

Visa Waiver Program (VWP)

Important Notices:

[Glossary](#)

Effective July 1, 2009, all Visa Waiver Program (VWP) emergency or temporary passports must be electronic passports (e-Passports) to be eligible for travel to the United States under the VWP. This includes VWP applicants who present emergency or temporary passports to transit the United States. [Learn more](#). Review the [CBP Website notice](#).

ESTA: As of January 12, 2009, a valid ESTA approval is required for all Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to travel to the United States. The Department of Homeland Security, Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) is a free, automated system used to determine the eligibility of visitors to travel to the United States under the VWP. It collects the same information as the paper I-94W form that VWP travelers fill out en route to the United States. ESTA applications may be submitted at any time prior to travel. An ESTA authorization generally will be valid for up to two years. Authorizations will be valid for multiple entries into the United States. DHS recommends that travelers submit an ESTA application as soon as they begin making travel plans.

Learn more about [ESTA](#) on the DHS Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website, www.cbp.gov. ESTA applications may be completed **FREE** online at the official DHS website, which is: <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/>. **Review the important DHS Advisory Warning about unauthorized third-party ESTA application related web sites.**



NEW COUNTRIES ADDED: The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) was expanded to include the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Republic of Korea, and the Slovak Republic in late 2008. Review the Visa Waiver Program [quick reference handout](#), as well as this webpage to learn about VWP travel.

PASSPORT REQUIREMENTS: Specific passport requirements apply to all VWP travelers. See [What do I need to know about VWP MRP and e-Passport requirements?](#) for more information.

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Overview – What is the Visa Waiver Program?

The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) enables nationals of 35 participating countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business (visitor [B] visa purposes only) for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa. The program was established in 1986 with the objective of eliminating unnecessary barriers to travel, stimulating the tourism industry, and permitting the Department of State to focus consular resources in other areas. VWP eligible travelers may apply for a visa, if they prefer to do so. Nationals of VWP countries must meet eligibility requirements to travel without a visa on VWP, and therefore, some travelers from VWP countries are not eligible to use the program. VWP travelers are required to have a valid authorization through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to travel, are screened at the port of entry into the United States, and are enrolled in the Department of Homeland Security's [US-VISIT](#) program.

Which countries participate in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP)?

Currently, 35 countries participate in the Visa Waiver Program, as shown below:

Andorra	Iceland	Norway
Australia	Ireland	Portugal
Austria	Italy	San Marino
Belgium	Japan	Singapore
Brunei	Latvia	Slovakia
Czech Republic	Liechtenstein	Slovenia
Denmark	Lithuania	South Korea
Estonia	Luxembourg	Spain
Finland	Malta	Sweden
France	Monaco	Switzerland
Germany	the Netherlands	United Kingdom
Hungary	New Zealand	

How does a country qualify to participate in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP)?

To be admitted to the VWP, a country must meet various security and other requirements, such as enhanced law enforcement and security-related data sharing with the United States and timely reporting of both blank and issued lost and stolen passports. VWP members are also required to maintain high counterterrorism, law enforcement, border control, and document security standards.

In addition, designation as a VWP country is at the discretion of the USG. Meeting the objective requirements of the VWP does not guarantee a successful candidacy for VWP membership.

Which travelers may use the Visa Waiver Program to enter the United States?

Nationals of the 35 countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program may use VWP if:

- They have received an authorization to travel under the VWP through the [Electronic System for Travel Authorization](#) (ESTA)

- They present the appropriate type of passport valid for six months past their expected stay in the United States (unless [country-specific agreements](#) provide exemptions). This is a requirement in addition to other [passport requirements](#) for all categories of passports -- regular, diplomatic, and official - when the traveler is seeking to enter the United States for business or tourist purposes, for a maximum of 90 days;

- The purpose of their stay in the United States is 90 days or less for tourism or business ([Visitor \(B\) visa](#)) purpose of travel. (If in doubt, travelers should check with the nearest Embassy or Consulate to verify that what they plan to do is considered tourism or business.) Transit through the United States is generally permitted. **Important Notice:** Foreign media representatives planning to engage in that vocation in the United States are not eligible for VWP travel, as the purpose of their stay does not qualify as “business”. These professionals must obtain a nonimmigrant [media \(I\) visa](#). Note also that travelers planning to work or study cannot travel on VWP, and they must obtain the appropriate visa to travel to the United States [Learn More](#).

- If arriving by air or sea, they are traveling on an approved carrier (See the [approved carriers list](#)) and have a return trip ticket to any foreign destination;

- They can demonstrate the intent to stay 90 days or less in the United States and demonstrate sufficient funds to support themselves while in the United States. [Learn more](#) on the CBP website.

VWP travelers who have been admitted under the Visa Waiver Program and who make a short trip to Canada, Mexico or an adjacent island generally can be readmitted to the United States under the VWP for the balance of their original admission period. See the Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website for additional details. Also VWP nationals resident in Mexico, Canada or adjacent islands are generally exempted from requirements to show onward travel to other foreign destinations. [Learn more](#) at the CBP website.

When does a national of a VWP country need to apply for a visa instead of using the VWP?

