

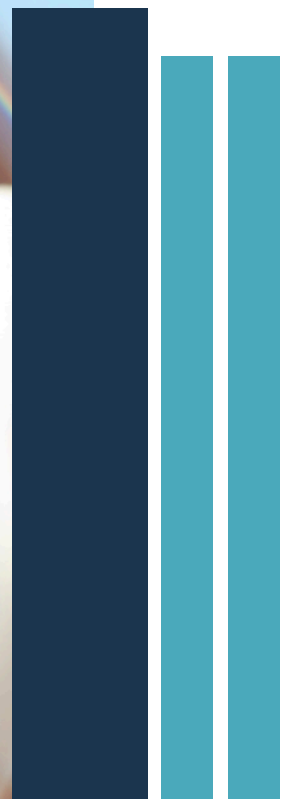


American Society of
Travel Advisors

GLOBAL TRAVEL AUTHORIZATIONS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR U.S. TRAVEL ADVISORS AND THEIR CLIENTS

*AN INDUSTRY BRIEF FROM THE
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF TRAVEL ADVISORS*

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Global Travel Authorizations: A Practical Guide for U.S. Travel Advisors and Their Clients

Executive Summary

The global travel ecosystem is undergoing a structural shift toward mandatory digital pre-travel authorization systems. These systems, commonly referred to as Electronic Travel Authorizations (ETAs), eVisas, or pre-arrival registrations, are rapidly becoming a standard requirement for international travel even when a visa is not required. These systems include ESTA (United States), eTA (Canada), ETA (United Kingdom), NZeTA (New Zealand), K-ETA (South Korea) and the forthcoming ETIAS (European Union), among others.

Since the introduction of the U.S. Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) in 2009, governments worldwide have implemented similar programs to enhance border security, traveler screening, and operational efficiency. For travel advisors, these changes present both a risk and an opportunity. Advisors who proactively guide clients through these requirements can help them avoid boarding denial or other travel disruptions, while at the same time enhancing their value as trusted professionals.

This industry brief provides:

- A clear explanation of the difference between travel authorizations and visas
- A global overview of major systems that affect U.S. travelers
- Practical workflows for advisors
- Client-facing guidance

This industry brief is intended to provide general information and should not be relied upon as a definitive or authoritative source of entry, visa or digital travel authorization requirements. Because such requirements may change without notice, advisors and travelers are advised to regularly consult official government sources and the resource links provided in this document to confirm current requirements prior to booking and again **before departure**.













What Is a Travel Authorization?

What Is a Travel Authorization?

A **travel authorization** is a mandatory digital pre-screening requirement for travelers who do not need a visa. It must be completed online prior to travel and is electronically linked to the traveler’s passport. Airlines verify the authorization before boarding, and it is required in addition to holding a valid passport. However, it is important to note that submission and approval of a travel authorization does not guarantee entry, as final admission decisions are made by border authorities upon arrival at the destination.

Key Distinctions

This chart provides a quick comparison of the general features and characteristics of a travel authorization versus a visa. Each country is unique and may have different processes to be followed for the travel authorization process or for obtaining a visa.

FEATURE	TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION	VISA
 Application	 Online, simple	 More complex, may require interview
 Processing Time	 Minutes to days	 Days to weeks (or longer)
 Purpose	 Pre-screening visa-exempt travelers	 Full entry authorization
 Entry Approval Guarantee	 No	 No

Why These Systems Are Expanding Globally

Governments are rapidly accelerating the adoption of these systems to enhance border management and security. They enable pre-departure screening to identify potential risks before travelers arrive, while also supporting the digitization of border processes, which reduces manual workloads. These systems improve traveler tracking, particularly in visa-free travel regimes, and create new opportunities for revenue generation through application fees. As a result, a hybrid global entry model is emerging, one that blends traditional visa frameworks with digital pre-travel authorization, where even visa-free travel increasingly requires advance digital clearance.

Major Travel Authorization Systems U.S. Advisors Should Know

United States – Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)

- Applies to: Visa Waiver Program (VWP) travelers entering the U.S.
- Validity: Typically, 2 years (or until passport expiration, if less)
- Stay limit: Up to 90 days
- Cost: \$40 USD (subject to change)
- Effective date: Implemented and mandatory since 2009
- Actionable guidance: Advisors should encourage ESTA approval well in advance of travel, ideally before finalizing non-refundable arrangements

What Is a Travel Authorization?

