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- [Travel Security](#)
- [Immigration](#)

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Fact Sheet: US-VISIT



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US-VISIT is a top priority for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security because it enhances security for our citizens and visitors while facilitating legitimate travel and trade across our borders. US-VISIT helps to secure our borders, facilitate the entry and exit process, and enhance the integrity of our immigration system while respecting the privacy of our visitors.

US-VISIT is part of a continuum of security measures that begins outside U.S. borders and continues through a visitor's arrival in and departure from the United States. It incorporates eligibility determinations made by both the Departments of Homeland Security and State.

US-VISIT currently applies to all visitors (with limited exemptions) entering the United States, regardless of country of origin or whether they are traveling on a visa. Most visitors experience US VISIT's biometric procedures – a digital, inkless fingerscan and digital photograph – upon entry to the United States.

In those cases where a visitor requires a visa, the Department of State collects the visitor's biometrics and biographic information that is then checked against watch lists; therefore, improving the Department of State's ability to make a visa determination. When the visitor arrives in the United States, US VISIT procedures allow the Department of Homeland Security to determine whether the person applying for entry is the same person who was issued the visa by the Department of State, and with an additional watch list check improve the Department of Homeland Security's ability to make admissibility decisions.

US-VISIT entry procedures are currently in place at 115 airports, 15 seaports and in the secondary inspection areas of the 50 busiest land ports of entry. By December 31, 2005, US VISIT entry procedures will be implemented in the secondary inspection areas of all remaining land ports of entry.

The Goals of US-VISIT are to:

- Enhance the security of our citizens and visitors
- Facilitate legitimate travel and trade
- Ensure the integrity of our immigration system
- Protect the privacy of our visitors

How It Works

Pre-Entry:

- Visitors applying for a visa have their information reviewed before they enter the United States. Both the Departments of Homeland Security and State play a role in determining the eligibility of a visitor to receive a visa.
- As of October 26, 2004 visitors who do not require a visa to enter the United States must present a machine-readable passport to be admitted through US VISIT and enter the country.

Entry:

- Many of the entry procedures in place today at airports and seaports remain unchanged and are familiar to international visitors. When a visitor arrives through an airport or seaport, he or she is enrolled in US-VISIT as part of the primary inspection process. At the nation's 50 busiest land ports of entry, those visitors carrying a foreign passport and/or who are required to complete a Form I-94 are enrolled in US VISIT at the secondary inspection area. (This does not apply to most Canadian citizens or, initially, to those Mexicans who use their Border Crossing Cards or "Laser Visa.")
- The new, inkless digital fingerscanner is easy to use. Visitors first put the left index finger, then the right index finger on a glass plate that electronically captures their fingerscans.
- Visitors will also look into a camera and their digital picture will be taken.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers will review travel documents and ask questions about the visitor's stay in the United States.
- The biometric enhancements to the entry procedures take just seconds.
- Biometric identifiers also protect our visitors by making it virtually impossible for anyone else to claim their identity should their biometrically-enhanced travel documents (such as a visa) be stolen or duplicated.

Status Management:

- Should a visitor seek to adjust status or extend his/her stay, US-VISIT would be updated with any modifications to the individual's status.

Exit:

- US-VISIT is exploring departure confirmation alternatives at airports and seaports. The tests and evaluation will continue in 2005. Ultimately, all visitors will be required to check out before leaving the United States.
- US-VISIT exit procedures are operating in five locations: Chicago O'Hare International Airport, Baltimore Washington International Airport, Denver International Airport, Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport and Miami International Cruise Line Terminal. Visitors leaving from these locations must check out.
- The exit pilot program will be expanded from its current locations and will be piloted at the following airports and seaports:
 - Atlanta, Georgia (Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport)
 - Detroit, Michigan (Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport)
 - Ft. Lauderdale, Florida (Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport)
 - Newark, New Jersey (Newark Liberty International Airport)
 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia International Airport)
 - Phoenix, Arizona (Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport)
 - San Francisco, California (San Francisco International Airport)
 - San Juan, Puerto Rico (Luis Muñoz Marin International Airport)
 - Seattle, Washington (Seattle-Tacoma International Airport)
 - Los Angeles, California (San Pedro and Long Beach Seaports)

A visitor can expect to encounter one of these departure procedures at the ports above. After evaluating these exit procedures, DHS will select the most effective process to implement at airports and seaports system wide.

- The exit procedures being piloted require foreign visitors to check out at an exit station or with a US VISIT exit attendant at the departure gate at the port. Foreign visitors will go through one of the following three processes, depending on location.
 - o Under one alternative, visitors departing the United States will check out of the country at exit stations located within the airport or seaport terminal. As with the process the visitors encounter upon entry at airports or seaports, their travel documents are read, their two index fingers will be scanned at the exit station, their digital picture will be taken, and they will receive a printed receipt that verifies that they have checked out. An exit attendant will be available to assist with visitors' check out.
 - o The second alternative still uses the exit station but includes an additional step – verifying – at the departure gate. Visitors will be required to present the receipt at their departure gate to confirm that they checked out at the exit station. The exit attendant will scan the receipt and then ask the visitor to place an index finger on the scanning device. Once the person's identity is matched to the receipt, the exit attendant will hand the visitor his or her receipt back and the visitor will board the airplane.
 - o Another alternative under the pilot program is a biometric check-out process with a US VISIT exit attendant at visitors' departure gates.
- Currently, foreign visitors who depart from a port where the departure confirmation system is in place must comply. This exit confirmation information will help facilitate the visitor's future visits to the United States.
- US-VISIT compares arrival and departure biographical manifest data provided by the airlines and cruise lines to know when someone entered and exited the country.

Respecting Privacy and the Environment

- The Department of Homeland Security safeguards the biometric and biographic information provided by travelers and ensures that their privacy interests are not violated. US-VISIT records will be protected in a manner consistent with all applicable privacy laws and regulations. Personal information will be kept secure and confidential and will not be discussed with or disclosed to any person within or outside the US-VISIT Program other than as authorized by law and as required for the performance of official duties. Careful safeguards, including appropriate security controls, will ensure that the data is not used or accessed improperly.
- US-VISIT has published a Privacy Impact Assessment that ensures that personal information is used appropriately, protected from misuse and improper disclosure, and destroyed when no longer needed. This will be updated as necessary.
- A US-VISIT privacy officer is available to answer questions or resolve concerns and may be contacted by sending an email to usvisitprivacy@dhs.gov, or by writing to the Chief Privacy Officer, Department of Homeland Security, Washington DC 20528, USA, ATTN: US-VISIT Appeal. Information on the US-VISIT privacy program is available at DHS.gov/us-visit.
- US-VISIT complies with all environmental laws and regulations.

Timing and Delivery

- The Department of Homeland Security has met the December 31, 2003 and December 31, 2004 Congressional deadlines to deploy an entry/exit program that strengthens security and facilitates travel for legitimate visitors while respecting their privacy and our environment.
- The Department of Homeland Security met Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge's deadline to implement technology that will collect and match biometric information (digital fingerscans and photos) of foreign nationals required to obtain a visa to enter the United States at the airport and seaport primary inspection locations.
- The US-VISIT program received \$340 million for FY 04 and has been appropriated \$340 million for FY 05.

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