- Only the medication that I need for my trip and in its original container?
- Receipts or registration paperwork (CBP Form 4457) for any new electronics, such as a camera or laptop, that I'm taking with me? (Only suggested if traveling with recently purchased goods. Not necessary for goods more than six months old.)
- Proof of rabies vaccinations for my dogs if they are traveling with me? (Not required for cats. Check for requirements regarding other pets.)  
[www.aphis.usda.gov/ac/pettravel.html](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ac/pettravel.html)
- Appraisals or receipts if I'm traveling with a lot of new jewelry?
- Valid driver's license? (Do I need an international driver's license in the country I am visiting?)  
[www.thenac.com/international\\_driving\\_permit.pdf](http://www.thenac.com/international_driving_permit.pdf) or [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com)
- An envelope to put all the receipts for my purchases? (This will make filling out the CBP declaration easier.)
- Copy of Know Before You Go brochure?

Information on items that do not have a Website address after them can be found in this brochure or on [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov)

## What is CBP?

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is responsible for keeping America's borders safe and secure. On March 1, 2003, CBP combined the inspectional workforces and broad border authorities of the U.S. Customs Service with three other agencies: Immigration and Naturalization Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the Border Patrol.

At CBP, our job is to keep terrorists, their weapons, and other illegal material or individuals from entering the United States, while also facilitating the flow of legitimate trade and travel. For obvious reasons, this mission is vitally important. We are dedicated to carrying it out to the best of our abilities.

## Your Inspection

To keep our borders secure, we must inspect everyone who arrives at a U.S. port of entry. We pledge to treat you courteously and professionally. We do not assume that you have done anything wrong—because very few travelers actually violate the law.

As part of your inspection, you may be asked questions on

- the nature of your citizenship
- your trip, and
- about anything you are bringing back to the United States that you did not have with you when you left.

We may also need to examine your baggage or your car, which we have the legal authority to do. If we are checking your baggage, you will need to place it on the exam station and open it. (After the exam is completed, you will be asked to repack and close the baggage.) If you are unhappy with the way you are being treated, ask to speak to a CBP supervisor.

## Terms Used in This Booklet

“Duty” and “dutiabie” are words you will find frequently throughout this brochure:

- Duty is the amount of money you pay on items coming from another country. It is similar to a tax, except that duty is collected only on imported goods.
- Dutiable describes items on which duty may have to be paid. Most items have specific duty rates, which are determined by a number of factors, including where you got the item, where it was made, and what it is made of.

Also, anything you bring back that you did not have when you left the United States must be “declared.” For example, you would declare alterations made in a foreign country to a suit you already owned, and any gifts you acquired overseas.

## Check Our Website Before You Travel!

Please note that the information contained within this brochure may change routinely. Visit the travel section of the CBP Website at [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov) for the most up-to-date traveler information.

## Preparing to Return to the United States

When you come back, you will need to declare everything you brought back that you did not take with you when you left the United States. If you are traveling by air or sea, you may be asked to fill out a CBP declaration form. This form is almost always provided by the airline or cruise ship. You will probably find it easier and faster to fill out your declaration form and clear CBP if you do the following:

- Keep your sales slips.
- Try to pack the things you’ll need to declare separately.
- Read the signs in the arrival area.

# Documents You Will Need to Enter the United States

**Important Note:** The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will soon require all travelers to and from the Americas, the Caribbean, and Bermuda to have a passport or other accepted form of documentation to enter or reenter the United States. The program will be rolled out in phases. The proposed timeline is as follows:

- **December 31, 2006:** Requirement applied to all air and sea travel to or from Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.
- **December 31, 2007:** Requirement extended to all air, sea and land border crossings.

**(NOTE: These dates are not final until the final ruling is published in the *Federal Register* later this year.)**

Until this requirement is in effect as noted above, U.S. citizens are currently exempt from the requirement to show a passport unless they are returning to the U.S. from outside the Western Hemisphere (Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia). However, it is highly recommended that you be prepared to present documentation such as valid U.S. passport, U.S. birth certificate, or naturalization certificate to avoid delays.

**U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs)** must provide one of the following in addition to a valid passport:

- I-551, Permanent Resident Card (“Green Card”)
- Machine-Readable Immigrant Visa endorsed with a CBP Admission Stamp
- Temporary Residence Stamp (ADIT stamp) contained in a passport or on Form I-94
- Valid Reentry Permit
- Unexpired Immigrant Visa

**Visitors/Non-immigrants** must provide:

- Generally, a valid unexpired passport and visa. (However, certain people may require specific supporting documentation such as an employment petition, student authorization, or approval notice.)

- Citizens of countries authorized to participate in the Visa Waiver Program are required to present an unexpired machine-readable passport. (For additional information refer to the State Department at [http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without\\_1990.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html).)
- Mexicans may provide a valid DSP-150 (BCC) in lieu of a valid passport and visa
- Generally, Canadian Nationals must show ID but are exempt from passport and visa requirements. However presentation of a Canadian passport, birth certificate, naturalization certificate or other supporting documentation will facilitate the inspection and is strongly encouraged.
- Nationals of countries authorized to participate in the Visa Waiver Program are required to present an unexpired passport.

## **Advance Parole**

### **Caution**

Due to recent changes to U.S. immigration law, travel outside of the United States may have severe consequences for aliens who are in the process of adjusting their status or applying for an immigrant visa (refugees and asylees). Upon return, these aliens may be found inadmissible, their applications may be denied, or both. It is important that the alien obtain the proper documentation before leaving the United States.

Aliens who have pending applications for certain immigration benefits need Advance Parole to re-enter the U.S. after traveling abroad.

Aliens applying for advance parole on the basis of a pending application for adjustment of status must be approved for advance parole prior to leaving the United States in order to avoid the termination of their pending application for adjustment. Note: this does not apply to aliens who have applied to adjust to permanent resident status and who maintain H-1B (Specialty Worker) or L-1 (Intracompany Transferee) status, or their dependents, who have applied to adjust to permanent resident status and who have valid H-1B or L status and valid visas, V nonimmigrants who have a valid V nonimmigrant visa, are in valid V nonimmigrant status and have or obtain a valid

V nonimmigrant visa before applying for readmission to the US, and K-3/4 nonimmigrants who have applied to adjust to permanent resident status and who have a valid K-3/4 nonimmigrant visa, are in valid K-3/4 nonimmigrant status and have or obtain a valid K-3/4 nonimmigrant visa before applying for readmission to the US.

An I-131 application for Advance Parole is filed with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) pursuant to the instructions found on their Website, [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).

Aliens in the United States should, prior to departure, obtain Advance Parole in order to re-enter the United States after travel abroad if they have:

- Filed an application for adjustment of status but have not received a decision from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services;
- Hold refugee or asylee status and intend to depart temporarily to apply for a U.S. immigrant visa in Canada; and/or
- An emergent personal or bona fide reason to travel temporarily abroad.

**Applicants who are the beneficiary of a Private bill and Applicants who are under deportation proceedings must file to the Department of Homeland Security, 425 I Street, NW, ATTN: Parole and Humanitarian Assistance Branch, Washington, DC 20536**

Aliens in the United States are not eligible for Advance Parole if they are:

- In the United States illegally; or
- An exchange alien subject to the foreign residence requirement.

Please note that Advance Parole does not guarantee admission into the United States. Aliens with Advance Parole are still subject to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection inspection process at the port of entry.

For more information, please visit the State Department Website at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) or the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Website at [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov). To apply for a passport, U.S. citizens can visit [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) or call the U.S. Passport Office at 1-877-4USA-PPT or TDD/TYY: 1-888-874-7793. Foreign residents should contact their respective governments to obtain passports.

### **Visa Waiver Program – Participating Countries**

Andorra	Luxembourg
Australia	Monaco
Austria	The Netherlands
Belgium	New Zealand
Brunei	Norway
Denmark	Portugal
Finland	San Marino
France	Singapore
Germany	Slovenia
Iceland	Spain
Ireland	Sweden
Italy	Switzerland
Japan	United Kingdom
Liechtenstein	

For more information on documentation requirements for VWP participating countries, contact your consulate or embassy or their Website at <http://usembassy.state.gov/> for further instructions.