Nationals of VWP countries must meet the conditions noted in the section above in order to seek admission to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program. Travelers who do not meet these conditions must apply for a visa. In particular, a visa must be requested if the traveler:

Wants to remain in the United States for longer than 90 days, or envisions that they may wish to change their status (from tourism to student, etc.) once in the United States;

Wants to work or study in the United States, wants to travel as a working foreign media representative, wants to come to the United States for other purposes not allowed on a visitor visa, or intends to immigrate to the United States;

Is a national of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Republic of Korea, or the Slovak Republic **AND DOES NOT HAVE** an [electronic passport](#) with an integrated chip;

Is a national of one of the VWP countries not listed above **AND DOES NOT** have a [machine-readable passport](#) (MRP)(depending on the date the MRP was issued, renewed, or extended, it may also need to contain a digital photograph or an integrated electronic chip);

Intends to travel by private aircraft or other non-VWP approved air or sea carriers to the United States. Click here to see the [approved carriers list](#);

Has a criminal record or other condition making them ineligible for a visa (see [Classes of Aliens Ineligible for Visas](#)).

Has been refused admission to the United States before, or did not comply with the conditions of previous VWP admissions (90 days or less stay for tourism or business, etc.).

I was denied a visa on a recent visa application, may I use the VWP?

A recent visa denial for any reason could result in denial of an authorization via ESTA, additional questioning at the port of entry, or denial of admission to the United States. Applicants who are uncertain of whether they qualify for VWP travel may choose to apply for a visa.

What do I need to enter the United States under the VWP?

To request entry into the United States under the Visa Waiver Program, travelers must meet the requirements listed in **Which travelers may enter the United States using the Visa Waiver Program?** Each VWP traveler must present his/her own valid passport of the appropriate type. See **What do I need to know about VWP machine-readable passport (MRP) and e-Passport?**, **What is a machine-readable passport (MRP)?** and **What is an e-Passport?** for additional details. VWP travelers must also have an authorization through the [Electronic System for Travel Authorization](#) (ESTA) and, until DHS eliminates the requirement for the paper form, present a completed and signed I-94W Nonimmigrant Visa Waiver Arrival-Departure Record to U.S. officials at the port of entry. I-94W forms are free and often provided by travel agents, airlines or cruise ships prior to arrival, but may be picked up and completed on arrival at the U.S. port of entry. Travelers may also be asked to provide evidence of onward travel or other documentation on the purpose of their stay in the United States. Travelers entering through land ports of entry must pay a small land border fee as prescribed in 8 CFR 103.7(b)(1).

What do I need to know about VWP machine-readable passport (MRP) and e-Passport requirements?

All VWP travelers, regardless of age or type of passport used, must present a machine-readable passport. In addition, depending on when VWP travelers' passports were issued, other passport requirements apply:

Nationals of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Republic of Korea, and the Slovak Republic require passports with an integrated chip containing the information from the data page ([e-Passport](#)).

Nationals of other VWP countries:

- Machine-readable passports issued or renewed/extended on or after 10/26/06: passports must have integrated chips with information from the data page ([e-Passport](#)).
- Machine-readable passports issued or renewed/extended between 10/26/05 and 10/25/06: passports must have digital photographs printed on the data page or integrated chips with information from the data page.
- Machine-readable passports issued or renewed/extended before 10/26/05: no further requirements.

Notice: Effective July 1, 2009 all Visa Waiver Program (VWP) emergency or temporary passports must be electronic passports (e-Passports) to be eligible for travel to the United States without a visa under the VWP. This includes VWP applicants who present emergency or temporary passports to transit the United States. U.S. Customs and Border Protection may exercise discretion at the ports of entry for cases in which VWP applicants are traveling for medical or other emergency reasons. A VWP national arriving in the United States with a non-compliant passport, for other than emergency travel reasons, may be detained for further processing and/or denied admission". Review the [CBP Website notice](#).

What should I know about machine-readable passports and family travel?

Families seeking to enter the United States under the VWP need to obtain an individual machine-readable passport for each traveler, including infants. A machine-readable passport typically has biographic data for only one traveler in the machine-readable zone. Because of the October 26, 2004 requirement that passport data be presented in machine-readable format, children included in family or parents' passports may be denied visa-free entry into the United States since only the primary traveler's biographic data is included in the machine-readable zone of the passport.

Entering the United States under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) – What happens at the port of entry?

Detailed information about admissions and entry to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program can be found on the DHS Customs Border Protection website at [Visa Waiver Program](#) and [Admission to the United States](#). Since September 30, 2004 VWP travelers have been enrolled in the [DHS US-VISIT](#) program when they arrive at U.S. ports of entry. Travelers should be aware that by requesting admission under the Visa Waiver Program, they are generally waiving their right to review or appeal a CBP officer's decision as to their application for admission at the port of entry. Likewise, if the traveler is later found to have violated the conditions of admission under the Visa Waiver Program, they do not have the right to contest a removal order (See [CBP website](#) for additional details.)

Is there a fee to use the Visa Waiver Program (VWP)?

There is a small land border fee for VWP travelers arriving at land ports of entry, per 8 CFR § 103.7(b)(1).

What about Canadian, Mexican or Bermudan citizens and VWP?

Canada, Mexico and Bermuda are not participants in the Visa Waiver Program. The Immigration and Nationality Act includes other provisions for visa-free travel for nationals of Canada and Bermuda under certain circumstances. See [Citizens of Canada, Mexico and Bermuda](#). Since they are not part of the Visa Waiver Program, VWP requirements for machine-readable or biometric passports do not apply to nationals of Canada, Mexico or Bermuda. Also, it should be noted that some nationals of Canada and Bermuda traveling to the United States require nonimmigrant visas. Visit [Entry from Canada](#) on the CBP website for more information.

How can I get additional information?

Additional information on the Visa Waiver Program is available from the Department of Homeland Security [Customs and Border Protection](#) website.
