

International Student Travel Tips for Winter Break (2020-2021)

WARNING: International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) does not recommend non-essential travel at this time due to an increase in travel restrictions. ISSS does not have the authority to influence changes in visa processes, immigration policies, and enforcement arising from the global pandemic.

What is essential travel?

Essential travel is travel that is so important that you take your trip even though it might risk long delays in your return, knowing that you could miss being on-campus for classes for a significant portion or perhaps all of the spring semester. If you have made the decision to travel, carefully review the below information.

1. Process/Timeline

- **Review Travel information** published on [ISSS website](#).
- **Request a travel signature** from ISSS at least 2 weeks prior to travel or during Travel Signature Days, November 16-23. Normally, it takes up to one week to process a request for a travel signature. Travel signature requests submitted during Travel Signature Days will be processed by noon the next business day.
- **Apply for an F-1 visa if needed.** If your visa has already expired or will expire prior to your return, you must apply for and receive a new visa before your return. (Be aware it may be difficult to schedule a visa interview appointment) *
- **Purchase airline tickets.** You may be required to self-isolate for 14 days upon arrival in your home country and your return to the U.S. Plan time for visa application processing if necessary. Review visa process details in section 3.
- **Organize all documents** recommended in the document checklist. Be sure to carry these original documents with you during your return to the U.S. We recommend carrying paper copies as well and keeping electronic copies stored on your smart phone or another electronic device.
- **Contact ISSS if any problems arise** during travel such as visa application delays, restriction from boarding your return flight, and delays at the port of entry.
- After you have been readmitted to the U.S. in F-1 immigration status, **find your new I-94 arrival record** by going to <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/>
- **Follow [UT guidelines for self-isolating](#)** upon your return to the U.S.

2. Document Checklist

- **The following documents are required:**
 - **Original Passport** with at least 6 months validity (from the time you will return to U.S.)
 - **U.S. Student Visa.** Be sure the expiration date is later than your expected return date
 - **I-20 Form** with a valid travel authorization signature on page 2. Signatures are valid for up to 12 months.
- **These documents are recommended:**
 - **Academic History or Transcript** showing completed course work and grades
 - **Schedule of Classes for the next semester.** Schedule classes prior to travel and ensure that you have at least one face-to-face course.

3. COVID-19 Risk Assessment and Minimization

- **Center for Disease Control (CDC)'s travel restriction list and USCIS regulations.**
 - Re-entry to the U.S. may be delayed, restricted or banned from certain countries: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/from-other-countries.html>
 - If traveling from a country in the Schengen area of Europe, print a copy of the statement found on the U.S. State Department web site showing that F-1 students are exempt from the travel ban: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/national-interest-exceptions-from-certain-travelers-from-the-schengen-area-uk-and-ireland.html>.
- **World Health Organization (WHO)'s advice on travel safety.** Both WHO and the CDC have cautioned international travelers because there is higher risk of contracting or spreading the COVID-19 virus during international travel when compared to remaining in the local community.
 - **WHO's General Advice for Travelers:**
 - Clean hands frequently
 - Cough or sneeze into a bent elbow or tissue
 - Always try to maintain a physical distance of at least one meter from others
 - Follow recommendations of the travel authorities regarding policies in the airport and of the airline for the flight
- **Visa Process**
 - Immigration regulations and travel restrictions have been changing often and could change while you are outside the U.S. As an example, some students who still have not been able to return to U.T. after traveling home for winter break 2019-2020 because they had planned to return in early February after the virus began to spread.
 - Visa consulates have been closed to all or some applicants for visas since this past March. Operating hours are curtailed during the holiday season.
 - If you need to apply for a new visa before returning to the U.S., schedule your visa interview as early as possible. Check with the local embassy or U.S. consulate office so that you can carefully plan your [visa application process](#) and interview appointment: <https://www.usembassy.gov/>
 - Plan sufficient time in your itinerary at your port of entry. Be sure you have extra time to go through immigration inspection and to get to your gate for your domestic flight to Knoxville.

Travel Questions?

Contact a CGE advisor during Virtual Immigration Advising hours, Monday – Friday from 1pm to 4pm. You may check-in for virtual advising by going to

<https://ivols.utk.edu/istart/controllers/checkin/CheckinEngine.cfm> and filling out the E-form.

International Student and Scholar Services contact Information:

Phone: 865-974-3177

Email: international@utk.edu

* Citizens of Canada or Bermuda are not required to obtain a student visa.