European Union – Entry/Exit System (EES)

- Applies to: All non-EU travelers (including U.S. citizens) entering Schengen Area for short stays. The Schengen Area currently consists of the 25 EU Member States¹ plus 4 non-EU countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein)
- Biometric registration (fingerprints, facial recognition) required upon entry and exit
- Replaces passport stamping
- Tracks length of stay automatically
- Effective date: Began in October 2025, being phased in and is scheduled to become fully operational on April 10, 2026
- Note: Implementation will remain flexible, with member states able to adjust or temporarily ease procedures during an initial period of several months
- Validity: Not a visa or authorization; records entries and exits and monitors compliance with a 90-day cumulative limit within any rolling 180-day period, across all Schengen countries
- Cost: Free
- Strategic impact: EES is expected to significantly change how non-EU travelers (including U.S. citizens) are processed at Schengen borders, representing a major shift toward automated border management
- Operational impact: Anticipated longer processing times during initial implementation phases, particularly at high-volume border crossings
- Helpful Hint: The “Travel to Europe Mobile App” (Download the app from the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#)) is an official tool for non-EU visitors to pre-register passport and biometric data (facial images) within 72 hours of travel to streamline Entry/Exit System checks. Availability and use of the app may vary by country and border crossing during the rollout period.

What Is a Travel Authorization?

European Union – European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS)

- ETIAS vs. EES: ETIAS is a pre-travel authorization system (permission to travel for visa-exempt travelers), while EES is a border management system that records travelers' entries, exits, and length of stay; they are separate but complementary and will operate in parallel, with ETIAS screening travelers before departure and EES tracking compliance once they enter the Schengen Area.
- Applies to: Visa-exempt non-EU nationals traveling to the Schengen Area (including U.S. citizens). The Schengen Area currently consists of the 25 EU Member States plus 4 non-EU countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein).
- Requirements: Pre-travel online application with security and background screening (no biometrics required at application stage)
- Effective date: Expected to launch in Q4 2026 (subject to implementation timelines)
- Validity: Up to 3 years, or until passport expiration (whichever comes first); allows multiple short stays of up to 90 days within a 180-day period
- Cost: €20 (subject to change and waived for travelers under 18 and over 70 as well as family members of EU citizens)
- Strategic impact: ETIAS introduces a pre-travel authorization layer for visa-exempt travelers, aligning the EU with systems like the U.S. ESTA and strengthening advance security screening
- Operational impact: Minimal impact at borders once approved but requires advance traveler compliance prior to departure; potential for denied boarding if authorization is not obtained
- Note: The "Travel to Europe" app mentioned above does not apply to ETIAS travel authorization

What Is a Travel Authorization?

Canada - eTA

- Applies to: Visa-exempt foreign nationals arriving to Canada by air. U.S. citizens are fully exempt from eTA requirements but must carry proper identification such as a valid U.S. passport
- Validity: Up to 5 years
- Cost: CAD \$7
- Effective date: Fully implemented in 2016
- Key nuance: Not required for land or sea entry, which creates mode-of-transport compliance complexity

United Kingdom - ETA

- Applies to: Visa-exempt travelers from approximately 85 designated countries including the citizens of the U.S., Europe, Australia, Canada, Australia, EU/Schengen countries and an evolving range of other exempt countries across Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin America
- Validity: Expected ~2 years
- Cost: £16 (increases to £20 as of April 2026)
- Effective rollout: Began 2023; expanding through 2025-2026
- Actionable insight: Advisors must track nationality-based rollout phases, as requirements differ by traveler citizenship

What Is a Travel Authorization?

Australia - ETA

- Applies to: Eligible passport holders from select countries, including the United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and others. (*Note: EU nationals use a separate eVisitor program.*)
- Validity: Typically, 12 months with multiple entries within validity period permitted; each stay is limited to up to 3 months per visit
- Stay limit: 3 months per visit
- Cost: AUD \$20 service fee (via app)
- Note: Application must be completed via official mobile app, not traditional web portals and must be applied for outside Australia
- Note: Australia's ETA is technically a visa (Subclass 601), though it functions similarly to an authorization system

New Zealand - NZeTA

- Applies to: Visa-waiver travelers; cruise ship passengers and Australian permanent residents
- Required prior to travel
- Validity: 2 years; allows for multiple visits
- Cost: NZD \$17-\$23
- Note: Travelers must also pay the applicable International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy (IVL) of NZD \$100; verify current amount at time of application

What Is a Travel Authorization?

