



So, you've decided to travel? Nice choice! Hopefully, you won't regret it. But we all know it's not as simple as just boarding a plane and jetting off to a new destination. After booking your flight you might start feeling the pre-travel panic thinking about the million things there are to organise, pack and double (or triple) check.

One of the most important checklist items for most travel destinations is a visa. In this article, we will discuss what a visa is, why you need a visa and a quick general guide to help when applying for visas.

The first thing to note though is: if you haven't already got a passport, you should apply for or renew your Australian Passport as early as possible. This is because most countries require you to have a minimum of 6 months validity left on your passport, which can vary from your return or departure date.



Part of your travel checklist will involve sorting out your visa.

What is a visa?

A visa is a document, issued by the host country, that gives the bearer certain rights to be inside the host country. Visas are usually a stamp or paper glued into your passport and they will either state the entry date or both the entry and exit dates of your trip.

There are several different types of visas. Common visa types can include travel/tourist visas, business visas, e-Visa, working visas, immigrant visas and student visas. Our advice in this article will be more targeted towards tourist/e-Visas.



A visa is usually stamped or glued into your passport.

When do you need a visa?

All countries have their own visa requirements and sometimes Australia has special relationships with host countries, allowing Australians a 'visa-free' status or special visa status.

Multiple countries now have visa-free regimes for a certain period which means you do not need a visa to enter the country if you stay less than the designated period. Otherwise, it is likely that you will need a visa to enter any country without these special relationships, or if you want to stay longer than the 'visa-free' period.

To find out the visa requirements for any country, visit the Australian Government [Smartraveller website](#) or check the official website of the host country.



Each country is different when it comes to whether a visa is required.

Applying for a visa

Applying for a visa can be as simple as crossing a border, paying some money and getting a stamp. Or it can be as difficult as detailing exact hotel dates, flight schedules, which tourist attractions you plan to visit and possibly even a letter of invitation – it just depends on the country.



The application process can be fairly straightforward or more complicated.

What are the requirements?

The requirements will vary between countries, however, there are typical documents that many countries will request. These requirements are highly variable so make sure you check with the appropriate government website or embassy for the country you intend to travel to and prepare them before you leave.

The typical documents that may be requested for your visa application include:

- One or two photographs with the style and dimensions determined by the host country
- A copy of your passport
- A copy of your travel insurance
- Proof of sufficient funds for the length of your intended travel or even proof of work in your home country
- Aeroplane tickets or proof of exit from host country i.e. a train or bus ticket
- Visa form from the host country
- Letter of invitation (not often asked for)

Once you have a checklist of requirements for your host country, then make sure you submit all of them together when you apply. Otherwise, you may be rejected and must start the process again. It might be worth checking with your embassy about whether you'll need copies of the relevant documents with you upon arrival as well.



Make sure you have all the documents you need before you apply.

How long does it take to process?

A quick reminder: you're dealing with governments so nothing is certain, what was promised to take two days might take two weeks. We would say that the most touristic countries like Thailand and areas of Southeast Asia only take a few days to process visas.

However, more strict countries like Turkmenistan take well over a month or two to process a visa (if it gets processed at all). To be on the safe side, it's usually worth applying for your visa a month or two in advance if you are in Australia.

As processing times change dramatically between countries, always check with the host countries website for their expected processing times and make sure you submit your application as early as possible.



When we applied for our visa in Thailand, the process was very speedy.

What countries can I travel to visa-free?

Currently, Australia has amazing passport access with visa-free or visa on arrival for 180



countries and territories. A surprise for us while travelling was the visa-free regime for Georgia which allows Australians and many other countries free entry for an entire year. You can then exit and enter in one day for another visa-free year!



Hungary is one of the European states in the Schengen Area.

What countries can I visit with a Schengen visa?

Australians can travel 'visa-free' in 26 European states in the Schengen Area for a period of 90 days. Visit the Smartraveller website [here](#) to get a full list of these countries and other requirements. If you need to travel for longer in Europe then it may be worth looking into the special 'visa' agreements Australia has with many European countries, including Schengen states like Germany (for more information on this bi-lateral agreement, head [here](#)). This gives Australians 90 days in these countries without affecting their Schengen visa.



Be aware of the German-Australian visa agreement when travelling to Germany.

Visa help for Central Asia (Silk Road)

A great tool to use is visiting this website [here](#) which not only helps with the application process of buying letters of invitation and authorisation codes but also helps with the planning process of your visas to visit Central Asian countries. The website is incredibly detailed and up to date with regular comments from travellers who have recently completed their applications.



Make sure you research the requirements of each country you plan to visit.

What are some difficult visas to be wary of?

The most difficult countries we have had the 'pleasure' of organising visas for have been China, Turkmenistan and Iran. If you plan to visit these countries, we would recommend doing some thorough research on their requirements and asking other travellers on forums of their recent experiences. Also, make sure that you use the official visa websites, as there are some fake ones to be wary of. If you're not sure if it's legitimate, check with a reputable source.

Many countries are making it easier for travellers to visit, specifically the Central Asian countries. However, some are becoming stricter such as the USA and China. Visa requirements can change quickly so always make sure you get the most up to date information. The best online source for visa information for Australians is the [Smartraveller website](#).

Happy travels everyone!

What's the most difficult visa you had to apply for?