

The background of the cover features a grayscale image of the Statue of Liberty on the left, holding her torch high. The lower portion of the image is overlaid with a semi-transparent American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The text is positioned on the right side of the cover.

A guide for

Filipinos
migrating

t o t h e

**United States
of America**

Eighth Edition

Commission on Filipinos Overseas
2009



Office of the President of the Philippines
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GUIDE FOR FILIPINOS MIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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GUIDE FOR FILIPINOS MIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FOREWORD

You are going to the United States as an immigrant, a move that will have a profound impact on your life and that of your family. Your preparedness will count a lot towards the achievement of the objectives of your migration.

It is important that you comply with minimum government travel requirements to avoid unnecessary inconvenience when exiting the Philippines or entering the U.S. Equally important is your awareness of regulations governing your permanent residence, as well as your knowledge of primary settlement concerns in the U.S. so you may proceed with confidence in your daily activities.

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas prepared this guide to provide you with information that will ease your adjustment abroad. It is our way of wishing you a safe trip and a successful settlement overseas.

Huwag po sana ninyong kalimutan, bagkus ay patuloy na ipagmalaki ang mga mabubuting kaugalian nating mga Pilipino.

GUIDE FOR FILIPINOS MIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GETTING READY FOR TRAVEL

Give yourself sufficient time to prepare for travel. Be sure to bring all the necessary documents.

Travel Documents

- Valid Philippine passport
- US visa and other documents from the Embassy
- Plane ticket
- Department of Social Welfare and Development Travel Clearance - for minors (17 yrs. old and below) traveling abroad alone or with someone other than the parents
- Other documents (i.e., National Statistics Office – issued marriage/birth certificates, employment/education credentials, health records and x-ray film)

Travel Tax

You are required to pay a travel tax of P2,700.00 (First Class passenger) or P1,620.00 (Business Class and Economy Class passenger).

Payment can be made through an airline office or travel agency, or directly to the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) office, or to the PTA counter at the airport.

Travel Funds

You need sufficient travel funds to support you during the first few months of your stay in the United States. You are allowed to bring out of the country any amount in dollar bills or traveler's cheques as well as Philippine currency not exceeding P10,000.00.

If, however, you bring into or out of the Philippines foreign currency amounting to US\$10,000.00 or more, you are required to declare the said amount at the following forms:

- *Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas* (BSP) Foreign Currency Declaration form (BSP-IOD- Form No. 1-02), which may be obtained from the BSP or Bureau of Customs counter at the airport.
- U.S. Government's form CF 4790, which may be downloaded from www.customs.gov, or may be obtained from a customs officer at the U.S. port of entry.

"Persons traveling together" cannot divide the amount among themselves to avoid the restriction.

Baggage Allowance

Ask your airline about free baggage allowance, restrictions on carry-on items, and charges for overweight or excess baggage. The following baggage allowance per person generally applies for travel to the U.S.:

Check-in baggage	Carry-on bag
Quantity: 2 pieces	Quantity: 1 piece
Weight: 23 kgs (50 lbs.) / pc	Weight: 7 kgs (15 lbs.)
Dimension: 62" (L+W+H) / pc	Dimension: 45"

YOUR DAY OF DEPARTURE

- Be at the airport at least three (3) hours before your scheduled flight.
- Submit yourself and your baggage for security check.
- Check in with your airline counter. Keep your boarding pass and baggage claim stubs.
- Pay the terminal and security fees at the terminal fee counter.
- Present your travel documents at the Philippine immigration counter.
- Proceed to the waiting lounge / gate.
- Board your plane when your boarding call is made.

ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES

Port of Entry

- If your destination is a State in mainland USA, your port of entry may be at any international airport in the U.S.
- If your destination is Hawaii or any U.S. protectorate or territory such as Guam, your port of entry must first be Hawaii or the U.S. protectorate or territory indicated in your visa.

Immigration Clearance

- Present your travel/entry documents (i.e., passport, visa, embassy envelope, medical records, customs declaration form) at the U.S. immigration counter.
- Claim your baggage from your airline's designated carousel.
- Proceed to the customs area for final customs check.
- Exit the airport or proceed to the domestic leg of your journey, if any.

Domestic Leg of Your Journey/Airline Transfer/Connecting Flight

If your final destination is another city and you are boarding on another plane, please ask your flight attendant prior to disembarkation if you would need to personally check-in your luggage with your next carrier.

GETTING SETTLED IN THE UNITED STATES

Accommodation

Your choice of dwelling will depend on the following: number of rooms, amount of space, accessibility to public transport, job site, school and budget. Generally, information on accommodations may be found in

newspapers, handouts, yellow pages, and real estate listings. You may also ask friends and relatives for advice on lease/rental agreements, etc.

