

Need a Passport? Read this first.

KEY TAKEAWAYS Only the U.S. Department of State can issue or renew a passport. A private courier cannot make the State Department process your application any faster than you can by applying directly through the government agency. Save money by completing the process yourself.

Passport couriers are private, for-profit companies that offer assistance with your passport application – typically by checking paperwork, hand-delivering applications to passport agencies and picking up completed passports. Some are “registered” with the State Department. But that only means the company is permitted to deliver and retrieve documents on your behalf – it does not mean that the government approves or endorses the courier or that you’ll get your passport processed any faster than going directly through the State Department on your own.

Why TINA.org is warning consumers

TINA.org conducted an [industry-wide investigation](#) that found that approximately 85% of active registered passport couriers have engaged in deceptive marketing. Thousands of consumer complaints reporting unexpected charges, missed travel, lost nonrefundable costs, and stranded passports or identity documents confirm the widespread harm caused by this deceptive marketing. Both the [State Department](#) and the [Federal Trade Commission](#) have previously issued consumer warnings about passport courier services. TINA.org has alerted the agencies to its recent findings.

Three misleading marketing tactics to beware of:

- 1. Government look-alikes.** Watch out for official-sounding names, seals, .us web addresses, website designs and claims such as “government partner,” “licensed Department of State passport expeditor” and “approved” or “authorized” by the government. The official site for passports and passport renewals is travel.state.gov.
- 2. Claims of obtaining passports in hours or days.** Be wary of couriers making unqualified claims of being able to speed up processing times or turn around passports in “24 hours” or even several days. Travelers must meet certain criteria to obtain a passport quickly and couriers do not have access to special shortcuts that passport applicants don’t have access to themselves.
- 3. A deceptively low advertised price.** Mandatory government fees, shipping costs and other service charges are often not included in the initial marketed price for courier services and may only appear during – or at the end of – the checkout or passport service process. Keep your eyes open for unexpected price hikes.

IF YOU’RE IN NEED OF A PASSPORT	HELPFUL LINKS
Start with the official site. Use travel.state.gov for forms and info on fees, processing times and urgent-travel options. Remember: forms and help are free. Do not pay for a passport application or for help catching errors in your completed form. Forms are free to download on the State Department website and the post office (or other acceptance facilities) can check for errors at no cost. Do not rely on national brands. A referral from FedEx, AAA, AARP, Staples or CLEAR does not mean the courier service isn’t engaged in deceptive marketing.	• OFFICIAL PASSPORT HELP: travel.state.gov/passports • REPORT FRAUD: ReportFraud.ftc.gov • REPORT AN AD: truthinadvertising.org/report-an-ad