

New security processes for travelers to the U.S.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has announced changes to the security procedures for travelers from countries participating in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP) attempting to enter the U.S. As part of legislation recently passed to enhance U.S. border security, travelers with passports from VWP countries will soon be required to use the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to their trip to the U.S.

What is ESTA?

ESTA is a Web-based, automated system used to determine the eligibility of visitors to travel to the United States under the visa waiver program. ESTA replaces the current system of travelers filling out an I-94W form during their flight (or ship voyage) to the U.S. ESTA requires the same information and is required by recent U.S. legislation to assess eligibility prior to travel so the U.S. government can determine if such travel poses a law enforcement or security risk.

How does ESTA work?

At least 72 hours prior to their journey to the U.S., travelers must access the ESTA site online at: <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

Use of the site is free; and it is available in 16 languages, although all application responses must be in English.

Once approved, an ESTA authorization generally will be valid for two years or until the applicant's passport expires, whichever comes first. Authorizations can be used for multiple entries to the U.S. However, if a traveler's name, gender, citizenship, or answers to the "yes" or "no" questions on the ESTA application change; a new application must be submitted.

Once a traveler's application is submitted successfully via the ESTA Web site, they will see one of three responses:

- **Authorization Approved**—travel is authorized
- **Travel Not Authorized**—traveler will be referred to www.travel.state.gov for information on how to apply for a visa to travel to the U.S.
- **Authorization Pending**—a final response will be issued within 72 hours; the traveler must check back on the ESTA Web site.

Travelers from the following recently-added countries to the U.S. visa waiver program must use the ESTA system from Nov. 17, 2008:

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| ■ Czech Republic | ■ Lithuania |
| ■ Estonia | ■ Slovakia |
| ■ Hungary | ■ South Korea |
| ■ Latvia | |

Travelers from the following current visa waiver countries must use the ESTA online authorization system beginning Jan. 12:

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| ■ Andorra | ■ Luxembourg |
| ■ Australia | ■ Monaco |
| ■ Austria | ■ The Netherlands |
| ■ Belgium | ■ New Zealand |
| ■ Brunei | ■ Norway |
| ■ Denmark | ■ Portugal |
| ■ Finland | ■ San Marino |
| ■ France | ■ Singapore |
| ■ Germany | ■ Slovenia |
| ■ Iceland | ■ Spain |
| ■ Ireland | ■ Sweden |
| ■ Italy | ■ Switzerland |
| ■ Japan | ■ United Kingdom |
| ■ Liechtenstein | |

Applicants can update their destination addresses or itineraries should they change after their ESTA has been approved, although this is not required. Travelers with a current and valid visa for travel to the U.S. will be able to travel to the U.S. without ESTA authorization for the duration of its validity and for the purpose it was issued.

Third-party sites

Unauthorized third-parties have established Web sites which charge travelers for information and submission of ESTA applications. These sites are not endorsed by, associated with, or affiliated in any way with the Department of Homeland Security or the U.S. Government. ESTA applications and information are free when done through the official Web site, and use of a private service will not expedite approval of ESTA applications.

ESTA impact

This change in procedures requires travelers to take an additional step prior to travel to gain authorization for entry into the U.S. or risk being denied boarding. ESTA authorization is not a guarantee of entry into the United States; ESTA authorization merely allows a traveler to board a plane or ship traveling to the U.S. without a visa. In all cases, U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers make admissibility determinations at ports of entry or pre-clearance facilities.

Travel managers are encouraged to use all available means to communicate the new ESTA requirements to all travelers, with special emphasis on those based in countries that participate in the U.S. visa waiver program. However, since travelers can often be based in one country yet hold a passport from another, communications about these requirements should target all travelers.

How CWT is supporting ESTA requirements

Legal responsibility for completing an ESTA application lies with the traveler affected; however, CWT is taking steps to help ensure travelers are aware of ESTA requirements, including:

- Updating existing **visa notices in traveler itineraries** for travelers from visa-waiver-participating countries, to advise travelers booked to go to the U.S. of the requirement to obtain authorization via ESTA.
- Recommending that clients add **a link on their CWT Portal** to the ESTA information and application Web site. CWT will also provide standard verbiage that clients can add to their *CWT Portal* "news and information" section or company intranet.
- Considering use of **CWT Portrait profile data fields** to store ESTA application status and expiration. Until this enhancement is developed and deployed, travelers can use the existing *CWT Portrait* visa-related data fields to register their ESTA authorization and trigger reminders when it is about to expire.
- **Training CWT travel counselors** on ESTA requirements so they can advise affected travelers as appropriate.

Please note:

The ESTA program is separate and additional to the Secure Flight rule affecting all travelers to, from, and within the United States. Secure Flight is the requirement of airlines and travel agencies to collect key information from passengers—full name, date of birth, gender, etc.—when they make a travel reservation to the United States. The U.S. Transportation Security Agency (TSA) then compares the information collected to a "watch list" of known criminals or terrorists. Responsibility for the "watch list" and comparing information on travelers to that list has recently changed from airlines to the TSA, and additional data fields were required. Full details about Secure Flight are available on the TSA Web site at http://www.tsa.gov/what_we_do/layers/secureflight/index.shtm.