



## India, Mexico, Jamaica: Warning to Travelers Who'll Have to Wait Years for A US Visitor Visa

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Lengthy visa processing times are stopping millions of travellers from travelling to the **United States**.

In some countries, wait times are more than 400 days for first-time applicants. But the delays vary hugely between countries. Getting the green light to enter the US can take anywhere from three days to three years, depending on the applicant's local embassy or consulate.

Planning on **travelling to the US**? Here's what you need to know about visas.

What is a US visitor visa?

The US visitor visa is for travellers who want to enter the US for business, tourism or both, and is valid for up to 90 days. They're also known as B-1 and B-2 visas.

The application process starts with an interview at the US embassy or consulate local to the applicant. This is where the delays are coming in. In some countries, applicants are having to wait up to three years for an interview appointment.

The visitor visa is available to travellers from most countries. But there are some exceptions.

Travellers from many **European countries** and some **South American, Asian** and **Oceanian** countries benefit from a fast-track scheme.

Which countries have been hit worst by US visitor visa delays?

**India** is facing some of the **longest delays**. In Mumbai and other big **Indian** cities, the average wait time is 825 days for an interview appointment.

**Chile, Colombia**, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guyana, Jamaica, **Mexico**, Nigeria and **Panama** all face upwards of 700-day wait times.

David Bier, associate director of immigration studies at the Libertarian Cato Institute, attributes the problem to COVID-induced lockdowns at US consulates worldwide. He told VOA News “They just stopped doing work during COVID. And that produced what we’re seeing now, which is year-plus waits, massive backlogs and all the problems associated with that.”

He added that these are the worst the wait times have been since 9/11.

What is the ESTA and how can you apply for it?

There is an alternative to the US visitor visa.

**The Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)** acts as a sort of fast-track program that allows applicants to stay in the country for up to three months without a visa, but only **40 countries** are part of it.

It’s part of the US Visa Waiver Program, which allows travellers to enter the US without going through the normal visitor visa process, and remains valid for two years. The process normally takes three days from application to approval, and costs \$21 [€21.52].

You must be a **citizen** of one of the 40 countries in ESTA to apply.

The first step of the application process is to create an ESTA account **online**. Then, you can fill out the application form. It asks for a passport scan and other information ranging from personal details to employment status and social media handles (some of these details are optional). Three days after submitting the application, its status will be communicated by email.