

# THE VISA WAIVER PROGRAM MAKES AMERICA MORE SECURE



Countries that participate in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP) are required to share security information, maintain high security standards and allow U.S. inspection of security compliance. Recent upgrades, enacted in late 2017, have further increased the security of the program to help minimize risks and strengthen the VWP's ability to track and identify terrorists.

## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY:

First and foremost, the VWP is a security partnership program. It mandates high and consistent standards from partner countries in the areas of national security, law enforcement, and immigration enforcement to detect and prevent terrorists, criminals, and other potentially dangerous individuals from traveling to the United States—while still facilitating legitimate travel and tourism.

*Kirstjen Nielsen, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security*

The new requirements reflect best practices derived from proven and effective security partnerships, such as the Visa Waiver Program, and from internationally-recognized law enforcement and national security initiatives, such as the adoption of ePassports to prevent fraud and counterfeiting.

*White House Fact Sheet on Enhancing Vetting Capabilities. September 24, 2017*

## HOW THE VISA WAIVER PROGRAM STRENGTHENS U.S. SECURITY: VWP REQUIRES INCREASED SECURITY FROM PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES.

### VWP participating countries are required to:

- Share information about known or suspected terrorists and criminals with U.S. authorities as well as maintain high standards for transportation security, border security and document integrity. Through VWP-mandated exchanges, the U.S. government has received actionable information that was previously unknown to U.S. authorities.
- Allow U.S. inspections of VWP country's security standards, protocols and apparatus to ensure compliance with the highest security practices.
- Promptly enter data on all lost and stolen passports into INTERPOL's Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database.
- Ensure all VWP travelers use ePassports that conform to stringent international aviation security standards.
- Screen all travelers crossing their borders against U.S. counterterrorism information.
- Assess the effectiveness of safeguards against insider threats in the aviation security environment.
- Initiate a public information campaign to reduce overstay violations if they have higher than a two percent rate visa overstay rate.

### VWP security compliance is regularly reviewed by U.S. authorities.

- The United States conducts comprehensive reviews of all VWP countries, at least every other year, to ensure ongoing compliance. Such reviews can result (and have resulted) in membership revocation or other conditions placed on a country's membership in the program.

# THE VISA WAIVER PROGRAM MAKES AMERICA MORE SECURE (CONT.)



## Travelers from VWP countries are screened against multiple law enforcement and security databases before arriving in the United States.

- Through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can determine whether an individual traveler represents any law enforcement or security risk before traveling to the United States.
- ESTA gives DHS the capability to conduct both advance and ongoing vetting of VWP travelers through appropriate law enforcement data, including:
  - The Terrorist Screening Database;
  - Lost and stolen passports data (including INTERPOL's SLTD database); and
  - Visa revocations, previous visa refusals and other immigration violations.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers may deny entry to anyone who is considered to be a security risk or is deemed to be at risk of overstaying their visa. Pre-screening works. For example, DHS estimated the visa overstay rate among VWP travelers to be approximately 0.65 percent in 2016.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Countries considered for VWP membership are independently assessed by U.S. intelligence agencies, in addition to DHS review.
- The VWP, like all good security measures, continues to evolve in the face of current threats, such as those posed by foreign fighters.

		VWP COUNTRIES	NON-VWP COUNTRIES
Who is coming here?		ESTA	B1/B2 VISA
Who poses a risk?	Required to share terrorist watchlist information?	✓	
	Required to share criminal data upon request?	✓	
	Required to share lost and stolen passport information?	✓	
Who is this person?	Generally required to have secure electronic passport?	✓	
	Fingerprints obtained?	✓	✓

**CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD SUPPORT AND EXPAND THE VISA WAIVER PROGRAM.**