International Travel: Exiting and Entering the United States

International Offices and Staff and Faculty Consultation Center

Ilana Smith, October 6, 2021
(Almost) All the World at Caltech/JPL
Agenda

• Travel Basics
• Visa Interview Waivers
• Travel Bans
• International Offices
• Presubmitted Questions
• Q and A
Travel Basics

• U.S. Department of State (U.S. Consulates/Embassies)
  • Issues visa stickers in foreign passports
  • A visa (or visa waiver ESTA) allows travel to the United States

• U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Customs and Border Protection)
  • Admits foreign nationals into the United States
  • I-94 defines nonimmigrant status inside the United States
Expansion of Interview Waiver Eligibility

March 11, 2021

• A visa applicant who is applying for a new visa in the same visa classification as their previously issued visa, if their prior visa expired within 48 months of the application.
  • Previously, this was limited to prior visas that had expired within 12 months.

• Expiration: December 31, 2021

• Intention: Reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission to other applicants and consular staff.

• Process: Consult the website of the nearest U.S. Embassy/Consulate
Important Announcement on F, M, and Academic J Visas

September 14, 2021

• An F or J visa applicant who has previously held any U.S. visa (regardless of the visa classification).

• An F or J visa applicant who is from a Visa Waiver country (ESTA), even if they have not previously held any U.S. visa.
  • J categories: students, professors, research scholars, short-term scholars
  • Consular officers may, if they so choose, and pursuant to local conditions
  • Travel bans are still in effect. F applicants are automatically be considered for an NIE to travel. J travelers must contact a U.S. Embassy/Consulate prior to travel to receive an NIE.

• Expiration: December 31, 2021

• Intention: Recognizing the importance of international students and scholars to U.S. higher education.

• Process: Consult the website of the nearest U.S. Embassy/Consulate to confirm the level of services currently offered and to find guidelines for applying for a visa without an interview.

Examples – Who is eligible for the in-person interview waiver?

• An H-1B visa applicant with an expired H-1B visa that is less than 4 years old.

• An F or J visa applicant with an expired B-2 visa (or any other classification).

• An F or J visa applicant with a valid B-2 visa (or any other classification).

• An F or J visa applicant, citizen of South Korea (a Visa Waiver Program country), even without ESTA registration.
What does being eligible for an in-person visa interview waiver mean?

• You may be eligible for an in-person visa interview waiver but:
  • You still need to be outside the United States to apply for a visa.
  • U.S. Embassy/Consulates have still not resumed regular processing. We don’t know how long the visa issuance will take.
  • Each U.S. Embassy/Consulate is going to have their own standards and instructions. Their websites may not be updated.
  • For example from the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava
    • Nothing about F or J
    • Need residence or nationality
    • Prior visa issued after 8/2007
Travel Ban Announcement
September 20, 2021

• Travel bans will end in “early” November 2021.
• In their place, the United States will require all foreign national travelers to demonstrate:
  • Fully vaccinated against COVID-19
  • Negative COVID-19 test within three days of boarding a flight to the United States
• CDC has announced that the United States will accept any of the vaccines approved for emergency use by the World Health Organization.
• Exceptions:
  • Children
  • COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial participants
  • Humanitarian exceptions for people traveling for an important reason and who lack access to vaccination in a timely manner.
  • Individuals who are exempted from the vaccine requirement may be required to be vaccinated upon arrival.
What does the end of the travel bans mean?

• If you are traveling from Brazil, China, European Schengen Countries, India, Iran, Ireland, South Africa, or the United Kingdom:
  • You will be able to fly directly into the United States without having to demonstrate eligibility for National Interest Exemption.
    • F students have been able to do this since June 2021.
  • You can leave the United States at any time but you will only be able to return once the travel bans have ended.
    • We don’t have an exact date yet.
  • You will still need a valid visa (or visa waiver) to enter the United States.
    • We don’t know how long the visa issuance will take.
    • U.S. Embassy/Consulates have still not resumed regular processing.
Role of the International Offices

- Represent Caltech and JPL to the government
  - Provide documents needed for visa interviews
- Provide information about rules and regulations
- Identify possible options and likely outcome
- Do not represent international scholars or students
  - Visa interviews are personal applications
- Do not provide guidance on process
- Do not follow process at each U.S. Consulate/Embassy or POE
- Cannot guarantee outcome
Presubmitted Questions

• Auto-revalidation for travel to Canada/Mexico (and adjacent islands)
  • https://international.caltech.edu/travel-new/automatic-visa-revalidation
  • Less than 30 days, no visa application
  • Travel with valid passport, expired visa, I-94 hard copy, & other immigration documents

• Travel signatures
  • J valid for 1 year
  • F valid for 1 year while you are student, valid for 6 months while on OPT/STEM OPT
Presubmitted Questions

• Can I get my visa issued while I am inside the United States?
  • No. You must be out of the country to apply for a visa.

• Administrative Processing
  • If my previous visa was subject to administrative processing, can I expect the same timeline for my next visa issuance? Probably.

• Will I need to quarantine after travel?
  • No. Fully vaccinated people are not required to quarantine after international or domestic travel.

• When will the vaccination requirement come into effect?
  • In November, once the travel bans end.
Presubmitted Questions

• Travel in December to Europe and India (all visa categories)
  • If the travel bans end in November, you will be able to travel from any of the 33 countries directly into the United States without needing an National Interest Exemption.
  • You may be eligible for an in-person interview waiver if you are applying for a second visa in the same category, or if you are applying for an F or J visa and you previously had any visa or are from a visa waiver program country.
  • Your visa will need to be issued by December 31, 2021.
  • U.S. Consulates/Embassies may still be severely backlogged.

• When can visitors (or Caltech/JPL family members) from Europe and India enter the United States?
  • After the travel bans end in November, provided they comply with the vaccination requirement or have a waiver.

• Can Caltech help with Expediting Visa appointments?
  • No

• Visa issuance and transitioning to new employer?
  • Same guidance
Questions, Resources, and Next Session

International Students and Scholars: Tools for Connection and Success
Staff and Faculty Consultation Center
Thursday, October 7 at 12 PM
https://hipaa-caltech.zoom.us/j/81605954731

https://international.caltech.edu/travel-new/current_travel_guidance
https://together.caltech.edu/faq/travel
https://together.caltech.edu/faq/international
https://together.caltech.edu/faq/vaccination-faq