



HELP! I LOST MY PASSPORT ABROAD

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We all expect our summer travel plans to go smoothly. However, mishaps can and do happen. No matter how perfectly you plan your trip and how well you secure your travel documents and money, some situations are beyond your control. As Mercer County Clerk and as an official US Passport processor, I thought I would share some tips to help you and your family if your US Passport is lost or stolen. Remember, a passport is needed when traveling abroad, and now even for travel to Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean Islands and Bermuda.

In advance of your departure, make several photocopies of your US Passport's ID page. This page contains your photo, passport expiration date and a unique registration number. Leave one copy at home, place another in your carry on bag or toiletries kit, and give one to someone you trust back home. Do the same for each member of your travel party. You can also scan and save a copy in a secured electronic file and e-mail it to yourself. Either way, if your US Passport is lost or stolen when you are abroad, it is much easier and faster to obtain a replacement when you have copy of your passport.

It is also smart to do some research in advance of your trip and to know the telephone number and location of the US embassy or consulate nearest your destination. You can go to www.usembassy.gov to locate them, or you can call the Department of State's Overseas Citizens Service at 1-202-647-5225 or 1-888-407-4747. Remember to write the embassy or consulate address and telephone number on each of the photocopies you made.

If your passport is lost or stolen, it is a serious matter. Report it to the US State Department immediately and to the local or regional police. A stolen US Passport can be of great value to criminals, imposters and others who wish to do harm. The US Consular personnel are usually available around the clock to provide emergency assistance and are trained to handle such situations to get you home. A photocopied ID page will help to prove your US citizenship and will aid officials so they can possibly issue you a limited-use passport within a day or so. However, be aware that once a US passport is reported lost or stolen it is often canceled and invalidated and will not get you back in to the US, if you happen to find it hiding under your hotel bed.

It is important to know that US embassies and consulates do not routinely issue passports abroad on weekends or holidays when State Department outposts are officially closed. Therefore, if you are abroad on Memorial Day or July 4th weekends, your travel will probably be delayed. All US embassies and consulates however, have an after-hours duty officer available to assist with life or death, medical, legal, or crisis situations involving US citizens abroad. Lastly, if a relative or friend notifies you that their US passport has been lost or stolen, you should contact the US Department of State's Overseas Citizens Services quickly.

To prepare for your trip outside of the US borders, you can apply for a passport from my office Monday through Friday during regular business hours at 209 South Broad Street in Trenton. Passports are routinely processed in six to eight weeks on a non-emergency basis. In addition, residents can also apply for a US Passport at my satellite location in the Mercer County Connection, located in the Hamilton Square Shopping Center, Route 33 and Paxson Avenue in Hamilton Township. The County Connection offers evening and Saturday hours as well. Passport photos and expedited services are available at both locations. Travelers who have not yet applied for a US passport should not hesitate, because the overall demand has been rising due to new passport requirements and with summer.

For further information on US Passport requirements, and what personal documents are needed to obtain or renew a passport, residents should visit my website at www.mercercounty.org and click on *County Clerk* or call my Passport section at 609-989-6473.

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