

Will Europe's New Border Entry System Present Challenges for Travelers?



by [Mia Taylor](#)

Last updated: 7:55 PM ET, Mon July 10, 2023

The COVID-19 pandemic aside, U.S. travelers have long been able to simply hop on a plane to visit Europe without giving it much advance thought. With no visas required for U.S. passport holders, there was little to interrupt such spur-of-the-moment travel.

But come January 2024, all of that will change. Travelers from more than 60 countries—some 1.4 billion people—who are currently able to travel through most European countries without a visa, will need to apply in advance for authorization to visit.

The visa process is known as the [EU Travel Information & Authorization System](#), or ETIAS for short. And in addition to U.S. passport holders, a long list of other countries will now be required to obtain the ETIAS visa before visiting the EU. Among them, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and Singapore.

While experts say the visa requirements are relatively simple and ideally, approvals should be quick, the new requirements could nonetheless cause havoc for American travelers who are simply unaware of the looming changes.

Travelers who don't have the necessary ETIAS approval in place, for instance, will not be able to get onto flights bound for the impacted European countries. Those traveling by ground transportation, meanwhile, will face rejection at the EU borders.

“Essentially it will be similar to an ESTA for visiting the US: relatively easy to obtain if you do it online and in advance of traveling—but without gaining one, you won’t be able to board the plane,” says Roman Townsend, managing director for Belvera Partners, a Spain-based agency that handles travel industry public relations. “I think very few people are aware of this coming change and even fewer would ever imagine that the USA or Canada would be included in such a situation.”



Travel to Paris. Eiffel tower at sunrise Getty Images/anyaberkut (Photo Credit: Getty Images/anyaberkut)

Specifics of the New Visa Program

What is ETIAS exactly? As the program’s website explains, [ETIAS travel authorization](#) “is an entry requirement for visa-exempt nationals traveling to any of...30 European countries.”

Some of the countries that will require the new visa include Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Additional countries that are part of the new measure include Iceland, Hungary, Denmark, and Finland. The

ETIAS website includes a [complete list of the 30 participating countries](#).

With a valid ETIAS travel authorization, travelers can [visit European countries](#) on the list as often as they want “for short-term stays - normally for up to 90 days in any 180-day period,” according to the ETIAS website.

ETIAS visas can be obtained using the official program website or the ETIAS mobile application. The application cost is 7 Euros, which is a little less than \$8.

The visa website also cautions that having ETIAS travel authorization does not guarantee entry into a country. “When you arrive, a border guard will ask to see your passport and other documents and verify that you meet the entry conditions,” the website explains.

Ramifications for Travelers and the Travel Industry

Perhaps the most significant hiccup that may result from the new program will be travelers who head to [Europe](#) in 2024 without the newly required visa in place. The travel industry and travel advisors will need to play a role as the program’s implementation nears, educating travelers far and wide.

“Given that this is a new requirement, intermediaries have got to be on top of their game warning their customers, or risk a lot of upset travelers and headaches” warns Simon Goddard, chief operating officer for the travel search and booking technology provider [Vibe](#).

What’s more, in cases where travelers aren’t prepared with the required visa in advance, there may even be a ripple effect for the travel industry—in the form of cancellations and the inevitable requests for refunds, say other experts.

These sorts of logistics challenges aside, the new visa requirements may also deliver some upsides or silver linings for the travel industry as well, suggests, Katie Crowe, a representative for the travel insurer [battleface](#). That’s because many visa-related processes require proof of insurance, which could be a boon for travel insurance providers, says Crowe.

Nonetheless, Crowe warns that “such travelers are likely to opt for basic or minimal policies simply to gain their visa, so insurers will have to work harder to sell more relevant and competitively priced policies instead of the inflexible one-sized-fits-all policies that travelers don’t understand or like”.

Should Travelers Be Concerned

While the ETIAS visa will add a new logistical step that U.S. passport holders will need to address in order to visit Europe, travel advisors also suggest it's not something to be overly worried about.

Underscoring this point, Jesse Morris, owner of [We Book Travel LLC](#), explains that once obtained, the visa will be good for three years. Meaning it's a hurdle travelers will only have to deal with periodically.

"This is going to be something new for Americans to do, but it's not all that dissimilar to the requirements some Caribbean islands have right now to complete an online application—such as the Dominican Republic e-ticket," says Morris.

"This was something we had to get used to with Covid travel and it reinforces the need to use a travel agent who can provide guidance in these areas," he adds.

Still, Tammy Levent, CEO of [Elite Travel](#), says the true test of the new program may be in just how long it actually takes to obtain the visas once an application has been submitted.

"If it's going to be one of those that you have to get weeks in advance and it requires advancing in your documentation, such as passports and then wait. And going through all those channels, I think Americans are not used to things like that and will get very impatient," says Levent.

For the latest travel news, updates and deals, subscribe to the [daily TravelPulse newsletter](#) here.