All travelers to the UK will need digital pre-authorization by 2025

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The U.K. will require all visa-exempt travelers to apply for digital travel authorization before entering the country, in a move regarded as the biggest shake-up of its border force rules in decades.

People holding passports that currently arrive in the country without pre-vetting — including European Union citizens and U.S., Canadian, Japanese, Australian, New Zealand and other nationals — will all need to apply and pay for Electronic Travel Authorisation. The scheme is set to be fully rolled out by the end of 2024.

British and Irish passport-holders, people with U.K. settled status and those with "permission to live, work or study" will be exempt from the scheme.

The government says the ETA scheme will strengthen border security and is comparable to that used by countries such as the U.S. and Canada. The U.K. has previously said that under current rules it does not have wholly accurate data on the number of people entering and leaving the country.

The cost of the ETA has not been confirmed but it is expected to be in a similar range to those schemes. The U.S. Electronic System for Travel Authorization costs $21.

The European Union is set to launch its own digital travel authorization scheme, called ETIAS, for visa-exempt nationals in 2024. It will enable travel within 30 countries.

Travelers from some countries are set to gain smoother access to the U.K. The scheme will launch for Qatari citizens in November when it will replace the Electronic Visa Waiver Scheme, and expand to Jordanian citizens in February 2024.

However, it will mark a significant change for many frequent travelers from Europe and elsewhere who do not currently need pre-approval.

Applications will be made online or via an app. Those with biometric passports will scan them using their phone, and may also need to take a "dynamic selfie," involving movement, to submit an image of their face. They will also answer a set of questions.

Their application will be automatically processed, with a decision given within three days. Some applications will be processed more quickly. If approved, the ETA will be valid for multiple visits over two years.

Nationals currently able to use e-passport gates on arrival into the U.K. will continue to be able to do so with an ETA.

Anyone arriving at the U.K. border by air or rail without an ETA will be turned away, including if they arrive via Ireland but are not Irish or British citizens.

The government has previously said it expects to handle 30 million ETA applications a year.

It is understood the U.K. has ambitions to eventually require all travelers to submit fingerprint biometrics ahead of travel and is working on a scheme that would see this submitted by smartphone.

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