

NONIMMIGRANT (TEMPORARY) VISAS

A BASIC PRIMER

There is a wide range of temporary visas, used for many different purposes and each lasting from a few days to several years. Some must be approved in advance by the INS before being reviewed and issued by the State Department; others are only reviewed by the State Department. Visas may be granted to the principal applicant and to his or her dependents (spouse and minor children).

There is a difference between a visa and a status, although both are referred to in the same manner and with the same alphabetical designation (based on the respective section of the Immigration and Nationality Act). A visa is simply a document in the person's passport. It serves as a "ticket" to ensure that a foreign national has boarded the airplane and arrived in the U.S. A person's visa status is granted by the INS once the applicant arrives at the border or a port of entry, and can be changed or extended by the INS at one of its remote Service Centers.

The different temporary visa categories are:

- A: Diplomatic employees and their households
- B: Business visitors (B-1) or tourists (B-2)
- C: Transit visa (pass-through at an airport or seaport)
- D: Crewmember (air or sea)
- E: Treaty-Investors or Treaty-Traders (from countries where we have a treaty of commerce and investment)
- F: Students
- G: Employees of International Organizations (IMF, OPIC, OAS, International Red Cross, etc.)
- H: Temporary Workers. Can be professionals (H-1B), nurses (H-1C), agricultural workers (H-2A), temporary or seasonal workers (H-2B), or trainees (H-3)
- I: Representatives of international media
- J: Exchange visitors (educational exchange students, au pairs, graduate medical trainees, practical training students, professors and researchers, short-term scholars, camp counselors)

K: Fiances and fiancees

L: Intracompany transferees (executives, managers, persons with proprietary knowledge)

M: Language and vocational students

N: NATO employees

O: Extraordinary ability aliens

P: Athletes, entertainment groups (such as orchestras) and support personnel

Q: Cultural exchange visitors (example: *Smithsonian Folklife Festival*)

R: Religious workers

S: Criminal informants

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