



Hints for Obtaining Visas

ISGF makes recommendations to facilitate the obtention of Entry visa for its members attending events.

Introduction

Most ISGF members do not need an entry visa to enter an other ISGF country. This is the case for European members going to another European country, or for citizens of Canada, the US and most Latin American countries visiting Europe, and vice versa.

On the other hand, visas are necessary as a rule for citizens of the European countries, or the US, Canada and Latin American countries, to enter most developing countries; and, vice versa, as a rule citizens of these countries need a visa to enter Europe, the US, Canada and Latin American countries.

Reciprocity is the rule in the field of visas; if a country imposes a visa on another country's nationals, the latter will also require a visa from the former's nationals.

It should be pointed out, however, that most developing countries only require visas because of reciprocity; they would be only too glad to abolish the visa requirement, which is insisted upon by developed countries. These countries do so not because of any ill-will or lack of a sense of hospitality, but because, especially in recent years, they have grown increasingly afraid of two things:

- security (terrorism, organised crime...)
- illegal immigration

This is the reason why most developed countries screen visa applications very carefully, and sometimes delay or refuse the granting of visas even for requests that are apparently wholly legitimate. On their part most developing countries are less strict in the processing and issue of visas; often they grant them directly at the entry border, without any prior application (this is the case e.g. for Egypt in relation to bona fide tourists).

This is the present-day world, whether we like it or not. While we try "to make it better than we found it", we have to try to live with it and make the most of it.

Practical suggestions

1. The first thing to do, as soon as you start planning any visit to another country, is **to find out whether you need an entry visa**. The best source of information is of course the embassy or consulate of the relevant country. (Visas are normally handled by consulates or, where they do not exist, by a consular chancery existing within the embassy). Should the embassy or consulate have a web site, a look at it will surely provide you with a lot of useful information. Some countries also have an online application service.

2. If you do need a visa, and if the object of your planned visit is participating in an ISGF or an Adult Scout/Guide event, the next thing is **to secure a letter of invitation** by your prospective hosts. This is very important, and in some cases may even be decisive in the embassy's or consulate's decision to grant an entry visa. Please note that the word "invitation" has only the purpose of facilitating the granting of the entry visa: it does not mean that you are exempted from payment of the participation fee, unless of course your hosts agree to this.
3. If the event you are planning to participate in is an important one, the organisers will probably have **gotten in touch with their own Foreign Ministry** with a view to facilitating the granting of visas around the world. The Ministry will then instruct the relevant embassies/consulates to grant the visas for the mentioned event. You may ask the organisers whether this has been done. Even if this has not been done, you may still ask that they do it specially for you.
4. This is also important concerning **visa fees**. These tend to be expensive, for developed and developing countries alike. Entry visas cost anywhere from 50 to 100 US dollars and more. Fees can sometimes be waived for courtesy reasons. If the organisers of the event are in touch with their Foreign Ministry, you may enquire whether, in your case, the fee could not be waived. This might be done in case your participation may be presented as a crucial one for the event in question.
5. As soon as you find out that you do need an entry visa, you should ask about the **documents to be submitted**. Have all of them ready – some countries deal with applications on paper without interview as a rule. Documents normally include a valid passport (many countries require that its validity exceeds the planned visit by a certain time, normally 3 to 6 months), the filling of forms, and any number (normally 1 to three) of passport-size photos. In addition, developed countries may ask a number of other documents: a photocopy of your travel tickets (especially a return ticket as proof of an intention to return to your home country), sometimes bank guarantees or salary statements, and of course any letters of invitation. The specific reason for the visit should be stated in the forms to be filled, where you should also be prepared to give details concerning your contacts in the country you want to visit, your accommodation etc. Make clear what event the visa is for – not everyone understands our Scout/Guide jargon. In the forms you should also state how long you want the visa for, the border of entry, sometimes which cities you want to visit (this last detail being mostly required by developing countries for security reasons).
6. You should **file your application as soon as possible**. This cannot be stressed enough. For most countries the processing of visas is done centrally and entails the participation of several actors: the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Interior, the embassy/consulate... All of them hate to be pressed into taking a decision. Remember also that there are likely to be logjams at busy times of the year (holiday seasons, for example).
7. On filing your application, you should ask **how long the decision on it will take**. And at the right time you should start enquiring, and keep the embassy/consulate in sight.

8. If you are travelling with a group, **make applications in a country together** as much as possible. It is more effective to have 30 applications in one batch than 30 individual ones, and it alerts the authorities that a major event is about to take place.
9. Should you at any time get a **negative answer**, or have reason to think that you will **not get a positive answer** in time for your planned visit, you should:
 - inform the organisers of the event;
 - and if you think the event is important enough, inform the ISGF World Bureau. Maybe some last-minute action can still be taken to reverse a negative decision or to unblock a stalemated situation.
10. Fifteen European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden) have set up a common visa arrangement known as **the Schengen system**. Together they form the "Schengen area", within which border controls have disappeared. They deliver "Schengen visas" according to unified procedures and criteria, although in certain cases they can still issue national visas. A Schengen visa will enable you to enter one country and travel freely throughout the Schengen area. Applications should be made at the Embassy or Consulate of the country of first entry or, alternatively, of the country of main destination. Further information may be obtained from: <http://www.eurovisa.info>