Homeland Security

Fact Sheet: Visa Waiver Program Expansion

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The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) 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. The program is administered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and was recently expanded to include seven new allies to the list of countries authorized to participate in the VWP.

Facilitating Travel Between Partner Nations With A Common Focus On Security

- The administration sought authority for years to reform the VWP.
- In 2006 President George W. Bush proposed, and Congress ultimately passed as part of the "Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Act)," reforms to the VWP law that gave the Administration greater flexibility to admit countries to VWP as the program's security was strengthened. Section 711 of the 9/11 Act amends Section 217 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which provides the legal authority for the VWP.

Easier Travel For Legitimate Tourists And Travelers

- DHS has increased the number of participating VWP countries from 27 to 34. 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 seven newly added countries are: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, the Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia.
- Citizens of countries eligible to travel to the United States under the VWP prior to November 17, 2008 are: 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.

Strengthening Security Measures To Protect Against Those Who Want To Do Us Harm

- To be admitted to the VWP, a country must meet various security requirements, such as 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.
- As a result of these information sharing measures, DHS is able to screen arriving VWP passengers far more effectively and to detect, apprehend, and limit the movement of terrorists, criminals, and other dangerous travelers.
- Beginning November 17, 2008 eligible citizens or nationals from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, the Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia must obtain approval through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to traveling to the United States under the VWP
- Beginning Jan. 12, 2009, eligible citizens or nationals from all VWP countries must obtain approval through ESTA prior to traveling to the United States under the VWP.
- ESTA is an automated system that assists in determining eligibility to travel to the United States under the

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VWP, and whether such travel poses any law enforcement or security risk. Upon completion of an ESTA application, a VWP traveler is notified of his or her eligibility to travel to the United States under the VWP.

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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