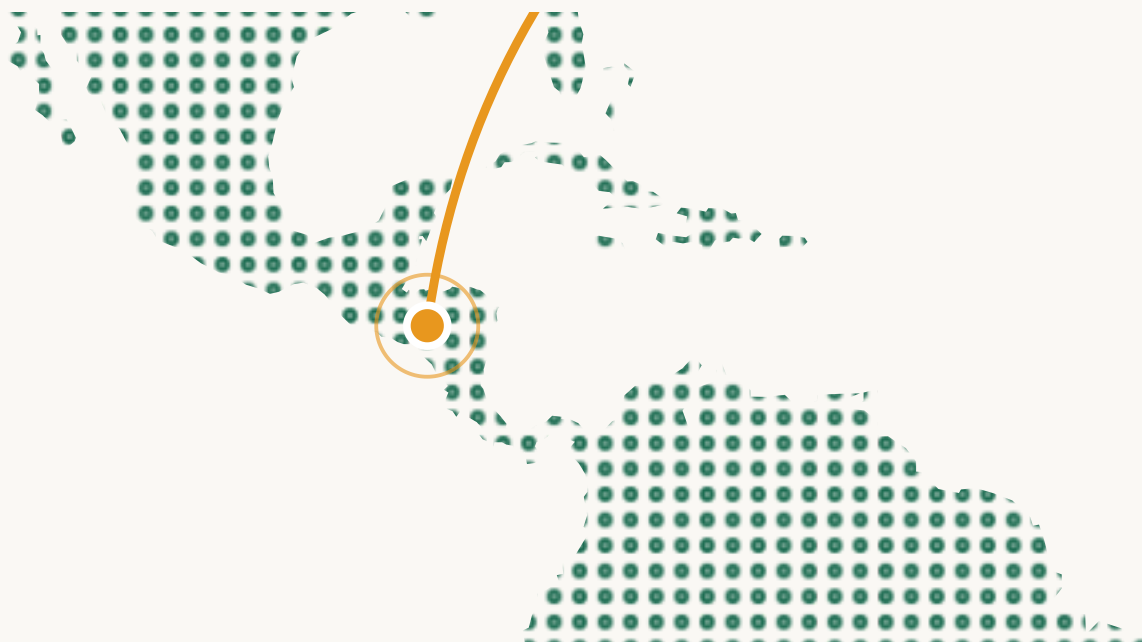


GUIDE

How international repatriation works

Steps, documents and who is responsible



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IN 30 SECONDS

- ✓ Repatriation is the transfer of a person who has died – or their ashes – from the country where they died to another country, usually their home country.
- ✓ Several parties take part: the family, the sending funeral home, the airline, the authorities, the consulate and the receiving funeral home.
- ✓ The exact list of documents is set by the provider and the authorities in each case. Here you'll see the ones usually requested.
- ✓ Transferring ashes has different rules from transferring the body.

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What is repatriation?

Repatriation is the transfer of a person who has died from the country where they died to another country – almost always their home country – for their farewell and burial or cremation there. The body can be transferred or, if the family chooses cremation, the cremated remains.

Every transfer crosses at least two sets of rules: those of the place of departure and those of the destination country. That's why no single list of requirements fits every case: it's defined by the responsible providers and the authorities in each place.

Who takes part

The family

Makes the decisions, authorizes the services and provides the information and documents requested.

The sending funeral home

Licensed where the death occurred. It collects and prepares the person, obtains the local permits and tenders the transfer to the airline, according to local rules.

The airline or cargo agent

Transports according to its own rules. The person who has died travels as cargo, not as passenger baggage.

The authorities

Vital records, health and the medical examiner at departure; on arrival, the destination country's authorities, as applicable.

The consulate

Of the destination country. It often issues or reviews documents for the transfer of its citizens.

The receiving funeral home

Licensed in the destination country. It receives the person, handles the local steps within its scope and performs the services the family chooses.

A coordinator (optional)

The communication point between the family and all the parties. A coordinator does not perform the regulated services.

The stages, one by one

1 First contact and case information

The person's details, where they are and who decides for the family are gathered.

2 The family's decisions

Body or ashes, destination city, ceremonies and budget.

- 3 The provider determines the requirements**
The sending funeral home, together with the receiving funeral home and the airline, defines which documents, preparation and packaging the case requires. This is the step that organizes everything else.
- 4 Documents and authorizations**
The authorities issue the death certificate and permits; the consulate acts under its own rules; the family signs the authorizations and provides what's requested.
- 5 Preparation and transport**
The licensed provider prepares the person according to the case's requirements and tenders them to the airline, which transports them as cargo.
- 6 Arrival and services at destination**
The receiving funeral home receives the person, handles the local steps within its scope and performs the services the family chose.

Documents usually requested

This list is a guide. The final list is determined by the provider and the authorities in your case, and some documents apply only in certain countries.

