

International Student Travel Tips Winter Break (2021)

WARNING: International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) does not recommend non-essential travel at this time due the unpredictability of 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 you 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 next semester. Before making plans, please consider the availability of flights to and from your destination, your visa expiration date, and your increased risk of developing COVID-19.

If you have made the decision to travel, carefully review the below information.

1. Process/Timeline

- **Review travel information** published on [ISSS website](#). Also, please check travel restrictions posted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO) and the government web sites of the countries you will enter during your travel.
- **Request a travel signature** from ISSS at least 2 weeks prior to travel. 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. Check the [current wait time](#) at your local embassy or consulate.
- **Purchase airline tickets.** You may be required to self-isolate, provide a negative COVID test, and/or provide proof of vaccination. Plan time for visa application processing if necessary.
- **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.
- **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/>

2. Document Checklist

- **Required Documents:**
 - **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.
- **Recommended Documents:**
 - **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, **following an executive order on January 25, 2021: [Travel Restrictions for Returning to the U.S.](#)**
 - Check with your airline [and the CDC to learn whether a COVID test](#) is required prior to traveling.
 - Please check the [CDC web site](#) for the latest details on COVID-related travel restrictions and regulations
- **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.
 - Some U.S. consulates have been closed to all or some visa applicants since spring 2020. The availability of visa interview appointments varies by location. Check your local embassy or consulate for their current appointment wait time.
 - 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.

4. COVID vaccine prior to travel

Vaccines are now available to all students through the Student Health Center and are highly recommended before traveling: [Vaccine Information.](#)

Travel Questions?

Contact a CGE advisor during Immigration Advising hours, Monday – Friday from 1pm to 4pm.

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.