## **What You Must Declare**

- Items you purchased and are carrying with you upon return to the United States.
- Items you received as gifts, such as wedding or birthday presents.
- Items you inherited.
- Items you bought in duty-free shops, on the ship, or on the plane.
- Repairs or alterations to any items you took abroad and then brought back, even if the repairs/alterations were performed free of charge.
- Items you brought home for someone else.
- Items you intend to sell or use in your business.

Also, if you acquired items in the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, or in a Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act country (see section on \$800 exemption for a list of these countries) and asked the merchant to send them to you, you must still declare them when you go through customs. *This differs from the usual procedure for mailed items, which is discussed in the section on **Sending Goods to the United States**.*

You must state on the CBP declaration, in U.S. currency, what you actually paid for each item. The price must include all taxes. If you don't know for sure, estimate. If you did not buy the item yourself—for example, if it is a gift—estimate its fair retail value in the country where you received it.

Remember: Even if you used the item you bought on your trip, it's still dutiable. You must declare the item at the price you paid or, if it was a gift, at its fair market value.

## **Tip: Register Items *Before* You Leave the United States**

If your laptop computer was made in Japan—for instance—you might have to pay duty on it each time you brought it back into the United States, unless you could prove that you owned it before you left on your trip. Documents that fully describe the item—such as sales receipts, insurance policies, or jeweler's appraisals—are acceptable forms of proof.

To make things easier, you can register certain items with CBP before you depart—including watches, cameras, laptop computers, firearms, and CD players—as long as they have serial numbers or other unique, permanent markings. Take the items to the nearest CBP office and request a Certificate of Registration (CBP Form 4457). It shows that you had the items with you before leaving the United States and all items listed on it will be allowed duty-free entry. CBP officers must see the item you are registering in order to certify the certificate of registration. You can also register items with CBP at the international airport from which you're departing. Keep the certificate for future trips.

## Duty-Free Exemption

The duty-free exemption, also called the *personal exemption*, is the total value of merchandise you may bring back to the United States without having to pay duty. You may bring back more than your exemption, but you will have to pay duty on it. In most cases, the personal exemption is \$800, but there are some exceptions to this rule, which are explained below.

### Exemptions

Depending on the countries you have visited, your personal exemption will be \$200, \$800, or \$1,600. There are limits on the amount of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco products you may include in your duty-free personal exemption. The differences are explained in the following section.

The duty-free exemptions (\$200, \$800, or \$1,600) apply if:

- The items are for your personal or household use or intended to be given as gifts.
- They are in your possession, that is, they accompany you when you return to the United States. Items to be sent later may not be included in your \$800 duty-free exemption. (Exceptions apply for goods sent from Guam or the U.S. Virgin Islands.)
- They are declared to CBP. If you do not declare something that should have been declared, you risk forfeiting it. If in doubt, declare it.
- You are returning from an overseas stay of at least 48 hours. For example, if you leave the United States at 1:30 p.m. on June 1, you would complete the 48-hour period at 1:30 p.m. on June 3. This time limit does not apply if you are returning from Mexico or from the U.S. Virgin Islands. (See also the section on the \$200 exemption.)
- You have not used all of your exemption allowance, or used any part of it, in the past 30 days—for example, if you go to England and bring back \$150 worth of items—you must wait another 30 days before you are allowed another \$800 exemption. (See the section on the \$200 exemption.)

- The items are not prohibited or restricted as discussed in the section on Prohibited and Restricted Items. Note the embargo prohibitions on products of Cuba.

### **Joint Declaration**

Family members who live in the same home and return together to the United States may combine their personal exemptions. This is called a joint declaration. For example, if Mr. and Mrs. Smith travel overseas and Mrs. Smith brings home a \$1,000 piece of glassware, and Mr. Smith buys \$600 worth of clothing, they can combine their individual \$800 exemptions on a joint declaration and not have to pay duty.

Children and infants are allowed the same exemption as adults, except for alcoholic beverages and tobacco products.

## **Types of Exemptions**

### **\$200 Exemption**

If you cannot claim other exemptions because:

- you have been out of the country more than once in a 30-day period or because
- you have not been out of the country for at least 48 hours,

you may still bring back \$200 worth of items free of duty and tax. As discussed earlier, these items must be for your personal or household use.

If you bring back more than \$200 worth of dutiable items, or if any item is subject to duty or tax, the entire amount will be dutiable. For instance, you were out of the country for 36 hours and came back with a \$300 piece of pottery. You could not deduct \$200 from its value and pay duty on \$100. The pottery would be dutiable for the full value of \$300.

You may include with the \$200 exemption your choice of the following: 50 cigarettes and 10 cigars and 150 milliliters (5 fl. oz.) of alcoholic beverages or 150 milliliters (5 fl. oz.) of perfume containing alcohol.

Note that unlike other exemptions, family members may not combine their individual \$200 exemptions. Thus, if Mr. and Mrs. Smith spend a night in Canada, each may bring back up to \$200 worth of goods, but they would not be allowed a collective family exemption of \$400.

Also, duty on items you mail home to yourself will be waived if the value is \$200 or less. (See the sections on **Gifts and Sending Goods to the United States.**)

### **\$800 Exemption**

If you are arriving from anywhere other than a U.S. insular possession (U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, or Guam) you may bring back \$800 worth of items duty free, as long as you bring them with you. This is called accompanied baggage.

For Caribbean Basin or Andean countries, your exemption is also \$800. These countries include:

Antigua and Barbuda	Guyana
Aruba	Haiti
Bahamas	Honduras
Barbados	Jamaica
Belize	Montserrat
Bolivia	Netherlands Antilles
British Virgin Islands	Nicaragua
Colombia	Panama
Costa Rica	Peru
Dominica	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Dominican Republic	Saint Lucia
Ecuador	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
El Salvador	Trinidad and Tobago
Grenada	
Guatemala	

You may include two liters of alcoholic beverages with this \$800 exemption, as long as one of the liters was produced in one of the countries listed above (see section on **Unaccompanied Purchases from Insular Possessions and Caribbean Basin or Andean Countries**).

Depending on what items you're bringing back from your trip, you could come home with more than \$800

worth of gifts or purchases and still not be charged duty. For instance, say you received a \$700 bracelet as a gift, and you bought a \$40 hat and a \$60 color print. Because these items total \$800, you would not be charged duty, since you have not exceeded your duty-free exemption. If you had also bought a \$500 painting on that trip, you could bring all \$1300 worth of merchandise home without having to pay duty, because fine art is duty-free.

### **\$1,600 Exemption**

If you return directly or indirectly from a U.S. insular possession (U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, or Guam), you are allowed a \$1,600 duty-free exemption.

If you travel to a **U.S. insular possession** and to one or more of the **Caribbean Basin or Andean countries** listed above, let's say on a Caribbean cruise, you may bring back \$1,600 worth of items without paying duty, but only \$800 worth of these items may come from the Caribbean Basin or Andean country(ies). Any amount beyond \$800 will be dutiable unless you acquired it in one of the insular possessions. For example, if you were to travel to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Jamaica, you would be allowed to bring back \$1,600 worth of merchandise duty free, as long as only \$800 worth was acquired in Jamaica.

Also, you may include 1,000 cigarettes as part of the \$1600 exemption, but at least 800 of them must have been acquired in an insular possession. Only 200 cigarettes may have been acquired elsewhere. For example, if you were touring the South Pacific and you stopped in Tahiti, American Samoa, and other ports of call, you could bring back five cartons of cigarettes, but four of them would have to have been bought in American Samoa.

Similarly, you may include five liters of alcoholic beverages in your duty-free exemption, but one of them must be a product of an insular possession. Four may be products of other countries (see section on **Unaccompanied Purchases from Insular Possessions and Caribbean Basin Countries**).

## For Frequent Travelers

If you cross the U.S. border into a foreign country and reenter the United States more than once in a short time, you may not want to use your personal exemption until you have returned to the United States for the last time. This is due to the “once every 30 days rule”—you can only apply your personal exemption once every 30 days.

So as an example, you go to Canada, buy a liter of liquor, reenter the United States, then go back to Canada and buy \$900 worth of merchandise and more liquor. You would probably want to save your \$800 exemption for those final purchases and not use it for that first liter of liquor. In this case, on your first swing-back, simply tell the CBP officer that you want to pay duty on the liquor, even though you could bring it in duty free.

