



AILA's Take on the Visa Waiver Program

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The purpose of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) is to facilitate and boost legitimate travel for business and tourism which provides economic benefits to the U.S. By providing visa free travel, the VWP also allows the State Department to allocate more resources to visa-issuing posts. More than 19 million travelers from 38 designated countries visit the U.S. through the VWP annually. The VWP's pre-screened, pre-approved visitor entry process and security cooperation requirements for participating countries strengthens border security and enhances the customs and entry process.

The Visa Waiver Program

- Visitors to the U.S. can come for 90 days or less for business or tourism under the VWP.
- All nationals or citizens of VWP countries are required to have an approved Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to travelling to the U.S. ESTA requires advance submission of biographic, travel, and credit card information. Prior to boarding, a carrier will electronically verify with CBP that the traveler has an approved ESTA on file.

VWP Security and Other Requirements

For a country to be in the VWP it must:

- Enter into an agreement with the U.S. to share information regarding whether citizens and nationals of that country traveling to the U.S. represents a threat to U.S. security or welfare;
- enter into an agreement with the U.S. to report or make available through Interpol or other means as designated by the Secretary of Homeland Security information about the theft or loss of passports;
- be determined not to compromise the law enforcement or security interests of the United States by its inclusion in the program;
- issue machine-readable passports to its citizens;
- have had a refusal rate of less than 3 percent for the previous fiscal year for its nationals who apply for business and tourism visas;
- accept the repatriation of any citizen, former citizen, or national against whom a final order of removal is issued no later than 3 weeks after the order is issued; and
- offer reciprocal visa-free travel privileges to U.S. citizens.

Economic Impact (see US Travel Association website: <https://www.ustravel.org/government-affairs/international-policy-issues/visa-waiver>)

- By facilitating travel from allied countries into the U.S., the VWP drives U.S. economic growth, spurs job creation.
- Approximately 60 percent of all overseas visitors arrived to the U.S. through the VWP. While here, they generated \$190 billion in economic output and supported nearly 1 million American jobs.
- The VWP has helped boost foreign direct investment (FDI) into America from participating countries for example, after gaining VWP status, FDI into the U.S. from South Korea, Singapore and Ireland.
- Overseas visitors spend an average of \$4,500 per trip and generate tax revenue in communities nationwide.