

Good Reasons to Have a U.S. Tourist Passport **By Rudy Wartella**

As most Soldiers know, they do not need a passport to come to Japan, and they do not need one to go back to the United States provided they are in possession of official travel orders AND in possession of a valid Military ID. The purpose of this article is to encourage Soldiers to obtain a tourist passport even if they don't think that they need one, and even if they have an "official" passport. If you want to get married on Okinawa, sponsor visitors from third countries, tour/travel to other places in Asia while you are on this side of the world, it is a good idea to obtain a U.S. tourist passport. Clients without U.S. passports sometimes have to expend additional time and money to prove their US citizenship.

A U.S. Tourist passport can come in handy even if you already own an official passport. An official passport can only be used for official travel. Even when traveling on orders and official travel, some places, like Taiwan, do not recognize official passports and will not let you transit through on official passports.

A U.S. Tourist passport is not only an important travel document; it is evidence of U.S. Citizenship. Many of you will find times when you need to prove that you are a U.S. citizen. As most of you know, being a Soldier in the U.S. Army does not prove that you are a U.S. citizen. If you were born in the United States, your original birth certificate is also evidence of citizenship; while for others, it is a Certificate of Naturalization, or Consular Report of Birth Abroad.

We have many Soldiers that decide to get married in Japan. One thing that you need to prove when you get married is citizenship. If your proof is a birth certificate, you will need to get your birth certificate translated into Japanese (time and money). If your proof is a U.S. passport, you don't need to get it translated. Others want to invite (sponsor) friends or family to visit Okinawa from countries that require a Japanese tourist visa. Once again, proof of citizenship is demanded by the Japanese Embassies and Consulates in these countries.

Finally, a U.S. Tourist Passport will allow you to travel to countries that do not have an agreement with the United States to let you fly with only your ID card and orders. It is much more convenient to have a passport handy when you are planning such a trip. U.S. Tourist Passports can be requested through Military Personnel Division in Building 216 on Torii Station.

March, 2011