## Duty-Free or Reduced Rates

### Items from Certain Countries

The United States gives duty preferences—that is, free or reduced rates—to **certain developing countries** under a trade program called the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). Some products that would otherwise be dutiable are not when they come from a GSP country. (For details on this program, as well as the complete list of GSP countries, please look for it on our Website.)

Similarly:

- Many products of **Caribbean and Andean countries** are exempt from duty under the Caribbean Basin Initiative, Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act, Andean Trade Preference Act and the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act.
- Many products of certain **sub-Saharan African countries** are exempt from duty under the African Growth and Opportunity Act.
- Most products of **Israel, Jordan, Chile and Singapore** may also enter the United States either free of duty or at a reduced rate under the U.S. free

trade agreements with those countries. Check with [cbp.gov](http://cbp.gov) for details on these programs.

- The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect in 1994. If you are returning from **Canada or Mexico**, your goods are eligible for free or reduced duty rates if they were grown, manufactured, or produced in Canada or Mexico, as defined by the Act.

Access the CBP Website for further details.

### **Household Effects**

Household effects are duty-free. These include such items as furniture, carpets, paintings, tableware, stereos, linens, and similar household furnishings; tools of the trade, professional books, implements, and instruments.

You may import household effects you acquired abroad duty-free if:

- You used them for at least one year while you were abroad.
- They are not intended for anyone else or for sale.

Clothing, jewelry, photography equipment, portable radios, and vehicles are considered personal effects and cannot be brought in duty-free as household effects. However, duty is usually waived on personal effects over 1 year of age.

All vehicles are dutiable.

## **Increased Duty Rates**

### **Items from Certain Countries**

Under what is known as its “301” authority, the United States may impose a much higher than normal duty rate on products from certain countries. Currently, the United States has imposed a 100 percent rate of duty on certain products of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, The Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the Ukraine. If you should bring more of any of these products back with you than fall within your exemption or flat rate of duty, (see

below) you will pay as much in duty as you paid for the product or products.

While most of the products listed are not the type of goods that travelers would purchase in sufficient quantities to exceed their exemption, diamonds from the Ukraine are subject to the 100 percent duty and might easily exceed the exemption amount.

For information on countries that may become subject to a higher than normal duty rate, check the Department of Commerce Website at [www.commerce.gov](http://www.commerce.gov).

## Determining Duty

The CBP officer will place the items that have the highest rate of duty under your exemption. Then, after subtracting your exemptions and the value of any duty-free items, a flat rate of duty will be charged on the next \$1,000 worth of merchandise. Any dollar amount beyond this \$1,000 will be dutiable at whatever duty rates apply. The flat rate of duty may only be used for items for your own use or for gifts. As with your exemption, you may use the flat rate provision only once every 30 days. Special flat rates of duty apply to items made and acquired in Canada or Mexico. The flat rate of duty applies to only to those purchases that accompany you on your return to the United States.

The following is an example of the different rates if you acquire goods valued at \$3,500 from various different places:

Country	Total declared value	Personal exemption (duty-free)	Flat duty rate	Various duty rates
U.S. insular possessions	\$3,500	\$1,600	\$1,000 at 1.5 percent	\$900
Caribbean Basin countries	\$3,500	\$800	\$1,000 at 3 percent	\$1,700
Other countries or locations	\$3,500	\$800	\$1,000 at 3 percent	\$1,700

**The flat duty rate** will be charged on items that are dutiable but that cannot be included in your personal exemption, even if you have not exceeded the exemp-

tion. The best example of this is liquor. If you return from Europe with \$200 worth of items, including two liters of liquor, one liter will be duty-free under your exemption; the other will be dutiable at 3 percent, plus any Internal Revenue Service tax.

Family members who live in the same household and return to the United States together can combine their items to take advantage of a combined flat duty rate, no matter which family member owns a given item. The combined value of merchandise subject to a flat duty rate for a family of four traveling together would be \$4,000.

### **Tobacco Products**

Travelers may import previously exported tobacco products only in quantities not exceeding the amounts specified in exemptions for which the traveler qualifies. Any quantities of previously exported tobacco products not permitted by an exemption will be seized and destroyed. These items are typically purchased in duty-free stores, on carriers operating internationally, or in foreign stores. These items are usually marked “Tax Exempt. For Use Outside the United States,” or “U.S. Tax Exempt For Use Outside the United States.”

For example, a returning resident is eligible for the \$800 exemption, which includes not more than 200 cigarettes and 100 cigars:

- If the resident declares **400 previously exported cigarettes**, the resident would be permitted 200 cigarettes, tax-free under the exemption and the remaining 200 previously exported cigarettes would be confiscated.
- If the resident declares 400 cigarettes, **of which 200 are previously exported** and 200 not previously exported, the resident would be permitted to import the 200 previously exported cigarettes tax free under the exemption and the resident would be charged duty and tax on the remaining 200 foreign-made cigarettes.

The tobacco exemption is available to each adult. Except for information and informational materials, no travel-

er (whether traveling legally under an Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) license or traveling illegally without an OFAC license) may import Cuban-made goods, including Cuban cigars, unless authorized to do so by a specific license issued by OFAC.

### **Alcoholic Beverages**

One liter (33.8 fl. oz.) of alcoholic beverages may be included in your exemption if:

- You are 21 years old.
- It is for your own use or as a gift.
- It does not violate the laws of the state in which you arrive.

Federal regulations allow you to bring back more than one liter of alcoholic beverage for personal use, but, as with extra tobacco, you will have to pay duty and Internal Revenue Service tax.

While Federal regulations do not specify a limit on the amount of alcohol you may bring back for personal use, unusual quantities are liable to raise suspicions that you are importing the alcohol for other purposes, such as for resale. CBP officers are authorized by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to make on-the-spot determinations that an importation is for commercial purposes, and may require you to obtain a permit to import the alcohol before releasing it to you. If you intend to bring back a substantial quantity of alcohol for your personal use, you should contact the port through which you will be re-entering the country, and make prior arrangements for entering the alcohol into the United States.

Also, you should be aware that state laws might limit the amount of alcohol you can bring in without a license. If you arrive in a state that has limitations on the amount of alcohol you may bring in without a license, that state law will be enforced by CBP, even though it may be more restrictive than federal regulations. We recommend that you check with the state government before you go abroad about their limitations on quantities allowed for personal importation and additional state taxes that might apply.

In brief, for both alcohol and tobacco, the quantities discussed in this booklet as being eligible for duty-free treatment may be included in your \$800 or \$1,600 exemption, just as any other purchase would be. But unlike other kinds of merchandise, amounts beyond those discussed here as being duty-free are taxed, even if you have not exceeded, or even met, your personal exemption. For example, if your exemption is \$800 and you bring back three liters of wine and nothing else, two of those liters will be dutiable. Federal law prohibits shipping alcoholic beverages by mail within the United States.

## **Paying Duty**

If you owe duty, you must pay it when you arrive in the United States. You can pay it in any of the following ways:

- U.S. currency. Foreign currency is not acceptable.
- Personal check in the exact amount, drawn on a U.S. bank, made payable to U.S. Customs and Border Protection. You must present identification, such as a passport or driver's license. CBP does not accept checks bearing second-party endorsements.
- Government check, money order, or traveler's check if the amount does not exceed the duty owed by more than \$50.
- In some locations, you may pay duty with credit cards, either MasterCard® or VISA®.

## **Sending Items Back to the United States**

Unaccompanied baggage is anything you do not bring back with you. These may be items that were with you when you left the United States or items that you acquired (received by any means) while outside the United States. In general, unaccompanied baggage falls into three categories: U.S. mail, express shipments, and freight.

### **U.S. Mail Shipments**

Shipping through the U.S. mail, including parcel post, is a cost-efficient way to send items to the United States.

The Postal Service sends all foreign mail shipments to CBP for examination. CBP officers then return packages that do not require duty to the Postal Service, which sends them to a local post office for delivery. The local post office delivers them without charging any additional postage, handling costs, or other fees.

Packages that contain fruits, vegetables, meat or other items of agricultural interest are inspected to ensure that items meet the requirements of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine. The CBP agriculture specialist encloses a Mail Interception Notice, PPQ Form 287, to document any agriculture items that are removed from the package. The package is returned to the U.S. Postal Service for delivery. (Information on importing agriculture items is located on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Website at [www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov).)

