

Travel Guidelines

DISCLAIMER: GCC ISO has prepared this guide to provide you with general guidance. GCC ISO staff will provide regulatory and practice information as it stands at the time of the consult. All advice provided by office staff or available in written publications does not constitute legal advice.

Travel within the United States:

You must always carry your printed and signed I-20/DS-2019 and your I-94 card. If you are traveling in the United States, also carry the following documents:

- Passport
- Visa

If you travel outside California or visit border areas (such as San Diego), bring your original immigration documents with you. If you travel within California, it is safer to leave the originals at home and carry copies instead. This helps prevent losing important documents. We also recommend keeping scanned copies of your immigration documents saved in a secure cloud account for permanent access.

Traveling to Home Country:

To travel to your home country, you will need the following:

- Valid passport (expiring at least 6 months into the future)
- Valid F-1 or J-1 visa
 - Bermudian and Canadian citizens do not require a visa
- Valid I-20 or DS-2019 with travel signature. The travel signature is valid for 5 months.
- Students on OPT will need additional items (see page 3)

TIP: Always keep your original documents with you. Carry copies on your phone in case of emergency.

Traveling to Another Country:

If you are traveling to a country **other than your home country**, [check to see if you need a visa](#) to enter that country. PLAN AHEAD: Visa processing can take several weeks.

Checking for Travel Bans:

Any current travel bans will be listed on our [Travel](#) page. Please weigh this information along with our Travel Do's and Don'ts before deciding upon international travel.

Traveling While On Optional Practical Training:

Travel recommendations are based on your stage in the OPT process. See the last page of this document for a detailed guide.

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What should I do if my Visa is about to expire or has expired?

If your visa has expired, you must apply for a new visa at a US embassy or consulate the next time you exit the US. We strongly recommend applying for the visa in your home country. If you are unable to apply in your home country, you may contact the visiting country's [embassy/consulate](#) to find out if they will review your application. Please keep in mind processing times and possible delays. You will need the following documents with you:

- Passport
- I-20 or DS-2019, signed for travel
- Financial Documents
- Proof of full-time enrollment (enrollment verification letter or copy of transcripts)
- Any other items required by your specific embassy

If you need to apply for a new visa, you should contact the US Embassy/Consulate in the country you will visit before you travel. Ask how long the visa process may take so you can plan your trip carefully.

Automatic Revalidation: The *only* exception to traveling on an expired visa might be if you visited Mexico, Canada, or an [adjacent island](#) for less than 30 days. In this case you might be able to take advantage of a process called [Automatic Revalidation](#). Automatic revalidation lets you keep your current I-94 number. When you arrive at the US border, you must tell the officer that you would like to return under automatic revalidation.

It is highly recommended that you print the [US Department of State's Automatic Revalidation](#) page to show to a border patrol officer, if needed.

Note: Citizens of countries classified as "[State Sponsors of Terrorism](#)" cannot use automatic revalidation, and must have a valid visa to enter the US.

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TRAVEL WHILE ON OPT: DECISION GUIDE

Please refer to the chart below for travel suggestions and documentation needed.

Scenario	Travel Recommended?	Travel Risk Level	What You Need
Applied for OPT. Application is pending and you are still a student (still enrolled in classes)	Yes	None, so long as you reenter the country at least a couple of weeks before the end date on your I-20.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travel signature - Valid passport & visa
Applied for OPT. Application is pending and you are no longer a student (no longer enrolled in classes)	Yes	Low – Immigration officers are not required to let you return to the United States just because you have OPT. However, many students have traveled in this situation without problems. You must still be able to receive mail at the address listed on your I-765 application and cannot miss any biometrics appointment. If your EAD approval date is coming soon, its recommended that you not travel until your card is issued.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travel signature - Valid passport & visa - Proof that you have applied for OPT (i.e. your formal receipt) - *EAD card, if approved while outside of the US
Application for OPT is approved and you have your EAD card, but you do not have a job offer	Maybe	Some Risk – If you choose to travel, bring proof that you are actively looking for a job. This can include copies of resumes you sent, interview invitations, or emails about job applications. While many students have traveled in this situation without problems , it is possible that an immigration officer may deny entry. Immigration officers are not required to allow entry for the purpose of job searching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travel signature - Valid passport & visa - EAD card - Proof that you are actively looking for a job
Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card and a job offer, but the position has not started	Yes	Low – if you decide to travel, make sure that you take a job offer letter on official letterhead which should include your expected start date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travel signature - Valid passport & visa - EAD card - Job offer letter
Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card, and you have begun work	Yes	None – request a letter from your employer indicating that they approve your travel and listing the date they expect you back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travel signature - Valid passport & visa - EAD card - Letter from employer
Original OPT period has ended, and you are in a period of <u>H1-B cap gap</u> .	NO	High – your F-1 status has technically ended. Customs and Border Protection may deny entry. Consult with your filing attorney on whether travel is advised. GCC ISO is unable to advise on this scenario.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As required.