For more information, please contact the following:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

<http://www.hud.gov>

1-800-569-4287

Employment

Being a new immigrant, it may be difficult for you to find a job, as some prospective employers require local working experience.

Checking the classified ads section of a newspaper is one of the best ways to begin your job search. It provides a list of available jobs, application procedures and eligibility requirements. Private and government agencies provide part-time job information services. You may also visit Human Resources offices, community agencies, Department of Employment, and check out bulletin boards in local libraries. If the particular company you would like to work for does not currently show a listing, do not hesitate to approach it. Many firms such as retail store chains do not normally advertise available jobs. It is best to visit them and speak directly to the manager about employment opportunities.

Education

Elementary and High School

School starts in the first week of September and ends in the first week of June. You may visit the district

school nearest your residence for advice on your child's education.

Admission Requirements:

- Green card or Temporary 1-551
- Passport
- Birth or baptismal certificate
- Vaccination certificate/records
- Previous school records
- Other documents that may be required by the school

College and Post-Graduate Studies

A college education can be very expensive. High school graduates may attend universities or colleges, or vocational schools or community colleges.

The U.S. government provides financial aid which may cover tuition fees, books, room and board, supplies and transportation. You may call 1-800-433-3243 or visit http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student_guide/index.html, for further information.

Admission Requirements:

- Satisfactory completion of a high school curriculum
- High school transcript of records
- Letters of recommendation from the last school attended
- Passing the entrance examination, intelligence and aptitude tests

Social Security Number

Apply for a social security number (SSN) if you have not requested for the same during your visa application. If you have requested for it prior to your entry to the U.S., the Social Security Administration (SSA) will mail the SSN / card to your U.S. mailing address within three (3) weeks upon your arrival. If you do not get the card after the said period, visit the nearest SSA office or call toll-free no. 1-800-772-1213. You may also visit the SSA's website at <http://www.ssa.gov>, for more information.

The SSN is a requirement for employment.

Social Security Benefits

Immigrants are barred from receiving means-tested benefits (i.e., food stamps, medicaid, supplemental security income, temporary assistance to needy families), for five (5) years upon arrival in the U.S. Other benefits from the U.S. Social Security will be available to immigrants on the basis of compliance with required amount and number of contributions. These benefits include:

Social Security Pension

The existing social insurance system in the U.S. provides pension and medical insurance benefits to people beyond working age, 62 for women and 65 for men. Social security is a pension-insurance plan, jointly paid for by the employee and employer with contributions

placed in a pool from which payments are derived when a worker reaches retireable age.

A person becomes eligible for retirement benefits when he/she is 62 years old, has worked for 10 years, and has paid payroll taxes. The regular retirement age with full benefits is 65.

Survivor's Benefits

If the deceased worker is fully insured under social security at the time of death, the survivors can get benefits based on the former's work records and earnings. If the deceased is only "current insured", the surviving child can receive benefits if he/she is under 18 or disabled, and the surviving spouse can receive benefits if he/she is caring for a child who is disabled or is under 16.

Disability Benefits

Disability benefits may be acquired before retirement age if disability is due to blindness, illness, or accident. The following can avail of disability benefits:

- Disabled workers below 65 years old and their families
- Children born disabled or who became disabled before the age of 22 and whose parents are retired
- Disabled or deceased
- Disabled spouses or disabled divorced wives or husbands of the deceased who have enough work credits under social security. The surviving spouse, however, must be at least 50 years old to get the benefits.

A member does not have to be disabled for life in order to qualify for disability benefits. If he/she suffers from disability for 12 months or when the disability results to death, then, he/she is entitled to disability benefits. This rule also applies to accidental injuries and chronic conditions.

Benefits for a Divorced Wife

A divorced wife, who was married to her former husband for at least 10 years, is entitled to benefits based on her former husband's work record. For example, if her former husband retires and has not remarried, she gets a benefit equal to half of her husband's benefit. If, however, the former husband remarries after retirement, the divorced wife will continue to get her benefits, but the new wife can get them, too. Further, if the former husband dies and has not remarried, the surviving divorced wife may be entitled to benefits when she turns 60. Her children may be entitled to the benefits based on the husband's work record. Finally, if the divorced wife is disabled, she can get disability benefits when she turns 50 and when her former husband dies, retires, or becomes disabled himself.

These benefits are based on uniform national standards, eligibility requirements, and state supplementary payments.

