

Greetings from Ambassador John R. Bass



Welcome to the first edition of U.S. Embassy Tbilisi's Consular Corner, a newsletter for American citizens living in Georgia.

As Ambassador, my highest priority is the safety and security of our fellow Americans here in Georgia.

Over the past two years we have seen the number of American citizens steadily rise.

As the number of Americans in Georgia grows we at the Embassy want to ensure our citizens know about our services and how we can assist them in case of an emergency.

The Consular Section provides routine passport and citizenship services, and also has the responsibility of assisting U.S. citizens in case of hospitalization, arrest, death, and other important services.

In a natural or man-made emergency the Consular Section can assist private Americans in Georgia. And as our community grows, so too does our responsibility for your safety and security, and a critical component of crisis planning is communication.

If you have not done so already, please take a few minutes to let us know you are here through our Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).

By enrolling in STEP you will receive important messages from our Consular Section related to security and other important issues.

Most importantly we will be better able to plan for your safety and security in the event of an emergency.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter, and find it to be useful.

Our Consular staff is always happy to hear suggestions on how they can make your lives easier through the services they provide. Please feel free to contact them with your thoughts at AskConsulTbilisi@state.gov.

As always, we look forward to welcoming you to the Embassy.

INTRODUCING

THE FIRST
SEMI-ANNUAL
NEWSLETTER
FOR
AMERICAN
CITIZENS



Consul's Video Podcast Welcome US Citizens!

WELCOME



American Citizens' Information Night 2010

Wednesday, November 17



6:30pm – 8:00pm
U.S. Embassy Atrium



The U.S. Embassy in Georgia and the American Chamber of Commerce in Georgia cordially invite you to attend the second annual American Citizens' Information Night on November 17, 2010 from 6:30 PM to 8 PM at the U.S. Embassy Atrium.

We will have experts on a variety of topics important to you, an American Citizen residing in Georgia. Topics will include information on Consular services, residency requirements, U.S. immigration, and other information on various useful goods and services of direct relevance to Americans living in Georgia.

U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, John R. Bass, will attend the event and make welcoming remarks. Thereafter, Embassy employees and guest experts will be available to answer your questions, and offer information useful to all American citizens in Tbilisi.

Click here for the [CONSUL'S VIDEO INVITE](#)

Guest experts include:

U.S. Consular Section * U.S. Marines * U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Section
 USAID * Millennium Challenge Corporation * Peace Corps
 Civil Registry Agency of Georgia * Department of Tourism
 American Chamber of Commerce in Georgia
 International Women's Association * National Investment Agency of Georgia
 Educational Institutions * Medical and Dental Services
 Shipping and Mail Services * Gardening Services * Real Estate Services

This event is open to all U.S. citizens in Georgia as well as accompanying, foreign-born spouses and children. US citizens must bring their U.S. passports. Non-US citizens, who are accompanying family members must bring their passports or photo identification.

Please plan on arriving by 6PM for security screening.

Refreshments and appetizers will be provided.

Please confirm your attendance by 6PM Tuesday, November 16 by email at askconsultbilisi@state.gov with a list of immediate family member attendees.

We hope to see you there!

New Consular Fee Changes



New passport fees for the U.S. Passport Book, the U.S. Passport Card, and other passport services went into effect on **July 13, 2010.**

Passport application fees are used to cover the costs of producing U.S. Passport Books and Passport Cards, and they also cover the costs of providing emergency services for American citizens overseas in crisis situations. Passport application fees enable the Department of State to keep up with technology and implement fraud

prevention initiatives to protect the United States passport.

Please visit www.travel.state.gov for the official list of new fees, summarized as follows:

- Initial Adult Passport Book: **\$135**
- Adult Passport Book Renewal: **\$110**
- Minor (under the age of 16) Passport Book: **\$105**
- Adult Passport Card: **\$30**
- Minor Passport Card ONLY: **\$40**
- Minor Passport Card (In connection with a book application): **\$15**
- Additional Passport Pages: **\$82** (NOTE: This is a new fee)
- Consular Report of Birth Abroad: **\$100**

- Notarial services: **\$50**
- Each additional seal provided for the same transaction: **\$50**

NOTE: You may apply for a 52-page passport book. The cost is the same as the normal 28-page book

SECURITY corner



There are regular reports of crimes against Americans and other Westerners in Tbilisi, and Georgia as a whole, although the level of violent crime has decreased due to improvements in the standard of living and more visible and professional law enforcement presence in the last few years.

