

## **ETA Briefing March 2024 Summary**

This briefing highlights the introduction and impact of the ETA, specific procedures for Northern Ireland, challenges in obtaining an exemption, and ongoing efforts to ensure proper communication and support for the tourism industry.

### **1. Introduction of ETA:**

- The UK Government has introduced an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) for non-visa national visitors.
- Cost: £10, valid for 2 years (multiple visits) or until passport expiry.
- Applies to all non-visa national visitors arriving in the UK, either directly or via the land border.
- Each traveller, including children and babies, must obtain their own ETA prior to travel.

### **2. Roll-out and Phases:**

- Phased roll-out; currently in place for specific countries (Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia). Note: these countries required a full visa, so ETA cheaper and quicker.
- Roll-out to other countries Rest of World (US/EU/Australia/New Zealand/Canada) scheduled for Autumn 2024 and EU countries scheduled for early 2025.
- It is expected that for first 3-6 months there will be no enforcement of ETA, rather people found without an ETA will be given a warning.

### **3. EU Schemes**

- 29 EU countries (excluding Ireland and Cyprus) will be introducing the Entry/Exit System (EES) for registering non-EU nationals travelling for a short stay, each time they cross the external borders of European countries. This is expected to be rolled out from October 2024
- 30 EU countries (excluding Ireland) will be implementing the ETIAS Travel Authorisation for visa-exempt nationals. This is similar to ETA and is expected to be implemented around 6 months after EES.

### **4. Ireland/Northern Ireland Border**

- British and Irish citizens are exempt.
- Non-visa national residents of RoI are exempt.
- Non-visa nationals who are not legally resident in RoI crossing the land border into NI have a legal requirement to follow UK's immigration framework, including obtaining an ETA if required.
- No routine immigration controls within the Common Travel Area (CTA), including the Ireland-Northern Ireland land border. However, there are intelligence led checks.

### **5. Impact on Tourism in Northern Ireland:**

- ETA impacts international visitors traveling via Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland. This covers around 70% of international visitors to NI.
- In 2019 this totalled 550K overnight visitors and we estimate 500K day trippers

who crossed the land border. In financial terms (based on 2019) £230m from overnight visitors and we estimate £250m from day trippers.

- Non-visa national residents of RoI who travel to destinations outside of the CTA via an airport within Northern Ireland will require an ETA when returning. This would impact City of Derry airport given its geographic location in the North West and provision of holiday destination routes.
- Lack of awareness among tourists entering Northern Ireland via Republic of Ireland may lead to unintentional violations and potential penalties.

#### **6. Current Situation and Exemption:**

- NITA has been lobbying for two years for an exemption for non-visa nationals crossing land border.
- Proposed solution of 5-7 days exemption covering 90% of tourists was rejected by the Home Office.
- Home Office argues uniformity in border security; NITA emphasises the unique nature of the Ireland-Northern Ireland land border (no border control) due to the CTA.

#### **7. Rationale for Exemption:**

- Small number of tourists crossing land border (1.8% of total visitors to the UK).
- Absence of immigration checks and unlikelihood of security threats make a short-term exemption reasonable.
- Potential to discourage visitors to include visit to NI while in Ireland
- Aligns with the Good Friday Agreement's collaborative spirit and protects the tourism economy. We are promoted as part of the Island of Ireland destination and many visitors do not realise they are travelling to a different jurisdiction.

#### **8. Support for Exemption:**

- NITA has support from the tourism industry and wider economic sectors, GB tourism bodies, Department for the Economy, Head of the Civil Service, Northern Ireland MPs, Shadow SoS, Taoiseach, Tánaiste, and peers in the House of Lords.
- The UK Tourism Industry Council, at their meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> February, supported the call for an exemption. The following was noted in the official minutes – 'Members called for the Home Office to exempt visitors from ETA requirements when visiting Northern Ireland - a particular concern given 70% of the region's visitors arrive via Dublin Airport and then travel north across the border for day visits.'

#### **9. Significant Events**

- 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – NITA and Tourism Ireland will be speaking at the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Plenary being held in Wicklow.
- 8<sup>th</sup> April – First meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council. NI Ministers briefed on ETA.
- 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – NITA submitted written evidence to the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee Call for evidence on Electronic Border Management
- 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – NITA met with Economy Minister, Conor Murphy, to brief him on ETA. This will be taken forward with NI Executive to the Home Office to make the case for the exemption.
- 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023 - Publication of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly - a cross-party group of lawmakers from the UK and Ireland - report from the

Sovereign Affairs committee which fully supported our call for an exemption. Committee Chair Senator Emer Currie said, *"The Common Travel Area underpins our all-island health and tourism strategies, and life on our island as we know it. The Electronic Travel Authorisation Scheme in its current form will undermine it, weigh down and damage tourism to Northern Ireland and the North-West of Ireland."*

- 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023 – Westminster Hall Debate with sitting NI MP's
- 17<sup>th</sup> July - House of Lords Follow up Questions to Regret Motion Debate
- 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 - House of Lords Regret Motion Debate

#### 10. **Communication to Mitigate Impact:**

- In the case that no exemption is secured, NITA, ITOA, Department for the Economy, TNI and TI are engaging with Home Office officials about communication requirements to inform non-visa nationals arriving in ROI first of the ETA requirement. Home Office would like to see all transport operators (airlines/airports/bus/coach/train/taxi) and tourism businesses providing information to visitors. There is no legal obligation on any of these businesses to ensure a tourist has an ETA prior to travelling to NI.
- Concerns about incorrect messaging discouraging visitors to Northern Ireland and potentially the island of Ireland.