

Caribbean Customs Information

Passports: Each Caribbean nation has its own requirements; these are summarized in each *Fast Facts* section. The U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security requires all citizens traveling by air between the United States and the Caribbean to present a valid passport, NEXUS card or U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner document to reenter the United States. Citizens traveling by land or sea also are required to present a valid passport or other documents. AAA recommends carrying a passport when traveling anywhere outside the United States, both to expedite your way through customs and to provide identification case of in emergency. AAA travel agents can assist you with the passport application procedure.

Before you leave, make two color copies of your passport's identification page, keeping one at home and carrying the other with you separately. Should you lose your passport, go to the nearest American Embassy or Consulate, or contact the National Passport Information Center at (877) 487-2778 or TTY (888) 874-7793 for information about obtaining an emergency passport. A U.S. driver's license and a copy of the original passport will save time in applying for a replacement.

Pets: Animals taken to the islands are subject to each island's public health department's regulations, and pets taken out of the United States are subject to U.S. Public Health and Department of Agriculture requirements on return. Also check with state, county and municipal authorities about restrictions on importing pets, and make arrangements well in advance. Consult the *Pets and Wildlife Licensing and Health Requirements* publication (# 0000-0509) online at www.cbp.gov or by writing to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20229; phone (877) 227-5511.

Transporting Currency: If you plan to carry more than \$10,000 in currency or negotiable instruments in or out of the United States, you must file a Report of International Transportation of Currency or Monetary Instruments (FinCEN Form 105) with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the port of exit or at the port of entry. Forms are available online or from your local CBP office. They also can be obtained at U.S. international airports and all other ports of entry.

Note: Due to heightened security, travel regulations may change without notice. For the most current information about passports, duties and taxes and federal restrictions, contact U.S. Customs and Border Protection at (877) 227-5511, or visit their web site at www.cbp.gov. The brochure "Know Before You Go" (publication 0000-00512) provides comprehensive information for U.S. citizens traveling abroad.

Returning to the United States

Duty-Free Exemptions: Any articles you acquire abroad and bring back to the United States must be declared. This requirement includes any repairs made to articles taken abroad and any gifts, such as wedding or birthday presents, you received while abroad.

Declaring Travel Items: It is wise to register foreign-made possessions—such as laptop computers, cameras, watches and CD players—at any CBP office *before* leaving the United States in order to avoid being charged duty on them when you return. Only items with serial numbers or other clearly identifiable marks may be registered. If you are traveling with unnumbered items such as expensive jewelry, a sales receipt, insurance policy or appraisal will be sufficient proof that the items were in your possession before you left the U.S. You may register items at the airport prior to departure or take them to a CBP office in advance. Inspectors must see the items being registered; keep your documentation for future trips.

Exemptions for Accompanying Articles: Returning U.S. residents are allowed a duty-free exemption for articles they carry with them. If you are arriving from anywhere other than a U.S. insular possession (the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa or Guam), your personal exemption is \$800; there are limits on the amount of alcohol, cigarettes, cigars and other tobacco products you may include (see the following section on *Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco Products*). If you travel to the U.S. Virgin Islands, your duty-free allowance is \$1,600, of which no more than \$800 may have been acquired elsewhere in the Caribbean.

To receive the duty-free exemption, you must have been out of the country a minimum of 48 hours and have not used the exemption within the preceding 30-day period. The 48-hour minimum does not apply to U.S. residents returning from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The exemption, based on fair retail value, applies to articles for your personal or household use or intended to be given as bona fide gifts (see the following section on *Gifts*). Returning residents who do not meet the 48-hour or 30-day time requirements may bring back up to \$200 worth of items for personal or household use free of duty and tax. Antiques at least 100 years old and fine art may enter the country duty-free.

Duty-Free Shops: High-quality merchandise from all over the world is usually featured in most duty-free shops. Prices are generally about the same as you would expect to pay in the country of origin. Do not be misled, however, by the words "duty free." This simply means that the local merchant has been exempted from his own country's taxes. All duty-free goods that return with you to the United States must be declared and are subject to U.S. import duties if you exceed your personal exemption.

Duties and Taxes: A flat rate duty of 3 percent is applied to the next \$1,000 worth of merchandise in excess of the maximum customs duty-free exemption. Items purchased in the U.S. Virgin Islands are assessed at a rate of 1.5 percent. The flat-rate provision and duty-free exemptions may not be exercised more than once every 30 days. Assessment of merchandise is based on the fair retail value in the country of origin; remember to retain sales slips for proof of value. Keeping purchases and sales slips in a carry-on bag speeds the customs declaration procedure.

Members of a family residing in the same household and traveling together can make a joint declaration, combining their individual articles for application of the flat-rate duty. Any merchandise that exceeds the flat-rate duty on \$1,000 worth of goods is dutiable at the various rates that apply to particular articles.

Exemptions for CBI Countries: The United States and the following countries have entered into an agreement called the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI). These countries include Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, The Bahamas, Barbados, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. Some articles made in and purchased in these countries are accorded a free rate of duty and are not counted against your exemption or flat rate.

Articles acquired abroad and sent home by you or by the store where you purchased them do not qualify as accompanied baggage and are subject to duty and taxes. You do not have to declare these items, as they cannot be included on the customs exemption; duty may be waived on articles not exceeding \$200 in total value.

However, articles you purchase and send home from CBI countries or the U.S. Virgin Islands may be duty-free under your personal exemption if the items are properly declared and processed. The CBP form 255 (Declaration of Unaccompanied Articles) must be affixed to each mailed package; merchants can usually supply this form. All shipped items should be indicated on your customs declaration form.

