



*Office of Public Affairs
U.S. Embassy, Wellington*

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NEW APPOINTMENT SYSTEM AND 0900 CALL CENTER FOR US VISAS:

The U.S. Consulate in Auckland is introducing an appointment system and a call center for non-immigrant visa applications.

Effective as of January 15, 2004, non-immigrant visa applicants will be able to make appointments for visa interviews.

Effective January 22, 2004, all non-immigrant visa applicants will be required to make appointments for visa interviews.

Appointments will be obtained via a toll call to 0900 US VISA (0900 87 8472).

In addition to making appointments, the 0900 call center will answer questions about visa application procedures and requirements.

The first minute of call time is free, with charges of \$NZ 3.45 per minute including GST, starting at 61 seconds. The maximum charge for any call is \$NZ 25 dollars including GST.

The hours of operation for this service are 0730 to 1730, Monday to Friday, excluding US and New Zealand public holidays.

The appointment system:

In June 2003, a global policy change meant that most persons between the ages of 16 and 60, who need a non-immigrant visa to travel to the United States, now require a personal interview with a consular officer to determine their eligibility. In New Zealand these interviews can only be conducted in Auckland.

These interviews will no longer be conducted on a walk-in basis.

Every effort will be made to schedule an appointment on a day of the applicant's choosing, but we cannot guarantee that all such requests will be accommodated. In cases of genuine emergency, we will make every effort to provide the applicant with an interview time later that same day.

An appointment system has become necessary because of the increased volume of travelers now visiting the Consulate. Scheduled appointments will ensure that applicants are not made to wait more than a few minutes when they appear for their interview.

Visa queries to the call center:

As visa regulations continue to change over coming months and years, it becomes ever more important to provide up-to-date, accurate information to the traveling public.

It is important that anyone traveling to the United States carefully checks that they comply with current regulations well in advance of their intended travel. The traveler is ultimately responsible for ensuring that they have the correct documentation.

Information on current regulations will continue to be available on our web sites: <http://usembassy.org.nz> or <http://unitedstatesvisas.gov>, but the new call center will allow the large volume of telephone queries received by the Consulate to be addressed in a more efficient manner.

The 0900 US VISA Call Center will be managed by a New Zealand company who already provides premium customer contact services to other embassies, large corporate clients and government organizations.

The 0900 US VISA Call Center provides the latest technology and a skilled and knowledgeable staff, trained by the Consulate and working from a range of official US government source materials.

Difficult questions will be noted and passed “offline” to the Consulate for a later response, ensuring customers receive accurate information at reasonable cost.

N.B. Visa Waiver Program.

Most New Zealanders and some third country nationals will still be able to use the Visa Waiver Program, and will not require a non-immigrant visa or interview. (Please see the FAQs for further information)

(A page of Frequently Asked Questions is attached.)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

How many people will this change impact upon?

Approximately 15,000 people residing in New Zealand apply for a non-immigrant visa per year.

But can't New Zealanders travel to the US without a visa?

Those who qualify for the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) – basically most New Zealanders and some third-country nationals who intend to travel for general business or pleasure purposes and stay less than 90 days – may continue to use the VWP. These people will not require an interview with a consular officer and therefore will not require an appointment.

Travelers who have a criminal conviction, have overstayed during a previous U.S. visit, or have been denied either admission to the United States or an U.S. visa do not qualify for the VWP. In addition, travelers seeking to enter the United States for certain specific purposes (study, work, etc.) may not use the VWP.

It is important that anyone traveling to the United States carefully checks that they comply with current regulations well in advance of their intended travel. The traveler is ultimately responsible for ensuring that they have correct documentation.

What if people are not sure whether or not they need a visa?

Anyone who is unsure about whether they require a visa or an interview should get clarification by a toll-call to the 0900 number.

Alternatively travelers may consult our websites <http://usembassy.org.nz> and <http://unitedstatesvisas.gov>.

Why are you doing this?

An appointment system has become necessary because of the increased volume of travelers now visiting the Consulate. Scheduled appointments will ensure that applicants are not made to wait more than a few minutes when they appear for their interview. The new call center will allow the large volume of telephone queries received by the Consulate to be addressed in a more efficient manner.

How much will calls cost?

The first minute of call time is free, with charges of \$NZ 3.45 per minute including GST, starting at 61 seconds. The maximum charge for any call is \$NZ 25 dollars including GST. Difficult questions will be noted and passed “offline” to the Consulate for a later response, ensuring customers receive accurate information at reasonable cost.

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