

Permanent Residents: Getting A Reentry Permit When Traveling

By: Ann Badmus

<http://www.physicianimmigration.com>

A lawful permanent resident (LPR) normally may travel outside the United States and return; however, there are some limitations. A reentry permit can help prevent two types of problems:

- Your Green Card becomes technically invalid for reentry into the United States if you are absent from the country for 1 year or more.
- Your permanent resident status may be considered as abandoned for absences shorter than 1 year if you take up residence in another country.

A reentry permit establishes that you did not intend to abandon status, and it allows you to apply for admission to the United States after traveling abroad for up to 2 years without having to obtain a returning resident visa. Reentry permits are normally valid for 2 years from the date they are issued. You may also want to get a reentry permit if you plan on traveling outside the United States and cannot or do not wish to get a passport from your home country. Many countries throughout the world may allow you to use a reentry permit much like you would use a passport — placing necessary visas and entry and exit stamps in the permit — so you may use it as your main travel document. Be sure to check with any country you plan to visit about specific requirements before you travel.

How to obtain a reentry permit

To obtain a reentry permit, file Form I-131, Application for Travel Document. You should file this application well in advance of your planned trip. An I-131 form is available at www.uscis.gov.

If you are a LPR planning to travel outside of the United States for 1 year or more, it is important that you apply for a reentry permit before you depart the United States. If you stay outside of the United States for 1 year or more and did not apply for a reentry permit before you left, you may be considered to have abandoned your permanent resident status. If this happens, you may be referred to appear before an immigration judge to decide whether or not you have abandoned your status. If you are in this situation, contact the U.S. consulate about a returning resident visa.

Be aware that if you are an LPR and you need to travel abroad, you cannot file a Form I-131 to obtain a reentry permit unless you are physically present in the United States when you file the form. You should file your Form I-131 no fewer than 60 days before you intend to travel abroad.

You do not need a reentry permit if you will be outside the United States for less than 1 year. If you have been outside the United States for less than 1 year, you may use your Green Card as your travel document.