



UK Visas  
& Immigration

# Visa information for the UK

A guide for UK Business Event Managers

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# 1. Overview - Visa Information for the UK

This guide is for organisers of business related events or conferences in the UK where delegates from overseas may require visit visas. If your delegates will be receiving any payment for work in the UK, unless activities are included under permitted paid engagements as a visitor [Immigration Rules - Immigration Rules Appendix Visitor: Permitted Activities - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), your delegate will need to consider an alternative visa route. Our visa self-assessment will allow you/your delegates to identify alternative options: [Check if you need a UK visa - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Whether your delegates need to apply for a visa to visit the UK depends on their nationality. If your delegate is on the list of visa nationals, they will need to apply for a visa before they travel to the UK. The visa national list can be found here: [Immigration Rules - Immigration Rules Appendix Visitor: Visa national list - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

If your delegate is a national who does not require a visa to visit the UK, they do not need to apply for a visit visa to participate in UK hosted events if what they are coming to do is permitted under the visitor route - [Immigration Rules - Immigration Rules Appendix Visitor: Permitted Activities - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). They can apply for entry on arrival in the UK.

People travelling to the UK who currently do not need a visa will soon need to get an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA). This is a new requirement that gives permission to travel to the UK, and it is electronically linked to your delegates passport. If you are not sure if your delegate requires a visa or and ETA for the UK, please check on our website at: [Check if you need a UK visa - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) or [Electronic Travel Authorisation \(ETA\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## 2. The Visitor routes in more detail

### Visitors (Standard)

All visitor visa applications are considered under the visitor Immigration Rules. As set out in the Rules, a delegate must satisfy the decision maker that they are a genuine visitor who will leave the UK at the end of their visit and will not make the UK their main home through frequent or successive visits – for instance that they have family, work or study ties in their home country. A visitor must also be able to show that they are able to support and maintain themselves during their visit. There is flexibility in the Rules for visitors to be maintained and accommodated by friends, relatives or another sponsor. A visitor must not intend to work or study except where this is specifically permitted.

The Visit Guidance provides further information about the Visitor routes - [Visit: caseworker guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

### Standard Visitor

Under the Visitor Rules, Standard visitors are permitted to undertake the following general business activities:

A visitor may:

- (a) attend meetings, conferences, seminars, interviews;
- (b) give a one-off or short series of talks and speeches provided these are not organised as commercial events and will not make a profit for the organiser;
- (c) negotiate and sign deals and contracts;
- (d) attend trade fairs, for promotional work only, provided the visitor is not directly selling;
- (e) carry out site visits and inspections;
- (f) gather information for their employment overseas;

- (g) be briefed on the requirements of a UK based customer, provided any work for the customer is done outside of the UK.

A full list of the permitted activities is available here: [Immigration Rules - Immigration Rules Appendix Visitor: Permitted Activities - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). Visitors must not receive payment for these activities beyond reasonable expenses.

V 13.3. The following are permitted paid engagements:

- (a) an academic who is highly qualified within their field of expertise, coming to examine students and/or participate in or chair selection panels, and have been invited by a UK higher education institution, or a UK-based research or arts organisation as part of that institution or organisation's quality assurance processes; and
- (b) an expert coming to give lectures in their subject area, where they have been invited by a higher education institution; or a UK-based research or arts organisation, and this does not amount to filling a teaching position for the host organisation; and
- (c) an overseas designated pilot examiner coming to assess UK-based pilots to ensure they meet the national aviation regulatory requirements of other countries, where they have been invited by an approved training organisation based in the UK that is regulated by the UK Civil Aviation Authority for that purpose; and
- (d) a qualified lawyer coming to provide advocacy for a court or tribunal hearing, arbitration or other form of dispute resolution for legal proceedings within the UK, where they have been invited by a client; and
- (e) a professional artist, entertainer, or musician coming to carry out an activity directly relating to their profession, where they have been invited by a creative (arts or entertainment) organisation, agent or broadcaster based in the UK; and
- (f) a professional sports person coming to carry out an activity directly relating to their profession, where they have been invited by a sports organisation, agent, or broadcaster based in the UK.

## Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)

An Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) is a new requirement for visitors who currently do not need a visa for short stays to the UK, or who do not already have a UK immigration status prior to travelling. An ETA can be applied for online and will be electronically linked to the passport, giving your delegate permission to travel to the UK. An ETA will last for two years or until the expiry date of your delegate's passport (whichever is sooner).

On 9 March 2023, the Government legislated that nationals of Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to be subjected to the new [Electronic Travel Authorisations \(ETA\)](#) rules. ETAs apply to people visiting or transiting through the UK, who do not currently need a visa for short stays, or who do not have an immigration status prior to travelling. On 15 November 2023, nationals of Qatar successfully joined the UK ETA scheme, followed by the remaining GCC countries from 22 February 2024.

On 10 September 2024, the Government will continue the rollout of the UK's (ETA) to the remaining 83 non-visa nationalities over the course of the next six months. The rollout will commence as follows

### Rest of World

- Application opens **27<sup>th</sup> November 2024**
- They can use it to travel from **8<sup>th</sup> January 2025** (6 weeks after app opens)

### EU/EEA

- Application opens **5<sup>th</sup> March 2025**
- They can use it to travel from **2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025** (4 weeks after app opens)

### Roll-out Phasing

Phase 1 Use from Nov 23* Use from Feb 24	Phase 2 Applies from 27 November 2024 Use from 8 January 2025			Phase 3 Applies from 5th March 2025 Use from 2nd April 2025	
Qatar* Saudi Arabia Oman Bahrain Kuwait UAE	<p><b>Asia</b></p> <p>Brunei Israel Macao (SAR) Malaysia Maldives Taiwan</p> <p><b>Oceania</b></p> <p>Kiribati Marshall Islands Federated States of Micronesia</p> <p>Nauru Palau Papua New Guinea Samoa Solomon Islands Tonga Tuvalu</p>	<p><b>Americas</b></p> <p>Antigua &amp; Barbuda Argentina Barbados Belize Brazil Chile Colombia Costa Rica Grenada Guatemala Guyana Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru St Kitts &amp; Nevis St Lucia St Vincent &amp; Grenadines</p> <p>The Bahamas Trinidad &amp; Tobago Uruguay</p>	<p><b>Africa</b></p> <p>Botswana Mauritius Seychelles</p> <p><b>B5JSSK</b></p> <p>Australia Canada Hong Kong (SAR) Japan New Zealand South Korea Singapore USA</p>	<p><b>European</b></p> <p>Andorra Austria Belgium Bulgaria Croatia Cyprus Czechia Denmark Estonia Finland France Germany Greece Hungary Iceland Italy Latvia</p>	<p>Liechtenstein Lithuania Luxembourg Malta Monaco Netherlands Norway Poland Portugal Romania San Marino Slovakia Slovenia Spain Sweden Switzerland Vatican City</p>

Customers do not need an ETA if they have either:

- a visa
- permission to live, work or study in the UK.
- a British or Irish passport

If you are not sure if your delegate requires a visa for the UK, please check on our website at: [Electronic Travel Authorisation \(ETA\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/electronic-travel-authorisation-eta)

### Documents for Visitors

Apart from a valid travel document, the Standard Visitor route does not require any mandatory documents (unless the individual coming to the UK for private medical treatment, to donate an organ, as an academic coming for up to 12 months, or is a child). This is because Visitors can come to the UK for a variety of reasons and each person will have their individual circumstances. Applicants are best placed to determine the documents they think best demonstrate that they meet the Immigration Rules.

It is, however, recommended that organisers inviting any delegates to their events in any of the Visitor routes provide invitation letters. An example is set out in Section 6 of this guidance.

Visitors **must** have a formal invitation letter from the inviting organisation based in the UK.

**Prepare the application and supporting documents carefully. Submitting only an invitation letter in support of an application may not give the decision maker all the necessary information to be satisfied that the delegate meets the requirements of the Immigration Rules. To support their application, your delegate should gather evidence of their circumstances, employment, ability to meet the costs of the trip and details of where they will be staying and why they are visiting the UK.**

The supporting documents guidance provides some examples of the types of documents a visitor might choose to submit with their visa application or show to a Border Force Officer on arrival – [Visit visa: guide to supporting documents - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/visit-visa-supporting-documents)

### 3. Advice on visa applications.

If delegates of business related events or conferences in the UK are required to apply for a visa in advance of travel, please advise them to apply as early as possible. Applications can be made up to three months in advance of proposed date of travel.

