

Introduction of the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) Fee for Visa Waiver Travelers

Reference Document: STATE 25644, 03/10

1. This is an action request for VWP posts (see para. 5).
2. Summary: This cable provides additional information on implementation of the Travel Promotion Act of 2009 (TPA) and fee collection for the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), requests posts to engage in outreach, and provides talking points. End summary.
3. As previously reported (Ref a), President Obama signed the TPA into law on March 4, 2010. The TPA will create a partnership between the U.S. government and the private sector to market the United States as a travel destination for international visitors. Fees collected from international travelers from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries, matched by private sector contributions, will fund the Corporation for Travel Promotion. The fees will be collected through the ESTA system, which the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) administers.
4. On August 6, 2010, DHS announced an interim final rule that amends DHS regulations to require travelers from VWP countries to pay operational and travel promotion fees when applying for ESTA beginning September 8, 2010. The total fee will be \$14.00, with \$4.00 to recover the cost of administering the ESTA system and \$10.00 as mandated in the TPA.
5. The Department is working with DHS and the Department of Commerce to notify foreign and domestic media, the travel industry, and other stakeholders about this change. The Department requests that consular officers in VWP countries, in coordination with DHS and Commerce representatives, meet with host government officials, and airline, tourism, and other stakeholders to inform them of the new fee provisions connected to ESTA. Please contact the ESTA Program Management Office [redacted] for outreach materials or requests for ESTA representatives to travel in-country. They will do their best to accommodate. This cable is being sent as an ALDAC to facilitate all posts answering questions from citizens of VWP countries and the general public.
6. The Department supports the TPA goal of attracting international visitors to the United States. Our greatest diplomatic tool for sharing American values is America itself, and we recognize the critical importance of travel and tourism to our economy and job creation. The Department looks forward to working with the Corporation for Travel Promotion to ensure that prospective visitors to the United States receive comprehensive, up-to-date information on travel documents and requirements for entry.
7. Frequently Asked Questions:
 - Q. What is the new fee charged to travelers?
 - A. It is \$14.00. Since the implementation of ESTA, DHS has had discretion to charge a fee to cover administrative costs. DHA determined that cost to be \$4.00 per registration. The TPA fee adds an additional \$10.00.
 - Q. When will the fee go into effect?
 - A. ESTA registrations on or after September 8, 2010, will be subject to the fee.

Q. How do travelers pay the fee?

A. At this time, payment is required through the following credit cards: Mastercard, Visa, American Express, and Discover. Payments can also be made with a debit card that holds the Visa or Mastercard symbol. Please check with your bank on the compatibility of your debit card. We are continuing to explore other payment measures. The ESTA registration form already in use will walk users through the payment process.

Q. What types of privacy protection exist on the website?

A. "Pay.gov" uses advanced encryption to protect transactions while applicants are logged in. When accessing a profile, any account numbers entered will be masked on-screen.

Q. How long are ESTA approvals valid?

A. Each approved ESTA application will be valid for a period of two years unless the traveler's passport expires sooner. It allows for multiple visits to the United States within that application.

Q. If I have a valid ESTA, will I have to re-register when the new fees go into effect?

A. No, existing ESTA registrations remain valid for travel through their expiration date.

Q. Is ESTA approval like a visa?

A. An ESTA approval is not a visa under U.S. law, nor does it confer the same benefits as a visa.

Q. Will this attract more international visitors to the United States?

A. Oxford Economics, a leading economic forecasting consultancy, estimates that the TPA program will generate \$4 billion in new visitor spending, and lead to the creation of 40,000 new jobs.

Q. Why do VWP countries have to fund this travel promotion program through ESTA fees?

A. Some countries fund tourism promotion through airline or hotel taxes. The Travel Promotion Act legislation specified that the U.S. government fund this program through a \$10 fee added to ESTA registration.

8. The following are Visa Waiver Program member countries: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Additional talking points are posted on the outreach page of CAWeb. Direct further questions to [redacted] CA/VO/F/P and [redacted].