

**USVISIT Fingerprints and Photographs of Visa Holders
Begin in January 2004**

Guidelines*

July 2, 2004

Visa holders entering the United States or returning after visits abroad now must be fingerprinted and photographed before entering the country. The Department of Homeland Security launched the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology ("USVISIT") program, a new entry-exit registration program, at 115 airports and 14 seaports (those with cruise ships) on January 5, 2004.¹ Land border processing is scheduled to be introduced in phases through 2006.

How Does the Entry System Work?

Under USVISIT, a Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection official reviews each visitor's travel documents and uses scanning equipment to collect "biometric identifiers," in particular, fingerprints and photographs. The visitor places right and left index fingers on a glass plate, and fingerprints are scanned electronically. The visitor looks into the innocuous eye of a camera, and a digital photograph of the visitor is captured.

Together with the standard information gathered from a visitor about identity and travel, the new program is intended to verify the visitor's identity and compare it to information on immigration and State Department watchlists. Arrival and departure information is to be automatically captured and reconciled to determine how long the person remained in the United States.

Does USVISIT Cause Travel Delays?

The process is designed to take about 10-15 seconds per person. Travelers should expect delays in processing upon entry and exiting the United States as kinks are worked out of the systems and efficiency is enhanced.

Who is Exempt?

Persons not required to have a visa are not subject to USVISIT. For example, under current policy Canadians are not required to have a visa to enter the United States (except for

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¹ For a list of the ports, see http://www1.iata.org/WHIP/Files/WgId_0014/airseaports-USVisit.pdf.

Canadians in E-1 “treaty trader” and E-2 “treaty investor” status). Similarly, persons from friendly countries entering under the U.S. Visa Waiver Program for fewer than 90 days are not subject to USVISIT.

There are also other exemptions, including children under the age of 14, and persons age 80 and older, as well as certain government visa holders. In addition, at this time, Legal Permanent Residents and U.S. citizens are not required to participate in the program.

How is the Information Used?

USVISIT is a cornerstone of the Department of Homeland Security's goals to improve border management at our ports of entry. By capturing more complete arrival and departure data for those who require a visa to enter the United States, the USVISIT program is intended to enhance the security of U.S. citizens and visitors while expediting legitimate travel and trade. All data obtained from the visitor is stored as part of the visitor's travel record.

How Will the Exit System Work?

While entry procedures are in place at the designated 115 airports and 14 seaports, departure procedures are currently available only at the Baltimore airport and Miami seaport. The exit system will be in effect in 30 airports and one seaport (Miami) in early 2004, and will be phased in at other ports through 2005.

Upon departure, the plan is that visitors will check out at exit points at automated self-service kiosks by scanning their visa or passport and repeating the simple inkless fingerprinting process. The exit confirmation will be added to the visitor's travel records to enable immigration officials to determine whether a visitor appears to have departed in a timely fashion, or to have overstayed.

Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us.

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