

The Irish Short-stay Visa Waiver Programme



Information Note

The Irish Short-stay Visa Waiver Programme was announced by the Government as part of its Jobs Initiative with a view to promoting tourism from emerging markets. It will commence on 1 July 2011. The programme will run as a pilot up to end October 2012 but may be amended or expanded at any point depending on experience of the pilot.

The main points of the programme are:

- Persons granted leave to enter the UK (i.e. granted a “UK visa”) as a general visitor, child visitor, business visitor, academic visitor or sporting visitor will be able to travel to Ireland within the period of validity of their leave to remain in the UK without the requirement to obtain an Irish visa.
- The period of validity of leave to remain in the UK for the above categories is 180 days but the maximum stay in Ireland will be 90 days or to the end of the period of validity of the UK leave to remain, whichever is the shorter. It should be stressed that the need for a visa to visit Ireland is not eliminated by this programme. Visitors from visa-required countries will still require an Irish visa (for direct travel to Ireland) or a UK visa (for travel to Ireland via the UK). What is eliminated by this programme is the need to have **both** an Irish and UK visa when visiting Ireland via the UK.
- The person travelling will be required to land in and have gained lawful entry to the UK, on foot of the current leave to enter (visa), prior to travel to Ireland. Lawful entry will be attested by the appropriate entry stamp of the UK Border Agency. Therefore, transit passengers through the UK to Ireland, who do not pass through immigration in the UK, will still require an Irish visa. There is no minimum length of stay in the UK required before travel to Ireland.
- Persons travelling to Ireland under the programme will be treated at their Irish port of entry just as they would have been previously if arriving with an Irish visa i.e. their passport will be further stamped by immigration officers at the Irish port of entry with an entry stamp and a date until which the visitor is allowed to stay. Visitors will have to satisfy immigration officers as to the purpose of their visit in the normal way.
- A person may return to Ireland within the period of validity of the UK leave to remain but will not be able to stay in Ireland for more than 90 days in any one visit. As above, the immigration officer at port of entry has the ultimate decision on the length of stay.
- In relation to persons travelling between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the following scenarios will apply:

- If arriving in Ireland and then travelling to Northern Ireland, both an Irish and UK visa will be required, as is the case at present
 - If arriving in Northern Ireland and travelling to Ireland, the visa waiver programme will apply and only a UK visa will be required
 - If arriving in Ireland, travelling to Northern Ireland and then returning to Ireland, both an Irish and UK visa will be required but the UK visa will be accepted under the programme for the return visit
 - If arriving in Northern Ireland, travelling to Ireland and then returning to Northern Ireland, the visa waiver programme will apply to the visit to Ireland but the appropriate UK visa will be required to allow a second entry into Northern Ireland
- The person may travel out of the Common Travel Area from either Ireland or the UK but this must happen before the expiry of the stamp issued by the immigration officer on arrival in Ireland (if leaving from Ireland) or the expiration of the UK visa (if leaving from the UK).
 - The categories of visitors covered by the programme are as set out above i.e. tourists, business persons, sportspersons, academics. Other types of visitors to the UK, for example those with transit visas, long-term student visas, join spouse or family reunification visas, are not encompassed.
 - Nationals of the following countries are proposed for inclusion in the programme:
 - Eastern Europe: Belarus, Montenegro, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine
 - Middle East: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates
 - Other Asian: India, Kazakhstan, Peoples Republic of China¹, Uzbekistan
 - Only passport holders of those countries are included in the scheme. Residents in those countries, who are not nationals of that country, are not covered. As the programme covers all those persons who are nationals of the above countries and who have been granted leave to enter the UK in the applicable categories, holders of diplomatic and special passports of the countries above, who are visa exempt for the UK, are included in the programme.
 - Nationals of the countries above, who are long-term legal residents in the UK, will still require an Irish visa but will have the visa fee waived as part of the programme.

The introduction of the programme required an amendment to the Visa Order (a Statutory Instrument) and this was signed by the Minister earlier this week.

¹ Please note in relation to China that nationals of the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau are already on the list of those nationals who do not require a visa to travel to Ireland.