

ESTA Webchat

January 7, 2009

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Join us on January 7, 2009 at 14:00 GMT/09:00 EST to ask your questions about travel to the U.S.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):You can submit your questions now and during the program.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Once you have submitted your question, it will appear in red.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Welcome everyone! Thanks for joining us today. We will start at the top of the hour.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email)Will I still need to fill out the I-94 form onboard the plane? What forms must I fill out on the plane?

Margie:Yes, for the time being you will need to complete the Visa Waiver form (I-94W) and the Customs Declaration on the plane.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):We are now joined by the Consul General. Please continue to submit your questions.

Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email): If I make a mistake on filling out the ESTA form online - like answering "yes" to prior arrest - and then getting rejected, how do I go about making a correction?

Margie:To help prevent mistakes, the ESTA™ Web site will prompt you to review the information you typed in before you click on "OK". In addition, the ESTA™ Web site will require you to confirm your passport number prior to submission. If you make a mistake when filling out important bio information including name, date of birth passport information or in answering eligibility questions, and you realize it too late - only after having submitted the ESTA™ application - you will need to submit a new ESTA™ application. Any other mistakes, including e-mail address, telephone number, carrier, flight number, city of departure, and address while in the United States may be corrected or updated by using the ESTA™ update function.

Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email): If I make a mistake on filling out my passport number, how can I change it?

Margie:This is pretty much the same situation as the previous question. To reiterate, the system is designed to help prevent mistakes and the ESTA™ Web site will prompt you to review the information you typed in before you click on "OK". If you make a mistake with your passport number and you realize it too late - only after having submitted the ESTA™ application - you will need to submit a new ESTA™ application.

Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email): Must I travel with my printed ESTA approval sheet?

Margie:No. This is an electronic registration system and your approval will be available to the customs official in the U.S. You may wish to print out a copy and carry it with you but this is not required.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):For more helpful information, please see the documents for download in the box to the left.

Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email): How will the airline know that I have ESTA approval?

Margie:The U.S. Government is working to develop a notification system. The airlines do not know for the near future but since this is a U.S. travel requirement of all visa waiver travelers as of January 12, we are advising all visa waiver travelers to complete their ESTA authorization at least 72 hours before planned travel, and preferably further in advance.

Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email): Do I have to give an ESTA form to the immigration officer or will he know that I have ESTA approval?

Margie:You do not need to give a copy of your ESTA authorization to an immigration officer. S/He will know via the ESTA system if you have received authorization.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):The Consul General is answering your questions as fast as she can! Welcome to all who have just joined us. Please submit your questions now.

Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email): I don't understand if the ESTA website wants me to provide an answer to BY which country my passport was issued or IN which country my passport was issued.

Margie:You should be answering BY which country your passport was issued. So, for example if you were living in the Philippines and your passport was issued by the Netherlands consulate there, you would answer "Netherlands".

Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email): The name on my passport and ESTA authorization are the same but the spelling of my name on my actual airline ticket is slightly different. Will this be a problem?

Margie:You might want to check with your airline to see if they will honor the ticket with a slightly different spelling. As long as the biographic information in your passport matches the information you entered to receive ESTA authorization, you have a valid ESTA authorization. If your name or passport number changes, you should apply for a new ESTA authorization.

Moderator (Kristin):(Submitted by email): Military personnel traveling on military orders on military aircraft (Dutch) – do they need to register with ESTA?

Margie:No. Military personnel on military aircraft do not need to register with ESTA because they are not traveling under the Visa Waiver Program. Rather, they are traveling under the auspices of a NATO agreement.

Dutchman:Does Dutch citizen needs a visa to travel USA?

Margie:The vast majority of Dutch citizens travel without a visa because they are going to the US for business or tourism for a stay of less than 90 days. Sometimes you need a visa. It depends on the purpose of travel. For example, most travel to work and study in the U.S. requires a visa. Travel for business and tourism that will be longer than 90 days requires a visa. Check the Consulate website at <http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov> for our "Visa Wizard" which helps you decide if you need a visa or not.

Belina:Hi, I am a Mexican living in Amsterdam for the past 3 years, I got my permit to travel to the US last year on October here in Ams, which I am planning to visit this year on February. Do I also need to obtain an electronic travel authorization? Thank you

Margie:If by a "permit" you mean that you have a visa to travel to the US than you don't need to register with ESTA. But if by a "permit" you mean you have a border crossing card than yes, you need to register with ESTA. This is because the border crossing card is only good for use at certain designated borders between the U.S. and Mexico. To enter the U.S. from Amsterdam you'll either need a visa or ESTA approval.

Brandy:I would like an email address for the consulate dept for visa

Margie:Our website address is <http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov>. There's a lot of information on the website that hopefully can help answer many of your questions. On the website you will also find helpful email addresses for questions based on their specific topic.

Smart:Do I need to also obtain the newly introduced ESTA for G-4 Visa too?