If the package does require payment of duty, CBP attaches a form called a mail entry, CBP Form 3419Alt, which indicates how much duty is owed and charges a \$5 processing fee as well. When the post office delivers the package, it will also charge a small handling fee.

Commercial goods—goods intended for resale—may have special entry requirements. Such goods may require a *formal entry* in order to be admitted into the United States. Formal entries are more complicated and require more paperwork than informal entries. Generally, informal entries are personal packages or commercial items worth less than \$2,000. CBP employees may not prepare formal entries for you; only you or a licensed customs broker may prepare one. For more information on this subject, please see the brochure *U.S. Import Requirements*.

If you believe you have been charged an incorrect amount of duty on a package mailed from abroad, you may file a protest with CBP. You can do this in one of two ways. You can accept the package, pay the duty, and write a letter explaining why you think the amount was incorrect. You should include with your letter the yellow copy of the mail entry (CBP Form 3419Alt). Send

the letter and the form to the CBP office that issued the mail entry, located on the lower left-hand corner of the form.

The other way to protest duty is to refuse delivery of the package. Then within five days, send your protest letter to the post office where the package is being held. The post office will forward your letter to CBP and will hold your package until the protest is resolved.

For additional information on international mailing, please see the brochure *International Mail Imports*, or visit the CBP Website at [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov).

### **Express Shipments**

Packages may be sent to the United States by private-sector courier or delivery service from anywhere in the world. The express company usually takes care of clearing your merchandise through customs and charges a fee for its service. Some travelers have found this fee to be higher than they expected.

### **Freight Shipments**

Cargo, whether duty is owed on it or not, must clear customs at the first port of arrival in the United States. If you choose, you may have your freight sent, while it is still in CBP custody, to another port for clearance. This is called *forwarding freight in bond*. You, or someone you appoint to act for you, are responsible for arranging to clear your merchandise through CBP or for having it forwarded to another port.

Frequently, a freight forwarder in a foreign country will take care of these arrangements, including hiring a customs broker in the United States to clear the merchandise through CBP. Whenever a third party handles the clearing and forwarding of your merchandise, that party charges a fee for its services. This fee is not a CBP charge.

There are several ways a traveler can find a broker:

- Phone book - in the Yellow Pages under "Customs Brokers"
- Internet - search for "Customs Brokers"

- CBP Website - click the "ports" button, click the state of interest and click on a city within the state. Under each city is a listing of brokers. Click "view list" for a listing of brokers in that area.

The phone book listings as well as the Internet listings are limited to brokers that submit the information. It is not all-inclusive.

The listing of brokers on the CBP Website is updated on a regular basis. Listed brokers have a current permit in that port. This list is the only broker information provided by CBP.

When a foreign seller entrusts a shipment to a broker or agent in the United States, that seller usually pays only enough freight to have the shipment delivered to the first port of arrival in the United States. This means that you, the buyer, will have to pay additional inland transportation, or *freight forwarding* charges, plus broker fees, insurance, and possibly other charges.

If it is not possible for you to secure release of your goods yourself, another person may act on your behalf to clear them through CBP. You may do this as long as your merchandise consists of a single, noncommercial shipment (not intended for resale) that does not require a formal entry—in other words, if the merchandise is worth less than \$2,000 and you must give the person a letter that authorizes that person to act as your unpaid agent.

Once you have done this, that person may fill out the CBP declaration and complete the entry process for you. Your letter authorizing the person to act in your behalf should be addressed to the "Officer in Charge of CBP" at the port of entry, and the person should bring the letter with them when they go to clear your package.

CBP will not notify you when your shipment arrives, as this is the responsibility of your carrier. If your goods are not cleared within 15 days of arrival you could incur expensive storage fees.

# Gifts

## Gifts you bring back

Gifts you bring back for your personal use must be declared, but you may include them in your personal exemption. This includes gifts people gave you while you were out of the country, such as wedding or birthday presents, and gifts you have brought back for others.

Gifts intended for business, promotional, or other commercial purposes may not be included in your duty-free exemption.

Also note that by federal law, alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, and perfume containing alcohol and worth more than \$5 retail may not be included in the gift exemption.

## Gifts you send

Gifts worth up to \$100 may be sent, free of duty and tax, to friends and relatives in the United States, as long as the same person does not receive more than \$100 worth of gifts in a single day. If the gifts are mailed or shipped from an insular possession, this amount is increased to \$200.

Unless returning to the United States from an insular possession, you don't have to declare gifts you sent while you were on your trip, since they won't be accompanying you.

## Gifts for more than one person

Gifts for more than one person may be shipped in the same package, called a consolidated gift package, if they are individually wrapped and labeled with each recipient's name. Here's how to wrap and label a consolidated gift package.

Be sure to mark the outermost wrapper with the:

- Words "UNSOLICITED GIFT" and the words "CONSOLIDATED GIFT PACKAGE;"
- Total value of the consolidated package;
- Recipients' names and

- Nature and value of the gifts inside. For example, tennis shoes, \$50; shirt, \$45; toy car, \$15. For instance:  
To John Jones—one belt, \$20; one box of candy, \$5; one tie, \$20.  
To Mary Smith—one skirt, \$45; one belt, \$15; one pair slacks, \$30.

If any item is worth more than the \$100 gift allowance, the entire package will be dutiable.

### **Can I send a gift to myself?**

You, as a traveler, cannot send a gift package to yourself, and people traveling together cannot send gifts to each other. But there would be no reason to do that anyway, because the personal exemption for packages mailed from abroad is \$200, which is twice as much as the gift exemption.

### **Personal Belongings**

Your personal belongings can be sent back to the United States duty-free if they are of U.S. origin and if they have not been altered or repaired while abroad. Personal belongings like worn clothing can be mailed home and will receive duty-free entry if you write the words “American Goods Returned” on the outside of the package.

### **If a package is subject to duty**

If a package is subject to duty, the United States Postal Service will collect it from the addressee along with any postage and handling charges. The sender cannot pre-pay duty; the recipient must pay duty when a package is received in the United States.

For more information about mailing packages to the United States, visit “Sending Goods to the United States” at [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/send\\_to\\_us.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/send_to_us.xml).

# **Sending Purchases from Insular Possessions and Caribbean Basin and Andean Countries**

Unaccompanied purchases are goods you bought on a trip that are being mailed or shipped to you in the United States. In other words, you are not carrying the goods with you when you return. If your unaccompanied purchases are from an insular possession or a Caribbean Basin country and are being sent directly from those locations to the United States, you may enter them as follows:

- Up to \$1,600 in goods will be duty-free under your personal exemption if the merchandise is from an insular possession.
- Up to \$800 in goods will be duty-free if it is from a Caribbean Basin and Andean country.
- An additional \$1,000 in goods will be dutiable at a flat rate if they are from an insular possession, or from a Caribbean Basin country. (See chart under **Paying Duty**.)
- If you are sending more than \$2,600 from an insular possession or more than \$1,600 from a Caribbean Basin country, the duty rates in the Harmonized Tariff Schedules of the United States will apply. The Harmonized Tariff Schedule describes different rates of duty for different commodities. For example, linen tablecloths will not have the same duty rates as handicrafts or plastic toy trucks.

To take advantage of the duty-free exemption for unaccompanied tourist purchases from an insular possession or a Caribbean country:

**Step 1.** At place and time of purchase, ask your merchant to hold your item until you send him or her a copy of CBP Form 255 (Declaration of Unaccompanied Articles), which must be affixed to the package when it is sent.

**Step 2.** (a) On your declaration form (CBP Form 6059B), list everything you acquired on your trip, except the things you already sent home as gifts. You must also

complete a separate *Declaration of Unaccompanied Articles form* (CBP Form 255) for each package or container that will be sent to you after you arrive in the United States. This form may be available where you make your purchase. If not, ask a CBP officer for one when you clear the customs area.

**Step 3.** When you return to the United States, the CBP officer will: (a) collect duty and tax on the dutiable goods you have brought with you; (b) check to see that your list of unaccompanied articles, which you indicated on the CBP Form 255, agrees with your sales receipts; (c) validate the CBP Form 255 as to whether your purchases are duty-free under your personal exemption (\$1,600 or \$800) or whether they are subject to a flat rate of duty.

