



SANS

Social & Affective Neuroscience Society

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International Travel Tips for Conference Attendees

Last updated: March 2026 | Please check official sources for the most current requirements and updates.

Important Notice: US entry requirements are subject to change without prior notice. The information below reflects policies as of early 2026, but we strongly encourage all attendees to verify current requirements with official government sources before traveling. SANS cannot intervene with embassies or immigration authorities on behalf of attendees.

Before You Travel

Visa Information

The type of visa or travel authorization you need depends on your nationality, country of residency, and the purpose of your visit. Most international conference attendees fall into one of the following categories:

Visa Waiver Program (ESTA) — For eligible nationalities

- Citizens of VWP countries (including most of Europe, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and others) may apply for ESTA instead of a visa.
- ESTA allows stays of up to 90 days and covers attending academic/professional conferences.
- Apply at the official site: esta.cbp.dhs.gov — do not use third-party sites, which often charge inflated fees.
- As of 2026, the ESTA fee has increased to \$40. Allow at least 72 hours for processing; apply earlier if possible.
- Ensure your ESTA contains the selfie photograph now required by CBP, or you may need to reapply.
- ESTA cannot be used if you have previously been denied entry to the US, overstayed a visa, or have certain criminal history.

B-1 Visa — Business/Conference Visitors (Non-VWP Countries)

- Attending or presenting at an academic or professional conference qualifies as a B-1 (business) activity.
- Apply at least 8–12 weeks in advance to allow for interview scheduling and processing. Wait times vary significantly by country — check your local US Embassy for current estimates.
- A new "visa integrity fee" of \$250 has been implemented (though collection has not started as of March 2026) for non-immigrant visa recipients as of 2026.
- Complete the DS-160 application form online at ceac.state.gov.
- You will need: a valid passport (valid for at least 6 months beyond your stay), conference registration confirmation, and supporting financial documents.

J-1 / F-1 Visa Holders

- Students and exchange scholars already in the US on F-1 or J-1 visas may attend the conference under their existing visa.
- If traveling internationally and re-entering the US, ensure your visa stamp is still valid before departing. An expired visa stamp does not necessarily mean loss of status, but you will need a valid stamp to re-enter.
- Consult your institution's international student/scholar office before any international travel.

Travel Restrictions (as of January 2026)

- Full entry bans are in effect for nationals of: Afghanistan, Burma, Burkina Faso, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Mali, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.
- Partial entry restrictions (affecting certain visa categories) apply to nationals of: Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Burundi, Cuba, Dominica, Gabon, The Gambia, Ivory Coast, Laos, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Venezuela, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
- If you are from an affected country and currently in the US with valid status, the ban does not affect your ability to remain. However, departure and re-entry may not be possible. Consult an immigration attorney before traveling.

⚠ Note: These restrictions are subject to legal challenges and policy changes. Check travel.state.gov and your country's US embassy for the latest.

Dual Nationality

- If you hold dual citizenship, consider which passport gives you the easiest entry pathway (e.g., a VWP-eligible passport vs. one requiring a visa).
- You may enter the US on whichever passport you choose, but be consistent — use the same passport each time you travel to the US to avoid discrepancies in CBP records.
- If one of your nationalities is from a country under a travel ban, US entry may be restricted even if you hold a second passport from a non-restricted country. Consult an immigration attorney for guidance.

Invitation / Support Letters

SANS can provide an official invitation letter upon request. This letter is useful for visa applications and for presenting at the port of entry. The letter will confirm:

- Your registration and participation in the SANS Annual Meeting
- The dates and location of the conference
- That no payment will be made to you by a US entity (if applicable)
- Contact details for the conference organizer

To request a letter, contact sans@podiumconferences.com. The following information is required:

- Your full name (as it appears on your passport)
- Your birthday
- Your institutional affiliation and job title
- Whether you are presenting (and your talk/poster title)
- Your visa type and the consulate or embassy where you are applying

General Pre-Travel Tips

- Check your passport expiration date. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months beyond your planned departure from the US.
- Bring printed copies of key documents: passport photo page, visa, conference registration confirmation, invitation letter, hotel/accommodation booking, and your institutional employment/enrollment verification letter.
- Obtain a letter from your employer or university confirming your position and the purpose of your trip (certificate of employment or enrollment).
- Be mindful about your online presence. As of late 2025, US visa applicants may have their social media reviewed. Ensure that your profiles are accurate and consistent with your application.
- Know your itinerary. Be prepared to state your full US itinerary, including accommodation addresses.
- Book refundable or flexible travel arrangements where possible given the current uncertainty in visa processing times.
- Consider travel insurance that covers trip cancellation due to visa denial.

