



Press Release

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**ESTA AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED FOR ALL VISA WAIVER PROGRAM
COUNTRIES BEGINNING JANUARY 12**
DHS to Designate Seven Additional Visa Waiver Countries

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced today that beginning Jan. 12, 2009, eligible citizens or nationals from all Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries must obtain approval through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to traveling to the United States under the VWP. On Monday, DHS will formally announce the addition of seven allies to the list of countries authorized to participate in the VWP. The seven countries are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, the Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia.

“We are especially pleased to welcome these allies into the Visa Waiver Program,” said Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. “Expanding the number of countries whose citizens can travel to the U.S. without a visa increases business and social ties between our countries and at the same time deepens cooperation on required security measures.”

The administration sought authority for years to reform the VWP. DHS received authorization through the issuance of the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. The VWP is administered by the department and enables eligible citizens or nationals of certain countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa. To be admitted to the VWP, a country must meet various statutory requirements, such as more 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.

The citizens or nationals of the following countries are currently eligible to travel to the United States under the VWP: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Beginning Nov. 17, eligible citizens or nationals from the new VWP countries may travel to the

United States under the program provided they have an e-passport and an approved authorization via ESTA, a web-based system that determines the preliminary eligibility of visitors to travel under the VWP prior to boarding a carrier to the United States.

Required authorization through ESTA will substantially strengthen the security of the VWP by providing the department with the capability to conduct advance screening of VWP travelers. ESTA is key to transforming the VWP from a program that evaluates security threats on a country-by-country basis to one that is capable of making traveler-by-traveler judgments. In addition to enhancing security, ESTA will provide for greater efficiencies in the screening of international travelers by reducing traveler delays at the ports of entry.

The department has submitted notices summarizing these changes to the Federal Register for publication. 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, visit www.cbp.gov/esta.

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