

PRESS RELEASE

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**NEW REQUIREMENT FOR TRAVELERS ON VISA WAIVER PROGRAM TAKES
EFFECT JANUARY 12, 2009**

The U.S. Department of State reminds travelers that beginning January 12, 2009, eligible citizens or nationals from all 34 Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries will need to obtain approval via the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to traveling to the United States under the VWP.

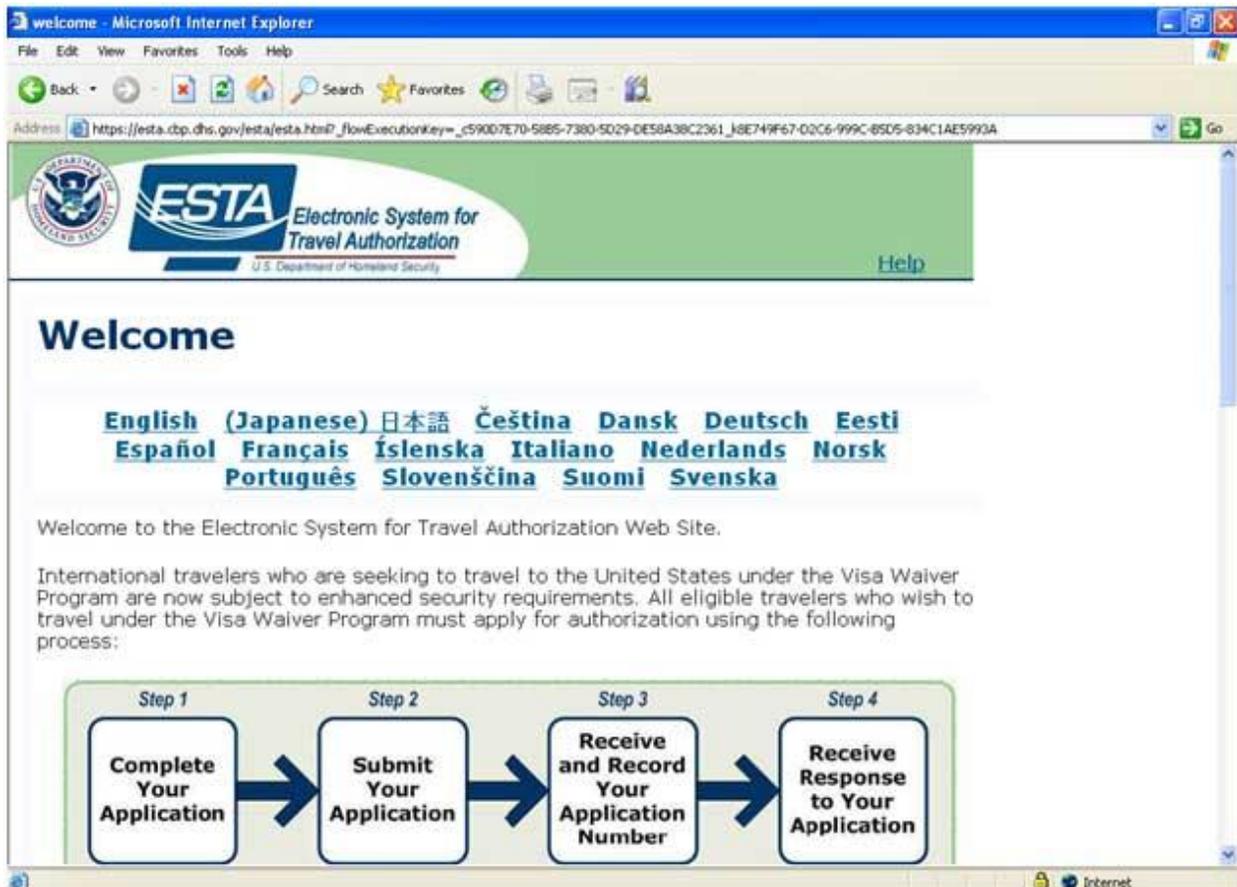
Citizens from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Korea, and Slovakia currently must obtain prior approval via ESTA to travel to the United States under the VWP.

As Cyprus is not currently eligible for the Visa Waiver Program, all travelers to the United States using a Cypriot passport must obtain a U.S. visa.

The 34 participating VWP countries are:

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

ESTA is a Web-based system. In order to apply for an ESTA, go to <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>, follow the instructions to answer all of the required questions, and submit an application for travel authorization. Travelers will not be able to submit ESTA applications at a U.S. port of entry or a U.S. embassy or consulate.



- The traveler must provide (*in English*) biographical data including name, birth date, and passport information. The traveler will also be required to answer VWP eligibility questions regarding communicable diseases, arrests, and convictions for certain crimes, and past history of visa revocation or deportation, among others.
- VWP travelers are not required to have specific plans to travel to the United States before they apply for an ESTA. As soon as VWP travelers begin to plan a trip to visit the United States, they are encouraged to apply for authorization through the ESTA Web site. Though not required, applicants are encouraged to provide their destination addresses and itineraries.
- In most cases, ESTA will provide an almost immediate determination of eligibility for travel under the VWP.

There are three types of responses to an ESTA application: Authorization Approved, Authorization Pending, and Travel Not Authorized. Those applicants who receive an approval are authorized to travel to the United States under the VWP. Applicants who receive an Authorization Pending response will need to check the Web site for updates within 72 hours to receive a final response. Applicants whose ESTA applications are denied will be referred to www.travel.state.gov for information on how to apply for a visa to travel to the United States.

VWP travelers who submit an ESTA application that is not approved and who then attempt to travel to the United States may be denied boarding, experience delayed processing, or be denied admission at a U.S. port of entry. Therefore, it is recommended that all VWP travelers who are denied an ESTA apply for a U.S. visa.

Each approved ESTA application generally will be valid for a period of two years or until the applicant's passport expires, whichever comes first. Each VWP traveler must have an approved ESTA for the passport he or she plans to use for travel to the United States.

A new travel authorization is required if (1) the traveler is issued a new passport; (2) the traveler changes his or her name; (3) the traveler changes his or her gender; (4) the traveler's country of citizenship changes; or (5) the circumstances underlying the traveler's previous responses to any of the ESTA application questions requiring a "yes" or "no" response have changed.

DHS is not currently collecting a fee for ESTA applications. If it is determined later that a fee will be charged, the fee would be implemented through the United States government's rulemaking process.

An approved ESTA is not a visa. It does not meet the legal or regulatory requirements to serve in lieu of a U.S. visa when a visa is required under U.S. law. Individuals who possess a valid visa are still able to travel to the United States on that visa for the purpose for which it was issued.

Required authorization through ESTA will substantially strengthen the security of the VWP by providing the Department of Homeland Security with the capability to conduct advance screening of VWP travelers. In addition to enhancing security, ESTA will help reduce traveler delays at the ports of entry.

For more information on the Visa Waiver Program, please visit http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/business_pleasure/vwp/.

For additional information on ESTA, please visit www.cbp.gov/esta.