

Pre-Travel Authorization Program for U.S. Bound Travelers from Visa Waiver Countries

This U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) program has a mandatory effective date, currently estimated to be January 12, 2009. On this date, subject to DHS modification, the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) will be mandatory, and all travelers, regardless of age, from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries will be required to complete an online application similar to the I-94W and obtain an ESTA approval prior to boarding a carrier by air or sea to the United States under the VWP.

A third party, such as a relative or travel agent will be permitted to submit an ESTA application on behalf of a VWP traveler. The DHS recommends that an ESTA approval be obtained as soon as a VWP traveler begins to plan a trip to the United States, and no later than 72 hours before departure. Should the information you provided change after receiving your approval, updating your application online is easy.

On August 1, 2008 the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will begin to accept voluntary applications through the ESTA website <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> . Applications must be made in English with additional languages available in late 2008. Until ESTA is mandatory for all VWP travelers, however, ESTA applicants will also need to complete an I-94W form en-route.

ESTA will determine almost immediately in many cases if an individual is eligible for VWP travel. Possible website responses include: Authorization Approved, Travel Not Approved or Authorization Pending. In the event that an ESTA applicant is denied authorization to travel to the United States under VWP he or she will be referred to www.travel.state.gov for information on how to apply for a visa to travel to the United States.

Applicants who receive an Authorization Pending response will need to check the Web site for updates within 72 hours to receive a final response.

An approved ESTA travel authorization is:

- valid for up to two years or until the travelers passport expires, whichever comes first
- valid for multiple entries into the U.S be it for business or pleasure.; and
- not a guarantee of admissibility to the United States at a port of entry. ESTA approval only authorizes a traveler to board a carrier for travel to the U.S. under VWP. In all cases, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers make admissibility determinations at U.S. ports of entry. (For additional information, please visit “Know Before You Go” at www.cbp.gov/travel.)

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