

Planning to Take a Cruise?

An increasing number of international students are taking cruises during vacation and holiday periods. Cruising can be a very economical way to enjoy a vacation to some beautiful warm weather destinations. Many of the cruises include stops in Mexico, and/or the islands of the Caribbean. Sometimes, the cruises venture further south into Central or South America.

International students in F or J status need to be aware of some very important US immigration rules associated with cruise travel.

Documents:

You **must** travel with your passport, I-94 departure card or I-94 electronic record, and your most recent I-20 or DS-2019. Your passport must be valid at least 6 months into the future on the date you return to the United States. The travel signature on page 3 of your I-20 or in the lower right section of page 1 of your DS-2019 must be less than one year old on the date you return to the United States. If you are an F-1 student on post-completion Optional Practical Training, the travel signature on page 3 of your I-20 must be less than six months old on the date you return to the United States, and you must also have with you your Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

Travel after Completion of Studies:

Students who successfully complete their studies have a 60-day grace period which allows them to remain legally in the United States. However, these students typically **cannot** take a cruise and reenter the United States in F or J status even if their F or J entry visa is still valid. Exceptions to this rule may include students who have applied for OPT or have been given an I-20 for a new program at DU or another institution. Please see an advisor for more information.

Visas For the Countries You Will Visit:

Some ports of call may require visas, be sure to research that information with the cruise line or by contacting the embassy or consulate of that country in the United States.

If Your U.S. F-1 or J-1 Entry Visa is Valid (Not Expired):

If you have an unexpired U.S. F-1 or J-1 entry visa inside your passport valid for multiple entries, you should not have any difficulties with your cruise plans, regardless of the itinerary, as long as your passport is valid at least 6 months into the future on the date you return to the United States, you have a valid travel signature on your I-20 or DS-2019 (see the section on Documents, above) and you have secured any required travel visas for your ports of call.

If Your U.S. Entry Visa Has Expired or is for a Different Immigration Category:

If your U.S. F-1 or J-1 entry visa has expired (or will expire during your cruise) or you have an entry visa for another immigration category such as F-2 or H-4, your cruise destinations are limited to **only** U.S. territories, Canada, Mexico and adjacent islands of the Caribbean except Cuba, and your combined visits to these countries must be limited to **less than 30 days**. It must also be your intention to resume your F-1 or J-1 status upon your return. This benefit, which is called Automatic Revalidation, is **not** available to citizens or nationals of Iran, Syria, Sudan and Cuba.

Your passport must be valid at least 6 months into the future on the date you return to the United States, you must have a valid travel signature on your I-20 or DS-2019 (see the section on Documents, above) and you need to have secured any required travel visas for your ports of call.

If you still have a white I-94 departure card inside your passport, it is **essential** that you retain your white I-94 departure card inside your passport. **Do not** permit it to be collected by either airline personnel or cruise personnel. If the I-94 is collected, you will not be able to return to the United States. [I-94 records are now electronic so students who entered the United States after May 2013 likely will not have a paper I-94.]

U.S. Territories in the Caribbean include: Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John).

Adjacent islands of the Caribbean (as defined in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations at 8CFR 286.1(a) include: Anguilla, Antigua, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Barbuda, Bermuda, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Marie-Galante, Martinique, Miquelon, Montserrat, Saba, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Christopher, Saint Eustatius, Saint Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Maarten, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, and other British, French and Netherlands territory or possessions bordering on the Caribbean Sea.

If your cruise itinerary includes even one port of call not on the above list (for example, Belize) and you have an expired U.S. entry visa or only an entry visa for a different immigration category, U.S. immigration officials will not allow you to re-enter the United States. Even if you stay on board the ship during the entire time the ship is docked in that country, it won't matter. The ship has physically entered that country's sovereign territory, and if you are on the ship, you've entered that country, too.

This is why it is so very important to carefully review a cruise itinerary for potential travel problems if your U.S. visa in your passport has expired.

If You Are a Citizen of Canada:

Citizens of Canada are exempt from needing U.S. visas, so you do not need to be concerned about having a valid U.S. entry visa in your passport.

If You Are Planning to Visit Cuba:

Some students come from countries that have diplomatic relations with Cuba, and want to visit Cuba as part of a vacation. The United States does not currently have diplomatic relations with Cuba. That does not prevent international students from visiting Cuba, but they can only do so if they have a **valid** (unexpired) F-1 or J-1 entry visa in their passport. Students whose F-1 or J-1 entry visa has expired cannot visit Cuba and then return to the United States.

Document Check:

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the validity of your passport or I-20 or DS-2019, bring them to the Office of International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) before you travel and ISSS staff will gladly examine them and provide you with a fresh signature for your I-20 or DS-2019 if needed.