

Article: Visa Waiver Anyone? Szabo, Zelnick and Erickson, P.C.

If you're from a country that participates in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html, and you plan to travel on a visa waiver, you will now need to plan ahead. No more jumping on a last minute flight to the U.S. The Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) program is now mandatory.

On January 12, 2009, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implemented the ESTA program that now requires all Visa Waiver Program (VWP) participants to obtain prior approval to travel by air or sea to the U.S.

To apply for ESTA, you will need to log on to the web-based system and complete an application. The information collected will be used to check your criminal background and your eligibility under the VWP.

The applicant process is straightforward and ESTA will make a decision almost immediately regarding your eligibility for travel under the VWP. If you are denied ESTA, you will receive a message advising you to log on to the travel.gov website to obtain information on seeking a visa to the U.S. If your ESTA application isn't approved you may not be allowed boarding under the VWP and/or denied entry into the U.S. So it's important that you register with ESTA early to avoid any travel delays.

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