Our current processing time is around 3 weeks from when we receive an application (including biometric information) to when we send our decision to the applicant. Please advise delegates to allow as much time as possible in case of delays or if additional information is required. It is the delegate's responsibility to ensure the information on their form is accurate.

In many locations, for an additional fee, delegates may be able to use our Priority and Super Priority visa service. The service standards for these products are 5 working days and the end of the next working day respectively.

Full instructions on what your delegates need to do before, during and after applying for a visa, and what to do once they enter the UK can be found on our website at: [What you need to do - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/what-you-need-to-do)

Your delegate must **apply and pay online** for the visa using the link at: [How to apply for a visa to come to the UK: Choose a visa - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/how-to-apply-for-a-visa-to-come-to-the-uk)

Your delegate will be asked to book a biometric appointment with one of our visa application centres at the end of the online application and pay the visa application fee.

UK hosts of events should ensure that invitation letters are sent to their participants as early as possible before the event to allow them to apply for a UK Visa. If you are issuing an official letter of invitation to attend an event in the UK, we would recommend that your delegates include the original letter with their supporting documents. Supporting documents can be self-uploaded before a delegate's appointment at no additional cost. On the day of your appointment your delegate must go in person to the chosen Visa Application Centre with their passport, printed application form and any other supporting documents. Assisted scanning at the VAC is available for an additional fee. They will also be required to give their biometrics: digital photograph and fingerprints.

To find details of the nearest visa application centre use this link: [Find a visa application centre - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). Read our guidance carefully and encourage your delegates to apply for visas as early as possible. Applications can be made up to three months in advance of the planned date of travel.

## 4. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### How do my delegates apply for a visa?

Applications for visit visas are made online [Select your language \(visas-immigration.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/visas-immigration/service)

### How do I make enquiries about a visa application?

You should be able to find the information you need about visit visas on our website ([Visit the UK as a Standard Visitor: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/visas-immigration/standard-visitor)) but if you need to contact us, our contact details are [here on GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/contact)

### Can my delegates apply in their own language?

The application form has been translated into a range of languages, however all answers must be in English. Supporting documents must also be in English or accompanied by a translation. Translation requirements are outlined on the guide to supporting documents: [Visit visa: guide to supporting documents - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/visas-immigration/standard-visitor/translation)

### Where should my delegate apply?

A visit visa application can be made from any country where we have a Visa Application Centre (VAC). The online form will ask which country a delegate is applying in, this then gives a list of available Visa Application Centres. An application can also be made online from a country where there is no VAC presence, but the delegate would need to travel to a VAC to complete the application process. Further details about our visa application centres are available [here](https://www.gov.uk/visas-immigration/standard-visitor/apply)

### When should my delegates apply?

Applications can be made up to three months in advance of the intended date of travel to the UK. Delegates are advised to apply as soon as possible. UK hosts of events should ensure that invitation letters are sent to the delegates as quickly as possible before the event to allow them plenty of time to apply for a visa.

### How long will my delegates applications take?

Our current processing time is around **3 weeks from submitting biometrics**, but we recommend that applications are made as early as possible allowing at least 3 weeks. In many locations, for an additional fee, delegates may be able to use our Priority and Super Priority visa service.

### What is “biometric information”?

Biometric information consists of fingerprint scanning and a full-face digital photograph. Visa applicants must provide their biometric information **each time** they apply for a UK visa.

### Can delegates do anything in advance to make the application process quicker?

Yes. When an application is started your delegate will be asked to supply an email address and create a password, they will then be emailed a link to return to the application at a later point. This means the form can be started more than three months before the planned date of travel.

