

The following article is for Immigrant Visa holders arriving in the US for the first time with their visa: Welcome to America!

When you go to the airport in the Old Country to check in for your departure (and possibly at subsequent transit airports), the airline must confirm that you have the appropriate entry document for the US.

An Immigrant Visa is the appropriate document; it will be inspected at check-in.

New regulations from the [Transportation Safety Administration \(the TSA\)](#) cover the guidelines of what you may pack and carry on in your luggage. Please pay special attention to tips on locking your luggage or consider using a TSA-approved luggage lock which will allow agents to open and inspect your bags AND relock them. Unapproved locks will be cut off and discarded.

Use caution in packing fragile items, and do not pack wrapped gifts; these items may be opened and/or not repacked carefully.

On the [flight](#), **you do not need to complete an I-94 (white card) although the flight attendant may try to force one on you. Tell them that you are moving to the US and don't need one.**

You **will** need to complete a **Customs declaration. Since you are immigrating, there is no duty on your belongings.**

This useful brochure from CBP/Customs & Border Patrol explains most everything about moving your personal and professional items to the US with you including your automobile!

[Moving Household Goods to the U.S.](#)

([source](#))

You are considered a Nonresident/First-Time Immigrant in their language. Details for you are on Page 31, but the list before that applies to you as well.

When you arrive at the POE, you will **be hand-carrying your Mysterious Brown Envelope** that the Consulate gave you. **DO NOT OPEN.** It contains all your visa paperwork from petition through interview and must be opened by your inspecting officer.

As you enter **the Immigration Hall**, have your MBE out and visible; the wandering officers will see it and can direct you to the most appropriate line for that airport. Unless otherwise directed, go to a Visitor's line.

At the first desk, they will take the envelope away and (usually) direct you to Secondary Inspection. Officers here may be armed, do not be alarmed. Take a number (like the bakery) if it's an option and wait. The process of getting checked in at Secondary only takes about 15 minutes, but you may have others waiting in line ahead of you. **Conservatively, and based on others' experiences, allow at least 2.5 hours for a connecting flight.**

In Secondary, your details will be entered into the computer and you may be asked a few confirming questions, all things that you already know (how long you've been married, where are you going etc).

You will want to confirm your US mailing address here: this will now be your address of record, and ANY change of address MUST be reported, by law, via [Form AR-11](#) from this point on.

You will give a fingerprint and signature here for the Green Card production and finally, the visa in your passport will be stamped, or 'endorsed'.

This endorsed visa is the documentary equivalent of your Green Card and serves as evidence of your status as a Permanent Resident. You can travel with this stamp as a Permanent Resident until you get your Green Card. Hopefully someone will tell you "Welcome to America" as they give you instructions about [Removing Conditions](#) in 2 years (ideally & if applicable).

You are now a Permanent Resident! Your Green Card and Social Security card will be mailed to you within 4 weeks. Until you get the Green Card, the endorsed visa is EXACTLY THE SAME THING. If you have not received your Green Card after 4 weeks, you may as well follow up on it right away--- usually nothing else will happen otherwise. Make an InfoPass appointment with your [District Office](#) and take your passport in to make an inquiry. New immigrant's cards are all produced at the Texas Service Center, so your envelope will have the Texas return address on it no matter where you live (this was related by the Director of a [USCIS DO](#)).

As you leave Immigration, you **will need to collect your luggage and clear Customs**. There is no duty for your used, personal belongings. Get waved through, welcomed to America and if you are connecting to another flight, look for a baggage belt and airport/airline personnel right outside of Customs. You put your luggage on the belt here and it will be taken to your next flight. You can then run or amble to your connection. If this is your final destination, have a great day, and thanks for entering America.

Social Security card note: If you applied for a Social Security card via form DS-230 II, you should be automatically issued a number and have a card mailed to you. If you do NOT receive your card within three (3) weeks of entry, you should go to your SSA office and apply anew with form SS-5. **If you apply before this and have ticked the 'yes' box on DS-230, you may wind up with two SS#s.** Yes, this procedure has worked successfully for the majority of people. True, it sometimes does not work. You can do a lot of thing in the US without a SS#; life will not be on hold while you wait. Please read the [SSN Guide for IV Holders](#) here at Family Based Immigration.

If you have time to kill in an airport, or are dying to go outside: Be Warned! Expect security lines to be long and involved if you will transit through a US airport on your way to your final destination. Allow enough time to go through security again if you go outside the terminal. There are some airports where it is simply not feasible to go outside and still make your connection.

Look for indoor smoking areas, and/or google your POE airport for a map and detailed local information. Check the TSA site again for all the things you will have to do when coming through security checkpoints (like taking off your shoes, carrying liquids in plastic ziplock bags, no water bottles allowed and updates on carrying lighters).

Last but not least:

be asked to collect their luggage first or some other variation on the above Guide. All of these

steps above will happen in some order, and the Guide is to give you an idea of what to expect (or not expect). Stay flexible, smiling and ask for help if you need it. The Customs and Border Patrol Agents are dealing with thousands of people per day in some cases, and not every one of them is going to be waiting for you with a bouquet of roses. But then again, that is what you married your spouse for, so count your blessings and enjoy your new life together in America!