Visa Waiver Program

Overview
The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) allows citizens of participating countries* to travel to the United States without a visa for stays of 90 days or less, when they meet all requirements explained below. Travelers must be eligible to use the VWP and have a valid Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) approval prior to travel.

If you are eligible to travel on the VWP, but prefer to have a visa in your passport, you may still apply for a visitor (B) visa.

Chile Joins Visa Waiver Program
Beginning March 31, 2014, Chileans meeting the criteria of the Visa Waiver Program may travel to the United States for business or tourism, for up to 90 days, without a visa.

Requirements for using the Visa Waiver Program (VWP)
You must meet all of the following requirements to travel to the United States on the VWP:

Travel Purpose Must be Permitted on a Visitor (B) Visa
The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) allows citizens of participating countries* to travel to the United States without obtaining a visa, for stays of 90 days or less for tourism or business. Transiting or traveling through the United States to Canada or Mexico is generally permitted for VWP travelers.

The following are examples of activities permitted while in the United States on the VWP.

Business:
- consult with business associates
- attend a scientific, educational, professional, or business convention or conference
- attend short-term training (you may not be paid by any source in the United States with the exception of expenses incidental to your stay)
- negotiate a contract

Learn more about Business Travel to the United States (PDF - 362 KB) on VWP or using a visitor visa.

Tourism:
- tourism
- vacation (holiday)
- visit with friends or relatives
- medical treatment
- participation in social events hosted by fraternal, social, or service organizations
- participation by amateurs in musical, sports, or similar events or contests, if not being paid for participating
- enrollment in a short recreational course of study, not for credit toward a degree (for example, a two-day cooking class while on vacation)

Learn more about Visitor Visas - Business and Pleasure (PDF - 510 KB).

Travel Purposes Not Permitted on Visa Waiver Program – Examples:
These are some examples of activities not permitted on the VWP and require visas for travel to the United States:

- study, for credit
• employment
• work as foreign press, radio, film, journalists, or other information media
• permanent residence in the United States

Citizen or National of a VWP Designated Country *
You must be a citizen or national of VWP-participant country*. The following 38 countries* are Visa Waiver Program participants:

A
- Andorra
- Australia
- Austria
B
- Belgium
- Brunei
C
- Chile
- Czech Republic
D
- Denmark
E
- Estonia
F
- Finland
- France
G
- Germany
- Greece
H
- Hungary
I
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
J
- Japan
L
- Latvia
- Liechtenstein
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
M
- Malta
- Monaco
N
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
P
- Portugal
S
- San Marino
- Singapore
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- South Korea
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
T
- Taiwan
U
- United Kingdom

Each Traveler Must Have Authorization Under ESTA
In order to travel without a visa on the VWP, you must have authorization through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to boarding a U.S. bound air or sea carrier. ESTA is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) automated web-based system to determine eligibility to travel without a visa to the United States for tourism or business. Visit the ESTA webpage on the CBP website for more detailed information, to apply for ESTA, and pay the fee.

Travel Must Be on an Approved Carrier
If arriving by air or sea, you must be arriving on an approved air or sea carrier. You must also have a round trip ticket indicating return passage to a country* outside the United States.

Previous Compliance and No Prior Visa Ineligibilities
If you have had a U.S. visa before or previously traveled to the United States under the VWP or another status, you must have complied with the conditions of previous admissions to the United States, and you must not have previously been found ineligible for a U.S. visa.

Travelers should be aware that by requesting admission under the Visa Waiver Program, they are generally waiving their right to review or appeal a CBP officer’s decision as to their application for admission at the port of entry. See the CBP website for additional details.

Have the Correct Type of Passport
You must have a passport that is valid for at least 6 months after your planned departure from the United States (unless exempted by country-specific agreements). For families, each member of your family, including infants and children, must have his/her own passport.

