

Using wrong passport leaves travelers stranded

Story & photo by **Brittany Carlson**
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Using a government-issued or “no fee” passport for leisure travel — or a tourist passport for duty assignments — may not seem like a big deal. However, it can lead to hefty fines, delays and even being stranded at the border of another country.

Government-issued passports are distributed to active duty military members, command-sponsored military family members, Department of Defense civilians and their family members, stationed overseas “specifically for execution of government orders and travel associated with those orders,” according to Edmund Snead, passport and visa specialist for the U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart passport office. They are not designed for leisure travel.

While travelers may have gotten away with vacationing on a government passport in the past, many countries have tightened passport restrictions. As of Feb. 1, 2010, several countries, including most African countries, France, Egypt and Great Britain, will not allow anyone on leisure travel to enter with an official (red), diplomatic (black) or official (blue) passport.

“Only recently, a service member stationed in Stuttgart attempted to cross the German-French border into Strasbourg using only a military ID card. Although the service member was allowed to enter France and then return to Germany, he was charged a €350 fine for traveling without proper documents,” Snead said.

For similar reasons, a tourist passport used for duty or business travel can also cause issues, added Tracee Quinn, Chief of the Military Personnel



Edmund Snead, right, passport and VISA specialist at the U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart Passport Office, instructs Jordan Raukin on how to complete his tourist passport renewal application Sept. 9. Maintaining a tourist passport is vital for service members, family members and civilians stationed overseas. In 2010, more than 40 community members were detained by airport officials for attempting to use a no-fee (official) passport for leisure travel, or vice versa.

Division for USAG Stuttgart.

“Recently, a service member returning to the Middle East from R and R entered on his tourist passport. When his tour ended a few months later, he tried to leave the country on his official passport, only to be detained for hours for violating the country’s visa laws. The service member was eventually released to his unit by authorities, but had to pay a \$4,000 fine and was not able to return home until a few days later,” she said.

The service member wasn’t alone.

In 2010, more than 40 people from the Stuttgart community were detained by airport officials attempting to use the no-fee (official) passport for leisure travel or the fee (tourist) passport for official travel, according to Snead.

Applying for a blue tourist or “fee” passport, in addition to having an official passport, can prevent problems like these from arising.

A tourist passport is recognized internationally and entitles the bearer to receive protection and assistance from the diplomatic and consular offices of

other countries while they are visiting.

Community members should not wait to obtain a tourist passport, Snead said. Tourist passports normally take eight to 12 weeks to process in the U.S. and cannot be expedited overseas.

SOFA requirements

Travelers can also run into problems for not having a valid Status of Forces Agreement stamp or certificate in their passport, or for leaving their SOFA certificate at home.

A SOFA certificate or stamp is required for all military dependents, contractors and DoD civilians and their dependents while assigned to Germany.

The SOFA certificate/stamp serves as proof to German customs officials that a traveler has the right to legally enter and stay in Germany beyond the normal 90 day visitor restriction.

Community members must have either a tourist passport with a SOFA certificate attached, or an official passport with a SOFA stamp. If they have the official passport with a SOFA stamp, they must use a tourist passport to depart Germany and the official passport to return to Germany.

Service members do not receive a SOFA certificate or stamp; they must carry their military ID card and assignment orders as SOFA validation.

Up-to-date travel information and country requirements for official and leisure travel are available in the Department of Defense Foreign Clearance Guide at www.travel.state.gov.

For more information on applying for or renewing a passport or SOFA card, call the USAG Stuttgart Passport Office at 431-2539/civ. 07031-15-2539.

Shoplifting

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In addition, AAFES would usually impose a \$200 civil recovery fee for shoplifting. At the conclusion of the suspension period, the ID cardholder would again be allowed to use Exchange facilities.

Starting Sept. 1, the garrison implemented a new program designed to combat shoplifting.

Under the new program, if a civilian/dependant/retiree is caught shoplifting and/or wrongfully passing bad checks at any AAFES facility, they will have their identification card confiscated by the Military Police immediately after the incident. A voucher will be provided to the shoplifter. The shoplifter must then report to the DEERS/ ID Card Section in Building 2915 on Panzer Kaserne to have a new ID card issued. In a case involving a juvenile, the sponsor must accompany the family member. The new ID card will have Exchange privileges omitted.

The suspension of Exchange privileges will be for at least six months, and during this period, the shoplifter will be prohibited from entering and/or using the Exchange and other Exchange facilities, including food courts, shoppettes and movie theaters.

In most cases, AAFES will continue to impose a \$200 Exchange administrative fee under the AAFES Civil Recovery Program.

“The new policy looks to enforce the high standards all military personnel and their families are supposed to uphold,” Bird said.

At the conclusion of the suspension period, the ID cardholder will have to request a reinstatement of his or her Exchange privileges through the USAG Stuttgart Assistant Civilian Misconduct Action Authority. The request must be in writing and state why reinstatement of Exchange privileges is appropriate.

In addition, the request must explain how the six month Exchange suspension has served its intended purpose. The suspension will remain in effect until this request has been approved by the garrison commander, the CMAA.

Exchange privileges will no longer be reinstated without a written declaration by the shoplifter that reinstatement is the proper course of action for the individual concerned and for the command.

If the shoplifter is on active duty, the service member will not have their ID confiscated. The gar-

rrison is not allowed to confiscate their ID cards; it is the unit’s responsibility to ensure the service member complies with orders from the garrison commander.

Service members will be notified that they are not to enter any Exchange facility for at least six months. After six months, the service member’s first line commander (O3 and above) may request reinstatement and the CMAA will determine whether to reinstate the service member’s privileges.

These actions will be taken in addition to any potential Uniform Code of Military Justice action the service member’s command may take.

Bird encouraged community members to do their part to stop the stealing trend. “I would just ask that the community be aware that there’s an issue here and help us curb incidences of shoplifting in our facilities,” he said.

The policy is available on the garrison website at www.stuttgart.army.mil. Click on “Leadership,” then “Command Policy Letters ...” then “Policy Letter #41.”

Editor’s Note: Brittany Carlson, USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs Office, contributed to this article.