**AURA OI Visas: Information, Policies, & Procedures**

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V1: Jun 2011

V2: Nov 2013/Jun 2014, updates to contact information, including “AURA HR”

V3: Nov 2014, update about RUTs

V4: Apr 2017, update timescale for OI visa renewals, per communication from Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding OI visa requirements.

**Introduction: What is “OI”**

**“Organización Internacional”**

OI stands for “Organización Internacional”. This is the status that the Chilean government gives to certain international government-related organizations operating in Chile. The prototype organization is the United Nations’ Economic Commission for Latin America, or CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina) in Spanish.

**A bit of history**

When the U.S. national observatory began pursuing an interest in establishing an optical observatory in Chile, AURA established itself as a legal entity in Chile. AURA was the first to bring a large-scale international observatory to Chile. Chilean law gave the responsibility of hosting the international observatories to the University of Chile, and provided that these international observatories could operate in Chile enjoying some of the privileges bestowed upon CEPAL. Later the law was changed such that AURA and other international observatories hosted by the University of Chile received the same privileges as the European Southern Observatory (that has a treaty directly with the Chilean government, and doesn’t rely upon the role of University of Chile as host), and that ESO receives the same privileges as CEPAL.

**Caring for our OI status**

We are special guests in Chile. As such, AURA, and all employee OI holders, benefit from numerous legal, juridical, economic, and diplomatic immunities, including the right to work and exemption from all local income taxes.

However, AURA and its employees can lose this special status. Unlike ESO, whose immunities are granted by virtue of a bi-lateral treaty, AURA’s privileges are derived from Chilean legislation, which can be amended or repealed unilaterally by the Chilean Congress. As a result of the spirit in which the Chilean government has granted the privileges, AURA has always been careful to adhere to long-standing expatriate accreditation protocols and guidelines.

**Upon Arrival: Getting your OI visa**

**How to get one**

New AURA expatriate employees initially come into Chile on a standard Chilean tourist visa. For US citizens, this is usually an automatic process when entering the country. Citizens of other countries should check the Chilean embassy web pages and/or with the AURA HR department to see if there are any additional requirements for their country.

Upon arrival, the new expatriate employee should immediately contact an AURA HR representative to arrange for the visa processing. This process must be started within 10 days of arrival.

Checklist of necessary information:

* Passport(s)
* Curriculum Vitae in Spanish
* Two 4 by 4 cm recent photographs in color with solid blue background
* Other Applicable Spousal and Dependent Documents

The AURA HR representative will give the paperwork to the AURA-O Director’s Office (Camila Ibarlucea), who will process and send it to AURA-O’s Santiago office. AURA-O staff there will take it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the visa will be issued. Once processed, the employee and family members will have a visa in their passports and each will receive a blue identification card (known as a “carnet” in Chile). That card will have an ID number, or RUT, which is the key identification number the new residents will need for many uses while living in Chile, from opening a bank account and registering for schools to daily practices like purchases with a credit card.

The process of getting the OI visa, from the time the paperwork is turned in to Camila until the return of the passport is approximately 3 to 4 weeks. We therefore encourage the new employee to plan accordingly, and make no plans to travel internationally during this period.

**Who must get one**

**AURA Employees**

All non-Chilean citizens working for AURA in Chile must apply for an OI visa. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

**Spouses**

All non-Chilean spouses of AURA employees must apply for an OI visa. However, exceptions may be possible if the appropriate Chilean authorities determine that the spouse does not require a visa for residence in Chile. *AURA will require the spouse to provide the necessary documentation in such cases.* If residency is approved on this basis, the spouse would not benefit from the normal privileges and immunities granted with OI status.

**Children**

AURA will seek the accreditation of all unmarried non-Chilean children up to the age of 21 and unmarried non-Chilean children up to the age of 25 who are undertaking full-time studies at a Chilean educational institution.

**Birth of Children**

Regardless of the parents’ citizenship, ALL children born in Chile are automatically eligible for Chilean citizenship. It is the responsibility of the parents to register the newborn in the Chilean system. Children born in Chile therefore cannot generally apply for or gain an OI visa through AURA.

