

THE ANDZNAGIR

News for the American citizen community in Armenia

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For further information:

- See the [State Department's travel website](#) for the [Worldwide Caution](#), [Travel Warnings](#), [Travel Alerts](#), and [Country Information for Armenia](#).
- Enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive security messages and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.
- Contact the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, Armenia, located at 1 American Avenue, at tel. (374-10) 46-47-00 and fax (374 10) 46-47-42, Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. After-hours emergency number for U.S. citizens is (374-10) 49-44-44. Our email address is ACSYerevan@state.gov.

Have you read the “fine print” in your U.S. passport?

There is a popular misconception that an American passport is like a “get out of jail free” card: that no matter what an American citizen does overseas, no matter what kind of trouble they find themselves in, the nearest U.S. embassy will ride to their rescue like the cowboys in an old Western movie. While embassies do take very seriously their responsibility to safeguard the safety of American citizens outside the U.S., this does not absolve American travelers from observing local laws and customs wherever they may be. Note that item #4 on p. 6 of your passport says: “Remember, while in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. Penalties for violating local laws, even unknowingly, can be more severe than in the U.S. for similar offenses.” We might add that some things that are not crimes in the U.S., for instance certain types of speech or protest or association, may be crimes in other countries. **There is nothing the U.S. embassy can do to get American citizens “off the hook” if they have committed crimes abroad.**

The situation can be even more problematic for dual nationals. Those of you who are both American and Armenian citizens should note item #14 on p. 7: “A dual citizen may be subject to the laws of the other country that considers that person its citizen while in that country’s jurisdiction, including conscription for military service. Dual nationality may hamper efforts to provide consular protection to dual citizens in the foreign country of their other nationality.” **So if you are a dual national of the U.S. and Armenia, you are considered an Armenian citizen first and foremost while you are in Armenia.** The U.S. embassy will be extremely limited in its ability to assist such dual nationals since we cannot interfere in a matter between them and their other country of citizenship.

The U.S. Embassy will be closed for the following upcoming holidays—February 20 (U.S. Presidents’ Day), March 8 (Armenian Women’s Day), April 24 (Armenian Remembrance Day), May 1 (Armenian Labor Day), May 9 (Armenian Victory and Peace Day).

ACS insight of the quarter

I'm getting married in Armenia to an Armenian citizen, and ZAGS has told me that I

need a form from the U.S. embassy that I am free to get married. This is correct, and we can provide this form for you if you make an appointment for a "notarial or other service" via our embassy website. Keep in mind, however, that this service is available at the embassy **ONLY to U.S. citizens**. Although ZAGS will require this form from Green Card holders as well, American Citizen Services cannot provide this service under current regulations. So what are Green Card holders supposed to do? **They must apply for a marriage record check BEFORE THEY LEAVE THE U.S. (usually from their county government offices) AND OBTAIN AN APOSTILLE on this document from the state's secretary of state office.** Without an apostille, ZAGS will not accept it, and **the embassy cannot affix an apostille in Yerevan to a document issued by a state.**



To accommodate American citizens who would prefer to see us in the morning to renew their passports and register their children, we have now shifted our appointments on Wednesdays to 9am-noon.

Visa question of the quarter

I'm an American citizen, and I plan to marry an Armenian citizen. What is the easiest route to take: to get married in Armenia and then take my new

spouse to the U.S. by filing an I-130 petition, or to take my fiancée to the U.S. by filing an I-129F petition and then get married there? Ultimately, it is a personal decision where you prefer to get married, which is why the U.S. has two visa routes. However, if you do not have any preference, you will find that it is easier and possibly



faster to get married in Armenia and then file an I-130 petition. **It is no longer the case that fiancé(e) petitions/cases are processed more quickly; on the contrary, they often take longer.** This is because fiancé(e) cases face one significant hurdle that married couples do not: they have to prove that they have a valid relationship in the absence of a marriage certificate. This often results in requests for further proof of relationship after the interview, and

therefore in further delay. In addition, a spouse entering the U.S. on an immigration visa will automatically receive a green card after being stamped in at the airport; a fiancé(e) must go through another bureaucratic process to change status in the U.S. and get the green card once the marriage has taken place. All in all, the I-130 process is much smoother, and often much faster and easier.

Renew passports early!!

If your passport will be expiring in 2017, you should begin to think about renewing it. Although we always tell passport applicants that their new passports will arrive in 7-10 business days, it is not a good idea to wait until the last minute to renew: systems problems do arise that can cause significant delays. And needless to say, an American citizen overseas should never be without a valid U.S. passport. Keep in mind also that there are many countries that require six months' validity for admission, so if you plan to travel to countries other than the U.S. and Armenia, you should check on this at travel.state.gov and renew at least seven months before your current passport's expiration date.



UPCOMING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS...AND YOUR PERSONAL SAFETY

As you know, parliamentary elections are due to take place in Armenia this coming April. Unfortunately, there has been a recent history of violent protest surrounding elections; thus, we wish to take this opportunity to remind you to be careful. Keep a low profile; avoid the areas where protests are taking place; and if violence erupts, leave the area as quickly as possible and return to your homes. When we get word that protests will be taking place, the ACS unit will send warning messages to registered American citizens to encourage them to avoid the protest areas. If you wish to keep abreast of developing protests and receive these warnings, we strongly recommend that you register your presence in Armenia using the STEP system, online, through travel.state.gov. If you are already registered, great! Now encourage your American citizen friends and relatives and colleagues to do so too!

NOTE ABOUT: Go-bags

Do you know what a “go-bag” is? All American citizens resident in Armenia should have one in case of an earthquake, a problem at Metzamor, or border violence in Nagorno-Karabakh that starts to escalate. All of these are reasons local residents might have to GO at a moment’s notice. We hope that none of these horrible events will take place, but it is better to be prepared than caught off-guard. You could have to leave your home, or your region...or Armenia altogether. And if such an evacuation does arrive, will you be ready, with your go-bag packed with the things you will need?

A go-bag is a carry-on-sized piece of luggage that you keep close at hand in case the worst should happen. Each member of your family, even babies, should have their own. What should it contain? Vital documents when they are not actually in use (like passports, birth certificates, etc.); some food and water; a change of clothes; an extra pair of glasses/contact lenses; a couple of weeks’ worth of vital medications; a few toys and games to keep children distracted in a stressful situation; and other items you might consider useful—such as a jacket, an umbrella, a flashlight, a battery-powered radio, a cell-phone charger, a first-aid kit, etc. etc.



You might also consider having go-bags for beloved pets in the event you are able to take them with you, but that may not be possible during certain types of evacuation.

When and if disaster strikes, and you are under tremendous stress to act quickly and ensure the safety of your family, you will be very grateful that your go-bags are packed and ready to grab.