Traveling to the US from Abroad for Classes or Tourism

Apr 7, 2009

For Non-US Citizens Coming to US Classes: beginning January 12, 2009, all non-US citizens coming into the US will need a visa or a visa *waiver*. The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) allows citizens of most European countries to skip obtaining a visa before travel by obtaining a visa *waiver*, which can be done online, and which needs to be done at least 72 hours before flying. But applications may be submitted at any time prior to travel. It is better to do it earlier, in case there are any problems and you end up having to apply for a regular visa. **IMPORTANT**: Have your flight details, passport, and the full address of where you will be residing in the US before you register. One student from England reported that with this info in hand, it took less than 5 minutes to register.

Passports: Your passport must be machine-readable. This rule has been in effect since 2005. Getting a passport can take more time than you expect, so the advice is to do this well enough in advance. People have missed classes because the amount of time needed to get passports and such turned out to be longer than expected. I advise everyone to do this well in advance.

Come as a Tourist: The whole customs/immigration thing goes much easier if you say that you are coming as a tourist. If you say you are coming to take a class, US Customs may insist that you get a student visa, which has new complications, so our suggestion is to do your best to avoid them.

General Links & Information on Visa Waiver Program: *(NOTE: some of the links below didn't work in the Google Chrome browser but worked fine in Internet Explorer.)*

This link takes you to general information on the electronic Visa Waiver Program:
http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/business_pleasure/vwp/
If you click on 'overview of the Visa Waiver Program' it takes you to:
http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/business_pleasure/vwp/vwp.xml
where there are more details. For instance, it lists the following countries as currently in the VWP program:

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

*United Kingdom Passports: Only United Kingdom passports notated with "British Citizens" and/or "with unrestricted right of abode in the United Kingdom" are eligible for VWP admission. Holders of

passports indicating that the bearer is a British Subject, British Dependent Territories Citizen, British Overseas Citizen or British National (Overseas) do not qualify for VWP travel.

Form I-94 & I-94W: One of the items on that information page says that you will, in addition to the electronic registration, need to "Present to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer a completed and signed Form I-94W, Nonimmigrant Visa Waiver Arrival/Departure Form." This is the form that registers your date of entry and the date you need to leave by. It must be handed back when you leave the US so they can check that you haven't overstayed your allotted time. I think this form is either given on the plane or can be found in the customs hall. It is a simple form. More information on this form can be found at: http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/

To Register for Visa Waiver: Go to http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/esta/ . On this page there is a link to **Apply Here**. If you click on it, it takes you to https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/esta.html?_flowExecutionKey=_cCCA41409-0414-521C-54FC-897AB6C2BDF7_k5DDB7C84-3C21-C9D2-589F-20169042052B where you can apply in 17 different languages. Anyone should be able to use this page to apply. Apparently English students can also use http://www.estauk.com/ .