Unemployment Insurance

Unemployment insurance entitles unemployed workers to a temporary income while in the process of looking for other employment. The joint federal and state unemployment insurance system gives laid-off workers

an average of 36% of their normal pay. Trade union members often supplement this with private employment benefits which may bring unemployment benefits up to as much as 95% of normal earnings.

Medicare Part A

Medicare Part A is a federal health insurance program that pays 80% of in-patient hospital costs, (hospital room, board, nursing services, laboratory test, etc.) and is totally paid for by payroll taxes. This is available to those aged 65 years or older who receive social security payments. Some people with disability may avail of this free program for life. Others may only avail of this program up to three (3) years after their rehabilitation.

Medicare Part B

Medicare Part B is a voluntary medical insurance paid from monthly premiums and subsidies from general tax revenues. This covers 80% (less yearly deductible) of the doctor's bill, out patient hospital services such as physical therapy, speech pathology, laboratory services, ambulance transportation, and medical equipment and supplies. Insurance coverage stops if premiums are not paid.

Medicaid

Medicaid is a health insurance program for people with low income and limited assets. It is run by state welfare or human services agencies.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

This is a program managed by the Social Security Administration and provides monthly checks to the

elderly, the blind, and people with disabilities who do not possess many properties or who have low income. The basic monthly SSI check is almost similar in all states. A person may get more if the state he/she lives in contributes to the SSI check or he/she may receive less if he/she or his/her family has other sources of income each month.

State Identification Card

All lawful permanent residents must apply for a state identification card at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). A State ID is valid for six (6) years and must be renewed. An immigrant who is 62 years old and above may apply for a senior citizen card which is valid for 10 years.

Driver's License

The Philippine license may be used in the U.S. for a limited period of time.

The steps in securing a driver's license from the DMV are as follows:

- a. Secure a copy of a driver's handbook from the local office of the DMV.
- b. Familiarize yourself with traffic laws and driving standards, which are strictly enforced in the U.S.
- c. Take a written examination and hands-on driving test. In taking the driving test, you need

to present your social security number and other documents to confirm your identity.

Bank Account

Open a bank account to safe keep your money. It will also help facilitate your financial transactions. Before opening bank accounts, compare the services, fees, working hours and location of banks so you can choose the one that best meets your needs.

Taxes

As permanent residents, you will be taxed by the U.S. Government for your income inside and outside of the U.S. You must file your income tax statements at the Internal Revenue Service regardless of whether you are earning an income or not.

For more information, please visit the website <http://www.irs.gov/localcontacts/index.html>, or call 1-800-829-1040.

U.S. Military Selective Service

All male permanent resident aliens aged 18 to 25 years must register with the Selective Service System (SSS). Registration must be accomplished within 30 days before and after the 18th birthday. If the age upon arrival in the U.S. is between 18 and 25 years, registration must be done within 30 days upon arrival. There are no exceptions to the said age bracket. Even mentally or physically disabled persons must register.

SSS mail-back registration cards are available in any post office nearest your locality. Registration may also be done on-line through the internet via website www.sss.gov.

IMMIGRATION CONCERNS

Rights and Responsibilities of a Green Card Holder

As an immigrant in the U.S., you are expected to become an active or useful community member. You are also granted certain rights and responsibilities.

Rights and Privileges

- Live anywhere in the U.S. and stay as long as you want.
- Study and work anywhere in the U.S.
- Travel in and out of the U.S. whenever you want.
- Petition your spouse and unmarried children to live in the U.S.
- Own property in the U.S.
- Apply to become an American citizen after three (3) or five (5) years of stay in the U.S.

Duties and Obligations

- Cannot commit a crime or participate in subversive activities.
- Obey all federal, state and local laws.
- Pay federal, state and local income taxes, as well as taxes from worldwide income as a U.S. resident.

- Register with the Selective Service System of the U.S. Armed Forces (Males, 18-25 years old).
- Inform the Department of Homeland Security of new address within 10 days.
- Cannot remain outside of the U.S. for more than one (1) year.

Permanent Resident Card

A permanent resident card or green card serves as one of the documentary proofs of your permanent residency in the U.S.

- Permanent residents who are 18 years old and above must carry their green card at all times.
- Green cards are valid for 10 years (if permanent resident) and for two (2) years (if conditional resident), and must be renewed before their expiry.

Re-entry Permit

Permanent residents who wish to stay outside the U.S. for more than one (1) year must apply for a re-entry permit at the USCIS before departure. A re-entry permit is valid for two (2) years and must be presented at the port of entry. To apply for a re-entry permit, file Form I-131 which is downloadable at <http://www.uscis.gov>.

Conditional Residency

A conditional resident has the same rights and responsibilities as a permanent resident. This conditional

residency status is granted if you are married to an American citizen for less than two (2) years from the time you receive your immigrant visa.