How to Avoid Becoming a Victim (!)

In light of the high crime environment, all American citizens visiting Georgia are strongly advised to maintain keen security awareness and exercise basic security precautions. They should vary routes and times, especially when traveling between places of residence to work locations. They should maintain a low profile by not carrying large amounts of cash or displaying jewelry. Additionally, Americans should be aware of their surroundings, travel in pairs or groups, and stay on main streets where possible.

It is also recommended that those traveling throughout the country do so only in the daylight hours, and that they provide travel itinerary and contact information to friends or colleagues.

Road Safety

The Regional Security Office of U.S. Embassy Tbilisi discourages the use of the Tbilisi underground Metro, marshrutka mini-buses, and any other form of public transportation other than established taxi cab companies.

Driving in Georgia can be extremely hazardous. Most Americans and other foreigners find that local drivers drive too fast and exhibit little lane discipline and frequently encroach from the opposite lanes of traffic. Seatbelts should be worn at all times and passengers should instruct taxi drivers to slow down if they do not feel comfortable with the operating speed.

Automobile travel between cities after sundown is strongly discouraged due to poor road conditions, insufficient lighting, increased likelihood of encountering intoxicated drivers, and heightened vulnerability to crime during vehicle malfunctions, stops, etc.

Police Response

In general terms, Georgian police are attentive and responsive to requests and calls for assistance from foreigners, Americans in particular. However, much of its effectiveness is based on resources, or lack thereof. Police response in Tbilisi can range from several minutes to an hour in some cases. Police response outside of Tbilisi can be considerably longer in the more remote areas. Also be aware that the local police emergency phone number is **022**.

Click to access the [list of attorneys](#) in Georgia.

Medical Emergencies

The local phone number for medical emergencies is **033**. Click to access the list of [local hospitals/doctors](#).

For medical emergencies, the embassy health unit advises American citizens to consider MediClub (899-58-19-91) or the emergency and general physicians at IMSS (899-56-12-53). It is highly recommended for both short term and long term travelers to purchase overseas medical insurance and medical evacuation insurance. Two overseas medical insurers used by Americans in the past are International SOS, www.internationalsos.com (1-215-942-8000), and MEDEX Assist, www.medexassist.com (1-800-732-5309).

Further Information

Regardless of the region in Georgia one is planning to visit, American citizens are urged to review their personal security precautions, increase their levels of awareness, register with the consular section and, as appropriate, take increased security measures. American citizens in Georgia are also advised to be aware of their surroundings at all times and to avoid straying off main roads or traveling after dark.

The Department of State urges American citizens to take responsibility for their own personal security while traveling overseas. For general information about appropriate measures travelers can take to protect themselves in an overseas environment, see the Department of State's extensive tips and advice on [traveling safely abroad](#).



Travelers from all **Visa Waiver Program** (VWP) countries are required to obtain approval through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to traveling to the U.S.

ESTA applies to all eligible citizens or nationals traveling under the VWP, this **DOES NOT** apply to U.S. citizens or legal residents. American Citizens must travel to the U.S. using their U.S. Passport.

ESTA is a web-based system, initially launched in August 2008, that determines the preliminary eligibility of visitors to travel under the VWP prior to boarding a carrier to the United States. The longest approval time is 72 hours. It is recommended that VWP travelers fill out the ESTA form on-line *at least 72 hours* in advance of travel.

Visitors may apply for travel authorization via the **ESTA** Web site.

Questions on ESTA requirements can be sent by e-mail to the Custom and Border Protection office of the Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for the ESTA program: **ESTA@cbp.dhs.gov**

Your Payments While You Are Outside The United States

Social Security Restrictions

Social Security restrictions prohibit sending payments to individuals in certain countries, including Georgia. Generally, you cannot receive payments while you are in Georgia, however exceptions can be made for certain eligible beneficiaries in countries with Social Security restrictions in place.