**Step 4.** Two copies of this three part CBP Form 255 will be returned to you. Send the yellow copy of the CBP Form 255 to the foreign shopkeeper or vendor holding your purchase, and keep the other copy for your records.

**Step 5.** When the merchant gets your CBP Form 255, he or she will put it in an envelope and attach the envelope securely to the outside wrapping of the package or container. The merchant must also mark each package “Unaccompanied Purchase.” *Please remember that each package or container must have its own CBP Form 255 attached.* This is the most important step to follow in order to gain the benefits allowed under this procedure.

**Step 6.** If your package has been mailed, the U.S. Postal Service will deliver it after it clears customs. If you owe duty, the Postal Service will collect the duty along with a postal handling fee. If a freight service transports your package, they will notify you of its arrival so you can go to the CBP office holding the shipment and complete the entry procedure. If you owe duty or tax, you can pay it at that time. You could also hire a customs broker to do this for you. However, be aware that brokers are not CBP employees, and they charge fees for their services.

If freight or express packages from your trip are delivered before you return and you have not made

arrangements to pick them up, CBP will authorize their placement in storage after 15 days. This storage will be at your risk and expense. If they are not claimed within six months, the items will be sold at auction.

Packages sent by mail and not claimed within 30 days will be returned to the sender unless the amount of duty is being protested.

## **Duty-Free Shops**

The term “duty-free” shops confuses many travelers. Travelers often think that what they buy in duty-free shops will not be dutiable when they return home and clear customs. But this is not true. Articles sold in a duty-free shop are free of duty and taxes only for the country in which that shop is located. So if your purchases exceed your personal exemption, items you bought in a duty-free shop, whether in the United States or abroad, will be subject to duty.

Articles purchased in American duty-free shops are also subject to U.S. duty if you bring them into the United States. Therefore, if you buy liquor in a duty-free shop in New York before entering Canada and then bring it back into the United States, it may be subject to duty and Internal Revenue Service tax.

## **Prohibited and Restricted Items**

CBP has been entrusted with enforcing hundreds of laws for 40 other government agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These agencies need to know what people bring into the United States, but they are not always at ports of entry, guarding our borders. CBP officers are *always* at ports of entry—their primary mission is to safeguard America’s borders.

The products we need to prevent from entering the United States are those that would injure community health, public safety, American workers, children, or domestic plant and animal life, or those that would defeat our national political interests. Sometimes the products that cause injury, or have the potential to

do so, may seem fairly innocent. But, as you will see from the material that follows, appearances can be deceiving.

Before you leave for your trip abroad, you might want to talk to CBP about the items you plan to bring back to be sure they're not prohibited or restricted. *Prohibited* means the item is forbidden by law to enter the United States. Examples of prohibited items are dangerous toys, cars that don't protect their occupants in a crash, or illegal substances like absinthe and Rohypnol. *Restricted* means that special licenses or permits are required from a federal agency before the item is allowed to enter the United States. Examples of restricted items include firearms, certain fruits, vegetables, and some animals.

### **Absinthe (Alcohol)**

The importation of Absinthe and any other liquors or liqueurs that contain *Artemisia absinthium* is prohibited.

### **Automobiles**

Automobiles imported into the United States must meet the fuel-emission requirements of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the safety, bumper, and theft-prevention standards of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Trying to import a car that doesn't meet all the requirements can be a frustrating experience for the following reasons. (See the CBP brochure, *Importing a Car*)

Almost all cars, vans, sport utility vehicles, and so on that are bought in foreign countries must be modified to meet American standards except most late model vehicles from Canada. Passenger vehicles that are imported on the condition that they be modified must be exported or destroyed if they are not modified acceptably. Also under these circumstances, the vehicle could require a bond upon entry until the conditions for admission have been met.

And even if the car does meet all federal standards, it might be subject to additional EPA requirements, depending on what countries it was driven in. You are

strongly encouraged to contact EPA and DOT before importing a car.

Information on importing vehicles can be obtained from visiting the Environmental Protection Agency Website at [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov), by writing to Attn.: 6405J, Washington, DC 20460, or by telephone at 202.564.9240, for EPA forms call 202.564.9660. You may also contact the U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Vehicle Safety Compliance (NEF 32) NHTSA, Washington, DC 20590, by telephone at 1.800.424.9393, or by visiting the DOT Website at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov).

Copies of the brochure *Importing or Exporting a Car* can be obtained by writing to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, P.O. Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044; or visiting the CBP Website at [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov). The EPA *Automotive Imports Fact Manual* can be obtained by writing to the Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC 20460; or by visiting [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov).

Cars being brought into the United States temporarily, by nonresidents, (for less than one year) are exempt from these restrictions. It is illegal to bring a vehicle into the United States and sell it if it was not formally entered on a CBP Form 7501.

## **Biologicals**

You may need a U.S. Department of Agriculture permit to import biological specimens including bacterial cultures, culture medium, excretions, fungi, arthropods, mollusks, tissues of livestock, birds, plants, viruses, vectors for research, biological or pharmaceutical use. Permit requirements are located under “Permits” on the USDA Website at [www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov). For some permits you may have to contact the Centers for Disease Control at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

## **Ceramic Tableware**

Although ceramic tableware is not prohibited or restricted, you should know that such tableware made in foreign countries may contain dangerous levels of lead in the glaze, which can seep into foods and beverages. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends that if you buy ceramic tableware abroad—especially

in Mexico, China, Hong Kong, or India—you have it tested for lead release when you return, or use it for decorative purposes only.

### **Cultural Artifacts and Cultural Property (Art/Artifacts)**

Most countries have laws that protect their cultural property: art/artifacts/antiquities; archaeological and ethnological material are also terms that are used. Such laws include export controls and/or national ownership of cultural property. Even if purchased from a business in the country of origin or in another country, legal ownership of such artifacts may be in question if brought into the United States. Therefore, although they do not necessarily confer ownership, you must have documents such as export permits and receipts when importing such items into the United States.

While foreign laws may not be enforceable in the United States, they can cause certain U.S. laws to be invoked. For example, under the U.S. National Stolen Property Act, one cannot have legal title to art/artifacts/antiquities that were stolen—no matter how many times such items may have changed hands. Articles of stolen cultural property from museums or from religious or secular public monuments originating in any of the countries party to the 1970 UNESCO Convention specifically may not be imported into the United States.

U.S. law may also restrict the importation of specific categories of art/artifacts/antiquities. For example, U.S. laws restrict the importation of: 1) Any pre Columbian monumental and architectural sculpture and murals from Central and South American countries; 2) Native American artifacts from Canada; Mayan pre Columbian archaeological objects from Guatemala; pre Columbian archaeological objects from El Salvador and Peru; archaeological objects like terracotta statues) from Mali; Colonial period objects such as paintings and ritual objects from Peru; 3) Byzantine period ritual and ecclesiastic objects such as icons from Cyprus; and 4) Khmer stone archaeological sculpture from Cambodia.

Importation of items such as those listed above is permitted only when an export permit issued by the

country of origin, where such items were first found accompanies them. Purveyors of such items have been known to offer phony export certificates.

As additional U.S. import restrictions may be imposed in response to requests from other countries, it is wise for prospective purchasers to visit the State Department cultural property website. This website also has images representative of the categories of cultural property for which there are specific U.S. import restrictions.

Merchandise determined to be Iraqi cultural property or other items of archaeological, historical, cultural, rare scientific and religious importance illegally removed from the Iraq National Museum, the National Library and other locations in Iraq, since August 6, 1990, are also prohibited from importation.

### **Dog and Cat Fur**

It is illegal in the United States to import, export, distribute, transport, manufacture, or sell products containing dog or cat fur in the United States. As of November 9, 2000, the Dog and Cat Protection Act of 2000 calls for the seizure and forfeiture of each item containing dog or cat fur.

The Act provides that any person who violates any provision may be assessed a civil penalty of not more than \$10,000 for each separate knowing and intentional violation, \$5,000 for each separate gross negligent violation, or \$3,000 for each separate negligent violation.

### **Drug Paraphernalia**

It is illegal to bring drug paraphernalia into the United States unless they have been prescribed for authentic medical conditions such as diabetes. CBP will seize any illegal drug paraphernalia. Law prohibits the importation, exportation, manufacture, sale, or transportation of drug paraphernalia. If you are convicted of any of these offenses, you will be subject to fines and imprisonment.

