
APPENDIX E: INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

Obtaining approval for federal employees to travel abroad (including to Mexico and Canada) is more complex than normal domestic travel, requiring significant additional steps and time. These guidelines, consistent with NOS and NAO guidance, discuss the steps necessary and provide the additional documentation needed for the approval process. These guidelines are for use to help facilitate international travel by NMSP employees and should not be construed to replace NOAA travel regulations. All employees engaging in foreign travel for official purposes should be familiar with NOAA travel regulations contained in Attachment 1 and online at http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/~finance/TR.chapter_306.htm.

PRE-TRIP STEPS

Step 1: Obtain supervisory approval for the trip at least nine to ten weeks ahead of the day of departure. Call SATO and make arrangements for the trip.

Step 2: Send an email to NMSP International Coordinator as an FYI and in case any coordination is necessary.

Step 3: Determine accounting code of the funds that will be used to pay for the travel. In some cases, this will be a unit's account; in other cases it may be a national program priority or other special account.

Step 4: Prepare the paperwork for the trip. Be sure to check the NOAA Foreign Travel website <<<http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/%7efinance/FT.html>>> when verifying foreign travel requirements, especially when verifying visa requirements. The required paperwork includes:

- Travel Order – The travel order is prepared by the administrative staff of the traveler's unit but requires the signature of the traveler's supervisor AND approval at the NOS level, ideally six weeks prior to travel (eight weeks if a government passport is needed; please see step 5). All international travel requires NOS approval. Please ensure that the appropriate signature blocks and accounting codes are used in preparing the travel order, and that any reasonably anticipated travel costs are authorized. Also, please include a copy of the traveler's itinerary with the travel order.

- Government Passport – When a federal employee travels abroad on official business, he or she is required to travel on an official government passport ("red passport"). If a traveler does not have an official government passport, they must fill out a passport application by mail (DS-82) form; in some circumstances, the traveler may need to complete a DS-11 form; both forms and instructions can be found at http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html for

guidance and forms), and send it, two passport photos, and his or her personal passport along with the rest of the travel package. Employees may use either the online version or the printable version of the State Department forms, however if the printable version is used, the information must be typed on the form. The State Department only accepts the 09/2005 version of these forms. The regular passport will be returned along with the new government passport at the conclusion of the approval process. In many cases, the NOAA security office can take the passport photos for the traveler. There are also a number of commercial firms that also will take passport photos. Please note that official government passports are issued on an as-needed basis for a specific trip and only accompanied by a signed travel order.

- **Country Clearance Form** – The State Department requires that notification be given to the appropriate embassy of the country being visited by federal employees on official business. This helps protect the employee since the embassy will be aware of their presence and can assist them as necessary in case of sickness, injury, unrest, or other problems. The country clearance form (Attachment 2) must be filled out as completely as possible and included with the travel package.
- **Visa Application Form/Invitation Letters** – Different countries have different requirements for entry, including some specifically for travelers on official business instead of leisure travel. The visa requirements of each country can be found starting on page 7-9 of the NOAA Travel Regulations in Attachment 1. Visa applications are usually available online from the country’s embassy. Also see the website <http://traveldocs.com/> that provides visa forms electronically. Some countries require letters of invitation before they will issue a visa; travelers should ensure that letters of invitation are included with the package. Visa photos must be submitted on photo paper and cannot be submitted on regular paper. Ideally, visa photos should be submitted as the standard size of 2x2 inches, as required by the Department of State for passports, although the NOAA Travel Office will accept other sizes as long as the embassy accepts them as well.
- **Defensive Travel Briefing Acknowledgment Form** – NOAA travel regulations require that every NOAA employee going on official travel read a defensive travel briefing that provides safety and security guidance and ensures the traveler is aware of his or her security responsibilities as a federal employee on foreign travel. The traveler should read the entire defensive travel briefing starting on page 7-3 of the NOAA travel regulations in Attachment 1. The traveler should then fill out and sign the acknowledgment form on page 7-8 and include it with the travel package.
- **Information Memo** – If discussions during the trip will result in (a) signing or negotiations on developing a formal agreement or (b) establishing a long – term programmatic relationship, then an information memo through IPO is required. The information memo is used to officially notify NOS IPO and NOAA International about the trip. It should be prepared according to the template in Attachment 3 and forwarded by email to the NMSP International Coordinator.

- Notification of the U.S. Embassy - For trips longer than two weeks or for interactions that require more than two visits, notify the Science Officer of the U.S. Embassy of the host country with the traveler's itinerary.

Step 5: Submit the travel package in its entirety to Debbie Heath at HQ. Please include point of contact name, address, and phone number in each foreign travel package. Please use federal express when sending the travel package to HQ; this provides better security for sending passports and allows for tracking the package to ensure delivery. Ideally eight weeks is required for full processing of all the paperwork; four weeks is the absolute minimum. If the package is submitted less than four weeks before the departure date, a justification letter is required explaining why the package is late. For all rush packages, the NOAA Travel Office (NTO) requests that an unsigned order be sent directly to Chasity Donaldson of NTO, along with a formal memorandum explaining the rush and any other applicable visa/passport paperwork. In addition, a "heads-up" email needs to be sent to the servicing headquarters point of contact, as well as to Chasity Donaldson explaining the rush situation and the fact that the visa/passport paperwork is going directly to NTO and not to headquarters. Copies of all documents sent directly to Chasity must accompany the rest of the foreign travel package that is sent to headquarters for approval. Even with justification, there is no guarantee that NOAA, the State Department, and/or the embassy issuing the visa (if necessary) will meet the traveler's deadlines. If there is any question about whether or not a package is a rush, please call Chasity Donaldson from NTO.

Step 6: Check in on a regular basis to make sure that the approval process is proceeding.

Step 7: Upon approval, the traveler should receive from HQ a signed travel order and government passport including any necessary visas. The traveler will receive confirmation of country clearance electronically from NOS IPO.

POST-TRIP STEPS

Step 1: Secure the government passports. The NOAA travel regulations require that government passports be returned for safekeeping to the NOAA Travel Office. However, employees who are frequently on foreign travel may keep their passports in a locked safe in their offices. The passports must never be kept at home.

Step 2: Prepare and submit a travel voucher. Please ensure that all accounting codes are accurate and that all receipts are included. Also, please ensure that all amounts have been converted to U.S. currency. Numerous currency converters are available online; the one at <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic> allows you to convert based on a conversion rate for a specific date and a specific currency.

Step 3: Prepare and submit a trip report to the NMSP International Coordinator. The traveler should use the format

of the trip report included as Attachment 4. Trip reports will be posted to the intranet for any interested staff to read. The traveler should also make use of other ways to share the information and experience gained on the trip, including brown bag presentations.

ATTACHMENTS

The attachments will be added electronically after the International Program Action Plan is posted online.

Attachment E1: NOAA Travel Regulations including Defensive Travel Briefing Acknowledgment Form

Attachment E2: Country Clearance Form

Attachment E3: Trip Information Memo

Attachment E4: Trip Report Format