

Dear Readers,

As we move into spring and head toward summer, we are getting many questions about application procedures, early applications for summer travel, and summer work and travel programs through private companies. This month's issue of "Ask the Consul" edition is devoted to information about all of these issues. Please send any questions to me at [askconsultbilisi@state.gov](mailto:askconsultbilisi@state.gov), and I will be happy to answer your questions, even if we don't have room for them in the newspaper column.

Sincerely,  
Lindsay Henderson  
Consul  
U.S. Embassy Tbilisi

*Dear Consul,*

*I heard that it is ok to apply now even if I don't plan to travel until July. Is this true?*

Yes! In fact, I would encourage you to apply as soon as possible. Due to staffing gaps in the consular section, visa appointments will be limited after April until later in the summer. We will be interviewing up to 120 people per day through most of April. After April, appointments will be reduced to 50 per day, which is the number of cases that we process per day during slow seasons. If a visa is issued, it will be for one-year, multiple entries, so it would be smart to apply now and reduce the chance that all the appointments could be taken as we get farther into the busy summer travel and visa application season. If you are curious about how many days you have to wait to get an appointment (right now it is two business days in Tbilisi), you can see the waiting times online for any U.S. Embassy or Consulate online at:

[http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/tempvisitors\\_wait.php](http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/tempvisitors_wait.php).

Although this information is available publicly for all visa processing posts, please remember that for the best chances of qualifying, you need to apply for the visa in the consular district where you normally live, even if you are not originally from there or do not hold that country's passport.

*Hello,*

*I heard that you can schedule non-immigrant visa appointments online? I live in the United States and am going to be back to visit my family this summer. I need to renew my work visa and scheduling online before I leave on my trip would make the whole process a lot more convenient for me.*

Yes! As of March 1, all applicants for non-immigrant visas are required to schedule their appointments online through our new online appointment scheduling system. To find application forms and schedule your appointment, please visit our website at:

<http://georgia.usembassy.gov/visas.html>. The Georgian language version of the website can be found here: [http://georgia.usembassy.gov/ge/Consular/visasappl\\_g.html](http://georgia.usembassy.gov/ge/Consular/visasappl_g.html). Please

note that all application fees (\$131 per applicant, non-refundable) are payable to the consular cashier on the day of the interview. Please remember that our website is the *only* website where appointments can be scheduled.

We have had very good feedback from our customers about online appointment scheduling so far and we hope that this new system will make the non-immigrant visa application process simpler and more convenient for all. Please note that all *immigrant* visa appointments are still scheduled by the National Visa Center in the United States, so applicants for immigrant visas or Diversity Visas (Green Card Lottery) should not schedule an appointment on our website.

*I plan to apply to participate in a Summer Work and Travel program this year. Could you tell me which local companies are safe to work with?*

For legal reasons, we cannot recommend any specific companies. Due to very high overstay rates over the past several years, as well as problems with applicants and with a few companies (who have been reported to the US Department of State in Washington for eligibility review), applicants for summer work and travel are going to given extra scrutiny by interviewing consular officers from now on. If you apply, please do not be surprised if you are called back for more than one interview with a consular officer. Please note that even if you participated last year, it does not guarantee that you will be We have additional information, including new deadline dates for summer work and travel applications, available on our website for applicants and sponsoring organizations to review at: <http://georgia.usembassy.gov/summer.html>

Additionally, please keep the following information in mind:

- Summer work and travel programs are not designed for you to make a lot of money (you won't make much money; these are for minimum wage jobs and most involve hard work. You would probably earn about 7 USD per hour *before* taxes are deducted--between 40 and 50 percent of the salary in most U.S. states, and U.S. employers take taxes out for you before you receive your paycheck). These programs not money-making ventures. They are educational exchange programs designed to help you learn English and learn about American culture while working to earn *some* money to help pay for *part* (not all) of your personal expenses (i.e. food, housing, spending money).
- It is a danger sign if the company or facilitator you are working with guarantees that you will receive a visa;
- The company or facilitator won't refund your full program fee if you do not receive a visa.
- The company or facilitator tells you or hints that you should give false answers or provide fraudulent documentation to the consular officer during your visa interview.
- The company or facilitator fails to explain that summer work and travel companies in the United States are permitted to require up to 50% of their program participants to locate their own job.

- We check 100 percent of summer work and travel participants to make sure they have returned to Georgia within an acceptable time frame. Although all applicants are interviewed based on their own personal circumstances, we adjust our criteria when making visa decisions when large numbers of people overstay their summer work and travel visas.

*I have some information to provide about my neighbor, who plans to go to the US illegally. If I send you this information, will you please not tell my neighbor?*

We receive letters, e-mails and telephone calls every day with information about visa fraud and alien smuggling. We never reveal the source of our information, nor do we tell the person involved anything that might identify where information came from. Some of our most valuable information about visa fraud and alien smuggling comes from you, the general public. If you have information to share, please send us an e-mail at [consulate-tbilisi@state.gov](mailto:consulate-tbilisi@state.gov). If you prefer to send a regular letter, our address is: Consular Section, Fraud Prevention Unit, 11 Balanchini Street, Tbilisi 0131, Georgia.

*Dear Consular Officer,*

*I want to tell you about my most recent visa application experience. I have been traveling and applying for visas to visit the United States (and other countries) since the late 1990s. The process is usually long and takes up a lot of time out of my day. However, I applied on March 6 this year and it was the most pleasant visa application experience I have ever had at any embassy. I filled out my application forms and scheduled my appointment online. I paid for my application at the cashier. A very nice person called me to take my fingerprints (I was actually busy reading a magazine out in the waiting room and did not hear my name the first time it was called because the article I was reading was so interesting!). After that, a consular officer called me just a few minutes later. The interview lasted less than two minutes, and after the interview, I was given my receipt and asked to go to another window to fill out the DHL delivery envelope. Then I was free to go. The entire procedure took less than a half an hour and I was able to get back to work much more quickly than I thought I would. The passport and visa were delivered to my house on Saturday morning with no problems. Thank you and your staff for what was actually a rather pleasant experience!*

Thank you very much for your e-mail. It is always encouraging to receive feedback from our customers. Based on your suggestions, we have made improvements to the media selection available in our waiting room and have put information flyers in our waiting room on a variety of topics that you may find useful or interesting. We want the visa application experience, regardless of the outcome, to be as painless as possible and are trying to make our waiting room as comfortable as possible for our customers.