

UNITED KINGDOM - ELECTRONIC TRAVEL AUTHORISATION

The UK Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme forms part of the government's ambition to make the UK's border fully digitalised. The scheme went live initially for Qatari nationals in October 2023, followed by nationals of other Gulf Cooperation Council countries in February 2024. The scheme extended to all other non-Europeans from 8 January 2025 and Europeans need an ETA to travel to the UK from 2 April 2025.

The government has said ETAs will allow them to gather accurate information regarding the numbers of people travelling to the UK and where they are travelling from. The intention is that border security will be enhanced by screening passengers before they travel and thereby identifying potential threats earlier.

WHAT IS AN ETA?

An ETA provides a digital permission to travel to the UK. However, note, it does not confer permission to enter the UK - it is **not** a visa. Non-visa nationals such as US citizens will still have visa-free status therefore but will need an ETA prior to travel. As such, proof of a valid ETA will be required prior to boarding a flight, train, boat or other carrier into the UK.

The scheme is similar to the ESTA scheme for short term travel to the United States. It is an electronic only authorisation as opposed to a physical document placed in a passport and is required for those visiting the UK for short visits such as for tourism, business trips and transit.

WHO NEEDS ONE?

All Europeans and other non-visa nationals either visiting or transiting through the UK need an ETA. Creative Workers coming to the UK for three months or less and relying on the Creative Worker Visa concession also need to apply. The scheme applies to adults and children.

The following do not need an ETA:

- ▶ British and Irish nationals;
- ▶ A non-Irish national who is lawfully resident in Ireland and is travelling to the UK from elsewhere in the Common Travel Area; and
- ▶ Individuals who are required to apply for a visa to enter the UK or already have a visa for the UK will not need to apply for an ETA as well.

Note: the requirement for eligible nationals to possess an ETA will be strictly enforced (without discretion) from February 25, 2026. From this date, those requiring an ETA will not be allowed to travel to the UK unless they have one.

WHAT DO I NEED TO APPLY FOR AN ETA?

There is no need to attend an application centre or biometric appointment. The ETA system works by screening visitors before they arrive in the UK. Travellers are required to provide:

- ▶ basic personal details
- ▶ passport data
- ▶ a photo of themselves
- ▶ security information

It is recommended that the application be completed at least three days before travel to the UK.

HOW LONG IS AN ETA VALID FOR?

An ETA is valid for two years or until the applicant's passport expires (whichever the sooner) and allows for multiple trips to the UK.

WHAT IS THE COST?

An ETA costs £16 per applicant.

WHAT IF THE ETA APPLICATION IS REFUSED?

If the application is refused, the individual will need to apply for a visa to seek permission to travel to the UK.

BACKGROUND

The scheme was rolled out in phases:

- ▶ 25 October 2023 – the scheme launched for Qatari nationals for travel from 15 November 2023.
- ▶ 1 February 2024 – the scheme launched for nationals of Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for travel from 22 February 2024.
- ▶ 27 November 2024 – the scheme launched for nationals of non-European countries for travel from 8 January 2025.
- ▶ 5 March 2025 – the scheme launched for nationals of European countries for travel from 2 April 2025.

For further guidance, please contact nomadicclientsupport@fragomen.com