



*Office of Public Affairs
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New U.S. Entry-Exit System Aims to Enhance Security and Reduce Fraud

Finger scans and photos will be required for some New Zealanders planning to visit the United States.

US-VISIT (United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology) — an automated entry/exit system — will require most visitors traveling on visas to the United States to have two fingers scanned by an inkless device and a digital photograph taken by immigration officials upon entry at U.S. air and seaports starting January 5, 2004.

The new system will be in place at 115 airports and 14 major seaports in early 2004 and will be phased in at U.S. land borders throughout 2005 and 2006.

In New Zealand, this will affect approximately 15,000 people who apply for a US visa each year.

The US Consulate in Auckland will begin collecting this biometric data as part of the visa application process on or about March 1, 2004.

US law requires that by October 26, 2004 biometric identifiers must be collected from all visa applicants.

Photographs and finger scanning have been selected as the most effective and least intrusive identifiers.

Most New Zealand nationals traveling to the U.S. will be unaffected by the change, as visitors participating in the visa-waiver program (including qualifying New Zealanders) may continue to use the visa waiver program without submitting biometric data.

However anyone requiring a visa to travel to enter the United States (e.g. a student visa) will be required to have a digital finger scan and photo taken upon entry. (Certain diplomatic visas will be exempt.)

Under US-VISIT, many of the procedures upon entry and exit to the United States will remain unchanged.

Upon entry, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers will continue to review travel documents, such as a visa and passport, and ask questions about the visitor's stay in the U.S.

However now when an immigration official electronically scans the visa in the visitor's passport, the photo and biographic data collected during the visa application interview in Auckland, will become available on the official's computer.

The visitor will then be asked to put one and then the other index finger on a glass plate that will electronically capture two fingerprints. The scans will be run through a database to ensure the visitor is eligible to enter the United States. Matching the finger scan will ensure that the person seeking entry into the United States is the same person who applied for a visa.

Also, visitors will be photographed. The photo can be taken while fingerprinting is in process.

The data obtained will be securely stored as part of the visitor's travel record and made available only to authorized officials and selected law enforcement agencies responsible for ensuring the safety and security of foreign visitors and U.S. citizens.

Upon exit from the United States travelers will see automated, self-service kiosks at the international departure areas, where visitors with visas will be asked to scan their travel documents electronically and repeat the fingerprinting process on the inkless device.

This process will verify the visitor's identity and departure and will confirm compliance with U.S. immigration policy. The exit confirmation will be added to the visitor's travel records to demonstrate compliance and record the individual's status for future visits to the United States.

The goal of US-VISIT is to enhance the security of the United States while expediting legitimate travel and trade. The program provides the capability to verify the identity of incoming visitors, record the entry and exit of non-U.S. citizens into and out of the United States, and confirm compliance with visa and immigration policies.

US-VISIT is the latest in a series of visa changes that have been implemented since September 11, 2001.

"All of these entry and exit procedures address our critical need for tighter security and our commitment to expedite travel for the millions of legitimate visitors we welcome each year to conduct business, learn, see family or tour the country," said US Embassy Charge d'Affaires, David Burnett.

"The U.S. wants to continue to be a welcoming nation," he said.

As visa regulations continue to change over coming months and years, it becomes ever more important to provide up-to-date, accurate information to the traveling public.

It is essential that anyone traveling to the United States carefully checks that they comply with current regulations well in advance of their intended travel.

The traveler is ultimately responsible for ensuring that he or she has the correct documentation.

As of 15 January 2004, anyone who is unsure about US visa procedures and requirements (e.g. whether they require a visa to travel to the US, whether they require an interview or whether they need to submit biometric data) may get clarification by a toll call to the 0900 US VISA. (0900 87 8472). Until January 15 anyone with visa queries should continue to contact the US Consulate in Auckland.

Alternatively travelers may consult our websites <http://usembassy.org.nz> and <http://unitedstatesvisas.gov>.

For more information about the US-VISIT program, visit www.dhs.gov/us-visit.

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