



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) · Regional Office US & Canada · 871 United Nations Plaza · New York, NY 10017

New York, August 11, 2026

Travel authorization for the USA

The DAAD does not have the necessary expertise to advise you on a US visa, but we can point you in the right direction so you can carry out your own research.

You are most likely eligible to enter the USA under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) with an ESTA.

- Go to the official ESTA website: Access the ESTA application page.
- Complete the application: Fill in the required information, including personal details, travel information, and eligibility questions.
- Submit the application: Once you have filled out the form, submit it for processing.
- Pay the fee: An ESTA application requires a fee, which can be paid online with a credit or debit card.
- Receive authorization: Once approved, the ESTA authorization is sent by email. It is recommended to print a copy for your trip.
- Submit the application at least 72 hours before departure, but ideally as early as possible to avoid last-minute issues. It is advisable to complete the application as early as possible.
- With an ESTA you may stay in the USA for up to 90 days per visit.

It is important to know that the ESTA is valid for two years from the date of approval or until your passport expires, whichever comes first. During this period you may enter the USA multiple times, but each stay may not exceed 90 days.

More information:

Travel.State.Gov: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visitor.html/visa>

In general, a citizen of another country who wishes to travel to the United States must first apply for a visa, either a nonimmigrant visa for a temporary stay or an immigrant visa for permanent residence. Visitor visas are nonimmigrant visas for people who wish to enter the United States temporarily for business purposes (B-1 visa), for tourism purposes (B-2 visa), or for a combination of both (B-1/B-2 visa).

Entry Checklist

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1. Check travel documents & visa

- **Passport:** Valid for at least 6 months beyond the end of the stay
- **ESTA**

In addition to a valid passport and an approved ESTA, German travelers should bring the following documents to ensure a smooth entry into the USA:

- **Itinerary:** Details of your flight, accommodation, and planned activities. This helps demonstrate the purpose and duration of your stay.
- **Proof of sufficient financial means: bank statements** or credit card statements showing that you have enough money to cover your expenses during your stay.
- **Conference invitation** or registration: If you are attending the GAIN conference, bring a copy of your invitation or registration confirmation.
- **Return or onward travel ticket:** Proof that you have a ticket to leave the USA at the end of your stay.
- **Contact information:** Details of where you will be staying in the USA, including address and phone number.
- **Proof of employment:** A letter from your employer or academic institution confirming your employment or academic status and the purpose of your visit.
- Having these documents on hand can help make the entry process smoother and answer any questions from US Customs and Border Protection officers.

2. Entry for citizens outside the EU / non-VWP countries

The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) with ESTA applies only to citizens of participating countries (including most EU member states and other partner countries – currently with the exception of Romania, which has not participated in the VWP since June 2025). Anyone who is not a citizen of a VWP country cannot enter with ESTA and instead requires a regular nonimmigrant visa (typically a B-1/B-2 visitor visa for conference or short stays).

- **Check VWP status:** Check whether your country participates in the VWP (current list at travel.state.gov). If not, a visa is always required — regardless of the length of stay.
- **Apply for a visa:** Complete the online DS-160 form (nonimmigrant visa application) and pay the processing fee (MRV fee).
- **Schedule an interview appointment:** Schedule an appointment for the personal interview via the website of the responsible US embassy or consulate. Appointment wait times can vary significantly by country — plan ahead (ideally several months in advance).
- **Prepare documents:** Bring your passport, DS-160 confirmation page, passport photo, invitation/registration confirmation for the GAIN conference, proof of funding, and, if applicable, evidence of professional/academic ties to your home country to the interview.



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Processing times and appointment availability for visas vary significantly by country and consulate and can take several weeks to months. Non-EU citizens should therefore apply for their visa as early as possible.

Overview of visa requirements/VWP countries: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visa-waiver-program.html>

DS-160 online application: <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>

3. Social media accounts

When applying for a visa as well as upon entry into the USA, you may be required to provide certain social media profiles, which may be reviewed as part of the security screening.

More information is also available on the advisory office's website: <https://www.daad.de/usa-beratungsstelle/>

For travel under the ESTA program, such mandatory disclosure of social media accounts is not currently required. However, an expansion of such checks is being discussed politically.

In general, it is therefore advisable to be prepared for additional checks during visa or entry procedures, and that information about online profiles may need to be disclosed if requested.

4. Travel & conduct upon entry

- **Be prepared for questions:**

Upon entry into the USA, immigration officers may ask a number of questions to verify your identity and purpose of travel and to ensure that you meet entry requirements. Below are some frequently asked questions you may be asked:

- Purpose of visit: “What is the purpose of your visit to the United States?”
Suggested answer: *“I am attending a science and research networking conference organized by GAIN (German Academic International Network). The event is sponsored by the DAAD, DFG, and the AvH Foundation and brings together researchers and institutions to exchange ideas and foster international collaboration. I am not engaging in any employment or study activities during my stay”.*
- Length of stay: “How long do you intend to stay in the USA?”
- Accommodation: “Where will you be staying during your visit?”
- Travel plans: “Do you have a return or onward travel ticket?”



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- Employment/academic status: “What do you do for a living?” or “What is your academic status?”
- Conference details: "Are you attending a conference? Can you provide details or an invitation letter?"
- Financial means: “Do you have sufficient funds to support yourself during your stay?”
- Previous visits: "Have you visited the USA before? If so, when and for how long?"
- Contacts in the USA: "Do you have friends or relatives in the USA? If so, where do they live?"
- Personal information: “Can you confirm your personal details, such as your name, date of birth, and nationality?”

It is important that you answer these questions truthfully and confidently. Having all your documents organized and readily available can help the process go more smoothly.

5. Important contacts

- **Accommodation:** Address and phone number of the hotel or place where you will be staying.
- **Professional contacts:** If you have professional contacts or colleagues in the USA, provide their names, addresses, and phone numbers.
- **Emergency contact person:** A contact person in the USA who can be reached in an emergency. This can be a friend, family member, or colleague.
- **Conference organizers:** Contact details of the GAIN conference organizers, including their names, phone numbers, and email addresses.
- Contact address of the DAAD New York office: Anna Oberle-Brill
- oberle-brill@daad.de

6. Important links for your stay in the USA

- **Travel and safety information from the German Federal Foreign Office** should be read carefully, checked for recent changes close to your departure date, and any recommendations and advice should be followed. Available here: USA/United States: Travel and safety information - Federal Foreign Office <<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/laender/usa-node/usavereinigtstaatensicherheit/201382>>
- Register with the Federal Foreign Office's crisis preparedness list “**ELEFAND**”: ELEFAND registration <<https://krisenvorsorgeliste.diplo.de/signin>>
- **Note emergency contacts:**
 - Note the German embassy and consulates (pay attention to the consulate responsible for your region)



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- Overview of consulates: German missions in the United States - Federal Foreign Office <<https://www.germany.info/us-de>>

- Consulate finder USA - Federal Foreign Office <<https://www.germany.info/us-de/service/konsulatsfinder-1217036>>

- Map: hk-karte-pdf-data.pdf
<<https://www.germany.info/resource/blob/2511334/c0fec6c5fc21124cb85f2b8b70c0c25c/hk-karte-pdf-data.pdf>>