### **Firearms**

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) regulates and restricts firearms and ammunition;

and approves all import transactions involving weapons and ammunition. If you want to import or export weapons or ammunition, you must do so through a licensed importer, dealer, or manufacturer. Also, if the National Firearms Act prohibits certain weapons, ammunition, or similar devices from coming into the country, you will not be able to import them unless the ATF provides you with written authorization to do so.

You do not need an ATF permit if you can demonstrate that you are returning with the same firearms or ammunition that you took out of the United States. To prevent problems when returning, you should register your firearms and related equipment by taking them to any CBP office before you leave the United States. The CBP officer will register them on the same CBP Form-4457 used to register cameras or computers. (See the section on **Register Items Before You Leave the United States**).

For further information about importing weapons, contact the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC 20226; or call 202.927.8320; or visit [www.atf.gov](http://www.atf.gov).

Many countries will not allow you to enter with a firearm even if you are only traveling through the country on the way to your final destination. If you plan to take your firearms or ammunition to another country, you should contact officials at that country's embassy to learn about its regulations.

### **Fish and Wildlife**

Certain fish and wildlife, and products made from them are subject to import and export restrictions, prohibitions, permits or certificates, and quarantine requirements. We recommend that you contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before you depart if you plan to import or export any of the following:

- Wild birds, land or marine mammals, reptiles, fish, shellfish, mollusks, or invertebrates.
- Any part or product of the above, such as skins, tusks, bone, feathers, or eggs.
- Products or articles manufactured from wildlife or fish.

Endangered species of wildlife, and products made from them, generally may not be imported or exported. You will need a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to import virtually all types of ivory, unless it is from a warthog. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has so many restrictions and prohibitions on various kinds of ivory—Asian elephant, African elephant, whale, rhinoceros, seal, pre-Endangered Species Act, post-CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), and many others—that they urge you to contact them before you even think of acquiring ivory in a foreign country. You may contact them at 800.358.2104.

You may import an object made of ivory if it is an antique. To be an antique the ivory must be at least 100 years old. You will need documentation that authenticates the age of the ivory. You may import other antiques containing wildlife parts with the same condition, but they must be accompanied by documentation proving they are at least 100 years old. Certain other requirements for antiques may apply.

If you plan to buy such things as tortoiseshell jewelry, or articles made from whalebone, ivory, skins, or fur, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Law Enforcement, P.O. Box 3247, Arlington, VA 22203-3247, or call 800.358.2104 or visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Hunters can get information on the limitations for importing and exporting migratory game birds from this office as well. Ask for their pamphlet, *Facts About Federal Wildlife Laws*.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated specific ports of entry to handle fish and wildlife entries. If you plan to import anything discussed in this section, please contact CBP. CBP will tell you about designated ports and send you the brochure *Pets and Wildlife*, which describes the regulations CBP enforces for all agencies that oversee the importation of animals.

Some states have fish and wildlife laws and regulations that are stricter than federal laws and regulations. If you are returning to such a state, be aware that the stricter state laws and regulations have priority. Similarly, the

federal government does not allow you to import wild animals into the United States that were taken, killed, sold, possessed, or exported from another country if any of these acts violated foreign laws.

### **Food Products (Prepared)**

You may bring bakery items and certain cheeses into the United States. The APHIS website features a Travelers Tips section and Game and Hunting Trophies section that offers extensive information about bringing food and other products into the country. Many prepared foods are admissible. However, almost anything containing meat products, such as bouillon, soup mixes, etc., is not admissible. As a general rule, condiments, vinegars, oils, packaged spices, honey, coffee and tea are admissible. Because rice can often harbor insects, it is best to avoid bringing it into the United States.

Some imported foods are also subject to requirements of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

#### *Prior Notice for Food Importation*

The Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 (Bioterrorism Act or BTA), Public Law 107-188, established the requirement that food items, imported (or offered for import) for commercial use, including hand-carried quantities, be properly reported to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prior to arrival of those items in the United States. The FDA prior notification timeframes (by transport mode) are two hours by land, four hours by rail or air, eight hours by vessel and prior to the “time of mailing” for international mail.

Food that was made by an individual in his/her personal residence, or food purchased by an individual from a vendor that is sent by that individual as a personal gift (for non-business reasons) to someone in the United States is not subject to BTA requirements. However, food that is sent to an individual in the United States by a business is subject to special requirements of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. For instance, if you go to a food shop in England and buy a gift basket, then take it to the post office or a courier service to send to a friend, the shipment is not subject to BTA requirements.

But if you go to that same shop and ask them to send the gift basket for you, the shipment is subject to BTA requirements, and the vendor will have to file Prior Notice. Many travelers are finding that vendors will not ship food directly to U.S. residents because the reporting requirements can be time-consuming to complete.

In general, failure to provide complete, timely and accurate prior notice for BTA regulated items, can result in refusal of admission of the merchandise, movement of the goods to an FDA registered facility (at importer expense) and/or civil monetary penalty liabilities for any party that was involved in the import transaction.

For full details regarding the latest FDA BTA requirements, including those food items exempt from these requirements, access the FDA Website at [www.fda.gov/oc/bioterrorism/bioact.html](http://www.fda.gov/oc/bioterrorism/bioact.html).

### **Fruits and Vegetables**

Bringing fruits and vegetables can be complicated. For instance, consider the apple you bought in the foreign airport just before boarding and then did not eat? Whether or not CBP will allow the apple into the United States depends on where you got it and where you are going after you arrive in the United States. The same would be true for those magnificent Mediterranean tomatoes. Fresh fruits and vegetables can carry plant pests or diseases into the United States.

One good example of problems imported fruits and vegetables can cause is the Mediterranean fruit fly outbreak during the 1980s. The outbreak cost the state of California and the Federal Government approximately \$100 million to get rid of this pest. The cause of the outbreak was one traveler who brought home one contaminated piece of fruit. It is best not to bring fresh fruits or vegetables into the United States. However, if you plan to, contact either CBP or check the Permits section on the USDA-APHIS Website at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/permits/plantproducts/index.html> for a general approved list on items that need a permit.

## **Game and Hunting Trophies**

If you plan to import game or a hunting trophy, please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before you leave at 800.358.2104. Currently, 14 ports of entry are designated to handle game and trophies; other ports must get approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to clear your entry.

Depending on the species you bring back, you might need a permit from the country where the animal was harvested. Regardless of the species, you are required to fill out a Fish and Wildlife Form 3-177, Declaration for Importation or Exportation.

Trophies may also be subject to inspection by CBP for sanitary purposes. General guidelines for importing trophies can be found on APHIS Website under the APHIS Import Authorization System (IAS) at <https://web01.aphis.usda.gov/ias.nsf/Mainform?OpenForm>; or by writing to USDA, APHIS, VS, NCIE Products Program, 4700 River Road, Unit 40, Riverdale, MD 20737-1231; or by calling 301.734.3277.

Also, federal regulations do not allow the importation of any species into a state with fish or wildlife laws that are more restrictive than federal laws. If foreign laws were violated in the taking, sale, possession, or export to the United States of wild animals, those animals will not be allowed entry into the United States.

**Warning:** There are many regulations, enforced by various agencies, governing the importation of animals and animal parts. Failure to comply with them could result in time-consuming delays in clearing your trophy through CBP. You should always call for guidance before you depart.

## **Gold**

Gold coins, medals, and bullion, formerly prohibited, may be brought into the United States. However, under regulations administered by the Office of Foreign Assets Control, such items originating in or brought from Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Serbia, and Sudan are prohibited entry. Copies of gold coins are prohibited if not properly marked by country of issuance.

## Meats, Livestock, and Poultry

The regulations governing meat and meat products are very strict. You may not import fresh, dried, or canned meats or meat products from most foreign countries into the United States. Also, you may not import food products that have been prepared with meat.

The regulations on importing meat and meat products change frequently because they are based on disease outbreaks in different areas of the world. APHIS, which regulates meats and meat products as well as fruits and vegetables, invites you to contact them for more information on importing meats. You may write to USDA-APHIS Veterinary Services National Center for Import/Export (NCIE), 4700 River Road, Unit 40, Riverdale, MD 20737-1231; or call 301.734.7830.

