

UK's mandatory ETA scheme ends free-visa entry

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International visitors from countries so far visa-exempt will not be able to travel to the UK without advance permission in the form of an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) under new rules announced by the government on Monday.

Visitors from 85 nationalities, including the United States, Canada, and France, who have thus far not needed advance clearance, must apply online for an ETA from

February 25, 2026, before entry to the UK. Indians already require visas across different categories when travelling to the UK and will be unaffected by this particular change.

"ETAs give us greater power to stop those who pose a threat from setting foot in the country and gives us a fuller picture of immigration," said Mike Tapp, UK's Minister for Migration and Citizenship.

"ETAs are also better for travellers. Digitising the immigration system ensures the millions of people we welcome to the UK every year enjoy a

more seamless travel experience," he said.

The UK Home Office said this marks a "significant step" towards digitising the country's immigration system and paves the way for a contactless UK border in the future.

Enforcing the new rules will mean that everyone who wants to come to the UK must

have digital permission through either an ETA or an eVisa. All aircraft carriers will be required to check people have the requisite documentation before

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they board.

"Since the launch of ETA in October 2023, more than 13.3 million visitors have successfully applied and benefited from faster, smoother travel. ETA is now a fundamental part of travel, including for visitors who take connecting flights and go through UK passport control," the Home Office said.

As part of a wider ETA roll-out, it was not being strictly enforced to give travellers time to adjust to the new requirement — in line with the approach other countries such as the US and Canada took for similar travel schemes. PTI