DOCUMENT	USUALLY ISSUED OR PROVIDED BY
Death certificate (certified copy)	The vital records authority where the death occurred. In the United States, the state's vital records office.
Certified translation	A translator, when the destination requires the document in another language.
Burial-transit or disposition permit	The local authority; usually obtained by the sending funeral home.
Embalming or preparation certificate	The licensed professional who performed the preparation, when applicable.
Statement of cause of death or of no communicable disease	The health authority or physician, when the destination country requires it.
Consular documentation	The destination country's consulate, under its own rules.
Passport or ID of the person who died	Provided by the family.
ID and signed authorization of the responsible family member	The family.

Airway bill

The airline or cargo agent, through the funeral home.

❗ Some countries require certain documents to carry an apostille or legalization. An apostille is a single certificate that replaces legalization among the countries party to the Hague Convention ¹; if a country isn't a party, consular legalization is used. The provider or the authority will tell you whether it applies.

If the transfer is into the United States

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) publishes the federal public-health requirements for bringing human remains into the country ², based on the regulation at 42 CFR 71.55 ³. Among them:

- The remains must arrive with a death certificate stating the cause of death; if it isn't in English, with an English translation.
- Remains that have not been cremated must travel in a leak-proof container.
- That container requirement does not apply to cremated remains.
- If the person is known or suspected to have died of an infectious disease and was neither embalmed nor cremated, a CDC permit may be required.

State and airline requirements also apply. The receiving funeral home in the United States confirms what applies to your case.

If a U.S. citizen dies in another country

The U.S. embassy or consulate in that country can help the family communicate with local authorities and with the transfer documents ⁴. According to the State Department's Foreign Affairs Manual, the consular officer does not decide on the remains: that responsibility, including the costs, rests with the legal representative, the surviving spouse or the next of kin, and arrangements follow local law ⁵.

Transferring cremated remains

When the family chooses cremation, the transfer is often simpler, though it has its own rules:

- **On the plane:** in the United States, TSA allows cremated remains in carry-on bags if the container can be screened by X-ray. It suggests a lightweight container, such as wood or plastic; if the image is opaque, it won't be allowed, and officers won't open the container even if asked ⁶. Some airlines don't accept them in checked bags: check with yours.

- **By mail:** the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) publishes how to package and ship cremated remains ⁷. For international shipments, it depends on what the destination country allows.
- **At the destination:** the country may require documents such as the death certificate and the cremation certificate. Ask the consulate or the receiving funeral home before you travel.

What affects the costs

We don't publish prices because every case is different. These are the factors that usually matter:

- Distance, route and airline.
- Whether the body or the cremated remains are transferred.
- The preparation and container required by the destination and the airline.
- Documents, translations and consular steps.
- The services the family chooses in the destination country.

Ask each provider for an itemized written estimate before you authorize anything. In the United States, the FTC's Funeral Rule gives you the right to a written price list and to a written statement of what you're buying before you pay ⁸.

Frequently asked questions

Can I travel on the same flight as my loved one?

Often yes, as a passenger; your loved one travels as cargo, under the airline's rules. Ask the provider about the route and schedule before you buy your ticket.

Who chooses the airline?

The provider responsible for the transfer, based on the route, availability and each airline's rules. The family can share its preferences.

What happens if a document is missing?

The transfer may stop until it's resolved. The provider will tell you what's missing and who needs to issue it.

Can remains be repatriated to any country?

It depends on each country's rules and on providers being available at the destination.

Official sources

1. Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH). [Apostille Section](https://www.hcch.net/en/instruments/conventions/specialised-sections/apostille)
<https://www.hcch.net/en/instruments/conventions/specialised-sections/apostille>

2. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [Importation of Human Remains into the U.S. for Burial, Entombment, or Cremation](#)

<https://www.cdc.gov/importation/human-remains/index.html>

3. Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (eCFR). [42 CFR § 71.55](#)

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/chapter-I/subchapter-F/part-71/subpart-D/section-71.55>

4. USAGov. [What to do if a U.S. citizen dies abroad](#)

<https://www.usa.gov/death-abroad>

5. U.S. Department of State · Foreign Affairs Manual. [7 FAM 250 — Disposition of Remains](#)

<https://fam.state.gov/fam/07fam/07fam0250.html>

6. U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA). [Cremated Remains](#)

<https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/items/cremated-remains>

7. U.S. Postal Service (USPS). [Publication 139 — How to Package and Ship Cremated Remains](#)

<https://about.usps.com/publications/pub139/welcome.htm>

8. U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC). [The FTC Funeral Rule](#)

<https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/ftc-funeral-rule>

Links to the official sources. Requirements change: always check the current version.

General information

This guide is general information. It is not legal, medical, immigration or tax advice and does not replace a professional licensed in your jurisdiction. Requirements, timelines and costs are determined by the providers and authorities in each case and may change. Eternimax coordinates between the parties and does not itself perform funeral or other regulated services.

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