

# USA TO BECOME VISA FREE?



USA has decided to expand their Visa Waiver Program by new states including the Czech Republic, the Baltic Republics and others. Journalists often label this move as the removal of visa requirements. It is not entirely true.

The citizens of the countries that will become part of the program on November 17 will not be allowed just to get on plane and easily get off to Washington DC. The procedure will still be similar to older system of obtaining visa because the travelers will be required to fill in an electronic on-line form.

This Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) needs to be applied for at least 72 hours prior one's journey travel to the U.S. The visitor will also need a tamper-proof biometric passport. The passport must include information about the traveler's fingerprint and iris.

Unlike visa the ESTA is currently free of charge. It is also important to mention that even if a visitor meets all the requirements the immigration officers may still decide that he or she may not enter the U.S.

This "visa free" entry allows leisure and business tourists to stay in USA for 90 days. Those who want to stay longer still need visa. If you are a student, journalist, or if you seek employment in the country, you need to ask for visa.

The Travel Industry Association (TIA) welcome the expansion because they hope it will help the United States to attract up to 1 million additional visitors every year. The TIA claims there has been a significant drop in numbers of overseas visitors after the post 9/11 tightening of security measures. Thanks to the association's work six additional countries—Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Poland and Romania—may soon be included in the VWP.

The development in the U.S. visa policy towards the European countries has been welcomed by representatives of the EU. European Commission Vice President Jacques Barrot said that this move will considerably strengthen the close ties between the EU and USA.

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