## Medication

**Rule of thumb: When you go abroad, take the medicines you will need, no more, no less.** Narcotics and certain other drugs with a high potential for abuse—Rohypnol, GHB, and Fen-Phen, to name a few—may not be brought into the United States, and there are severe penalties for trying to do so. If you need medicines that contain potentially addictive drugs or narcotics (e.g., some cough medicines, tranquilizers, sleeping pills, antidepressants, or stimulants), do the following:

- Declare all drugs, medicinals, and similar products to the appropriate CBP official.
- Carry such substances in their original containers.
- Carry only the quantity of such substances that a person with that condition (e.g., chronic pain) would normally carry for his/her personal use.
- Carry a prescription or written statement from your physician that the substances are being used under a doctor's supervision and that they are necessary for your physical well being while traveling.

U.S. residents entering the United States at international land borders, who are carrying a validly obtained controlled substance (other than narcotics such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or LSD), are subject to certain additional requirements. If a U.S. resident wants to bring in a controlled substance (other than narcotics such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or LSD) but does

not have a prescription for the substance issued by a U.S.-licensed practitioner (e.g., physician, dentist, etc.) who is registered with, and authorized by, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to prescribe the medication, the individual may not import more than 50 dosage units of the medication into the United States. If the U.S. resident has a prescription for the controlled substance issued by a DEA registrant, more than 50 dosage units may be imported by that person, provided all other legal requirements are met.

Please note that only medications that can be legally prescribed in the United States may be imported for personal use. Be aware that possession of certain substances may also violate state laws. As a general rule, the FDA does not allow the importation of prescription drugs that were purchased outside the United States. Please see their website for information about the enforcement policy for personal use quantities.

**Warning:** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prohibits the importation, by mail or in person, of fraudulent prescription and nonprescription drugs and medical devices. These include unorthodox “cures” for such medical conditions as cancer, AIDS, arthritis, or multiple sclerosis. Although such drugs or devices may be legal elsewhere, if the FDA has not approved them for use in the United States, they may not legally enter the country and will be confiscated, even if they were obtained under a foreign physician’s prescription.

For specifics about importing controlled substances, call 202.307.2414. For additional information about traveling with medication, contact your nearest FDA office or write to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Division of Import Operations and Policy, Room 12-8 (HFC-170), 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857.

### **Merchandise from Embargoed Countries**

Generally, you may not bring in any goods from the following (if not followed by an asterisk or where specified that the embargo only applies to diamonds): Cuba, Iran\*, Iraq\*, Serbia and Montenegro\*, North Korea\*, Burma (Myanmar), Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone (diamonds only) and Sudan. The Office of

Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of Treasury enforces this ban.

\*The embargo on Iranian goods has been revised to allow the importation of food stuffs intended for human consumption, carpets and other textile floor coverings. Please check with your local port for further details.

\*Only certain Iraqi cultural property or other items of archaeological, historical/cultural, rare scientific and religious importance illegally removed from the Iraq National Museum, the National Library and other locations in Iraq is prohibited.

\*There is a general lifting of the embargo on Serbia and Montenegro (exception relates to certain “Specially Designated Nationals” and “Blocked Persons” involving transactions prior to January 19, 2000). For more information visit OFAC Website at <http://www.treas.gov/offices/eotffc/ofac/>.

\*The importation of merchandise from North Korea requires a letter of approval issued by the OFAC.

You may, however, may bring in information and informational materials—books, magazines, films, posters, photographs, microfilms, tapes, CDs, records, works of art, etc. Blank tapes and blank CDs are not informational materials.

If you want to import merchandise from any of these countries, you will first need a specific license from the Office of Foreign Assets Control. Such licenses are rarely granted.

There are strictly enforced restrictions on travel to these countries. Therefore, before making plans to visit any of the countries on this list, you should write to the Office of Foreign Assets Control, Department of the Treasury, Washington, DC 20220, or visit their Website at [www.treas.gov/ofac](http://www.treas.gov/ofac).

## **Pets**

If you plan to take your pet abroad or import one on your return, please get a copy of the CBP brochure *Pets*

and Wildlife. You should also check with state, county, and local authorities to learn if their restrictions and prohibitions on pets are stricter than federal requirements.

Importing animals is closely regulated for public health reasons and also for the well being of the animals. There are restrictions and prohibitions on bringing many species into the United States.

**Cats** must be free of evidence of diseases communicable to humans when they are examined at the port of entry. If the cat does not seem to be in good health, the owner may have to pay for an additional examination by a licensed veterinarian. As a rule, both cats and dogs must be free of fleas and ticks, and have a health certificate that was issued by the country of residence.

**Dogs** must also be free of evidence of diseases that could be communicable to humans. Puppies must be confined at a place of the owner's choosing, which can be a private residence, until they are three months old and then they must be vaccinated against rabies. The puppy will then have to stay in confinement for another 30 days following the vaccination.

Dogs older than three months must get a rabies vaccination at least 30 days before they come to the United States and must be accompanied by a valid rabies vaccination certificate if coming from a country that is not rabies-free. This certificate should identify the dog, show the date of vaccination, the date it expires (there are one-year and three-year vaccinations), and be signed by a licensed veterinarian. If the certificate does not have an expiration date, CBP will accept it as long as the dog was vaccinated 12 months or less before coming to the United States. Dogs coming from rabies free countries do not have to be vaccinated.

**Birds** may be imported as pets as long as you comply with APHIS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife requirements. These requirements may include quarantining the birds at one of the three APHIS Animal Import Centers at your expense. You must make advance reservations at the quarantine facility. If you intend to import a bird,

call the APHIS National Center for Import and Export at 301.734.8364 for more information.

In any case, birds may only be imported through ports of entry where a USDA port veterinarian is on duty; and you must make arrangements in advance to have the bird examined by a USDA port veterinarian at the first U.S. port of entry. There is a minimum user fee for this service based on an hourly rate. For more information, contact the USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services, National Center for Import and Export (NCIE), 4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD 20737; call 301.734.8364; or visit the APHIS Website at [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/subjects/animal\\_health/index.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/subjects/animal_health/index.shtml).

Other common pets such as rabbits, ferrets, hamsters, gerbils, and guinea pigs may be imported if they are in good health. The importation of reptiles and invertebrates is restricted, please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for additional guidance. Most species of snails are not admissible. Contact APHIS for additional information.

### **Plants and seeds**

Some plants, cuttings, seeds that are capable of propagation, unprocessed plant products, and certain endangered species are allowed into the United States but require import permits; some are prohibited entirely. Threatened or endangered species that are permitted must have export permits from the country of origin.

Every single plant or plant product including handicraft items made with straw, must be declared to the CBP officer and must be presented for CBP inspection, no matter how free of pests it appears to be. For information write to USDA-APHIS-PPQ, 4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD 20737; call 301.734.8645; or visit the APHIS Website at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/permits/plantproducts/index.html>.

### **Soil**

Soil is considered the loose surface material of the earth in which plants, trees, and scrubs grow. In most cases, the soil consists of disintegrated rock with an admixture of organic material and soluble salts. Soil

is prohibited entry unless accompanied by an import permit. Soil must be declared and the permit must be verified.

### **Textiles and Clothing**

In general, there is no limit to how much fabric and clothing you can bring back as long as it is for your personal use or as gifts. If you have exceeded your personal exemption, you may have to pay duty on the items. Unaccompanied personal shipments (packages that are mailed or shipped), however, may be subject to limitations on amount.

On January 1, 2005, quotas for all countries that are part of the World Trade Organization (WTO) were eliminated. There are still some countries, like Vietnam, that are not part of the WTO that have quotas in place for commercial shipments. These countries may require an additional document called a “visa” accompany the shipment.

China could have limits on particular garments called “safeguards.” It is recommended that you contact a CBP import specialist in your area or at the port where you plan to import to determine what countries are subject to quotas and what products from China are subject to safeguards.

There may be additional documentation required for textiles from other countries such as the African countries that require a visa to be placed on a commercial invoice in order to get duty-free treatment. There may also be a certificate of eligibility document requirement to get duty-free treatment under many of the free trade agreements that are negotiated between the United States and the foreign government. These are not admissibility documents, but allow you to import your garments duty-free, provided certain conditions are met.

