

Travel Advisory: Check passport validity before making travel plans!

Recently, a U.S. citizen assigned to Ramstein Air Base travelled to the UK (a non-Schengen country - see below for a list of “Schengen” countries) and was denied re-entry to Germany because his U.S. passport expired in less than three months.

If your passport is about to expire, please take note of the following travel requirements: Entry into any of the European countries in the Schengen Area for short-term tourism, business trips or in transit to a non-Schengen destination requires your passport be valid for at least three months beyond your intended date of departure. For example, if you will be staying in any of the Schengen countries for 1 month, your passport must be valid for four months from the date you arrive.

The Schengen Area is comprised of 26 European countries that have abolished passport and any other type of border controls at their common borders, which means the area serves as a single country for international travel purposes with a common visa policy. If you are a qualified visitor for tourism or business with a valid U.S. passport, you can enter the Schengen area without a visa for a period of three months within each six-month period. Those countries are Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Although not a part of the Schengen area, the countries of Cyprus and Croatia also require a passport validity of three months beyond your planned date of departure.

The European Union is not alone in implementing such a requirement. Since there are other countries that require passports to be valid for some period after your return, your best bet is to check passport and visa requirements prior to making travel plans and make sure your passport is renewed well in advance of its expiration date (at least six months prior).

Regular processing times to apply for or renew a tourist passport are four to six weeks. Expedited services are not available in the overseas area unless there is an emergency. Please contact your servicing passport office for more information on applying for a new or renewal passport. For more information on traveling in the Schengen area, please visit the following web sites:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/schengen-fact-sheet.html> or
<http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/>

If your passport does not meet the Schengen requirements, you may be refused boarding by the airline at your point of origin or while transferring planes. You could also be denied entry when you arrive in the Schengen area. Some airlines require your passport to be valid for six months to allow boarding. For this reason, we recommend that your passport have at least six months validity remaining whenever you travel in Europe.

Courtesy of the 786 FSS Passport Office.