

ESTA Web site available in 13 additional languages for U.S.bound travelers from visa waiver countries

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For Immediate Release Office of the Press Secretary Contact: 202-282-8010

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced today the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) Web site has been enhanced to better facilitate travel by nationals of Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries to the U.S. Instructions on how to obtain an electronic travel authorization are now available in 13 additional languages: Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish.

"Over 200,000 travelers have sought electronic travel authorization in the weeks since the site went live, and 99.6 percent of them have been approved – the vast majority in under one minute," said DHS Assistant Secretary for Policy Stewart Baker. "Obtaining this advance information makes visa-free travel more secure, an enhancement that allows us to expand the valuable Visa Waiver Program. Making the site easier to navigate is one of the many steps we'll be taking in the coming months to prepare for Jan. 12, 2009, when all visa-free travelers will be using this system."

Congress required through the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 that DHS develop and implement an automated system to determine, in advance of travel, the eligibility of visitors to travel to the U.S. under the VWP, and whether such travel poses a law enforcement or security risk. On Aug. 1, DHS began to accept voluntary applications through the ESTA Web site at https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov. The department anticipates publishing a notice in the Federal Register in the coming weeks, announcing implementation of a mandatory ESTA requirement on Jan. 12, 2009 for all VWP countries. Travelers from VWP countries are allowed to apply for entry to the U.S. on a passport for up to 90 days for business or pleasure, without obtaining a visa.

Once ESTA is mandatory, all nationals of VWP countries who plan to travel to the U.S. under the VWP will need to receive an electronic travel authorization prior to departing for the U.S. The requirement does not affect U.S. citizens returning from overseas or citizens of VWP countries traveling on a valid U.S. visa.

VWP travelers currently complete a written I-94W form providing basic biographical, travel and eligibility information while en route to the U.S. VWP travelers will provide this information online prior to departure for the U.S. with ESTA.

ESTA applications may be submitted at any time prior to travel, and once approved, generally will be valid for up to two years or until the applicant's passport expires, whichever comes first. Authorizations will be valid for multiple entries into the U.S. DHS recommends that ESTA applications be submitted as soon as an applicant begins making travel plans.

For more information about ESTA, please visit www.cbp.gov/ESTA.

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