

Sao Tome and Principe

This guide is compiled from the IAM Country Guide for reference only. Customs regulations change frequently; please consult your Seapoe relocation consultant for the latest requirements before shipping.

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Documents

Documents required for importing used household goods, personal effects, and related shipments.

Required Documents

- Original bill of lading (OBL) or air waybill (AWB)
- Copy of valid passport
- Copy of residence permit
- São Tomean tax card (*cartão de contribuinte*) from the owner of the goods, or from their company or organization
- Original valued inventory list in Portuguese, dated and signed by the owner of the goods, with values declared in Euros or USD
- Packing list in Portuguese, French, or English
- Letter of employment in Portuguese, stamped by the company or organization in São Tomé
- Original certificate of change of residence (*certificado de mudança de residência*)
- Letter of exemption (returning citizens)
- Diplomatic exemption stamped by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (diplomats only)

Specific Information

Portuguese is the official language and all primary documents must be in Portuguese. The valued inventory must be in Portuguese and signed by the shipper.

The *cartão de contribuinte* (taxpayer identification card) is required for all importers, including those qualifying for exemptions. If the owner does not yet have one, it must be obtained from the relevant São Tomean authority -- the destination agent can assist with this process, but it should be initiated before shipment arrives.

A certificate of change of residence is required as proof of genuine transfer. Returning citizens must additionally provide a letter of exemption from the relevant authority.

Extra charges, including port fees, storage rent, and demurrage, cannot be avoided at destination and should be budgeted for. Shipments that arrive before documentation is complete will begin accruing storage charges immediately.

All solid wood packing materials must comply with ISPM 15 phytosanitary treatment standards.

Prohibited & Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

The following items are prohibited from import into São Tomé and Príncipe:

- Illegal drugs, narcotics, and controlled substances
- Weapons, ammunition, and explosives (without authorization) [PERMIT REQUIRED]
- Pornographic photographs, films, drawings, and other media

- Distilled beverages containing harmful essences such as wormwood, ethers, benzyl alcohol, isopropyl alcohol, and similar substances
- Counterfeit copies of literary and artistic works (intellectual property infringement)
- Medicines and food products harmful to public health
- Lottery tickets
- Foodstuffs containing saccharin
- Endangered animals, plants, and their derivative products protected under CITES [CITES]

Restricted / Dutiable Items

Accompanied baggage allowances:

Tobacco: 250 g, or 200 cigarettes, or 50 cigars. Alcohol: 1 litre of spirits, or 2 litres of wine.

Perfume: 50 ml; eau de toilette: 250 ml. Pharmaceutical products are permitted in reasonable personal-use quantities.

Plants and agricultural products:

Animal and vegetable products require a certificate of origin and are subject to inspection on arrival. Roots, tubers, bulbs, and cuttings require a license from the Ministry of Agriculture. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Medicines:

Pharmaceutical products require permission from the Ministry of Health for quantities beyond personal use. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Alcohol distilling equipment:

Devices for creating alcohol require an import permit from the Ministry of Commerce.

Denatured or undenatured alcohol (beyond personal allowance) can only be imported with special permission. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Firearms and ammunition:

Subject to authorization requirements. Contact the destination agent for current procedures. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Currency:

Foreign currency may be imported in the amount declared upon entry. A declaration is required on arrival; the amount permitted for export is limited to the declared amount on entry.

Consignment Instructions

Recommended: Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air and sea shipments.

São Tomé and Príncipe is a small island nation in the Gulf of Guinea with limited port infrastructure at the Port of Ana Chaves in the capital, São Tomé. Most freight arrives by sea, with connections typically via Portugal, Angola, or other West African hubs. Air freight is handled at São Tomé International Airport. Limited shipping frequency and port capacity mean that planning well in advance is essential.

All documents must be in Portuguese or accompanied by certified Portuguese translations. Inventory and packing lists should be prepared meticulously, as customs inspection is routine and discrepancies will cause delays.

Demurrage and storage charges begin accruing immediately upon the shipment's arrival. Members should ensure documentation is complete and submitted before the vessel arrives to avoid costly storage fees.

The *cartão de contribuinte* (tax ID) must be in hand before clearance can proceed. The destination agent should be engaged early to initiate this registration if the client does not already have one.