You and your American spouse must file a Petition to Remove the Conditions on Residence, using Form No. I-751 with the USCIS Regional Service Center, within 90 days before the expiration of the two-year conditional status. Failure to do so will lead to cancellation of your immigration status.

A spouse and his / her unmarried children under two (2) years old who are victims of abuse or extreme cruelty may file for self-petition to remove the conditional status.

For inquiries, you may contact the following:

1-800-799-7233 - National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-787-3224 - For information on shelters, mental health care, legal advice and other types of assistance, including information about self-petition.

Citizenship / Naturalization

Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is conferred upon a foreign citizen or a legal permanent resident in the U.S. after fulfilling the requirements imposed by the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act.

Following are the general requirements for naturalization:

If you are an immigrant, you must:

- Be at least 18 years old;

- Have five (5) years of permanent residence in the U.S. You must be physically present in the U.S. for not less than thirty (30) months or two and a half (2 ½) years out of the five (5) years. Absence of more than six (6) months, although less than one (1) year, may disrupt the continuity of your residence unless you can establish that you have not abandoned your residence during such period;
- At least three (3) months of residence in the state where you reside during your application for naturalization;
- Be able to read, write, speak, and understand the English language;
- Be of good moral character; and
- Demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the history, principles, and form of government of the U.S.

If you are a spouse of a U.S. national, you must:

- Be at least 18 years old;
- Have lived for three (3) years with your American spouse in the U.S., or must have been married for three (3) years to an American citizen who is employed in a foreign country and who has intention of residing in the U.S. (employment must be with an American firm or the U.S. government or an international organization);
- Be able to read, write, speak, and understand the English language;
- Be of good moral character; and

- Demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the history, principles and form of government of the U.S.

Naturalization is not automatic after the required years of residency. An application must be filed with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service using Form N-400, or Form N-402 if a petition is to be filed on behalf of a child.

Sponsorship Through A Family Member

Sponsorship of Relatives

To be eligible to sponsor a relative to immigrate in the U.S., you must:

- Be a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the U.S.;
- Prove that you can support your relative at 125% above the federal poverty level; and
- Provide proof of relationship with your relative.

Persons Who Can Be Sponsored

A U.S. citizen can sponsor the following:

- Husband or wife
- Married or unmarried son or daughter of any age
- Brother or sister, if the sponsor is at least 21 years old
- Parent, if the sponsor is at least 21 years old

A lawful permanent resident can sponsor the following:

- Husband or wife
- Unmarried son or daughter of any age

Joint Sponsorship

The U.S. immigration law allows joint sponsorship. If the petitioner's household income is not sufficient to meet the requirements of a sponsor, he/she is permitted to get a co-sponsor. The co-sponsor may not necessarily be a relative of the person sponsored, but he/she should individually meet the income required of a person before he/she could execute an affidavit of support.

Substitute Sponsorship

A substitute sponsor is a person who files an I-864 Affidavit of Support in place of a petitioner who has died. To be a substitute sponsor, a person must be related to the person to be sponsored in one of the following ways:

Spouse	Mother-in-Law
Sibling	Son
Son-in-Law	Sister-in-Law
Grandparent	Parent
Father-in-Law	Child (if at least 18 years of age)
Daughter	Daughter-in-Law
Brother-in-Law	Grandchild

The substitute sponsor must be a U.S. citizen or a legal permanent resident, at least 18 years old, residing in the U.S., and meet the financial requirements of a sponsor. When approved by the USCIS, the substitute sponsor shall assume all the obligations of the deceased sponsor.

Affidavit of Support

The U.S. immigration law provides that all family-sponsored immigrants must have legally enforceable affidavits of support (Form-1864) if they file visa or adjustment of status application on or after 19 December 1997. By executing the affidavit of support, the sponsor agrees to provide financial support to the sponsored immigrant at or above the 125% federal poverty level. Sponsors who fail to support the immigrants can be sued by the immigrants themselves and/or by any federal, state or local agency or private entity that provides means-tested benefits.

The sponsorship obligation will be terminated when the sponsored immigrant has acquired naturalization, has worked for 10 years or can be credited with 40 quarters of work, has left the U.S. permanently, or has died.

Sponsorship Through Employment

Employment-Based Immigrant

To live and work permanently in the U.S., you must have an employer who will file your petition or application with the USCIS. Your would-be employer must complete a labor certification request (ETA 750) from the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Philippine Diplomatic Posts in the United States

Embassy of the Philippines

1600 Massachusetts Avenue NW

Washington D.C. 20036, U.S.A.

