



DHS Designates Malta as a Visa Waiver Program Country

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The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will designate Malta as a Visa Waiver Program (VWP) country on Dec. 30, 2009. Maltese nationals will be able to travel visa-free to the United States effective Dec. 30th.

"I commend Malta's commitment to meeting all of the security requirements for joining the Visa Waiver Program this year," said Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for Policy Stewart Baker. "This development will further strengthen the U.S. relationship with Malta and reflect our joint commitment to enhancing trade, travel, and security for all our citizens."

Malta was required to meet various security requirements, including more enhanced law enforcement and security-related data sharing with the United States. VWP members are also required to maintain high counterterrorism, law enforcement, border control and document security standards.

The VWP will enable citizens of Malta to travel to the United States, beginning on Dec. 30, 2009, for 90 days or less for tourism or business purposes without a visa, provided they have an e-passport and an approved authorization via the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA).

Currently, 34 countries participate in the Visa Waiver Program. The U.S. Congress authorized DHS in August 2007 to reform the VWP and strengthen the security arrangements required of existing participant countries, as well as to expand the opportunity for aspiring countries to join the program. This legislation also mandates certain improvements to the VWP for all participating countries, such as the requirement that travelers first obtain an online authorization to travel under the newly established ESTA, a web-based system that determines the preliminary eligibility of visitors to travel under the VWP prior to boarding a carrier to the United States.

Beginning Jan. 12, 2009, all visitors from VWP countries must apply for and receive an approved travel authorization via ESTA to board a plane or vessel bound for the United States. Of the more than 732,000 ESTA applications filed so far, over 99.7 percent have been approved, the vast majority in less than one minute. For additional information about the VWP, as well as the new ESTA requirement, please visit <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

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