In addition, your passport must meet the following requirements for VWP travel:
Citizens of: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Republic of Korea, and the Slovak Republic

Must have a machine-readable passport, and also:

with an integrated chip containing information from the passport data page = e-Passport

Taiwan

with an integrated chip containing information from the passport data page = e-Passport, and a national ID number

Citizens of: all other VWP countries *

Must have a machine-readable passport, and: with an integrated chip containing information from the passport data page = e-Passport

If the passport was issued, renewed, or extended:
on or after 10/26/06.

with a digital photograph printed on the data page or an integrated chip with information from the data page = e-Passport

between 10/26/05 and 10/25/06.

with no further requirements

before 10/26/05.

About Machine-Readable Passports and e-Passports

The e-Passport and machine-readable passport requirements are in compliance with standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Machine-Readable Passport – A machine-readable passport has certain biographical data entered on the data page, which is scanned at the port of entry, most often an airport, when you seek to enter the United States.

Travelers should contact their country’s passport issuing agency or authority if they have questions whether their passport is machine-readable.

e-Passport - Data related to an individual’s identity is incorporated in an integrated electronic chip into the passport, referred to as an e-Passport. The data on the chip includes the two lines of machine-readable printed data and facial recognition data. The chip can be scanned to match the identity of the traveler to the passport. You can readily identify an e-Passport, because it has a unique international symbol on the cover. Review more about e-Passports on the Department of Homeland Security website.
Emergency and Temporary Passports
If you use an emergency or temporary passport to enter the United States on the VWP, the passport must be an electronic passport, or e-Passport. This includes VWP travelers who are transiting the United States.

May I apply for a visa instead of using the VWP?
Travelers who are eligible for the VWP may apply for a visitor (B) visa, if they prefer to do so. If you do not meet all of the criteria explained in this webpage, then you must apply for a visa. Additionally, you need to apply for a visa if you will be traveling on a private aircraft or other non-VWP approved air or sea carrier. Review the approved carriers list. Also, if you intend to extend your stay beyond 90 days or change your status once in the United States (for example, you intend to request change of status to student or temporary worker, etc.), then you need to apply for a visa.

I was denied a visa under section 214(b). May I use the VWP?
A recent visa refusal for any reason could result in denial of ESTA authorization, additional review at the port of entry, or denial of admission to the United States. If you are uncertain if you qualify for VWP travel, you may choose to apply for a visa.

Trips to Canada, Mexico, or nearby Islands
If you are admitted to the United States under the VWP, you may take a short trip to Canada, Mexico, or a nearby island and generally be readmitted to the United States under the VWP for the remainder of the original 90 days granted upon your initial arrival in the United States. Therefore, the length of time of your total stay, including the short trip, must be 90 days or less. See the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website.
Citizens of VWP countries who reside in Mexico, Canada, or a nearby island are generally exempted from the requirement to show onward travel to another country when entering the United States. Learn more at the CBP website.

How can a country join the VWP?
A country must meet various requirements to be considered for designation in the Visa Waiver Program. Requirements include, but are not limited to:
• enhanced law enforcement and security-related data sharing with the United States;
• issuing e-Passports;
• having a visitor (B) visa refusal rate of less than three percent;
• timely reporting of both blank and issued lost and stolen passports; and
• maintenance of high counterterrorism, law enforcement, border control, and document security standards.
Designation as a VWP country is at the discretion of the U.S. government. Meeting the objective requirements of the VWP does not guarantee a country will receive VWP designation.

Reference
* With respect to all references to “country” or “countries” on this page, it should be noted that the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, Pub. L. No. 96-8, Section 4(b)(1), provides that “[w]henever the laws of the United States refer or relate to foreign countries, nations, states, governments, or similar entities, such terms shall include and such laws shall apply with respect to Taiwan.” 22 U.S.C. § 3303(b)(1). Accordingly, all references to “country” or “countries” in the Visa Waiver Program authorizing legislation, Section 217 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1187, are read to include Taiwan. This is consistent with the United States’ one-China policy, under which the United States has maintained unofficial relations with Taiwan since 1979.