



*Office of Public Affairs
U.S. Consulate General, Auckland*

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MEDIA RELEASE

Don't pay too much for your visa-free (ESTA) travel to the United States

The U.S. Consulate General in Auckland is warning Kiwis not to be fooled into paying more than they have to for the necessary paperwork to travel to the United States.

Beginning on September 8, 2010 a fee of U.S.\$14 will be introduced for a new or renewed electronic travel authorization (known as ESTA) for travel to the United States. Nick Greanias, the U.S. Consular Chief in Auckland, is worried that unofficial sites which charge a fee, so-called 'ESTA web agents', will take the opportunity to fool travellers into paying extra while providing little service in return.

“Soon after ESTA was introduced in early 2009, we became aware of unofficial sites which sprang up to offer the ESTA application service for a fee. Frankly, they try to look official but they're not associated in any way with the U.S. Government, and using them will in no way speed up the ESTA process.”

Since January 2009 New Zealand passport holders travelling to the U.S.A. under the visa-free Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) have needed to obtain an ESTA, which is valid for two years, prior to boarding a carrier to travel by air or sea.

ESTA is an automated and secure on-line system which determines whether visitors are eligible to travel to the U.S. under the VWP. The VWP is a programme which allows qualifying nationals or citizens from New Zealand and 33 other countries to travel to the U.S. for business or pleasure for up to 90 days without first having to obtain a visa. Passengers transiting the United States en route to another destination require an ESTA if travelling on the Visa Waiver Programme, or a visa if not.

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“Some of these sites have been charging upwards of U.S.\$50, for filling out an online form you can do yourself in a few minutes,” says Nick Greanias. “The only way to ensure you’re using the official, secure U.S. Government site – and paying only U.S.\$14 – is to go to <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/>, answer the required questions and click the submit button.’

“Travel authorisations are valid for two years, or until your passport expires, whichever comes first,” says Nick. “A visitor may travel to the U.S. repeatedly within the validity period without having to apply for another ESTA. For those who don’t have access to the internet, a friend, relative, travel agent, or other third party can apply on a traveller’s behalf.”

ESTA background

- Once a traveller’s ESTA application has been successfully submitted online, most cases get an immediate determination of eligibility for travel. Worldwide, over 99.5% of ESTA applications are approved, most in less than a minute.
- As an advance electronic travel authorisation system, ESTA adds an extra layer of security for airline travellers. It allows the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to determine in advance of travel whether an individual is eligible to travel under the VWP, and whether such travel poses a security risk either on board or once they reach the United States.
- ESTA requires the same information as the green paper I-94W form which VWP travellers used to fill out while en route to the US, but it brings the admission process into the 21st Century. Rather than old-fashioned pen and paper, the U.S. authorities now automate traveller admission so as to collect their details on-line and, importantly, *prior* to departure.
- The US\$14 ESTA fee has come in as a requirement of the U.S. Travel Promotion Act of 2009. It is made up of:
 - **Processing Charge** -- All applicants requesting an electronic travel authorization are charged for the processing of the application. The fee is U.S.\$4.
 - **Authorization charge** -- If your application is approved and you receive authorization to travel to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program, an additional U.S. \$10 will be charged to your credit card. If your electronic travel authorization is denied, you are only charged for the processing of your application.

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- The ESTA system currently accepts the following credit/debit cards: MasterCard, VISA, American Express, and Discover.
- The purpose of the Travel Promotion Act is to increase international travel to all areas of the United States, communicate United States travel policies overseas, and make entry procedures into the United States more efficient and welcoming.

For more general background information about ESTA, please visit www.cbp.gov/ESTA, and for more background information about the new ESTA fee, please click [here](#) (http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/news_releases/national/08062010_2.xml) or see the FAQs linked from the U.S. Embassy website [here](#) (<http://newzealand.usembassy.gov/index.html>).

Media looking for further information can call U.S. Consulate General Public Affairs Advisor Phil McKenna on tel 09 303 2724 x 2843 or 027 276 7889.