To qualify for an exception, you must agree to the conditions of payment. One of the conditions is that you must appear in person at the U.S. Embassy each month to receive your benefits. Contact **your nearest U.S. Social Security office** or the **U.S. Embassy Consular Section** for additional information about these conditions and whether you qualify for an exception.



For information please visit: **<http://www.ssa.gov/>**

Regional Federal Benefits Unit email: **FBU.Athens@ssa.gov**



U.S. Visa News



Know Someone Who Needs a U.S. Visa?

The new on-line nonimmigrant visa application DS-160 is now obligatory for all U.S. visa applicants, regardless of nationality.

This new, on-line form simplifies the visa application process by reducing the number of forms required for most applications from three to one. Once complete, the form is then submitted on-line directly to the U.S. Embassy's Consular Section in Tbilisi. Once the application is complete and submitted on-line, a single confirmation page is printed, and applicants may schedule their personal interview for the next available date. Applicants must bring the printed confirmation page and other required documents with them to their interview. Although the online visa application **DS-160** is the only visa application form required, other items may still be required depending on your purpose of travel.

You can find more information about the DS-160 and instructions on how to apply for U.S. visa on the **U.S. Embassy** website.

Please note that during the visa interview the applicant has to demonstrate strong social and economic ties that would compel his/her return to Georgia after a short trip to the United States.

The ACS unit is not able to answer questions regarding visas. Any question concerning non-immigrant visas should be directed to tbilisivisa@state.gov

How to File An Immigrant Visa Petition

The Consular section will only accept I-130 petitions on behalf of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under extremely limited circumstances, for example an American citizen petitioning for spouse or minor children must be physically and legally resident in our consular district for at least the past 6 months and must be able to demonstrate this residence through a residence permit. All other immigrant visa petitions for a foreign spouse, stepchildren and parents must be filed with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS/USCIS) Service Centers in the United States. For details on how to file with DHS, please visit the DHS website at <http://www.dhs.gov> and click on "Immigration." Once your I-130 petition is approved by DHS/USCIS, it will be forwarded to the National Visa Center in Portsmouth, New Hampshire for document collection and appointment scheduling. As soon as the case is ready for processing, it will be forwarded to the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi, Georgia.

All interview appointments are scheduled by the National Visa Center. For general steps please visit the **U.S. Embassy** Consular section website. Please send your inquiries to the Immigrant Visa Unit via email at:

tbilisiimmigrant@state.gov

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program

From **November 10, 2010**, the Internet Based Registration Service (IBRS) became the **Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)**

Millions of Americans travel abroad every year and encounter no difficulties. However, U.S. embassies and consulates assist nearly 200,000 Americans each year who are victims of crime, accident, or illness, or whose family and friends need to contact them in an emergency. When an emergency happens, or if natural disaster, terrorism, or civil unrest strikes during your foreign travel, the U.S. embassy can be your source of assistance and information. By informing us about your trip or residence abroad, you help the Consular section to locate you when you might need us the most. **Signing up is voluntary and costs nothing, but it should be a big part of your travel planning and security.**

If you previously registered online through IBRS, we will automatically enroll you in STEP.

If you have not yet signed up for STEP, you can do so [here](#) from **November 10th!**

AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES (ACS) UNIT

Address:

11 George Balanchine str.
0131 Tbilisi

Tel:

(992 32) 277-724

After-hours

emergency number:
(995 32) 27-71-33

Web:

georgia.usembassy.gov
travel.state.gov

E-mail:

AskConsulTbilisi@state.gov

Calling for Wardens!



What is a Warden? Wardens are volunteers who assist U.S. Embassy to disseminate messages from the U.S. Embassy Consular section and alert Americans to emergency situations.

What does a Warden do? Wardens share important information with the expat community and encourage Americans to [sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#)

The role of Warden volunteers is to relay messages and information to American citizens.