South Korea – K-ETA

- Applies to: Visa-waiver travelers, though temporary exemptions may apply for certain nationalities including U.S. citizens through December 2026; verify current requirements before travel
- Approval required at least 72 hours before boarding
- Validity: Typically valid for up to 3 years from approval, allowing multiple entries; each stay duration is determined separately (commonly up to 90 days per visit, depending on nationality)
- Cost: KRW 10,000 (~USD \$7-8)
- Effective date: 2021
- Risk area: Denials require visa application with limited appeal options

Emerging and Secondary Systems Expanding Globally

A growing number of countries are implementing similar systems. The following systems are evolving and may have limited or changing applicability; always verify through official government sources:

- Cuba digital tourist card transition
- Dominican Republic: Mandatory entry/exit form (not a travel authorization)
- Israel ETA-IL : Implemented in phases by nationality and timing; requirements may not apply initially to all visa-exempt travelers but will become fully mandatory over time
- Kenya eTA (2024): Applies to *all travelers*, replacing visa-on-arrival
- Seychelles ETA: Includes health and travel authorization
- Sri Lanka ETA: Required for most short stays; requirements subject to change
- Turkey eVisa: Functions similarly to ETA

What Is a Travel Authorization?

Planned / Under Development (subject to confirmation):

- Japan JESTA
- Pakistan ETA
- Thailand ETA

The industry trend is that even traditionally “open” destinations are shifting toward mandatory digital pre-clearance.

Client Risk Areas

Travel disruptions most often occur when clients are unaware of entry requirements, misunderstand them, or fail to adequately prepare in advance. A common issue arises when travelers assume that “no visa required” means no action of any kind is needed, leading them to overlook necessary authorization requirements. Problems also occur when applications are submitted too late, when travelers unknowingly use fraudulent third-party websites, or when passport validity does not meet destination requirements. Additionally, multi-country itineraries can create complications when different destinations have varying entry rules or requirements.

What Is a Travel Authorization?

Recommended Advisor Workflow

Step 1: Identify Requirements Early

- Review all destinations and transit points
- Check requirements at time of booking

Step 2: Use Reliable Sources

- Government websites
- IATA Timatic database
(<https://www.iata.org/en/services/compliance/timatic/>)

Step 3: Provide Official Links Only

- Avoid third-party services
- Clearly label official application sites

Step 4: Set Client Expectations

- Advise clients to:
- Apply well in advance (recommended: 2–4 weeks minimum)
- Use accurate passport information
- Save confirmation records

Step 5: Confirm Completion

- Prior to ticketing (if possible)
- Or before final documents are issued

Step 6: Document Your Communications

- Record that requirements were shared
- Protects both advisor and agency

What Is a Travel Authorization?

Information for Your Clients

What Clients Need to Know Before Travel

A travel authorization may be required before an international trip, even in cases where a visa is not needed, making it essential for travelers to plan ahead. It is important to check entry requirements for every country on the itinerary, including any transit or connecting destinations. Applications should be completed only through official government websites to avoid scams, and they should be submitted several weeks prior to departure to allow sufficient processing time. Travelers must also ensure their passport remains valid for the entire trip, keeping in mind that some countries require additional validity periods both before and after travel. Finally, retaining copies of all digital travel authorization approvals is recommended in case they are needed during the journey.

Important Reminders

- Approval is required before boarding a flight
- Airlines may deny boarding without it
- Approval does not guarantee entry at the destination
- Should travelers have uncertainty regarding the process or need for digital authorizations they should consult their travel advisor while planning travel

What Is a Travel Authorization?

A Strategic Opportunity for Travel Advisors

Advisors who master travel authorization requirements are better positioned to reduce client travel disruptions while differentiating their services in a competitive market. By demonstrating expertise in this area, they can build trust, encourage repeat business, and establish themselves as reliable compliance experts. Providing accurate and timely information on travel authorizations is no longer optional; it has become a core component of modern international travel planning. Because these requirements are often complex and constantly evolving, it is essential for travel advisors to stay well informed and maintain access to reliable resources to effectively support their clients.