Entering the US

At the Port of Entry

Upon arrival at a US airport, you will go through Customs and Border Protection (CBP). This process typically includes:

- Biometric data collection (digital fingerprints and photograph) for all non-US citizens, except Canadian citizens.
- Primary inspection: present your passport and travel documents to a CBP officer. This typically takes 2-5 minutes.

- Please ensure that all relevant documents, including printed copies of your conference letter and accommodation confirmation, are readily available and can be presented if requested.
- You will need to complete a Customs Declaration Form (CBP Form 6059B) or use an Automated Passport Control (APC) kiosk if available.
- Secondary inspection: a small number of travelers are referred for further questioning - this is not necessarily cause for alarm and is part of routine screening.
- A small number of travelers are referred for additional screening or questioning. This does not necessarily indicate a problem and is often part of routine processing. During secondary inspection, officers may review your documents in more detail and ask additional questions about your travel plans, immigration status, or items you are bringing into the country.

Carrying a visa or ESTA does not guarantee entry; it only allows a traveler to reach the port of entry and request admission. Carrying a visa or travel authorization does not guarantee entry. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port-of-entry have authority to permit or deny admission to the United States. So it is important to travel with complete and consistent documentation.

- **What CBP Officers May Ask**

Common questions at the border include:

- What is the purpose of your visit?
 - Answer specifically: "I am attending the Social Affective Neuroscience Society Annual Meeting in [city], from [date] to [date]." Optional: Have your conference invitation ready.
 - Where are you staying?
 - Have your hotel or accommodation address ready.
- How long are you staying?
- Are you carrying more than \$10,000 in cash or monetary instruments?

When describing your work, keep your description general but accurate. For example:

- Say: "I am a neuroscientist / cognitive scientist / professor / researcher."
- Avoid overly specific descriptions of sensitive research topics that may prompt unnecessary additional questioning (e.g., you can say "I study human behavior" rather than citing the specific name of your research program).
- Be calm, honest, and cooperative. Do not volunteer information beyond what is asked.

Electronic Device Searches

CBP has authority to search electronic devices (phones, laptops, tablets) at the border. While very few travelers are affected, be aware:

- Non-US citizens who refuse to provide access to devices may be denied entry.
- If you have concerns about sensitive research data or confidential information, consult your institution's IT department before traveling. Consider traveling with a "clean" device and accessing sensitive data remotely only after arrival.
- Remove or secure any sensitive personal or research data before crossing the border if privacy is a concern.

What to Declare

All travelers must declare:

- Food, plants, animal products, or soil.
- Any amounts of currency totaling over \$10,000 USD.
- Any items that may be prohibited or subject to duty.

Failure to declare items can result in fines, confiscation, or delays. When in doubt, declare it.

If You Encounter Difficulties

- Always remain calm and cooperative.
- You have the right to ask the reason for secondary inspection.
- You may request to contact your country's consulate or embassy.
- Keep a contact number for SANS and your institution available.
- If you are denied entry or detained, contact DHS TRIP (see Additional Resources) after the fact to address any issues with your travel record.

Traveling Within the US

Domestic Air Travel

- You will need a REAL ID-compliant document or a valid passport for domestic flights within the US. International visitors' passports are accepted.
- Arrive at domestic airports at least 90 minutes before departure (2 hours recommended during busy periods).
- TSA PreCheck is available to eligible international travelers through programs like Global Entry. If you travel to the US frequently, this may be worth applying for.

