

Greece Added to List of Visa Waiver Eligible Countries; Visa Applications Complicated by New Visa Application Form DS-160

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On March 9, 2010, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano announced the designation of Greece as a member of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The designation will allow Greek nationals to travel to the U.S. without visas for up to 90 days, starting next month. The VWP designation process requires that Greece comply with key security and information-sharing requirements with the U.S., including the timely reporting of lost and stolen passports, and the maintenance of high counterterrorism, law enforcement, border control, aviation and document security standards.

As of this announcement, 36 nations participate in the VWP. They are:

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

Citizens of the above designated countries are eligible to apply for admission under the VWP if they: intend to enter the U.S. for 90 days or fewer for business, pleasure or transit; arrive via a VWP signatory carrier; have a return or onward ticket; and their travel does not terminate in a contiguous territory or an adjacent island (unless the traveler is a resident of one of those areas). In addition, VWP travelers must receive an electronic travel authorization (ESTA) **prior** to boarding a U.S.-bound airplane or cruise ship. An ESTA application may be submitted at any time prior to travel to the U.S. Although many authorizations are granted immediately, some applications require additional processing that takes up to 72 hours to complete. Therefore, we recommend that the ESTA application be made at least three days before travel commences. Once approved, it will be valid for multiple entries up to two years, or until the foreign traveler's passport expires, whichever comes first. For more information on both the Visa Waiver Program and the ESTA requirement, please see <http://travel.state.gov/>.

Visa Applications Complicated by New Visa Application Form DS-160

Get ready for more procedural changes at US Consulates abroad. Late in 2009, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) announced that all U.S. consular posts will require the online form DS-160 for nonimmigrant visa applicants by April 30, 2010. Many posts, such as London, Montreal and Vancouver, already have the electronic form operational, and more will begin to require it as April 30th draws near. A list of consular posts using the new Form, and a link to Frequently Asked Questions, may be found at <http://travel.state.gov/>. Links to all Consular websites can be found at <http://usembassy.gov/>.

Form DS-160 will replace most of the paper forms, such as DS-156, DS-157 and DS-158, and will consolidate the information gathered in these disparate applications into a single digital record. The Form DS-160 is completed and submitted by visa applicants electronically, well in advance of the visa appointment, allowing the Consular officials sufficient time to complete all pre-application screenings. The Form contains all of the questions included in the predecessor application Forms, but also asks for some details that were not previously requested of nonimmigrant visa applicants, such as whether the applicant has ever held a U.S. driver's license or Social Security number. A technological advance permits each applicant to upload her photo directly to the visa application record. Each accompanying dependent is still required to complete his own nonimmigrant visa application form, although family members who are applying for nonimmigrant visas at the same time may "group" their applications together.

The transition to the new Form DS-160 has not been without problems. Early users reported issues with loss of data, while working through the application, and current protocol recommends that the applicant save her data frequently as she progresses through the form, since the DS-160 website will "time out" and data will be lost if more than 20 minutes elapse without any activity. Numerous users also had problems with the tool used to upload digital photographs, and the system now allows the applicant to bypass the feature (and bring the original photograph to the Consular appointment) after one unsuccessful attempt. More recently, the website has experienced significant issues, forcing consular posts around the world to revert to the old-style application forms for several weeks. It appears this is just another step along the bumpy road to the technologically-advanced future!

The Form DS-160 may be accessed from the DOS's "Consular Electronic Application Center," found at <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>.

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