

I-94 Travel Tips for Fewer Headaches

Labor & Employment Law Update

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Traveling to the U.S. can be grueling. By the time you arrive at Customs and Border Protection (CBP), all you want is to get through and be on your way. But diligence and a little extra time at CBP can save you headaches, money, and unnecessary travel later on.

I-94 Required for All Foreign Visitors to the U.S.

In addition to your passport, U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services requires foreign nationals to have an accurate I-94, also known as the Arrival/Departure Form. The I-94 tracks when you enter and leave the U.S. and proves you did so lawfully.

When you enter the U.S., CBP no longer stamps your passport. Records are kept and managed electronically on the CBP website and CBP One™ mobile app. You can print the most recent I-94 record at cbp.gov.

I-94 Mistakes

Despite the importance of I-94 accuracy, errors occasionally occur. Incorrect information – such as inaccurate entry or departure dates – could shorten your stay.

One foreign national client entered the country after getting an H-1B extension only to learn her I-94 had the old expiration date – in other words, it incorrectly showed only a week left on her visa. Although it was fixable, it required her to go to her original port of entry, Boston Logan International Airport.

F-1 student visas intentionally have no end date and are marked “duration of status” to allow students to stay for their full course of study. When an I-94 incorrectly shows an expiration date, it can complicate the student’s stay and must be corrected to allow the student to remain in the U.S. legally.

What Happens When Your I-94 Is Incorrect

It is important to ensure your information is correct at your initial port of entry – failure to do so may mean you need to return to that port of entry or go to a deferred inspection site, which may be far away. Although there are 328 U.S. ports of entry across air, sea, and land, only 70 are deferred inspection sites

where they will correct errors on your I-94 form. If your I-94 is incorrect, **CBP requires you to go in person** to the nearest port of entry or deferred inspection office.

How to Ensure Your I-94 Is Accurate

Applying for a provisional I-94 within seven days of anticipated entry to the U.S. improves your chances of securing an accurate, error-free form. Although it is not the final legal form and does not guarantee there will be no mistakes, it lets the port know you are coming and minimizes the risk of the record being incorrect or incomplete. You will still need to check online that your information, including entry and departure dates, are correct.

If you leave the U.S. by land and CBP does not stamp your I-94, make sure Canada or Mexico stamps your passport so you can prove your departure. Keeping receipts from your trip abroad is also a good idea for recordkeeping.

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