

Travelers from 54 countries now are required to complete an online pre-travel check to enter the U.K. following the continued rollout of the country's Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme.

(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-an-electronic-travel-authorisation-eta>)

From January 8, travelers from 48 non-European countries—those who previously did not require a visa for short-stay visits, including the U.S., Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore—will need to apply for an ETA before arriving in the U.K.

The requirement will also extend to **travelers from European countries** from April 2, with applications for these travelers open from March 5.

The move to digitize the U.K.'s borders will require all visitors and **transit passengers** who do not currently need a visa—except British and Irish citizens—to obtain an ETA prior to arrival. Travelers who require a visa to enter the country will still need to obtain a valid visa but will not need an ETA as well.

The changes are expected to enhance border security and, according to U.K. law firm Kingsley Napley, will "level the playing field between visa and non-visa nationals coming to the U.K." as all visitors will now have their criminal background checked prior to arrival.

Immigration law firm Fragomen also advised when an ETA is declined, the traveler will need to apply for a visa, "and that can take time," said Kelly Chua, a director at the firm. "Travelers might also find that airlines may not refund tickets should an ETA be refused," Chua added.

Many travelers might already be familiar with similar systems, such as the U.S. ESTA, yet it's crucial to note that anyone arriving without an ETA, even for transit, will be denied entry.

"While expected to improve border security processes, the new U.K. ETA changes the landscape of visa-free travel and requires more forward planning from travelers. Similar to pre-travel checks required to enter the U.S., the ETA will be electronically linked to travelers' passports and applications can be made through "a quick and simple process" online or via a dedicated app.

An ETA costs £10 and permits multiple journeys to the U.K. (for stays of up to six months) over a period of two years.

The EU is also expected to implement its **long-delayed Entry/Exit System (EES)** sometime this year, followed by the **Electronic Travel Information and Authorisation System** (ETIAS).

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