Conclusion

Digital travel authorizations are reshaping international travel. No longer optional; they are now a core component of global mobility infrastructure. As more countries adopt these systems, the complexity of international travel will only continue to increase.

Travel advisors who proactively integrate these requirements into their workflows and clearly communicate them to clients will be best positioned to succeed in this evolving landscape. Travel professionals must evolve from itinerary planners to compliance advisors, integrating authorization requirements into every stage of the booking process. Those who do so effectively will reduce client risk, improve operational outcomes, and strengthen their role as indispensable partners in their clients' global travel.

What Is a Travel Authorization?

Reference Table: Global Travel Authorizations

This table is designed to be updated regularly as policies evolve. Please check official government sources for the latest information available.

 Country/Region	 Program Name	 Type	 Applies To	 Validity	 Status	 Notes
 European Union	ETIAS	ETA	Visa-exempt travelers	Up to 3 years	Expected Q4 2026	Linked to Schengen travel
 United States	ESTA	ETA	Visa Waiver Program travelers	2 years	Active	Required before boarding
 Canada	eTA	ETA	Visa-exempt air travelers	Up to 5 years	Active	Air travel only (U.S. citizens exempt)
 United Kingdom	ETA	ETA	Visa-exempt travelers	~2 years	April 2025	Expanding by nationality
 Australia	ETA	ETA	Eligible travelers	Varies	Active	Multiple entry
 New Zealand	NZeTA	ETA	Visa-waiver travelers	Varies	Active	Includes tourism levy
 South Korea	K-ETA	ETA	Visa-free travelers	~2 years	Active	Required before boarding
 Kenya	eTA	ETA	All travelers	Single entry	Active	Replaced visa-on-arrival
 Seychelles	ETA	ETA	All travelers	Short stay	Active	Includes health clearance
 Sri Lanka	ETA	ETA	Most travelers	Short stay	Active	Online approval required
 Israel	ETA-IL	ETA	Visa-exempt travelers	~2 years (eligibility fee applies)	Active (since 2025)	Requirements subject to change
 Turkey	eVisa	eVisa/ETA hybrid	Eligible travelers	Varies	Active	Functions similarly to ETA
 Dominican Republic	eTicket	Entry form	All travelers	Single trip	Active	Required for entry/exit
 Cuba	Tourist Card (digital application)	Entry authorization	Most travelers	Single trip	Transitioning	Moving toward digital model

What Is a Travel Authorization?

How to Use This Table

- Review during trip planning for every itinerary
- Re-check close to departure (policies change frequently)
- Use as a starting point. This table is not a substitute for official sources

Advisor Takeaways

- Not all systems are labeled "ETA" or "eTA," but many function similarly
- Requirements may apply even in destinations that are traditionally considered "easy entry"
- Rapid policy changes are common; always verify requirements close to departure

Best Practice

Treat all international itineraries as required for documentation review, regardless of destination complexity.

What Is a Travel Authorization?

Glossary of Key Acronyms and Terms

- **ETA (Electronic Travel Authorization):** Digital pre-screening for visa-exempt travelers
- **eTA:** Variant terminology used by Canada and others
- **ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization):** U.S. travel authorization system under the Visa Waiver Program
- **ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System):** EU travel authorization system (implementation in process)
- **EES (Entry/Exit System):** EU biometric Entry/Exit System
- **eVisa:** Digital visa, often more complex than ETA
- **VWP (Visa Waiver Program):** Allows visa-free travel with authorization
- **IVL (International Visitor Levy):** Tourism tax (New Zealand)
- **Schengen Area** – border free travel zone encompassing 25 EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

References and Information Sources

- U.S. State Department - <https://travel.state.gov>
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection – ESTA <http://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>
- Government of Canada – eTA www.canada.ca
- UK Home Office – ETA Program www.gov.uk
- European Commission – ETIAS <https://travel-europe.europa.eu>
- Entry/Exit System (EES) <https://travel-europe.europa.eu>
- Australia – ETA <https://usa.embassy.gov.au/visas-and-migration>
- New Zealand Immigration – NZeTA <https://www.immigration.gov.nz>
- Korea Immigration Service – K-ETA <https://www.k-eta.go.kr>