

# Getting through Customs

Welcome Home!

Do you have anything to declare?



For both the first-time traveler abroad and the seasoned wayfarer, clearing Customs upon returning home can be the most stressful and intimidating part of the trip.

However, no matter how one feels about this process, the U.S. Customs Service performs necessary and valuable functions.

The U.S. Customs Service protects the U.S. against illicit foreign drugs, safeguards protection, enforces immigration laws, protects us from contaminated agricultural products, and collects duties levied on foreign goods

## **What is the simplest way to avoid problems?**

You must declare the value of all items purchased on your trip. Save your receipts and store them in an easily accessible place so you can produce them upon request. Otherwise the agent will estimate values for you.

## **What if you are challenged on an item you did not buy abroad?**

It is possible that you may be questioned on items you really did bring from home. Expensive furs, camera equipment, electronics and jewelry may attract an agent's attention. If you regularly travel with similar high-ticket items, it's a good idea to routinely carry copies of your original receipts. Better safe than sorry.

**Must you unpack everything?** Travelers sometimes complain of having to unpack and repack their luggage at Customs. To minimize the chances of this, pack all declarable items separately. If an agent asks you to open your luggage for inspection, do so without delay.

**What should be declared?** You should declare any article you acquired while abroad and that you are carrying with you upon re-entering the U.S. Items shipped ahead are assessed duty separately, as they enter the country. If you are in doubt about an item, declare it and ask the agent if it should be included. Penalties are severe for failure to declare or undervaluing an item.

**What are the penalties for failure to declare a purchase?** If you fail to declare an item it can actually be seized by Customs. You can also be assessed a fine equal to the value of that article. In some cases you may also be subject to criminal prosecution.

**What is exempt?** In general, the overseas traveler is allowed a \$400 exemption allowance; duty on articles above this amount is equal to 10% of the retail value where purchased. There are certain limitations on liquors, cigarettes and cigars. The items you purchase must be for your personal or household use. You must have been abroad for at least 48 hours and you can use the exemption only once in a 30-day period.

**Are there any exceptions to these rules?** Yes. Duties vary not only according to country of origin but by type of article, so these are only general guidelines.