Documentation: If requested, you must present all sales receipts to Customs upon returning to the United States. *Do not* accept the friendly shopkeeper's offer to give you a sales slip showing a price lower than that actually paid. Customs inspectors are experts at spotting fraudulent receipts. If you understate an article's value or misrepresent an article on your declaration, you might have to pay a penalty in addition to the duty. Under certain circumstances the article might be seized and forfeited. Keep a record of what you spend for merchandise as you spend it.

Paying Duties: If you owe duty, it must be paid when you arrive in the United States. Acceptable forms of payment include U.S. currency, personal checks, money orders, travelers checks (value not exceeding \$50 of the amount due), and in some locations, MasterCard or Visa.

Shipping Gifts: Gifts worth up to \$100 in total fair retail value where acquired may be sent duty free to friends and relatives in the United States, provided only one such package is received by the same person in one day. The dollar value for gifts sent from the U.S. Virgin Islands increases to \$200.

Gifts for more than one person may be mailed in the same package, provided each gift is individually wrapped and labeled with the name of the recipient. If any article in the consolidated gift package is subject to duty and tax, or if the total value of all articles exceeds the gift allowance, no article will be exempt from duty and tax. Duty cannot be prepaid; it is collected by the United States Postal Service when the package is delivered.

You may not send gifts to yourself, nor may persons traveling together send gifts to each other. The gift allowance does not include alcoholic beverages, tobacco products or perfume valued at more than \$5 if it contains alcohol. All parcels must be marked *Unsolicited Gift*, and the nature of the gift and its estimated fair retail value must be noted on the outside wrapper.

Food, Plant and Animal Product Restrictions: To prevent the introduction of plant and animal pests and diseases into the United States, an agricultural quarantine bans importation of most fruits, vegetables, plants, livestock, poultry and meats. For details refer to the Department of Agriculture's Animal Products and Fruit and Vegetable manuals online at www.aphis.usda.gov.

Endangered animal or plant species, and products made from them, generally cannot be exported or imported. This includes products made from elephant ivory, although articles made from antique ivory may be imported, provided they can be documented as being at least 100 years old. If you wish to purchase and bring back to the United States any articles made from whalebone, ivory, tortoise shell, animal skins or fur, or products manufactured wholly or in part of any type of wildlife, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at (800) 358-2104 to make sure items are admissible.

Prohibited Articles: Certain articles considered injurious or detrimental to the United States also are prohibited: these include absinthe, firearms, biological specimens, meat products and narcotics. There are stringent import restrictions on firearms and ammunition as well; consult

the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Products originating in Angola, Iran, Liberia, Myanmar, North Korea, Serbia and Montenegro, Sudan and Cuba—and all items containing Cuban components—are subject to restriction and require a license. Cuban cigars are expressly forbidden. For further information consult the Office of Foreign Assets Control, Department of the Treasury, 1500 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20220, phone (800) 540-6322, or visit their web site at www.treas.gov/ofac.

Prescription Drugs: If you require medicines containing habit-forming drugs or narcotics, keep them in their original containers and bring an authorizing prescription to avoid potential customs problems upon return to the United States. It is wise to pack medicines in your carry-on luggage.

Trademarked Items: The distribution rights for many trademarked items are protected by law, and those items may not be brought into the U.S. by unlicensed entities. Residents returning with foreign-made articles bearing a protected trademark are allowed one exemption per type of article; for example, one Chanel handbag and one Polo shirt. The goods must be intended for personal use and must not be sold within 1 year of importation. Articles bearing a counterfeit mark or an inappropriately used federally registered trademark are subject to seizure and forfeiture.

Alcoholic Beverages: A returning resident 21 years or older entitled to the \$800 duty-free exemption may include 2 liters of alcoholic beverages—provided 1 liter was produced in a CBI country. Additional quantities are subject to duty and taxes. Travelers 21 years and older returning from the U.S. Virgin Islands may bring back 5 liters of alcoholic beverages, provided that 1 liter was produced there. Liquor cannot be mailed to the United States.

Tobacco Products: There are no federal age restrictions for persons returning with tobacco products. However, the laws of each state where an entry port is located are enforced, and tobacco products may be confiscated if the holder is under the state's minimum age for purchase of tobacco. Persons who meet age requirements may bring back up to 100 cigars and 200 cigarettes. Travelers returning from the U.S. Virgin Islands also may include in their exemption 1,000 cigarettes, provided no more than 200 were acquired elsewhere, and 100 cigars. It is illegal to bring cigars and tobacco products of Cuban origin into the United States.

Travelers may import previously exported tobacco products in quantities not exceeding their eligible exemptions. These items are usually stamped "Tax Exempt: For Use Outside the United States." Amounts exceeding your exemption will be seized and destroyed. Under this regulation, you may bring home 200 previously exported cigarettes plus an additional quantity of foreign-made cigarettes, paying duty and taxes only on the second group.

Laws concerning the importation of cigarettes and alcohol vary from state to state; check the importation requirements of your state of residence, as well as the state of entry.

Automobiles: Automobiles taken out of the country may be brought back duty free as long as they accompany you upon your return and meet EPA standards. Unleaded fuel is sometimes not available in the Caribbean; if leaded fuel is used, catalytic converters on late-model cars will become inoperative and in most cases will fail to meet emission standards, requiring replacement in order to obtain entry back into the United States. For details visit the EPA's website at www.epa.gov/otaq/imports or contact the agency directly: Environmental Protection Agency, Ariel Ross Bldg., Investigation/Import Section, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20460; phone (734) 214-4100.

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