Where one or both parents are non-Chilean, the parents can choose to register the child with their respective Embassy, and obtain citizenship from the country of parental citizenship. The child would then have dual or multiple citizenship, and depending on the laws of the country of origin, could keep or abandon his or her Chilean citizenship at age 18. Parents should consult with their respective Embassies as the rules governing dual citizenship vary substantially from country to country.

**OI Visa Benefits**

**Privileges and Immunities**

The following are some of the most important privileges and immunities granted to AURA accredited employees.

* Exemption from any form of direct taxation on salaries and allowances paid by AURA.
* Exemption, together with employee spouses and dependents, from immigration restrictions and alien registration
* LIMITED immunity from personal arrest or detention
* LIMITED immunity from seizure of personal and official baggage
* Freedom to maintain foreign security accounts while on official duty in Chile.
* The right to import, free of customs duties and other prohibitions, furniture and personal effects, including one new motor vehicle (used vehicles are not allowed) during the first year of taking up AURA duties in Chile. Details on these specific benefits, including any dollar limitations, should be discussed with an AURA HR representative and/or AURA-O (Camila).

**Limited Immunity**

These major privileges and immunities are granted to AURA under provisions of Chilean law. They are intended to protect and enable AURA employees while on official business. They are NOT intended for the personal benefit of employees. As such, the AURA-O Head of Mission can waive the immunity of any employee that may misuse these privileges.

It is important that all employees holding an OI visa recognize that AURA will at all times co-operate with Chilean authorities in the proper administration of justice and Chilean law. AURA is here as a guest of the Chilean Government, and is careful to observe and respect all Chilean laws.

**Purchasing and Importing Automobiles**

AURA expatriate employees are entitled to import or purchase one new motor vehicle within the first year of Chilean residency within the limits of their total importation allowance. The principle advantage is that the buyer pays no VAT tax (19%), and can sometimes buy the car at a diplomatic discount. The disadvantages are primarily incurred when the employee wants to sell the car – as the buyer will have to pay some part of the taxes foregone when originally purchased. Another option is to purchase a vehicle locally, and NOT make use of the OI importation benefit—rather paying initially the taxes at the time of purchase. While more expensive, this approach will generally ensure less paperwork and a quicker sale of the vehicle upon leaving Chile. However, because there important details regarding the above options, it is important to discuss the variations and requirements and procedures necessary to import, own and/or purchase a vehicle in Chile with the AURA-O legal representative, Hernán Bustos.

AURA-O also has an automobile rental fleet that is available for both short and long term leases at reasonable rates. The fleet is often fully booked, however, and if interested in this option, the employee should see Camila Ibarlucea upon arrival in Chile. One “rule of thumb” in renting from AURA-O vs. purchasing a car is how long a stay is contemplated with AURA-O in Chile. Generally, if the employee knows that he or she will be in Chile for less than 2 years, it may be advantageous to rent from AURA-O. Again, though, this is personal decision, and can be discussed with coworkers who have had experience with all the options.

**OI License Plates**

As a holder of an OI visa, AURA employees currently have the right to request a maximum of one blue OI license plates for personal vehicles (independent of whether the vehicle was purchased with or without duty free allowance). Details on “first time” and renewal procedures for obtaining OI plates should be discussed with Camila Ibarlucea. It is the employee’s responsibility to note when a renewal is required and provide the necessary documentation to Camila upon request. The advantage of registering a car with OI plates is that one does not have to pay the annual vehicle tax (“permiso de circulación”). On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requests that those who have OI plates also show they have liability insurance.

**OI Visa Limitations**

**Unique RUT**

The OI visa is accompanied by a unique identification number (known in Chile as a RUT or RUN) and a blue identification (ID) card. The ID card is slightly different from that of Chilean nationals and residents, as it is issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (not the Ministry of the Interior), and indicates that the holder is an “international person”, associated to a “mission” (AURA). This ID card is linked to the OI Visa, and as such must be renewed every two years along with the visa.

Holders of the OI visa and associated RUT card **cannot** solicit another RUT or RUN from Chilean authorities.

Occasionally, holders of an OI RUT have problems with certain services that make assumptions about national RUTs (usually that they do not start with 49). In such cases, the holder should report the issue to Camila Ibarlucea, so that she can try to help resolve the issue. AURA-O will do everything it can to help resolve the issue, but cannot promise success. In no case shall an OI visa holder use this as a reason to try to obtain a Chilean RUT or RUN.