If you are interested in becoming a warden for the U.S. community in Georgia, please contact us by sending an email to:
askconsultbilisi@state.gov

How to get U.S. Vital Records

Vital records (birth, death or marriage certificates) are usually held by state, county or city governments. Please follow the link (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm>) for convenient guidance on how to obtain vital records in your state.



The Consular section **CANNOT** obtain vital records documents on your behalf.

There are fee-based on-line services that can help obtain these records:

- www.Vitalchek.com, which allow you to request birth, death and marriage certificates online, by phone, or by fax.
- www.usbirthcertificate.net can help you obtain the U.S. vital records.

Visit the Department of State website for updated [Country Specific Information](#) on Georgia

USEFUL INFORMATION:

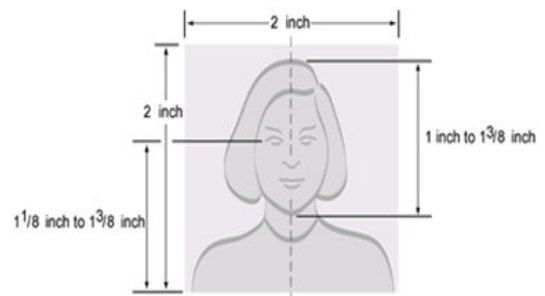
- U.S. citizens staying in Georgia for 360 days or less do not need a visa to enter Georgia. For more information please [click here](#)
- In case your stay in Georgia is more than 360 days, U.S. citizens should obtain residence permits at the Civil Registry Agency. For instructions please [click here](#)
- A foreign driver's license is valid in Georgia for one year after arrival. After one year, foreign nationals must obtain a Georgian national driver's license from the Service Agency of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. For additional information please [click here](#)

To review the Travel Alert for Europe please visit the State Department [website](#)

F.A.Q: What type of photo is necessary at the U.S. Consular section?

Though the State Department introduced a new required passport photo format many years ago, we still see applicants who present the wrong type of photo. This frequently causes undue delay in providing the service you request from the Consular section.

The correct U.S. document photo format is 2" x 2" inches, or 5cm x 5 cm, square. The photo should be taken within the past 6 months. The background must be white or off-white. This format is required for all consular services, be it for a U.S. passport application, or for a non-immigrant or immigrant visa application.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR U.S. CITIZENS

In case of a crisis and/or natural disaster American citizens in Tbilisi may tune in to the following FM radio stations for the updated U.S. Embassy warden message information for U.S. citizens:

Radio Syndicate — 104.3 FM (Tbilisi and Gori)

Radio GIPA — 94.3 FM (Tbilisi)

Radio Atinati — 105.9 FM (Zugdidi)

Radio Hereti — 102.8 FM (Lagodekhi and Kakheti)

Radio Dzveli Kalaki — 107.9 FM (Kutaisi)

Hours of Operation & Contact Information

American citizen services are available by appointment only.

To make an appointment for citizen services please visit <http://georgia.usembassy.gov/service.html>

Address: # 11 George Balanchine Street
0131 Tbilisi

Telephone: (995-32) 27-77-24

After hours emergency number: (995 32) 27-71-33

E-mail: askconsultbilisi@state.gov



Important Security Announcement

When visiting the Embassy, please remember not to bring mobile phones or any electronic devices (such as Blackberries, iPods, or PDAs), food/drinks, medicine or cosmetic products, as they are not allowed within the Embassy. We also strongly advise that you do not bring large bags, such as backpacks, suitcases or packages to the interview as there are no storage facilities on Embassy grounds.

We Welcome Your Ideas!

The American Citizen Services Unit is constantly thinking of new ways to improve our service and efficiency.

If you have an idea or a suggestion about how we can make your visit easier, or about items or subjects you'd like to see covered in this newsletter, please let us know by email:

askconsultbilisi@state.gov

Catch All The Latest

Visit the U.S. Embassy Tbilisi [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) pages for all the latest news of the U.S. mission in Georgia.



Holiday Closures

November 23	St. George's Day
November 25	Thanksgiving Day
December 24	Christmas Day
December 31	New Year's Day
January 7	Christmas Day (Orthodox)
January 17	M.L. King Jr.'s Birthday
January 19	Epiphany (Orthodox)