

# Get me Out of Here

## Visas and onward touring

How to get visas for touring companies and staff and the logistics of moving performing companies around the world. How could it be easier?

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## Session Notes

### Edinburgh Festival Fringe

As the UK is part of the European Union, artists and staff can from other countries inside the EU can live and work in the UK freely which really encourages international participation in the festival.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe also benefits from being a “permit-free festival” which is a status granted annually by the UK government and means that artists do not have to go through the sponsorship system. Instead they can enter as “entertainer visitors” and they may or may not need to apply for a visa in advance, depending on their nationality. The “permit-free” status is another essential element to the international make-up of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, though it only applies to artists (and their entourages) and not to staff working at venues or at the Fringe Society.

The “permit –free status” is a great example of a government recognising the worth of cultural activity and facilitating it, and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society is happy to share experiences with other Fringes if it would be helpful.

### British Council

International work is desirable in order to create meaningful dialogue to facilitate artist –to- artist engagement and debate. The British Council can give advice but can only physically get involved in projects in which they are a partner.

Remember that immigration regulations are very fluid and you should always check the country’s website for special circumstances and exemptions. When a company has a mix of nationalities, the situation can be complicated as performers will have differing entry requirements in different places. Costs of visas should also be considered and might be affected by economic situations.

There are many international quirks and issues around validities of passports and previous countries visited, so it’s essential to get a full travel history of everyone in the company.

The British Council does work in partnership with Fringes but they need to be sure of curatorial content and will look at the scale of the event. They aim to create a legacy of long term relationships and promote arts in a wide cultural context. More information is available on the British Council website – <http://dramaanddance.britishcouncil.org/> and <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts>.

## **General experiences**

Visas are a sticking point for many Fringes and it requires a lot of planning, research and resources to host international companies and tour work abroad. There are usually a variety of routes to bring artists into a country and so all the options need to be considered.

Fringes can look at lobbying to find long term official solutions to visa problems but should also look at solutions for artists on an individual level.

## **US visas**

Visas are the main issue that prevents US Fringes from hosting international artists. CAFF is lobbying the US government for a performance visa to make it easier for international artists to take part in Fringes. Many visiting artists are Canadian, which is easier in terms of entry requirements but problems remain for artists from other parts of the world.

The Fringe organisations are not immigration agents themselves and so can't get too involved in the circumstances of each artist. However, they are keen that barriers to performing should be lessened and that the touring possibilities for international artists of the Fringe circuit should be opened up.

The CAFF lottery gives international artists the chance for a large tour and the opportunity to make money, so Fringe visits are not in isolation but represent a wider opportunity. USAFF may also get involved in the lobbying and local British Council offices may be able to help on a strategic level.

Hollywood Fringe has sponsored international artists but it does stretch resources and there are issues with international artists receiving payment for their work in the US.

## **China**

International artists can't travel individually, they need to be invited and policies vary by region and by city. It is easier if shows are cultural exchanges and collaborations rather than commercial operations and support from local organisations and authorities can help.

## **Other issues**

Union regulations also need to be taken into consideration and in some countries entertainment unions may get involved in international work coming in or work from the home country going overseas.

Taxes are another issue for international touring. For the UK, international artists can declare beforehand their level of profit or loss and may have tax on their earnings waived. In most instances though UK companies have to charge international artists Value Added Tax on their services and goods - the artists will need to put in a claim themselves to get VAT refunded when they return so receipts and records should be kept.

In the US, international performers have to be given an I0-99 tax form by the Fringe organisation and then it is their responsibility, but generally there is no tax to pay.

## **Conclusion**

Fringes would definitely like to host more international work and artists to create meaningful global exchanges and to raise the profile of Fringe around the world. However problems in obtaining visas and the costs involved are a real challenge to this ambition.

In the short term, individual solutions will need to be found but potentially longer term solutions can be found through networks. Networks between Fringes and the creation of touring routes could create a greater lobbying force for Fringes, which could then be supported by cultural agencies.