**Spouse work limitations**

Spouses and partners that hold an OI visa cannot work in Chile. The exception is employment with OI institutions, such as AURA, ESO, Carnegie, an Embassy, or a UN organization.

Volunteering, however, is perfectly OK, and is encouraged.

Under some circumstances, however, it may be possible for a spouse to “give up” their OI status and legally work in Chile. This option is very infrequently used, and details on what the process entails (and the potential negative ramifications) should be discussed with the AURA-O Director/Head of Mission.

**Participation in Chilean political activities**

AURA expatriate employees or their spouses or dependents may NOT engage in ANYpolitical activity, including rallies, protests, or other gatherings.

Also, expatriate employees may lend NO support (written, verbal or financial) to any political party or candidate, or participate in elections or campaigns in any way.

**Maintaining your OI Visa**

**Renewal Process**

At two year intervals, AURA employees must renew their OI visa. It is important to allow for **at least 60 days** between giving Camila Ibarlucea the passport and having all the necessary documentation returned. This means that employees must plan carefully to ensure that no foreign travel is scheduled during the time the passport(s) are being processed in Santiago.

AURA employees are responsible for handling Camila their passport and documentation on time in order to renew their visa as well as their families ‘visa. The noncompliance of their renewal can lead into a fine of more than $1,000 USD that must be paid by the employee.

**OI and Passport Renewal Responsibilities**

In the case of OI visas and passports, the responsibility for the providing all of the necessary documents in a timely manner for processing by the Ministry rests with the AURA employee.

However, AURA will normally send expatriate employees a reminder approximately 2 months before documents are required for OI renewals. It is critical that this reminder is acknowledged, and that the expatriate employee works with AURA to plan the on-time submission of all necessary passports and other documents. Documents not received by the Ministry in sufficient time to permit renewal of the OI visa can result in a substantial fine to the visa holder.

AURA will also endeavor to send a reminder to employees when their passports are within 3 months of expiration. **Passport renewal is the responsibility of the employee and is consider a personal errand**. OI renewals cannot be processed without a passport that is current for the full period of the OI visa renewal.

**Canceling the OI Visa**

**Leaving Chile**

When an AURA employee is preparing to leave Chile (and the AURA payroll), the following document timescale must be followed:

**Not less than 9 weeks** before a departure date, the passport must be turned in to Camila Ibarlucea, who will forward it to Santiago for processing by the Ministry. The Ministry requires that the passport be handed over at least two months prior to the departure date. The OI visa will be “annulled” and replaced with a standard visa with a specific end date.

No less than 10 days before the departure date, the employee’s ID card (“carnet”) must also be surrendered for cancelation by the Ministry. Before surrendering the ID card, it is critical that the employee close all local bank accounts and/or sell any automobiles or other property purchased in Chile. After the ID card is annulled, the employee cannot complete any legal transaction in Chile.

Employees leaving Chile are encouraged to visit Camila with at least 9-10 weeks in advance so that we can create a plan with timescales to help you go through this end of mission process.

**Retiring**

The process for leaving the AURA payroll and “retiring” in Chile is essentially the same as above — except that when the passport is submitted for processing (and cancellation of the OI visa), AURA will inform the Ministry that the employee intends to seek a permanent resident visa and continue to live in Chile. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will emit a letter stating that the person will like to apply for a Chilean resident visa in Extranjeria. The ensuing process for obtaining a permanent resident visa is essentially a private function that does not involve AURA. However, the AURA-O and HR staff are available to discuss this option and some of the necessary requirements for seeking such a visa.

**Summary**

In summary, OI status is special. It has both benefits and limitations. Generally, though the benefits far outweigh any limitations, and it is AURA policy that every effort is made to ensure that this special status is retained for current and future employees.

**SIGNATURE**

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I have read this document, and I understand and accept the OI Visa, including the advantages and disadvantages described here as well as those that may develop in the future. I agree to the limitations that accompany this special status within Chile, and promise to abide by the conditions associated with holding an OI visa in Chile.

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Signature of OI visa holder (or guardian) Date