

Poland's Inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How will Polish citizens travel to the United States once Poland is included in the Visa Waiver Program?

A: For short tourism and business trips of 90 days or less, Polish citizens who apply for and receive an approved online authorization via the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) will not need to have a visa. For other categories of travel, including stays over 90 days, working, or studying in the United States, a visa will still be required. Polish citizens traveling to the U.S. without a visa will need a passport with an embedded computer chip.

Q: When will visa-free travel for Polish citizens begin?

A: The ESTA system will open for Polish travelers on November 11, 2019.

Q: How do I know if my passport has an embedded computer chip?

A: All Polish passports, except for emergency passports, contain an embedded computer chip. A symbol for the chip appears on the bottom front cover of the passport.

Q: Do Polish citizens need to register anywhere for visa-free travel to the United States?

A: To travel without a visa, the Polish citizen traveler must also request an online authorization under ESTA. ESTA allows more effective and efficient pre-screening of travelers. Polish citizens will be allowed to apply for ESTA shortly before the date on which visa-free travel will commence. ESTA is required for travelers from all of the 38 existing Visa Waiver Program member countries.

Q: How much does ESTA cost?

A: ESTA currently costs \$14, which is significantly less than the \$160 fee for applying for a U.S. tourist/business visa.

Q: - What information is required to complete the ESTA authorization form?

A: The ESTA application asks similar questions to those included in the U.S. visa application, including name, date of birth, passport information, and other questions about employment and travel history. The ESTA application is considerably shorter than the U.S. visa application form, however.

Q: I have a visa that is still valid. How will I travel to the U.S.?

A: Any traveler who has a valid visa can continue to use it, even after visa-free travel is possible. A valid visa holder need not apply for ESTA. Those traveling with visas may be able to stay in the United States for up to six months, as determined by the immigrant agent at the U.S. port of entry.

Q: How long can Polish citizens stay in the U.S. when traveling there without a visa within the Visa Waiver Program?

A: Polish citizens can travel on the Visa Waiver Program for short tourism or business trips of up to 90 days. Extensions are not possible.

Q: If I travel with ESTA, is the maximum time I can stay in the United State three months once a year, three months in the two year validity period, or multiple times within the timeframe my ESTA authorization is valid?

A: U.S. law imposes no specific time limit. However, the immigration agent at the U.S. port of entry may deny admission if he/she believes that the traveler is trying to use visa-free travel for extended stays in the United States broken only by short absences from the United States. ESTA is for short visits only.

Q: I was denied a visa before, or had problems at a U.S. port of entry. Can I now travel to the U.S. without a visa?

A: Generally, an applicant who previously was denied a U.S. visa, or who has a history of other incidents that could affect visa eligibility, such as a criminal conviction or previous U.S. immigration violation, will not receive an approved ESTA, and thus cannot travel visa-free. Any traveler who is denied an ESTA can apply for a U.S. visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate.

Q: Is it possible for an ESTA submission to be denied? If so, why?

A: ESTA may be denied for various reasons, including an applicant's past criminal or immigration violation. All questions on the ESTA form must be answered truthfully. For example, if a Polish citizen has a criminal conviction 20 years ago, s/he must answer "yes" to the question about past crimes. The fact that s/he currently can obtain a clean police certificate is not relevant.

Q: Can Polish travelers still apply for a B1 and B2 visas?

A: Yes. Many travelers prefer to have visas rather than apply for ESTA.

Q: Are there other restrictions on visa-free travel?

A: Visa-free travel generally is only available for those arriving on regularly scheduled commercial flights or cruise ships. In addition, special rules apply to those crossing by car or on foot at land ports of entry. Please read all of the frequently answered questions available on U.S. Government websites relating to the Visa Waiver Program and ESTA (see below).

Q: Can I be turned around at the point of entry even if I have ESTA authorization?

A: Whether you travel with a visa, or visa-free with an approved ESTA, the final decision of whether you will be admitted to the United States is made by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent at the U.S. port of entry.

Q: I have a visa valid for the next 10 years, but I got married and changed my last name and passport. What do I do?

A: You may apply for ESTA using your new passport information, or you may apply for a new U.S. visa.

Q: How about travelers going to the United States for programs such as Summer Work Travel, Camp Counselor, Au Pair or Intern/Trainee? Does an appropriate visa still apply? Can they travel with ESTA?

A: Participants of exchange programs require a category J visa. They are not allowed to engage in those activities without a visa.

Q: Does taking part in the Diversity Visa program in any way complicate travelling with ESTA?

A: No, participating in the Diversity Visa program has no impact on a traveler's ESTA application.

Q: Where can Polish citizens find more information about the Visa Waiver Program?

A: Complete details on the Visa Waiver Program (including ESTA) are available at U.S. Customs and Border Protection's ESTA website at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> and the State Department's travel website at <http://travel.state.gov>, and additional information soon will be available on the U.S. Embassy's website: <http://pl.usembassy.gov>.

Q: Why did it take so long for Poland to become a member of the Visa Waiver Program?

A: Most of Poland's neighboring countries became members of the Visa Waiver Program when the legal requirements for entry were less strict (most notably, the visa refusal rate requirement). In addition, the U.S. Congress has enacted legislation in recent years making the program's security-related requirements more robust. Poland has fulfilled all of these stricter legal requirements for Visa Waiver Program membership.

Q: I paid for the visa application fee, but have not yet scheduled my appointment or wish to cancel my appointment. May I seek a refund?

A: Unfortunately, visa application fees are not refundable. We welcome you to schedule your visa interview appointment. If your visa is approved, you will not need to apply for ESTA.