### **Trademarked and Copyrighted Articles**

CBP enforces laws relating to the protection of trademarks and copyrights. Articles that infringe a federally registered trademark or copyright or copyright protected by the Berne Convention for the Protection of

Literary and Artistic Works are subject to detention and/or seizure. Infringing articles may consist of articles that use a protected right without the authorization of the trademark or copyright owner or articles that copy or simulate a protected right.

Articles bearing marks that are counterfeit or inappropriately using a federally registered trademark are subject to seizure and forfeiture. The importation of articles intended for sale or public distribution bearing counterfeit marks may subject an individual to a civil fine if the registered trademark has also been recorded with CBP. Articles bearing marks that are confusingly similar to a CBP recorded registered trademark, and restricted gray market articles (goods bearing genuine marks not intended for U.S. importation for which CBP granted gray market protection) are subject to detention and seizure.

However, travelers arriving in the United States may be permitted an exemption and allowed to import one article of each type, which must accompany the person, bearing a counterfeit, confusingly similar or restricted gray market trademark, provided that the article is for personal use and is not for sale.

This exemption may be granted not more than once every 30 days. The arriving passenger may retain one article of each type accompanying the person. For example, an arriving person who has three purses, whether each bears a different infringing trademark, or whether all three bear the same infringing trademark, is permitted only one purse. If the article imported under the personal exemption provision is sold within one year after the date of importation, the article or its value is subject to forfeiture.

In regard to copyright infringement, articles that are determined by CBP to be clearly piratical of a protected copyright, i.e., unauthorized articles that are substantially similar to a material protected by a copyright, are subject to seizure. A personal use exemption for articles, similar to that described above also applies to copyrighted articles for the personal, non-commercial use of the importer and are not for sale or distribution.

You may bring back genuine trademarked and copyrighted articles (subject to duties). Products subject to copyright protection most commonly imported include software on CD-ROMs, sound recordings, toys, stuffed animals, clothing with cartoon characters, videotapes, DVDs, music CDs, and books. Products subject to trademark protection most commonly imported include handbags and accessories, and clothing.

## **Money and Other Monetary Instruments**

You may bring into or take out of the country, including by mail, as much money as you wish. However, if it is more than \$10,000, you will need to report it to CBP. Ask the CBP officer for the Currency Reporting Form (FinCen 105). The penalties for non-compliance can be severe.

“Money” means monetary instruments and includes U.S. or foreign coins currently in circulation, currency, travelers’ checks in any form, money orders, and negotiable instruments or investment securities in bearer form.

## **Photographic Film**

CBP will not examine film you bought abroad and are bringing back unless the CBP officer has reason to believe it contains prohibited material, such as child pornography.

You will not be charged duty on film bought in the United States and exposed abroad, whether it is developed or not. But film you bought and developed abroad counts as a dutiable item.

## CBP's Pledge to Travelers

- We pledge to cordially greet and welcome you to the United States.
- We pledge to treat you with courtesy, dignity, and respect.
- We pledge to explain the CBP process to you.
- We pledge to have a supervisor listen to your comments.
- We pledge to accept and respond to your comments in written, verbal, or electronic form.
- We pledge to provide reasonable assistance due to delay or disability.

If you have a concern or need help understanding CBP regulations and procedures, ask to speak with the passenger service representative on duty. There are passenger service representatives available to travelers on a full-time basis at selected international airports. The representatives' major purpose is to help travelers clear CBP. Photos of the passenger service representatives are posted wherever the program is operating, to make it easy for you to recognize them if you need assistance.

If you have any questions about CBP procedures, requirements, or policies regarding travelers, or if you have any complaints about treatment you received from CBP officers or about your CBP processing, please write to:

**Customer Service Center  
Office of Public Affairs  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20229**

Or call 1.877.CBP.5511 (1.877.227.5511).

Allegations of criminal or serious misconduct may be reported to the Joint Intake Center by telephone at 1.877.2INTAKE (1.877.246.8253), by email to **Joint.Intake@dhs.gov**, by fax to 202.344.3390, or by mail to:

**U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
P.O. Box 14475  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20044**

## Other Travel-Related Information

**Passports** are issued by the U.S. Department of State Passport Agency. Please contact the Passport Agency nearest you for more information. Postal clerks also accept passport applications. Additional information can be found at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov).

**Baggage allowance:** Ask the airline or steamship line on which you are traveling for more information. Contact the Transportation Security Administration at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov) for a list of prohibited and permitted items.

**Currency of other nations:** Your local bank can be of assistance.

**Foreign countries:** For information about the country you will visit or about what articles may be imported or brought into that country, contact that country's embassy, consular office, or tourist information office.

## Key Travel-Related Websites

### U.S. Department of Homeland Security

protects U.S. citizens and their way of life by securing the borders, airports, waterways and critical infrastructure.

[www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov)

### U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs

serves Americans traveling or residing abroad, issues passports to U.S. citizens and visas to citizens of foreign countries for travel to the U.S.

[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

### U.S. Customs and Border Protection

the border agency preventing terrorists and their weapons from entering the U. S., while facilitating the flow of legitimate trade and travel.

[www.cbp.gov/travel](http://www.cbp.gov/travel)

### US-VISIT Program

combining technology and processes to establish biometrically-enhanced security measures that

enhance security, ensure the integrity of the immigration system, facilitate legitimate travel and trade and protect the privacy of visitors.  
[www.dhs.gov/us-visit](http://www.dhs.gov/us-visit)

**Transportation Security Administration**

responsible for security at the nation's airports by screening all passengers and baggage.  
[www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)

**U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)**

protects and promotes U.S. agricultural health.  
[www.aphis.usda.gov/subjects/importing/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/subjects/importing/)

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration**

protects the public health by assuring the safety, and security of human and veterinary drugs, biological products, medical devices, our nation's food supply, and cosmetics.  
[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

**U.S. Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

conducts research and investigations, and applies results to improve people's daily lives. Provides travelers with health information.  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Fish and Wildlife Service**

conserves, protects and enhances fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.  
[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)

**Office of Foreign Assets Control**

administers and enforces economic and trade sanctions.  
<http://www.treas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/index.shtml>

# **The U.S. Customs and Border Protection Mission Statement**

We are the guardians of our Nation's borders. We are America's frontline.

We safeguard the American homeland at and beyond our borders.

We protect the American public against terrorists and the instruments of terror.

We steadfastly enforce the laws of the United States while fostering our Nation's economic security through lawful international trade and travel.

We serve the American public with vigilance, integrity, and professionalism.

# Glossary of Terms

## **Accompanied baggage**

Baggage that you have with you when you return to the United States

## **CBP**

U.S. Customs and Border Protection was created in 2003, by combining the U.S. Customs Service, Immigration Inspection Service, Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service, and the U.S. Border Patrol into one border agency.

## **DHS**

Department of Homeland Security is the parent agency of CBP and was also created in 2003, after the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

## **Dutiable**

Items on which duty may have to be paid. Most items have specific duty rates, which are determined by a number of factors, including where you got the item, where it was made, and what it is made of.

## **Duty-free**

Also called the personal exemption, is the total value of merchandise you may bring back to the United States without having to pay duty.

## **Duty-free exemption**

See *Personal exemption*

## **Flat duty rate**

When determining the duty of the items a traveler brings with them upon their return to the U.S.: after the personal exemption of \$200, \$800 or \$1,600; the next \$1000 of merchandise will be charged a flat rate of duty of 1.5 percent or 3 percent.

## **GSP**

Generalized System of Preferences, a trade program that gives duty preferences—that is, free or reduced rates—to certain developing countries.

## **Joint declaration**

Family members who live in the same home and return together to the United States may combine their personal exemptions instead of each family member filing an individual declaration.

## **Personal exemption**

The total value of merchandise you may bring back to the United States without having to pay duty

## **Prohibited Items**

Items that are not allowed into the United States under any circumstances.

## **Restricted Items**

Items that are allowed into the United States but have a condition for importation. They may be limited in number or may need a license to bring into the United States.

## **Visa Waiver Program (VWP)**

The Visa Waiver Program enables nationals of certain countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa.







## U.S. Customs and Border Protection

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20229

Securing America's Borders

Report Suspicious Behavior  
1(800) BE ALERT

CBP Publication No. 0000-00512  
Revised July 2006