

Dear Readers,

Thank you for your continued interest in our “Ask the Consul” newspaper column. This edition is devoted to information about the Diversity Visa (Green Card) Lottery and to your questions about rumors around town regarding visas to the United States (yes, I hear the rumors, too). Please send any questions to us at askconsultbilisi@state.gov.

Sincerely,
Lindsay Henderson
Consul
U.S. Embassy Tbilisi

Dear Consul,

How do I apply for the Green Card Lottery? Is the application free?

The 2009 Diversity Visa (DV or Green Card) Lottery season has begun. The DV-2009 lottery registration period will run from Wednesday noon (Eastern Standard Time in the United States), on October 3, 2007 until Sunday noon, December 2, 2007. No applications will be accepted after that time, even if the computer system is busy, so please apply as early as possible.

As in recent years, the DV-2009 lottery will be conducted entirely electronically, including electronic entry. Paper entries are not accepted. The Department of State has established a dedicated website for the submission of E-DV entries, www.dvlottery.state.gov. Instructions in the Georgian language should be posted soon on that site. Successfully registered entries will result in the display of a confirmation screen containing the applicant's name, date of birth, country of chargeability, and a date/time stamp, which can then be printed.

People may prepare and submit their own entries, or have someone submit the entry for them. Regardless of whether an entry is submitted by you directly, or assistance is provided by an attorney, friend, relative, etc., only one entry may be submitted in the name of each individual, and the person entering the lottery is responsible for insuring that the information is correct and complete. If your entry is selected, the notification letter will be sent only to the mailing address provided by you on the entry.

Most applicants disqualified from the application process are disqualified for submitting more than one entry per person or for submitting incorrect data. If someone assists you with the application procedures, please make sure that the biographical information provided is correct.

Please note that although many businesses may claim that success is “guaranteed” if you apply with them, there are no guarantees in the lottery process. Winners are chosen at random from the applications submitted electronically. The program is administered by

the U.S. Department of States in the United States. Employees of the US Embassy in Tbilisi are not involved at all with the application process for the Diversity Visa lottery. If your entry is selected as a winner, however, the Department of State will forward your application to the consular section. Your visa case will be processed at the consular section at the Embassy.

Good luck with your application!

They say if a person has ever participated in DV lottery, than he/she will be refused a tourist visa by all means. Is that true?

No. When someone applies for a tourist visa, a consular officer examines his or her personal situation here in Georgia, to determine whether that situation is so strong that the applicant would have to come back to Georgia after his or her trip to the United States. Just because someone submits an application for the Diversity Visa lottery does not necessarily mean that he or she does not have a legitimate purpose of travel and reason to return from a business or tourist trip, a student or exchange visitor program, or other non-immigrant reason for travel.

Recently I read a newspaper advertisement where a company was offering assistance in filling out the DV application form and was even giving guarantees of successful outcome. Can it be true?

There are no guarantees with the Diversity Visa lottery—which is why it is a lottery. Anyone interested in registering for the 2009 Diversity Visa lottery can do so at the website listed above .

The Diversity Visa lottery is managed at the Kentucky Consular Center in the United States. After the registration period closes on December 2, the computer system will randomly select winning numbers from the applicants who have applied, and forward those cases in a randomly assigned order to US Embassies and Consulates overseas. Each country that is eligible to participate in the lottery (which includes Georgia) is assigned a certain number of visas per year. We start interviewing applicants with winning numbers in October in the order that we receive the visa cases from the Kentucky Consular Center. We issue visas to qualified applicants until all the visa numbers assigned to Georgia are gone or until the DV program expires on October 1 of the year in which the cases are being processed. Please contact me at askconsultbilisi@state.gov if you have additional questions about the Diversity Visa lottery and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Is it true that the percentage of visa refusals has significantly risen for past years?

Actually, the opposite is true. More Georgian citizens are traveling to the United States now than ever before, and our current non-immigrant visa refusal rate is lower than it has

ever been—the lowest ever since we began processing visas in Tbilisi in 1993 when our Embassy first opened in Tbilisi. This does not mean, however, that everyone who applies will be issued visas; all persons must qualify under U.S. immigration law to receive them. Consular officers apply the same standards when adjudicating visas worldwide and our consular officers are working very hard to ensure that all qualified applicants are issued visas in a timely manner as possible to facilitate all legitimate travel to the United States.

As part of the visa interview process, consular officers are required by U.S. immigration law to take into consideration the financial and social situation of the individual applicant, not the situation of their families or contacts in the United States. It is possible that an applicant's circumstances can change, which is why an applicant who did not qualify last year may qualify this year. Similarly, a previously issued visa applicant may have had a change in circumstances that disqualifies him or her at the time of a subsequent visa application. Having very strong family ties to the United States can adversely impact a decision on a non-immigrant visa case for an applicant, as successful applicants are required under U.S. immigration law to demonstrate that their strong financial and social ties to their home country would require their return after a brief stay in the United States. Many applicants are also under the mistaken impression that documentation is critical to the visa decision. In fact, documentation is not required, which is why a consular officer may choose not to review it, and many US Embassies prohibit visa applicants from bringing any documentation to their visa interviews at all.

They say some firms provide assistance in obtaining a visa. Furthermore the established "price" for a visa is -\$18 thousand. Is it true?

This sounds like fraud and alien smuggling and is illegal. We take any information related to visa fraud or potential visa fraud very seriously. If you have any information on who is doing this and/or how, please send me that information at consulate-tbilisi@state.gov and I will personally look into it. All information reported to us in such cases remains confidential. If you are not comfortable sending the information via e-mail, you may also fax or mail it to us at the Embassy. Please address the information either to the Consular Section or the Regional Security Office. The Embassy address is: 11 Balanchini Street, Tbilisi 0131, Georgia.

I heard that if you use the name of someone who went to the United States on a DV visa, then you are more likely to qualify for a tourist visa. Is this true?

No. As I mentioned above, everyone who applies has to establish that their personal situation here in Georgia will bring them back after their visit to the United States. You are always better off if you are completely honest on your visa application and during the interview. Under U.S. immigration law, misrepresentation to a consular officer or immigration official, including not telling the truth, not telling the entire story, or using fraudulent documents, can cause you to be permanently ineligible from traveling to the United States, and

will most certainly result in a refusal if the consular officer finds that an applicant has misrepresented him/herself. Honesty is always the best policy and you are more likely to receive a visa if you are honest and straightforward with the consular officer during your visa interview.

I want to travel early in mid-January to see my relatives in New York for a few weeks. When is the best time to apply for a visa?

With few exceptions, all applicants who qualify for a non-immigrant visa will receive a visa that is valid for one year with multiple entries. We urge you not to wait to apply for your visa. The holiday season is a very busy time, and as we get closer to the holiday season, it will become more difficult to quickly schedule appointments for visa interviews. At this time, the wait for an appointment is 2 to 3 business days. Therefore, you should apply as soon as possible to prevent any delays in your travel plans. To schedule an appointment, you may visit any branch of TBC bank to pay the \$100 non-refundable application fee. At that time, you will be given instructions on how to schedule a visa appointment on the telephone.

I am in the United States on a work visa. I will be traveling home to Georgia to see my family for the holidays. One of my family members has already gone to the bank and paid the visa fee for me and I have the information on how to schedule the appointment, which I plan to do soon. I see that all visas are now delivered with a courier service. Is this safe?

Yes! We have been returning issued visas for both immigrant and non-immigrant categories with DHL since October 2006. I am happy to report that no one has reported any problems to us and we will continue working with DHL to make sure that issued visas are delivered quickly to you.