

# USA TIGHTEN RULES FOR VISA-FREE TRAVEL



In the wake of the attacks on Paris, the USA tighten their rules for entering the country without a visa. Citizens from Germany and 37 other countries with a treaty for visa-free travel will have to face stricter security checks.

According to statements made by the US administration, upon granting an electronic entry permit (E-stay) the authorities are going to examine if applicants reside in countries which they deem as "terrorist refuges". **US intelligence agencies and the Homeland Security are going to update their list of problematic countries in regular intervals**, the White House explained.

Furthermore, the cooperation with partner countries for the exchange of biometric data will be strengthened. In collaboration with the US congress, airlines which fail to adequately verify the ID of their passengers will also have to pay a higher fee of USD 50,000 instead of the previous USD 5,000.

Minister of Homeland Security, Jeh Johnson, invoked the House of Representatives and the senate to provide more financial assets for the verification of air travelers upon entry of the USA. These assets then should be used in order to tighten airport security and send US border officers to additional international airports with direct flights to the United States. As of now, there are 15 US officers stationed at foreign airports, said Johnson.

Meanwhile, **Congress is working on laws to tighten the so-called "Visa Waiver" program, which enables citizens from partner countries a 90-day visit to the US visa-free travel.**

Among these partner countries are 23 EU states and countries such as Australia, Chile, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and Singapore. Based on the nature of quid-pro-quo, the program also allows US-citizens to travel to these partner countries visa-free as well.

In the assaults in a concert hall, restaurants, cafes and the football stadium Stade de France in Paris on November 13th, 130 people died and 352 were injured. The ones responsible for these attacks are the jihadist militia Islamic State (ISIS). Several of the identified terrorists had already fought for ISIS in Syria and were able to enter the US due to their French or Belgian citizenships.

In a statement made to US-president Barack Obama, the National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes mentioned the existence of a "significantly larger flow of foreign terrorists" to Iraq and Syria than seen in the USA, which should raise concern. Every year, nearly 20 million people enter the US using the "Visa Waiver" program - which is roughly a third of the total number of visitors.

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