

International Mailing Services for U.S. Mailers: What's Available and What's Different

When mail is sent to another country by the United States Postal Service (USPS), the country of destination determines how the mail is handled and how any services, such as registered mail delivery, insurance, return receipt, express delivery and others, are carried out. Whether services are offered between particular countries dictated by international accords. While some of these terms are set out in treaties between the U.S. and another country, most are set by the Acts and other agreements among the members of the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the U.N.-specialized agency responsible for postal affairs between its members.

What follows is a quick primer of the services that mailers ask me about most often and how they vary internationally when mailing through the USPS. Details can be found in the USPS's [International Mail Manual](#), commonly referred to as the IMM. The hyperlinks below are to the relevant section of the IMM. [Individual country listings](#) in the IMM provide details on what services are available in each country.

The restriction on what cannot be sent to certain countries is listed in the USPS's country listings. It is also important to note that not all countries provide parcel service for fragile or cumbersome items.

Delivery Related Services

Registration: Registered mail provides a receipt that an item was mailed and some chain-of-custody information. The specifics on the chain of custody for international mail may be less detailed than for domestic mail items, which remain in the control of the USPS until delivery. For items sent to other countries via the USPS, [International Registered Mail](#) is limited to First-Class Mail International items. Regardless of the declared value of an international registered item, there is a maximum amount of indemnity payable for lost, damaged, or missing contents limited to the amount set by the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

Service	UPU required?
registration service for all inbound letter-post items	mandatory
registration for outbound priority and airmail letter-post	mandatory
registration for outbound non-priority and surface letter-post to destinations without priority or airmail service	mandatory
registration for outbound non-priority and surface letter-post to destinations with a priority or airmail service	optional

Confirmation of Delivery: While the postal operator will report on delivery of the item, registration does not provide the recipient's signature as proof of delivery. The USPS offers [Return Receipt](#) service for Registered Mail items and Priority Mail International insured parcels. Return Receipt service can be purchased for letters to those countries that offer this service. For parcels, the service is more limited and many countries do not offer a delivery confirmation. Some countries restrict this service to Registered Mail items only. The receipt is returned to the sender by air mail, except as noted below.

Service	UPU required?
advice of delivery for incoming registered and recorded delivery or insured letter-post and parcels	mandatory
advice of delivery for outbound registered and recorded delivery or insured letter-post and parcels	optional
delivery to the addressee in person of registered, recorded delivery or insured letter-post	optional
recorded delivery for letter-post	optional

One year after the expansion of [electronic international delivery confirmation](#) for parcels to 26 countries, that service was suspended in seven of those countries (Brazil, Denmark, France, Gibraltar, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal). The countries to which this service continues are Australia, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The USPS suggested that customers who need tracking for shipments should purchase Global Express Guaranteed, Priority Mail Express International, or Priority Mail International (but not Priority Mail International Flat Rate Envelopes and Small Flat Rate Boxes).

Express Delivery: The USPS offers two express delivery services, [Global Express Guaranteed](#) (offered in conjunction with FedEx) and [Priority Mail Express International](#). While they serve about 180 countries, there are some countries to which the services are not offered and Global Express Guaranteed is limited to particular cities in some countries. Specific documentation is required for each service and, of course, import and export restrictions must be followed.

Service	UPU required?
express delivery service for letter-post and parcels	optional

Financial Services:

Insurance: The USPS mailing service and the destination country both affect insurance coverage, with some countries having no or little insurance available. Limits for insurance on [Global Express Guaranteed](#), [Priority Mail Express International](#), and [Priority Mail International](#) vary. The individual country listings provide information on coverage or lack of it.

The USPS does not offer an international cash-on-delivery option.

Service	UPU required?
Insurance for letter-post and parcels	optional
Cash-on-delivery (COD) service for letter-post and parcels	optional

Business Reply Service:

While offering Business Reply to mailers is optional, all UPU member countries are obliged to operate an [International Business Reply Service](#) (IBRS) "return" service. As with the domestic version, the IBRS has very specific requirements for the envelope or post card. The endorsements on the reply card or envelope are different from those used domestically.

[International Reply Coupons](#) are no longer sold by the USPS but may still be redeemed.

Service	UPU required?
international business reply service	optional
international reply coupons	optional

About the author

Merry Law, president of [WorldVu LLC](#), oversees their publications and worldwide marketing programs. She is editor of the authoritative *Guide to Worldwide Postal-Code and Address Formats* and author of *Best Practices for International Mailings*. Merry is a member of the Universal Postal Union POC Addressing Work Group and of the U.S. International Postal and Delivery Services Federal Advisory Committee. She can be contacted at mlaw@worldvu.com.

About the sponsor

GrayHair Software, Inc. is an industry leader in the development of critical services that improve business mail, including Intelligent Mail® barcode assignment, mail tracking, address quality, presort analysis, postage reconciliation, mail monitoring, consulting and global address validation and global hybrid mail services. GrayHair offers consulting services through its GrayHair Advisors division, which provides

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