

Surviving a Visit to the U.S. Embassy and Consulate for a Passport Renewal

My passport is due to expire in a few days so I went online to follow the renewal procedure. Why? Because visiting an embassy in person requires lots of time a patience and I have sort of been short on both lately.

You need to make an appointment to visit a U.S. Embassy. Even if you have an emergency.

I needed to visit the embassy here in person because, unfortunately, aside from a renewal fee increase, you have to pay the fees for an online renewal by money order in US Dollars. Hmm. How can I get a money order in US Dollars in Europe? The only option is to be invited to a U.S. base, find a bank, and hope that the bank will give a non-customer a money order. Not happening because I do not know anyone at any US base!

The next option (and my least favorite) is to go to the U.S. Consulate General in person. You need to make an appointment for US consulate services, even if you have an emergency.

I begrudgingly made an appointment, completed my forms and made three copies, just in case. I went to a German photographer and had color photographs made according to the new U.S. passport sizes (2 inches by 2 inches (5.08 cm by 5.08 cm)). In addition, since the passport will be sent to my home, I had to buy a prepaid envelope. Well, I purchased two (just in case). □

I also needed a name change on my social security card and according to the information online, I simply needed to drop off the form.



Photograph taken by Robert Rexach
www.mkt3000.com

The security is high at the U.S. Consulate and rightly so. I read the online instructions for renewing my passport and even sent emails to confirm my inquiries. OK. I set my appointment for the day after my vacation at 7:15 A.M. That meant I was up at 5:00 A.M. to drive an hour to the embassy. I drove the hectic Autobahn and made it 15 minutes early and was feeling confident I'd be out in an hour or so. Not!

At 7:00 A.M., I stood in the American line (the other one is

for non-Americans) and waited for the counter to open. At 7:15, they started called people forward to get a ticket.

Cool, got my ticket. Now on to the pre-security check. "Do you have a smart phone?" "Yes, I do." The security guard said turn it off so I did. Then the guard asked me to turn off my Fitbit. I informed you can't turn off the Fitbit Charge 2, but you can do a restart of the device, which is similar to rebooting a computer or cell phone. I would have known this if I was allowed to leave my smartphone on. The guard told me to bring my Fitbit to my car, come back and get in line for another ticket. Aargggh!

A daily meditation practice will prepare you for long waits at the U.S. Consulate office.

After running to the car, placing my Fitbit in the trunk and dumping the allowed contents in my own plastic bag, I waited in line again. I went through the pre-security check again. After 5 minutes, I was invited to go through security and provided a plastic bag to place my contents in.

I waited for my belongings and plastic bag contents full of papers and credit cards to be check and off I was to the U.S. Consulate building. There, I was told to leave the plastic bag. I told security it was "my" plastic bag and was allowed to go through the door.

Then, I had to wait in the Reception line. The receptionist checked my ticket (the second one) and told me to wait until my number was called. I told her I need to drop off the social security papers and she said the colleague upstairs would direct me to the correct counter. After 30 minutes or longer, I went to the door leading upstairs but had to press the buzzer and wait for security to open it from their secret box.

Bring credit cards, US Dollars, and local currency to the U.S. Consulate office.

Finally, I went to my counter and no one was there. A few minutes later a nice woman welcomed me to the embassy and I handed her my papers. She checked my renewal paperwork, left for a moment and returned to say all was in order. I signed the papers and provided my prepaid envelope, was directed to the payment window, and handed the employee my credit card. She informed me that the machine was not working. Luckily, I had enough greenbacks. Otherwise, I'd have to leave the premises, get cash, get in line, get a ticket, etc.



Photo

by

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/36495803@N05/8474532085/>

The embassy employee asked if I needed anything else and I said I needed to drop off the social security forms. She said, "We have a new policy. You will need a separate appointment." I'm sure after hearing that news, my blood pressure went up significantly. I had no chance of knowing since I had to leave my Fitbit in my car. And with a smile, I bowed my head, held my hands in prayer, thanked the colleague for her help, and

wished her a wonderful day.

I left the premises and the only good thing about surviving a visit to the U.S. Consulate General is that I didn't see a single photo of No. 45.

Wait. There's more. Now, I still need to repeat a similar process to update my German work permit.

Hopefully you will never need to visit a US embassy in person, if you do, here's a link to an [official list of embassies from the U.S. Department of State](#). I recommend adding the contact information to your phone just in case. ☐