

## Passport Update: A Travel Feature

by Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebook Co-Author

It all seemed so simple some years back. Congress passed the The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, which among other things, required passports for all people entering the U.S., including citizens. It seemed like a good, common-sense requirement in a time of heightened security consciousness.

The Departments of State and Homeland Security responded with proposed regulations, which is normal whenever laws are enacted. The public commented, the proposals were modified several times, and some groups and members of Congress were disappointed with the finalized regulations. New legislation was formulated, debated and finally approved in October 2006.

Every twist and turn in the process made headlines, and travelers (and the travel industry) did what they could to adapt to the changing circumstances. Each additional chapter added to the saga created more confusion. And now, the Departments of State and Homeland Security have thrown the latest log on the fire.

When Congress amended the The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 in October of this year, the headlines read, "Passport Requirements for Land and Sea Travel Pushed Back Until June 2009." However, buried in the law was a little "gotcha" - if the Departments of State and Homeland Security succeed in meeting certain requirements, that passport requirement can kick-in as early as January 1, 2008.

Based on the latest press releases issued November 23, 2006 by the Department of State, that's exactly what they aim to do - meet the requirements so that passports (or certain equivalents) are required for all air, sea, and land travel into the U.S. by January 1, 2008. From a standpoint of national security, that's a laudable goal.

Further, the passport deadline for all international air travel has been set to January 23, 2007, just a small change from the previous January 1, 2007 deadline.

The Cruise Line Industry Association (CLIA) and Disney Cruise Line have already responded to this latest announcement by encouraging all passengers to obtain passports as soon as possible. We here at PassPorter have to agree. The sooner you obtain a passport, the better. We see little value to holding off on a passport application while you

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wait to see if the passport requirement will be pushed back yet again.

A key item required by Congress in the new legislation is the so-called "PASS Card," a credit card-sized identity document that will be valid for land and sea border crossings between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda. It's intended to supplement or replace several similar documents that are used by daily cross-border commuters, and will be cheaper to obtain than a passport.

The new card is proposed to cost \$20 for adults, \$10 for children, with a \$25 application fee, \$45 or \$35, overall. A traditional passport including application fees costs \$97 for adults, \$82 for children under 16. That's an attractive cash savings, especially when an entire family is involved.

On the surface, this card seems to be a useful, money-saving item for folks cruising the Caribbean. However, we at PassPorter strongly recommend that you do not depend on a PASS Card for leisure travel, because the PASS Card cannot be used for international air travel (including flights to the Caribbean, Mexico and Canada), and cannot be used at all for travel to Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and South America.

Even if you only intend to cruise in the Caribbean, unexpected circumstances may require that you fly. Let's say the boat leaves a port without you, or an unexpected situation at home or work require that you cut your vacation short. Now you'll be flying home, and a PASS Card will do you little good. (Yes, there are special procedures for letting you back in the U.S. without a passport due to an emergency, but do you need that added complication?) From our perspective, everyone who travels (and even those unlikely to travel) should have a passport. When you consider the months it normally takes to obtain a passport and the added cost to obtain a passport on short notice, and then consider all the many circumstances that now (or soon will) require one, delaying seems like a false economy.

Did you just learn of an unbelievable, last-minute vacation deal in Jamaica or Cancun? Might your daughter go on a high school excursion to Italy? Will you fly to Vancouver for the Winter Olympics, or to board a cruise ship bound for Alaska? What about that second honeymoon in Paris? A passport leaves you free to travel nearly anywhere in the world, at any time, and in our increasingly small, connected world, that's a very useful freedom indeed.

To learn more about these changes, and how to apply for a passport,

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visit <http://travel.state.gov/passport>

*About The Author: Dave Marx is co-author of PassPorter's Field Guide to the Disney Cruise Line, PassPorter Walt Disney World, and PassPorter Disneyland Resort. He is also Publisher of PassPorter Travel Press, and in his spare time (yeah right) is Chairman of MouseFest 2006.*

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