



Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) A BCD Travel Informational Brief

What is ESTA?

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established a new online system – the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) – as part of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

Once ESTA is mandatory, all nationals or citizens of VWP countries who plan to travel to the United States for temporary business or pleasure will require an approved ESTA prior to boarding a carrier to travel by air or sea to the United States under the VWP.

To apply for authorization to travel to the United States under the VWP, travelers will log on to the ESTA Web-based system and complete an online application providing the biographical and eligibility information currently required on the paper I-94W form that is now submitted to border officials on arrival.

VWP travelers who fail to obtain an ESTA travel authorization after ESTA becomes mandatory may be denied boarding, experience delayed processing, or be denied admission at a U.S. port of entry.

When will ESTA go into effect?

On Aug. 1, 2008, DHS will begin to accept voluntary ESTA applications through the ESTA Web site.

Initially, the website will be operational in English only, but additional languages will be available no later than Oct. 15, 2008.

ESTA will be implemented as a mandatory program 60 days after publication of a notice in the Federal Register. DHS anticipates that the Secretary of Homeland Security will issue that notice in November 2008, for implementation of the mandatory ESTA requirements on Jan. 12, 2009.

Where can travelers register?

The ESTA Web site is <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

What will travelers need to do?

Once ESTA becomes mandatory, all travelers from VWP countries, regardless of their point of embarkation, will be required to provide basic biographical, travel and eligibility information online and obtain an electronic travel authorization prior to boarding a carrier to travel by air or sea to the United States under the VWP.

Travelers are not required to have specific plans to travel to the United States under the VWP before they apply for an ESTA authorization. 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. ESTA has, however, been designed to allow for the accommodation of last minute and emergency travelers.

In order to ensure maximum protection of your travelers' data, BCD Travel and its agents will not undertake ESTA registration for travelers. Travelers must register themselves on the official DHS site.

BCD Travel agents will alert travelers verbally during the booking process about the need to obtain an ESTA authorization. BCD Travel will place a registration reminder, with a link to the official DHS site, on the itinerary e-mailed to the traveler after booking.

What if my travelers are using an online booking tool?

Notification of ESTA requirements to travelers via their online booking tool is being handled on the individual country – and, for multinational customers, individual client – level in coordination with customer and legal requirements. If you require further information about the online booking tool your travelers are using, please contact your BCD Travel account manager.

What do I need to tell my travelers about ESTA?

Travelers who have not received ESTA approval after ESTA becomes mandatory may be denied boarding, experience delayed processing, or be denied admission at a U.S. port of entry. Because of this potential risk, travel managers should ensure that all travelers within the organization are made aware of the ESTA implementation and understand the procedures that they must follow under the new system.

Your travelers will be reminded of ESTA requirements by their BCD Travel agent during the booking process and will receive another reminder, with a link to the registration site, on their e-mail itinerary.

If you would like further assistance in determining how best to communicate the new requirements to your travelers, please contact your BCD Travel account manager.

What countries are affected by ESTA?

ESTA and the VWP apply to the citizens or nationals of 27 countries, including most of Western Europe:

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

ESTA regulations will apply to NATIONALS or CITIZENS of VWP countries. Citizens of non-VWP countries who are entering the U.S. from an embarkation point within a VWP country are exempt, but citizens of a VWP country traveling to the U.S., departing from a non-VWP country, will have to comply with ESTA regulations.

The rule does not apply to U.S. citizens traveling overseas.

The U.S. has also signed agreements with eight other countries –the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Slovakia and South Korea – putting them on track to join the VWP sometime during 2008.

Nationals or citizens of countries for which visas are required for travel to the U.S. are not required to participate in ESTA; normal visa procedures will continue to be followed.

How will ESTA work?

ESTA applications may be submitted at any time prior to travel to the United States. VWP travelers are encouraged to apply for authorization as soon as they begin to plan a trip to the United States. If applicants' destination addresses or itineraries should change after their authorization has been approved, they may easily update that information through the ESTA website.

Once an ESTA application has been successfully completed and submitted online, the application will be queried against appropriate law enforcement databases. ESTA application data will remain active for the period of time that the ESTA authorization is valid. DHS will maintain this information for an additional year, and then will archive the information for twelve years to allow retrieval of the information for law enforcement and investigatory purposes.

In most cases, ESTA will provide an almost immediate determination of eligibility for travel under the VWP. Possible responses include: Authorization Approved, Travel Not Authorized, or Authorization Pending.

An approved ESTA travel authorization is:

- valid for up to two years or until the traveler's passport expires, whichever comes first;
- valid for multiple entries into the U.S.; 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 the VWP. In all cases, CBP officers make admissibility determinations at our ports of entry. (For additional information, please visit "[Know Before You Go](#)" at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Web site.)

In the event that an ESTA applicant is denied authorization to travel to the United States under the 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. This process is similar to the current practice, in which VWP travelers who arrive at a United States port of entry and are determined by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to be ineligible for admission under the VWP may be returned to their country of origin to apply for a visa to enter the United States. It will be far more convenient for most travelers to receive this notification before commencing travel.

Accompanied and unaccompanied children, regardless of age, will be required to obtain an independent ESTA authorization and determination of eligibility.

Do you have more questions?

Please direct any questions about ESTA or about BCD Travel procedures to your BCD Travel account manager.