### What is Priority and Super Priority Service

Priority service means that we will aim to make a decision on your application in 5 working days, this service is available in over 200 locations. Super Priority service reduces this to the end of the next working day, this service is available in around 20 locations. Both services are charged at an additional fee. Some applications may take longer if they are complex, please check the [visa application centres](https://www.gov.uk/visas-immigration/standard-visitor/apply) website for any further information.

**Important note:** Priority service does not imply or guarantee in any way that a delegate will be successful in their visa application. All visa applicants must meet the requirements of the UK immigration rules.



**My delegate travels a lot and cannot be without their passport, are there any services that could help?**

We offer a Keep My Passport service in over 40 locations, this allows the applicant to keep their passport while their application is being considered. If their visa application is successful they will need to provide their passport to the VAC for the vignette to be printed. This service comes at an additional cost and details of which services are available at each VAC are available on the Commercial Partner website.

**Are there any other services available for the convenience of my delegates?**

Yes, a wide range of services are available for customer convenience, popular services include peak time and weekend VAC appointments, SMS updates, photocopying, premium lounges and even the ability to submit biometrics in the comfort of your own home or office. Additional services such as travel insurance and UK sim card can also be purchased via commercial partner websites and in VACs. These are known as 'user pay' or 'added value' services, please see the website of the VAC your delegate wishes to attend to find out which services are available in their location.

**Why aren't all services available in all locations?**

Not all customers want all services, to provide the best value for our customers, our additional services are provided where there is a demand for them.

**Is it possible for someone else to collect my delegates passport and documents on their behalf?**

Passports must be collected by the applicant or a nominated representative. You can check if a visa application centre offers a courier service, which may be a more convenient way for passports and documents to be returned, this is an additional service for which the fee will vary upon location.

**Can a delegate apply for a visa in one country and collect it in another?**

No, however a small number of VACs do offer an out of country courier service at an additional cost, please check the VAC website to see if this service is available.

**What travel date should be stated on the application form?**

On the application your delegates should be specific in stating planned dates of travel to and from the UK. Delegates cannot arrive in the UK earlier than the start date on their visa. If your delegate tries to travel before this date, the airline may not let them board their flight, or they may be refused entry on arrival in the UK. It is not usually possible to make changes to the validity dates of a visa, after it has been printed. If plans change, your delegate may need to make a new visa application.

**Are there any other ways to make my journey easier?**

Nationals of some countries may be able to clear immigration control faster through our Registered Traveller Service. To be eligible delegates must have a visa or have visited the UK 4 times or more in the last 24 months.

For further information about the Registered Traveller Service, please visit our website: [Registered Traveller: faster entry through the UK border: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/registered-traveller-faster-entry-through-the-uk-border)

**What can I do if my delegates visa is refused?**

A decision to refuse a visa is made only after careful consideration of all the facts by an Entry Clearance Officer, including the fact that the delegate is to attend or contribute to a specific event. If the application is refused, the refusal notice will provide details about the reasons for refusal. Your delegate is free to make a new application, but it is strongly recommended that they read their refusal letter carefully and fully address all the reasons for the initial refusal.

**I am funding my delegates travel; do I need to provide additional information?**

In most cases, providing details of your support on the visa invitation letter should be sufficient. However, if you send funds directly to your delegate it would be prudent to provide evidence to support the payments you have made.

## Electronic travel Authorisation (ETA) Q&A

### **What is an ETA?**

If granted, an ETA provides a traveller with permission to travel to the UK. An ETA does not provide permission to enter the UK, nor does it provide permission to live, work or study in the UK.

All individuals will still need to seek leave to enter at the border in the way they do now; either by passing through an eGate if eligible or by seeing a Border Force officer.

### **Why are you making these changes?**

The Government is committed to strengthening the UK's border by ensuring that everyone wishing to travel to the UK (except British and Irish citizens) seeks permission in advance of travel – this is our universal 'permission to travel' requirement.

To fill the current gap in advance permissions, for those passengers visiting the UK or transiting through the UK who do not need a visa for short stays and do not have any other immigration status prior to travelling, we will require them to obtain an ETA.

We will use the information provided in an ETA application to facilitate the passage of legitimate travellers whilst keeping threats away from the UK border. ETAs will enhance our ability to screen travellers upstream and stop those who pose a threat from travelling to the UK.