Margie:If you are traveling on a valid visa, whether it is G-4 or any other visa category, you don't need to register with ESTA. However, if your purpose of travel is different than what is allowed by the visa, you'll need ESTA approval. For example, if you are a flight attendant traveling for work on a crew visa (c1/d) you don't need to register with ESTA. But if you decide to take a vacation to New York you will need to register with ESTA because your purpose of travel is not work related.

Smart:Do I need to make appointment in order to apply for a G-4 Visa ?

Margie:Normally you don't need an appointment for a G-4 visa.

steven:hi i hold a british citizen passport and am not allowed to travel under the visa waiver program due to a driving offence. I am going to be travelling with my wife and daughter who hold Irish passports, are they able to travel under the Visa Waiver Program?

Margie:Steven: Please consult our website at www://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov for great information about the requirements of the Visa Waiver Program. We have developed something called the "Visa Wizard" to help guide you. If your wife and daughter seem to be eligible for travel without a visa they will need to complete the ESTA authorization process.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Please go to <http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov> for more information.

Kedar Thakar:If I have obtained visa (not eligible for visa waiver travel due to DUI conviction), do I still need to apply for ESTA? (I am British passport holder)

Margie:If you have a visa or need to apply for a visa, you do NOT need to apply for ESTA. ESTA is only for Visa Waiver Program travelers.

steven:thank you

Wshutt:but when we try to submit a new application it tells us one exists already

Margie:If you are trying to update an existing ESTA record that message might appear. Please try to create a new ESTA application and let us know if that works. If it does not we will check with our colleagues to see about a solution.

Ed Dixon:Your factsheet indicates a worst case scenario of a 72 hour turnaround. Does that include weekends (I am thinking of travelling on Sunday or Monday)

Margie:The 72 hours includes weekends and holidays. However, as you have noted, this is a minimum processing time before your departure. We strongly advise visa waiver program travelers to apply for ESTA well in advance. And remember, you don't need to have tickets to apply for ESTA -- you can do so at any time and the authorization remains valid for 2 years (or less if your passport expires before then or your biographic data changes.)

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Welcome to all who have just joined us! Please feel free to submit your questions now.

Wshutt:We have applied for an ESTA for one of customers but the Passport Expiry information was wrong, there is no way of amending this and we cant reapply

Margie:Our information is that you can reapply on behalf of one of your customers. If you are having specific problems perhaps you would consider sending us an email to the address for visa inquiries on our website: <http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov>.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):We see your questions coming in! Thank you.

timothy:hi i am travelling from london to new york this sunday do i need a visa

Margie:Timothy, it depends on your nationality and several other things, including the purpose and length of your travel. I'd suggest you check out our Visa Wizard on the website at: <http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov>

Lynda Grzesinski:Where can apply for a Visa for when I visit in May for 2 weeks

Margie:To find out the entry requirements for a visit to the Netherlands, contact the Netherlands Consulate closest to where you live. The U.S. Consulate General in Amsterdam only issues visas to go to the U.S.

Joseph:Is ESTA for security or efficiency?

Margie:Both, Joseph. We have a policy of secure borders AND open doors, meaning we want to do all we can to secure the international travel environment while extending a warm welcome to the United States (and facilitating the travel of) legitimate visitors.

colin tilley:My wife and I are due to fly to the US on January 15th and so will be among the first to use this new system. Can we be assured that it will be problem and will not jeopardise our travel plans?

Margie:Colin: We have been testing the ESTA system since August 1 when it opened for voluntary use and since that time over half a million visa waiver travelers have used ESTA. I am so glad to hear you were aware of the new requirement and I hope you enjoy your trip with your family to the U.S.!

becky:when i have applied for an esta the wrong passport information was entered, we cannot amend this and I have tried 3 times to enter a new application and it tells me I cant becasue one already exists. I have emailed the help options 2 months ago and still not got a reply. HELP

Margie:Becky: We've heard of a couple of instances regarding people in your situation. If your application was approved, we understand that you can reapply immediately. If you did not receive authorization, apparently you should wait 10 days to reapply. Since you have already contacted the help desk, we will follow up on this and post follow up information on our website. Thanks so much for bringing this to our attention.

Mark:Hi, I am doing some university research on U.S travel restrictions, any idea where I can get some more information?

Margie:Extensive information on travel requirements for the U.S. is available on <http://www.travel.state.gov>, including the legal basis for our entry requirements.

OliT:Once I have registered with ESTA, is there a provision for teh system to remind me once my 2-years authorisation expires?

Margie:OliT: I would suggest that you keep a copy of your ESTA authorization and note the date so that you can follow up before it expires when you plan to travel to the U.S. in the future. Just as you keep track of when your passport expires, the responsibility for tracking this info will be with the traveler.

Mark:many thanks for your help

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):You are welcome! Thanks for joining us today. Please go to <http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov> for more information. For more programs like this one please go to our facebook page at <http://co-nx.state.gov>

Ed Dixon:You say that you don't need to have tickets but the system requires a port of boarding, airline and flight number doesn't it?