Ground Transportation

- Rideshare apps (Uber, Lyft) are widely available in most US cities and are generally the easiest option for conference attendees.
- Many conference hotels offer shuttle services to/from airports — check with the hotel in advance.
- A valid foreign driver's license is generally accepted for renting a car for short visits; some states may additionally require an International Driving Permit (IDP).

Practical Tips

- Currency: The US uses USD. Credit and debit cards are accepted almost everywhere. Carry some cash for smaller purchases or in areas with limited card infrastructure.
- Tipping: Tipping is standard in the US. 15–20% is expected at restaurants; smaller amounts for hotel housekeeping, taxi drivers, etc.
- Mobile connectivity: Check international roaming rates with your provider before departure. Alternatively, purchase a prepaid US SIM card or eSIM upon arrival.

- Health insurance: Ensure you have travel health insurance that covers the US, where medical costs can be very high.

Exiting the US

Before You Leave

- Ensure you depart before your authorized stay expires. Your authorized stay is shown on your I-94 admission record (not necessarily on your visa stamp).
- Check your I-94 record at i94.cbp.dhs.gov to confirm your admitted-until date.
- If you are on a B-1/B-2 visa or ESTA and need more time, you may apply to extend your stay — do so before your admission expires.
- Keep your departure boarding pass and any entry/exit records for future reference.

At the Airport

- Non-US citizens are subject to biometric exit screening at many major US airports. This is conducted at the gate and typically involves a photograph.
- Arrive at the international terminal at least 3 hours before departure.
- Ensure you have all items you brought into the US, as re-importing items purchased abroad may require declaring them upon your next US entry.

Miscellaneous Tips

For Attendees from Europe

- The EU's Entry/Exit System (EES) launched in October 2025, collecting biometric data for non-EU travelers crossing EU external borders. If you are connecting through Europe, this may affect your transit.
- EU's ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorization System) is expected to launch in late 2026, functioning similarly to ESTA. Monitor [eu-LISA.europa.eu](https://eu-lisa.europa.eu) for updates.

Social Media and Online Presence

- US visa authorities may review your public social media accounts as part of screening. Ensure that your profiles are professional and consistent with the information on your visa application.
- Do not deactivate accounts before applying, as this may raise red flags. Instead, ensure content is accurate and current.

Protecting Your Research Data

- Be cautious with sensitive or unpublished research data when traveling. CBP may search devices at the border without a warrant.
- Use encrypted storage and strong passwords on all devices.
- Consider using a VPN when connecting to public Wi-Fi networks.
- Back up important data to a secure cloud service before departing so you are not at risk of losing it if a device is detained or lost.

Connecting with Other Attendees

- SANS is providing a conference Digital Program to help attendees coordinate.
- The SANS organizing committee is available at sans@podiumconferences.com to assist with any travel-related questions or concerns.

Additional Resources

The following official websites provide the most current and authoritative information on US travel and immigration requirements. We encourage all attendees to consult these sources directly, as policies can change rapidly.

Official US Government Resources

- [US Department of State — Visa information and consular services](#)
- [US Customs and Border Protection — International visitor guidance](#)
- [ESTA Official Application Portal \(Visa Waiver Program\)](#)
- [I-94 Admission Record Lookup](#)
- [DS-160 Nonimmigrant Visa Application](#)
- [DHS TRIP — For travelers who have had entry difficulties or screening issues](#)
- [CBP Mobile Apps for Expedited Entry](#)

Travel Alerts and Current Information

- [US State Department — Alerts and Warnings for International Travelers](#)
- [US State Department Newsroom — Current visa services and restrictions](#)
- [CBP Newsroom — Latest policy announcements](#)

For Researchers and Academic Travelers

- [American Physical Society — International Visitors Guidance \(a model for academic conference attendees\)](#)
- [US Travel Association — Entry Guide for International Visitors](#)
- [Global Entry \(Trusted Traveler Program\) — For frequent visitors to the US](#)

This document was prepared by the Social & Affective Neuroscience Society to support international conference attendees. It does not constitute legal advice, and attendees are responsible for monitoring any updates issued by official sources. For specific immigration questions, consult a licensed immigration attorney or your institution's international office.