

## A DIPLOMATIC MISSION

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**Annotation:** in this article you can learn about diplomatic missions and it's immunity

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### Introduction

A **diplomatic mission** is a representative office of a national government located in another nation's territory. There are two main types:

An **embassy** is usually in the capital city at the destination country; its main function is to deal with all diplomatic **government-to-government issues**. If there are trade negotiations to be done, or if one government wants to complain about some action by the other, the embassy handles that. If an official delegation from one country plans to visit the other, the embassies will make the arrangements.

A **consulate** can be located in any (usually major) city and provides **consular services for individuals or businesses**. They can usually provide visas for foreigners planning to visit their country. For their own citizens, they provide passport services as well as birth registrations, marriage registrations, and various other sorts of advice or assistance. If you are in business and need advice about local regulations, your consulate is a good source. **Many embassies also provide consular services**; that is, they can also do everything a consulate can. There are some exceptions in countries where the capital city is not a major city; for example, the US embassy in Canberra, Australia, does not provide consular services, but there are consulates in the larger cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. In other places, some embassies maintain a separate "consular section" location to provide consular services in the capital city of the host country. Sometimes the services are split up somewhat differently; for example, the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi provides most consular services but there is a separate office for Indians wanting a visa. In some cases, one country's mission may process visa applications on behalf of another. For instance, in Singapore, the Danish embassy processes visa applications for all the Nordic countries, even though Sweden, Norway and Finland all operate their own embassies in Singapore. Similarly, British embassies often provide consular services on behalf of Commonwealth countries that do not have diplomatic representation in the host country.

### Visitor registration services

Most nations have a system that lets a citizen who is abroad long-term **register** so that their home government has a record of their presence. For many countries, you can do this online but for some you may need to actually visit a consular office. Registration is generally not needed for tourists except in high-risk areas, but it is recommended for anyone working abroad, studying abroad or retiring abroad. Registering will usually get you on a mailing list that brings email notifications from your government; these are often rather boring, but some are useful or interesting. This can be very important in some circumstances; for example, if a war or epidemic breaks out, your country's mission may be a good source of information and aid. In extreme cases, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, they may even arrange evacuation flights. Registering can also be useful if you need services from your home country, for example being able to vote in an election back home or wanting to ensure that your health insurance there remains valid.

In addition to providing those services, the **missions give fine parties** and may invite any citizens who are about. Diplomats tend to live rather well, with good stocks of booze (even in countries where alcohol is illegal except for diplomats), excellent cooks and good supplies of imported foods. In particular, they often have the specialties of the home country; for example, a Russian mission will usually be well provided with caviar and vodka. Of course, most of their parties are only for other diplomats, local government officials and other important people; the average traveller will not be invited, though a visiting business person or journalist might be. However, they also host celebrations on their national day or other important holidays — for example, Christmas or Thanksgiving for Americans — and almost anyone with the right passport can be invited to those. If you are abroad at such a time, it is certainly worth asking. An oddity about this is that the more out-of-the-way the place is, the better your chances are. An embassy in a major capital may already have its guest list filled, but one in Back-of-beyond-istan is very likely to welcome visitors. Missions may also sponsor or assist with **cultural events** to promote their country.

Diplomatic missions have special status under international law.

An embassy is considered entirely under the control of the sending nation, and local laws do not apply inside it. For instance, police from the host country may not enter the embassy compound without permission from the sending nation. A consulate does not enjoy this privilege, and local laws do still apply.

A few relatively senior diplomats are immune to arrest or prosecution by the host country regardless of the crime, whether for spying or more mundane offenses, and the only option is for the host to expel them. The assassination of Kim Jong-nam in Malaysia is one of the more infamous examples. Some mission staff may have only

a weaker "consular immunity"; they cannot be prosecuted for anything done on the job, but can be for other things. Honorary consuls are not entitled to any diplomatic or consular immunity. While the sending nation can waive immunity, it is not required to do so.

Diplomats' luggage or things shipped in a "diplomatic bag" are immune from customs inspection, although there have been instances where customs officials simply ignored this restriction.

Some cars have diplomatic license plates, usually a conspicuously different colour than other plates and/or with a specific alphanumeric sequence. For example in Ottawa, these plates are white-on-red and have "CD" (from French *corps diplomatique*) as the first two letters. They cannot be stopped for traffic violations and in some places some of them flagrantly ignore "no parking" signs. This is particularly noteworthy with United Nations diplomats in New York City.

Diplomats are usually exempt from taxes imposed by the host country; some missions to London insist that city's "congestion charge" is a tax, which they refuse to pay.

People travelling on diplomatic or official passports typically have different visa requirements from those travelling on ordinary passports.

Children born to diplomats abroad do not obtain the citizenship of the host country as a birthright, even where *jus soli* is otherwise offered unconditionally. Yet the host country may still grant them legal permanent residency as aliens.

Reciprocity is often required as a baseline for respect, and a good deal of diplomacy is basically tit for tat. If members of a representative country's diplomatic staff refuse to pay parking tickets then the host country will likely instruct their staff in their corresponding mission to do likewise. Expulsion by the host nation of another nation's diplomatic staff may well result in their staff being correspondingly expelled. This can extend to visa policy for standard travelers, with fees and requirements often demanding the same treatment between two countries.

### References

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