This is in line with the approach many of the UK's international partners have taken to border security, including the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. This means it will already be a familiar concept to many international travellers and their carriers.

Moreover, by knowing more about people in advance of travel our ambition is to increase automation of passenger clearance at the border.

This will improve the end-to-end user experience for legitimate passengers and promote the UK as a top destination for tourism and business passengers.

### **Will ETAs replace the current visitor visa regime?**

No. If your nationality ordinarily requires a visa to visit the UK you will still need to apply for a visa; you should not obtain an ETA. You can use the Check if you need a UK visa tool on GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)), to check whether you need a visa to visit the UK.

If you do not need a visa, you will require an ETA when the scheme is opened to your nationality.

### **How long is an ETA valid for?**

An ETA will be valid for 2 years, or until the expiration of the passport used to apply if sooner and can be used for multiple journeys during this period.

### **Where can people go to for support with the application process?**

The Home Office is committed to providing the highest level of customer support for those interacting with the ETA scheme to make the process as easy as possible. A guidance video is available on GOV.UK to support people in the application process. Individuals can complete a webform on GOV.UK for extra support and should expect a response within three working days.

### **How do people apply?**

The application process is simple and fast. Most applicants will receive a response within three working days, with many receiving a result sooner. The easiest way to apply for an ETA is through the 'UK ETA app'. Individuals can also search for 'Apply for an Electronic Travel Authorisation to come to the UK' on GOV.UK if they do not have access to a smartphone.

To apply for an ETA, individuals need to:

- Pay a fee.
- Provide contact and passport details.
- Provide a valid photo, complying with our rules for digital photos on GOV.UK.
- Answer a set of questions.

Individuals must travel using the same passport they used when they applied for an ETA.

**Is an ETA an entry clearance?** Does an ETA permit permission to enter the UK?

No, an ETA is not an entry clearance. It does not provide permission to enter the UK, it only permits permission to travel to the UK.

As per the process now, on arrival at the UK border, a traveller obtain permission to enter on every occasion from a Border Force officer or, where appropriate, by passing through an eGate.

**Will anyone with an ETA be able to use an eGate on arrival?**

When the ETA scheme is initially launched, the policy on eGate usage will not change. Those nationalities who are currently eligible to use eGates will continue to use them as now.

## 4. Guidance on letters of invitation

When preparing a letter of invitation, you may wish to consider the following factors:

### How will the letter be sent to the recipient?

- If you are sending the letter by email, use a non-editable PDF format.
- Always use official headed paper for your organisation including the relevant contact information.

### Where possible a letter should be sent to delegate and include:

- full name - as it appears in the passport;
- date of birth;
- nationality; and
- passport number.

### The letter should also include:

- details of the event;
- dates of the event;
- location of the event;
- dates of arrival and departure to and from the UK;
- details of costs that will be covered by the host e.g. flights, accommodation, transportation etc;
- contact details for UKVI staff to use to verify the authenticity of the letter.

The letter should be signed by the relevant competent authority.

### Notes on best practice

You may find it helpful to give each delegate a unique reference number. This will make verification quicker and easier in the event it is requested.

## 5. Example letter:

### Example 1- letter to a delegate

London, April XXXX

Name  
Date of birth  
Nationality  
Passport number

Dear

#### **Invitation to the [Date] Euro Congress on Tropical Medicine**

We take great pleasure in inviting you to participate in the [Date] Euro Congress on Tropical Medicine, to be held in London.

We will provide the following:

- Accommodation and full board from Tuesday 28 July to Saturday 8 August
- All transportation during the week
- Congress registration and entry fees
- Clinic lectures and practical exercises on 29 and 30 July
- Assistance throughout your stay

You will be responsible for the travel costs to and from London. For a better cohesion of the group, please understand that no late arrival or early departure will be accepted. Please see the attached sheet for a full programme.

We look forward to having the pleasure of welcoming you to London.

This letter was signed by

President  
Euro Congress  
Event Director

## 7. Visa Application Process

End to End, Customer Journey – this represents a generic high-level visa customer journey for an international visa applicant

