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Poland Admitted to the Visa Waiver Program Starting November 11: Polish Citizens Eligible for Visa-Free Travel to the United States

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Poland will be the 39th country in the Visa Waiver Program, starting November 11, 2019, which allows for visa-free travel to the United States for up to 90 days for business or pleasure.

On November 6, 2019, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin K. McAleenan authorized Poland to be included in the Visa Waiver Program. This came after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo nominated Poland for the designation last month. In order to be nominated for inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program, Poland had to meet certain criteria, including completing bilateral security agreements and meeting the required B1/B2 visa refusal rate. The B1/B2 (tourism/business) visa refusal rate for Polish nationals worldwide for the fiscal year ending on September 30, 2019 was under 3%. Although the State Department anticipated that upon Secretary of State Pompeo's nomination it could take the Department of Homeland Security three to five months to complete the additional administrative process required to finalize and approve Poland's entry into the Visa Waiver Program, the announcement came within a few weeks.

Congress created the Visa Waiver Program in 1986 with the aim of facilitating tourism and short-term business visits to the United States, and allowing the United States Department of State to focus consular resources on addressing higher risks. The Program is a security partnership between the United States and the designated countries that meet requirements related to counterterrorism, law enforcement, immigration enforcement, document security, and border management.

Under the Visa Waiver Program, citizens and nationals of Poland will not be required to apply for B1/B2 visas at the U.S. Consulate. Instead, starting November 11, 2019, Polish citizens traveling on passports with embedded computer chips, and who have an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) will be able to visit the United States for tourism and business trips of up to 90 days. The ESTA is valid for two years and costs $14.00. Applications may be made online at: https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/. Polish citizens wishing to travel in the United States for longer than 90 days, or who wish to engage in activities requiring other visa categories (e.g., to work or to study in the United States) will still need to apply for the appropriate visa. Polish citizens who are denied ESTA will also need to apply for a visa. Travelers with B1/B2 visas may continue to use their visa for travel to the United States.

The first country to be admitted into the Visa Waiver Program was the United Kingdom in 1988. The complete list of 38 countries is:

Andorra	Australia	Austria	Belgium	Brunei
Chile	Czech Republic	Denmark	Estonia	Finland
France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Iceland
Ireland	Italy	Japan	Korea, Republic of	Latvia
Liechtenstein	Lithuania	Luxembourg	Malta	Monaco
Netherlands	New Zealand	Norway	Portugal	San Marino
Singapore	Slovakia	Slovenia	Spain	Switzerland
Taiwan	United Kingdom			