Ambassador Jeff Hovenier may be our new Ambassador to Kosovo, but he is no stranger to Kosovo and its history. In 1999, at the U.S. Mission to the OSCE, in 2006 as part of the UN-led Vienna Process talks, and later as part of the National Security Council, Ambassador Hovenier advocated for U.S. interests in ensuring an independent, sovereign Kosovo. Since his arrival in January, he has been busy meeting with government leaders, civil society activists, and Kosovans, as well as re-connecting with old friends and meeting new ones. You can watch this introductory video to hear more about his career and reflections on how Kosovo has grown over the past 14 years.

The Ambassador believes all Americans in Kosovo should take advantage of the unique opportunity they have to partner with their neighbors, friends, and family to help this young democracy advance and flourish. He’s impressed by the number of U.S. citizens in Kosovo doing so already.

In response to being asked about his relationship with U.S. citizens in Kosovo, the Ambassador responded:

As the U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, I have the responsibility to help protect America’s interests and promote America’s values here in Kosovo. The Department of State and our embassies and consulates abroad have no greater responsibility than the protection of U.S. citizens overseas, and I want the U.S. Embassy in Pristina to be a welcoming and supportive place for U.S. citizens and U.S. businesses in Kosovo. While I have been appointed by President Biden as his personal representative to Kosovo, I also represent the American people and America’s values here, including the U.S. citizen community here in Kosovo.

The Embassy wants to support and assist U.S. citizens. To better support U.S. citizens in Kosovo, we recommend that you register with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Being in STEP enables us to send you important information to help you make informed decisions about your travel plans or in the event of an emergency.

The Ambassador hopes to meet many of you as he goes about his duties and travels through Kosovo in the coming months and at the upcoming Town Hall meeting on April 22.
Passport Fee Increase

All passport fees have increased by $20 as of the beginning of 2022. Fees for other services remain at the same price. You can find the new cost of a passport via the fee calculator on travel.state.gov.

In general, a minor’s passport under the age of 16 now costs $135.00. An adult renewal costs $130.00. To be sure, check the fee calculator above.

Section of the Month — General Services Office

GSO, the General Services Office, is what keeps the Embassy functioning. It has a catch all of duties, from ordering and buying supplies to making Embassy housing ready to live in. Anything that involves logistics for the Embassy and its staff involves the General Services Office. GSO is one of the larger departments in the Embassy; it has many local staff working for the section as the eyes, ears, and hands of the Embassy. Because they are United States government employees, they cannot work for outside entities; their job is to help the Embassy, not the wider community.

Warehouse staff manage and stock all items stored in the Embassy’s warehouse located on the Embassy compound. Contracting staff administer all the Embassy’s contracts and check to ensure they are being followed. Housing staff manages housing contracts and housing issues for American staff living in Kosovo. Stock room staff manage office supplies and keep the Embassy in paper and pens. Whenever things need to be bought for the Mission, the procurement staff makes sure the order goes through, while the shipping people get it to us at the Embassy. Travel staff make reservations for official travel and keep us apprised of airline schedules and hotel quality and availability.

These people help you by enabling us to perform our duties for you. They do it every day, and mainly without credit for the hard work they do.
Return To The US On Your Expired Passport

As of May, 21, 2021, U.S. citizens can use their expired U.S. passports to return to the United States through June 30, 2022. This applies only to U.S. citizens whose passports expired on or after January 1, 2020.

Expired passports cannot be used to travel from the United States to an international destination or to travel to a foreign country for any length of stay longer than an airport connection en route to the United States or United States territory.

U.S. citizen travelers can use an expired passport if they are currently abroad seeking to return to the United States, they are flying directly to the United States, a United States territory, or have only short-term transit through a foreign country. Moreover, the expired passport must be undamaged and in their possession and originally valid for 10 years. For individuals who were under 15 years of age when the passport was issued, their expired passport must have originally valid for 5 years.

Remember to renew your passport early at the U.S. Embassy to avoid this problem! Email us at PristinaACS@state.gov for an appointment. Passports are ready approximately three weeks after your appointment in most cases.

Road Sign Shapes

Road signs give messages to drivers. But why do they look so varied, from shape to color? It turns out that the color and shape of a sign are part of the message. Here’s a short guide to the meanings of sign shapes and colors in Europe.

Red signs can be in any shape, but they always have the same message: this is important! Watch out! Obey! Just like a red light, they tell you to stop or warn of danger ahead. Signs with red borders are about safety threats – animal crossings, road work, tunnels, or even check points. The insides of the red bordered signs are usually white or yellow. You can tell what the warning is by looking at the picture in the center.

Squares and rectangles are blue, green, or white. The blue and green ones give highway information – how far to the next exit, what it is, that there is an exit, and so on. White ones give information about city limits, truck routes, crosswalks, residential areas, and community buildings.

Blue backgrounds circles are information regarding the local area – directional areas, traffic circles, and speed limits. They can also tell of bike lanes, cross walks, and parking areas. The information on them is limited to the road itself, just as blue squares and rectangles are. When there is a red line on them, it means not to do the action, or that it’s the end of a particular speed limit area.

Triangles mean change: you need to merge into traffic by yielding, there’s a railroad crossing, a lane is disappearing or being added, construction, bumps, slippery when wet, or you are about to go up or down a steep hill. Whatever it is, you need to look around and be prepared.
Unseen Kosovo—Petrovic Winery (Vinarija Petrovic)

Imagine traveling weeks by boat, coach, and train to reach a place where you don’t speak the language and everything is novel, different, and confusing. This is what Great Grandfather Petrovic did in 1895. He traveled from his hometown in Kosovo to San Francisco, starting a new life and gaining work as a stone mason. He was successful and saved a good sized nest egg.

Then imagine doing it in reverse – coming home a decade later at the behest of his family, who had found him a bride. He did this, too. Then he took his money and bought land in and around the area known as Velika Hoca. He did it by the law – getting a deed from the local Ottoman officials. Thirty hectares were his.

Visits to Vinarija Petrovic can include anything from a small rakija tasting over a wine barrel to a full stay in their guest rooms off the courtyard. Food is cooked by Mama Petrovic, and it is traditional, plentiful, and delicious. It is best to make reservations for anything more than a small tasting or a stop in to buy some of his liquors. The Petrovices are proud of their century long tradition. Celebrate it with them. If you want to visit, you can make reservations by calling 049 554 025.