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European Entry/Exit System (EES)

What Travellers from the UK Need to Know

Independent travel guidance by TravelLynStyle

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European travel is evolving, and a new digital border system now applies when entering most countries in the Schengen Area. The European Entry/Exit System (EES) modernises border control, improves security and replaces passport stamping for non-EU travellers.

If you hold a UK passport and travel to Europe, this system affects you. It does not prevent travel, introduce visas for short stays, or change where you can go — but it does change how your entry and exit are recorded.

This guide explains the EES clearly and practically, so you know what to expect before you travel.

What is the European Entry/Exit System (EES)?

The EES is a digital system that records the entry and exit of non-EU nationals travelling to the Schengen Area for short stays.

Instead of a passport stamp, travel movements are logged electronically. The system records:

- Your name and passport details
- Date and place of entry and exit
- Length of stay
- Biometric data (facial image and fingerprints)

This allows border authorities to monitor stays accurately and ensure travellers do not exceed permitted time limits.

Who does the EES apply to?

The EES applies to:

- UK passport holders
- Travellers from other non-EU countries
- Visitors entering the Schengen Area for short stays (up to 90 days in any rolling 180-day period)

It does not apply to:

- EU passport holders
- Travellers holding a valid long-stay visa or residence permit issued by a Schengen country

Irish passport holders and the Common Travel Area

Irish passport holders are EU citizens and are not subject to the EES when travelling within the EU.

The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland also operate under the Common Travel Area (CTA), a long-standing arrangement that allows British and Irish citizens to travel and live in each other's countries without needing immigration permission.

In practical terms, airlines and ferry operators may require official photo identification (often a passport), and travellers may be asked to demonstrate identity and nationality on arrival, particularly when travelling by air. Travel between the UK and Ireland is not affected by the EES.

Which countries are affected?

The EES applies to countries that are part of the Schengen Area. This includes most EU member states, as well as several non-EU countries that participate fully in Schengen.

Schengen Area countries (EES applies):

EU Schengen countries include France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Non-EU Schengen countries (EES applies):

- Norway
- Iceland
- Switzerland
- Liechtenstein

EU countries outside the Schengen Area (EES does not apply):

- Ireland
- Cyprus (Cyprus is an EU member but is not yet part of Schengen. It has stated an intention to join in the future, with 2026 often referenced, but this is subject to EU approval and readiness checks.)

Travel to non-Schengen EU countries is governed by national entry requirements rather than the Schengen system, and entry and exit movements are not recorded under the EES.

When is the EES being introduced?

The European Entry/Exit System began its phased introduction on 12th October 2025 and full rollout is expected by April 2026. It is live in principle, but it is not yet applied uniformly across all border points, transport modes and countries.

Implementation is being rolled out gradually as border infrastructure, staffing and technology are introduced and tested. As a result, travellers may encounter the EES at some airports, ports and land borders before others.

UK travellers should assume that the EES may be applied at any Schengen external border and be prepared for registration requirements when entering the Schengen Area.

What happens at the border?

Your first entry under the EES may take slightly longer than before.

At the border you will:

- Present your passport
- Have a facial image taken
- Provide fingerprints

This registration is usually required once every three years, or when you change passport.

On subsequent trips, your details will already be held on the system and border checks should be quicker and more streamlined.

What does this mean for queues and airport timings?

During the early stages of implementation, travellers may experience:

- Longer queues at some border points
- Additional processing time at busy airports, ports and rail crossings

This is typical when new systems are introduced and should ease as processes and infrastructure settle.

Allowing extra time at borders, particularly during peak travel periods, is sensible.

How long can UK travellers stay in Europe?

The EES enforces the existing rule:

- A maximum of 90 days in any rolling 180-day period within the Schengen Area

This rule has not changed. What has changed is how it is monitored.

Overstays are recorded automatically, making accurate trip planning more important than ever, particularly for frequent travellers and multi-country itineraries.

Is the EES the same as ETIAS?

No. The EES and ETIAS are separate systems with different purposes.

- EES records your entry and exit at the Schengen border
- ETIAS will be a paid travel authorisation completed before travel

ETIAS is expected to be introduced during 2026. It will require travellers from visa-exempt countries, including the UK, to apply online and pay a fee before travelling to the Schengen Area.

ETIAS is not a visa, but it operates in a similar way to the US ESTA system, assessing travellers before arrival. The EES takes place at the border; ETIAS, when introduced, will be completed in advance of travel.

What this means for your travel planning

For most leisure travellers, the EES represents a one-time registration and a small adjustment rather than a barrier to travel.

It is particularly relevant for:

- Frequent travellers to Europe
- Longer stays
- Itineraries combining multiple Schengen countries

Understanding how long you can remain within the Schengen Area, and how trips overlap, allows you to travel with confidence and avoid issues at the border.

Important notice and disclaimer

While every effort is made to keep this information accurate and up to date, travellers are responsible for ensuring that their travel documentation is valid and that they meet all entry requirements at the time of travel. Entry rules can change and are applied by border authorities.

Sources and further information

For the most up-to-date official guidance, travellers can refer to:

- European Commission travel portal: <https://travel-europe.europa.eu/ees>
- UK government guidance (FCDO): <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/eu-entryexit-system>

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