Tel. Nos.: (1202) 467-9300; 467-9363

Fax Nos.: (1202) 328-7614; 467-9417

Email: info@philippineembassy-usa.org

washingtonpe@dfa.gov.ph

Website: <http://www.philippineembassy-usa.org>

Philippine Consulate General

447 Sutter Street, 6th Floor

Philippine Center Building

San Francisco, California 94108, U.S.A.

Tel. Nos.:(1415) 433-6666 to 68; 433-6675; 433-6680

Fax No. :(1415) 421-2641

Email: sanfranciscopcg2004@yahoo.com

Website: www.philippineconsulate-sf.org

Philippine Consulate General

3600 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 500

Los Angeles, California 90010, U.S.A.

Tel. Nos.: (1213) 639-0980 to 85; (1213) 639-0989

Fax No. : (1213) 639-0990

Email: losangelespcg@earthlink.net

Website: www.philippineconsulatela.org

Website: <http://www.pcggenla.org>

Philippine Consulate General
30 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, Illinois, 60602 U.S.A.
Tel. No. : (1312) 332-6458 / Mobile No. 312-5016458
Fax No.: (1312) 332-3657
Email: chicagopcg@sbcglobal.net
Website: www.chicagopcg.com

Philippine Consulate General
556 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York
10036-5095, U.S.A.
Tel. Nos.: (1212) 764-1330; 575-4774; 382-1146
Fax No. : (1212) 764-6010
Email: newyork@pcgny.net
Website: <http://www.pcgny.net>

Philippine Consulate General
2433 Pali Highway, Honolulu, Hawaii 96817
Tel. Nos.: (1808) 595-6316 to 19
Fax No. : (1808) 595-2581
Email: honoluluipc@hawaii.rr.com
Website: <http://www.philippineconsulatehonolulu.com>

Philippine Consulate General
Suite 601-2, ITC Building, Marine Drive
Tamuning, Guam 96913
(or PO Box 9880, Tamuning, Guam 96931)
Tel. Nos.: (671) 646-4620; 646-4630
Fax No. : (671) 649-1868
Email: pcgagana@ite.net
pc.agana@dfa.gov.ph
Website: <http://www.pcgagana.com>

Philippine Consulate General
5th Floor, Marianas Business Plaza
P.O. Box 500731 CK Saipan MP 96950
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Tel. Nos.: (670) 234-1848; 235-8360; 234-1850/51
Fax No. : (670) 234-1849
Email: saipanpcg@pticom.com

Appendix II: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Field Offices

Website: <http://www.uscis.gov>
Call Center Nos.: 1-800-375-5283
1-800-787-3224
Fax No. : (02) 523-1215

Appendix III: United States Social Security Offices

Toll-Free Number: 1-800-772-1213
Monday through Friday
Between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Toll-Free TTY Number (deaf or hard hearing)
1-800-325-0778
Monday through Friday
Between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Websites: <http://www.ssa.gov>
www.socialsecurity.gov

Appendix IV: Social Security Regional Offices

Boston Region

(Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire,
Rhode Island, Vermont)

Room 1900

John F. Kennedy Federal Building

Government Center

Boston, MA 02203-1900

New York Region

(New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands)

Room 40-100 Federal Building

26 Federal Plaza

New York, NY 10278

Philadelphia Region

(Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland,
Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia)

P.O. Box 8788

Philadelphia, PA 19101

Atlanta Region

(Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida,
Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee)

Suite 1904

101 Marietta Tower

Atlanta, GA 30323

Seattle Region

(Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington)

M/S RX-50

2201 Sixth Avenue

Seattle, WA 98121

Chicago Region
(Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio,
Wisconsin)
Regional Commissioner
105 W. Adams Street
10th Floor
Chicago, IL 60603

Dallas Region
(Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas)
Room 1440
1200 Main Tower Building
Dallas, TX 75202

Kansas City Region
(Iowa, Kansas Missouri, Nebraska)
Room 436
Federal Office Building
601 East 12th Street
Kansas City, MO 64106

Denver Region
(Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota,
Utah, Wyoming)
Federal Office Building
1961 Stout Street
Denver, CO 80294

San Francisco Region
(American Samoa, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii,
Nevada, Northern Mariana Islands)
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Commission on Filipinos Overseas - Cebu
Causing-Lozada Bldg., Osmeña Blvd. Corner
M. J. Cuenco Ave., Cebu City
Telefax: (+6332) 2555253
E-mail: cfocebu@cfo.gov.ph

Commission on Filipinos Overseas -
Ninoy Aquino International Airport Desk
Terminal I
Telefax: (+632) 8795685
Terminal II
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