

Pre-Travel Authorisation Programme for US-Bound Travellers from Visa Waiver Countries

This US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) programme has a mandatory effective date, currently estimated to be 12 January 2009. On this date, subject to DHS modification, the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) will be mandatory, and all travellers, regardless of age, from Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) countries will be required to complete an online application similar to the I-94W and obtain 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 traveller. The DHS recommends that ESTA approval be obtained as soon as a VWP traveller 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 1 August 2008 the US 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 travellers, 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: Authorisation Approved, Travel Not Approved or Authorisation Pending. In the event that an ESTA applicant is denied authorisation 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 Authorisation Pending response will need to check the web site for updates within 72 hours to receive a final response.

An approved ESTA travel authorisation is:

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

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