Margie:Ed: You can use tentative travel plans and always change or update that information once you have a firm itinerary.

Natalie:Goodafternoon, you already indicated that you don't need to know your flight date etc to apply for the ESTA. Does this also apply on your stay address?

Margie:That's correct, Natalie. The information about your itinerary and destination is voluntary. Travelers don't need confirmed travel plans or specific destination addresses to apply for and receive ESTA authorization.

Ken:I have just got a 2years visiting visa to visti the USA and i want to know if there is a minimum period before my first entry?

Margie:Ken: If you have what we call a "B1/B2" visitors visa in your passport, you can travel to the United States at any time during the period of validity of the visa. Because you have a visa you do not need to apply for ESTA.

Natalie:Thank you!

Paul Smith:Hello, i travel to the USA on a regular basis and i hold a B1 / B2 visa. Do i have to also use the ESTA?

Margie:Paul: With your B1/B2 visa you do NOT need to apply for ESTA authorization. ESTA applies ONLY to visa-free travel to the U.S.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Welcome, new guests! Please submit your questions for the Consul General now.

SHELLI:I have my permanent resident card in Canada but hold a Dutch passport. I want to travel to Mexico and am stopping to change flights in Seattle. Do I need a visa because I will be stopping in Seattle both there and back?

Margie:Hi Shelli: Dutch citizens are generally eligible for visa free travel to the U.S. for tourism or business trips lasting less than 90 days (and to transit by air). So go ahead and use the ESTA website at: <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> to apply for your ESTA authorization.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Thank you everyone for your patience. The Consul General is answering your questions as fast as she can.

Siobhan:In 2004, I changed from H1-B to F1 visa status, and my old H1B was "cancelled without prejudice". In 2007, I entered the US on a visa waiver, and ticked "yes" to the question regarding "did you ever have a visa denied or cancelled". After an hour or so at immigration at JFK, I was told that I shouldn't have ticked "yes" because it referred only to denial and cancellation for crimes, illegal behaviour, etc. The same question appears on the ESTA form; but should I tick "no" as advised by the officer in JFK, or tick "yes" and risk having this hassle every time I enter the US? Thanks!

Margie:Siobhan: I would advise you to read the question on the site very carefully and follow the guidance of the immigration office at JFK. Changing your visa status from H1B to F1 does not mean your visa was refused and the stamp in your passport indicates only that the H1B is no longer valid.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Please let us know what you think about this program by voting in our poll on the upper left of your screen.

laura:I'm looking to go to Disney land next year, do i need both of the visas? Will this all be free? and will i have to take my family for interviews for application for visa?

Margie:Laura: If you are a UK citizen you might be eligible to travel visa free to go to Disney with your family. I'd suggest you start by visiting the U.S. Embassy in London's website at: <http://london.usembassy.gov> for information about the Visa Waiver Program, and if that does not apply, their visa application procedures.

Dolly:I am an American citizen living in the UK, my husband is british. We are in the process right now of applying for his immigration to the United States. MY petition for him has been approved, his medical is next week in London. We are still waiting for his interview, will this effect us?

Margie:Dolly: ESTA doesn't affect his immigrant visa process in any way.

guest 3:Imagine, somebody knows your passport number and logs in with your personal data. (Identity fraud). If that person gives the "wrong" answers, you could be refused entry into the U.S. Could this happen?

Margie:You raise an excellent point. Protecting your valuable documents is more and more important in this electronic era. I can tell you that there are significant safeguards to protect the information once it is submitted. If you have any indication that your identity documents have been used improperly in an ESTA application, you can always apply yourself.

Dolly:thank you **Margie**....

Sajith P. De saram:Anyone who has obtained visa from the consulate needs to obtain authorization via ESTA prior to his departure?

Margie:Just to clarify -- ESTA is required ONLY for visa free travel to the U.S. If you have already received a visa, you do not need ESTA authorization prior to your departure.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):We want to thank the Consul General for joining us today and thank you for your participation.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Although the chat is now over, the Consul General will answer all submitted questions and post the answers on the Consulate webpage which can be found here: <http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov/>

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Please also feel free to share with us your feedback on this program by voting in our poll or by submitting your comments.

Marcel Rijnbeek:As I work for a European subsidiary of a US company in the Netherlands, and travel frequently to the USA would it be easier for me to apply for a non-immigrant visa to avoid filling out the electronic travel authorization prior to travel to the United States each time?

Margie:ESTA registration is free and valid for 2 years, and you can be completed quickly using your own computer. You don't need to fill it out every time you travel, only if your passport or other personal information changes. To apply for a visa you will have to pay around \$130 and schedule an appointment at the Consulate General for an interview with an officer. A visitor's visa is normally issued for maximum validity, which for Dutch citizens is ten years.

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):Thanks again for joining us!

Webchat Moderator (Kristin):This chat is now closed. Please check the Consulate webpage for answers to your remaining questions.