



The Electronic System for Travel Authorizations (ESTA) Program

The Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) program is a pre-travel web-based authorization system for international visitors to the U.S. from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries. The ESTA application requests the same biographical and eligibility information that is currently requested on the paper I-94W form given out to passengers in-flight, and which is collected by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) upon entry to the U.S. The ESTA program will allow authorities to determine, in advance of travel, the eligibility of VWP visitors to travel to the United States and whether such travel poses any law enforcement or security risk. Currently such assessments are done after arrival.

Effective November 17, 2008, citizens from the new VWP countries—the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Korea, and the Slovak Republic— that meet all of the qualifications listed at: [http://www.travel.state.gov/pdf/VWP-QUICKREF\(2\).pdf](http://www.travel.state.gov/pdf/VWP-QUICKREF(2).pdf), including a valid ESTA, are eligible for VWP travel. Otherwise, a visa is required.

ESTA will become mandatory on January 12, 2009 for all VWP citizens.

This White Paper is intended to serve as a reference guide for travel agents who wish to assist customers with travel to the United States from VWP countries.

Visa Waiver Program Countries and their ESTA Effective Dates

ESTA Required January 12, 2009				ESTA Optional November 17, 2008, Required January 12, 2009
Andorra	France	Luxembourg	Singapore	Czech Republic
Austria	Germany	Monaco	Slovenia	Estonia
Australia	Iceland	Netherlands	Spain	Hungary
Belgium	Ireland	New Zealand	Sweden	Latvia
Brunei	Italy	Norway	Switzerland	Lithuania
Denmark	Japan	Portugal	United Kingdom	Slovakia
Finland	Liechtenstein	San Marino		South Korea

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ESTA PROGRAM:

What information does the traveler need when applying for travel authorization via ESTA?

The web-based ESTA application requests biographical and eligibility information currently requested on the paper I-94W form. Mandatory information includes the traveler’s name, date of birth, sex, country of citizenship, country of residence, and passport information. Other information requested by the application, but not required for approval, includes the traveler’s phone number and e-mail address, address while in the United States, and flight information. A series of required questions about the traveler’s criminal history, drug usage, and employment status also appears on the application.

In the event that any of this required information should change after a traveler has obtained ESTA approval, the traveler must submit a new application with the accurate information.

I94 Form

How far in advance does a traveler need to process an ESTA application?

The Department of Homeland Security recommends that travel authorization applications be submitted at least 72 hours prior to travel.

How long does it last?

Unless revoked, travel authorizations are valid for two years from the date of authorization, or until your passport expires, whichever comes first.

How does a traveler obtain a travel authorization via ESTA?

Currently, the only way to obtain ESTA authorization is to visit the online application system at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta>. The application is available in sixteen languages.

After submitting a completed application, the traveler will receive an application number, which should be retained for future reference.

The Department of Homeland Security will then review the application and provide one of three possible responses: *Authorization Approved*, *Travel Not Authorized*, or *Authorization Pending*.

- Applicants who receive an *Authorization Approved* notice are authorized to travel to the United States without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program.
- Applicants who receive an *Authorization Pending* message will be directed to check the ESTA web site for a response within 72 hours.

- Those receiving a *Travel Not Authorized* message are not eligible for visa-free travel to the United States. These applicants will be referred to the U.S. Department of State for information on how to apply for a visa to travel to the United States.

CBP is working with the GDS community and others in the travel industry to develop ways to integrate the collection of this data into other software applications.

How long does it take to receive a response?

Most applicants will receive a response instantaneously. Most applicants receive a response within 3 seconds of applying. Less than 1% of applicants receive an *Authorization Pending* response. Those who do will receive a follow-up response within 72 hours, but many people will receive a response in as little as 6 hours.

How much does it cost to submit an ESTA application?

The ESTA program is currently free of charge. Although the Department of Homeland Security has the statutory authority to levy a small service fee at some point in the future, it has not announced any plans to do so.

I found a website that charges for ESTA. Is it legitimate?

VWP travelers should be aware that unauthorized third-parties have established web sites, which charge visitors seeking to travel to the United States under the VWP for information about ESTA and for submitting ESTA applications to DHS on behalf of the traveler. These businesses and web sites are not endorsed by, associated with, or affiliated in any way with DHS or the US government.

Do I need to take a printout of the application with me to the airport?

No, this is not required; each traveler's ESTA status is automatically transmitted to the carriers once an application has been checked against law enforcement databases and a decision has been made. However, the Department of Homeland Security recommends that travelers print out the ESTA response in order to maintain a record of their ESTA application number and to have confirmation of ESTA status.

Do I need to apply for a separate travel authorization via ESTA each time I travel?

No. An approved ESTA travel authorization remains valid for up to two years or until the traveler's passport expires—whichever comes first. The authorization is valid for multiple entries into the United States.

Does an approved ESTA travel authorization guarantee admissibility to the United States?

No. An approved ESTA travel authorization only authorizes a traveler to board a U.S.-bound carrier under the terms of the Visa Waiver Program. CBP officers make final determination of travelers' admissibility at U.S. ports of entry. For additional information concerning admissibility, please visit the "Know Before You Go" page at <http://www.cbp.gov/travel>.

How far in advance of my trip may I apply for an ESTA authorization?

Although ESTA applications may be submitted at any time prior to plan travel to the United States, the Department of Homeland Security recommends that travelers apply as soon as they begin making plans to travel to the U.S., and at least 72 hours in advance of travel. While the ESTA system is designed to accommodate last-minute and emergency travel, applying as far in advance as possible will minimize the risk of unwanted delays and additional screening. People seeking to travel to the United States from Visa Waiver Program countries need not have specific travel plans in order to apply via ESTA.

My children are travelling with me. Do they need an ESTA authorization?

Yes. Accompanied and unaccompanied children, *regardless of age*, are required to obtain an independent ESTA approval. Third parties, such as parents or travel agents, may complete and submit an ESTA application on behalf of both minors and adult travelers.

As a travel agent, am I required to complete ESTA applications on behalf of my customers?

No, this is not required. According to CBP, the burden to comply with the ESTA requirement lies with the individual seeking to travel to the US. Travel agents may choose to notify customers of this requirement, and may facilitate data collection/transmission as a professional service to their customers.