

Ins And Outs Of US Trusted Traveler Programs

Law360, New York (November 23, 2015, 10:48 PM ET) -- As part of its initiatives to streamline international travel for trusted travelers, United States Customs and Border Protection announced in November plans to expand to citizens of the United Kingdom the benefits of the Global Entry program, which permits expedited processing through CBP upon arrival to the United States. The expansion, effective on Dec. 3, 2015, represents the latest step in easing the burdens of border processing for frequent international travelers, as well as in allowing U.S. immigration and security officials to focus on higher-risk travelers. Global Entry represents one of several programs, described below, for trusted U.S. and international travelers providing efficient processing at travel checkpoints in the United States and abroad.

Transportation Security Administration Pre-Check

TSA Pre-Check is an expedited security screening program connecting travelers departing from United States airports with streamlined passage through security screening, including a reduction in the cumbersome practices required by TSA security regulations. TSA Pre-Check provides members with expedited security screening at more than 150 airports nationwide, and is operated in conjunction with 12 major U.S. airlines.[1] The program is offered to U.S. citizens and U.S. lawful permanent residents (“LPRs”) only, and requires pre-enrollment online, followed by identification verification and biometrics screening at a Pre-Check enrollment office.

At a cost of \$85 for a five-year membership, TSA Pre-Check is an affordable option for frequent U.S. travelers to avoid the long lines and somewhat burdensome requirements of U.S. security screening. Pre-Check travelers are provided with an exclusive line through security screening, and are not required to remove shoes, belts and light jackets for screening. To ease standard processing, Pre-Check passengers are also not required to remove laptop computers and permissible “3-1-1” liquids from their carry-on baggage. For reasons explained below, however, travelers may wish to forego applying directly for TSA Pre-Check, as several of the options described below include Pre-Check as a benefit of their membership.

Global Entry

Global Entry is a CBP program that allows expedited customs clearance for pre-approved, low-risk travelers upon arrival in the United States. Applicants must possess a passport from one of the several eligible countries, and are subject to a rigorous background check.

Global Entry provides substantial time savings for international travelers seeking to enter the United States. Rather than proceeding through traditional immigration processing, program members present their passports and customs documents at a Global Entry kiosk, which allows travelers to proceed directly to the baggage claim and exit. The program is operated in joint agreement with similar programs in Australia, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand and South Korea, which allows Global Entry members to enjoy expedited clearance benefits when entering these countries.

Global Entry is presently available at 59 international airports, including 46 major airports located in the United States and its territories, as well as an additional 13 CBP pre-clearance locations in Canada, the Caribbean, Ireland and the United Arab Emirates. The program is available to U.S. citizens and LPRs, and citizens of Germany, the Netherlands, Panama, South Korea, Mexico and, effective on Dec. 3, 2015, the United Kingdom.

Global Entry applicants must clear a rigorous background check referencing multiple government databases. Applicants must confirm that they have never been convicted of a criminal offense and that no criminal charges are pending. Travelers confirm they have never been found in violation of any customs, immigration or agricultural regulations in any country, and are not subject to any ongoing investigation by any law enforcement agency. In addition, travelers must demonstrate they have never been deemed inadmissible to the United States. As a final step, applicants must appear in person at a designated CBP office with a valid passport and one other form of identification, such as a driver's license, and submit to biometrics processing and an interview. LPRs must also present their permanent residence cards.

At \$100 for a five-year membership, Global Entry represents the best value of the several trusted traveler memberships offered by the United States. Global Entry membership includes the benefits of TSA Pre-Check. U.S. citizens, LPRs and Mexican nationals are eligible for an accompanying Global Entry Card, which allows access to the NEXUS and SENTRI benefits, described below.

NEXUS

The United States-Canada NEXUS joint program allows pre-screened travelers expedited processing when entering the United States and Canada. Program members, which are limited to citizens and permanent residents of the United States and Canada, use dedicated processing lanes at designated U.S.-Canada border ports of entry, NEXUS kiosks when entering Canada by air, and Global Entry kiosks when entering the United States via CBP preclearance locations in Canada.

Applicants are subject to a rigorous security screening, which requires approval by both CBP and Canadian immigration authorities. Similar to requirements for Global Entry, applicants must demonstrate a clean criminal record, and have never been deemed to have violated an immigration, customs or agricultural regulation in any country.

NEXUS membership costs \$50 for five years, and includes the benefits of the TSA Pre-Check and Global Entry for eligible members. As a final step before approval, however, applicants must appear at a NEXUS enrollment office at a U.S.-Canada land border crossing for identification verification, biometrics screening, and an interview. This requirement may be burdensome to travelers not located near designated land border crossings, making NEXUS applications less desirable than Global Entry for U.S. international travelers who infrequently travel between the United States and Canada.

SENTRI

The Secure Electronic Network for Travelers' Rapid Inspection ("SENTRI") is a CBP program that allows expedited clearance for pre-approved, low-risk travelers upon arrival in the United States from Mexico. Participants may enter the United States by using dedicated primary lanes into the United States at its southern land border ports of entry.

Membership in the SENTRI program (\$122.25 for five-years) includes the benefits of NEXUS when entering the United States from Canada by land, TSA Pre-Check access, as well as access to Global Entry kiosks when entering the United States at designated Global Entry checkpoints. Similar to all other trusted traveler programs, applicants undergo a rigorous security clearance, followed by a visit to a SENTRI enrollment center for interview, biometrics collection, and identification verification. SENTRI enrollment centers are located exclusively in California, Arizona and Texas along the United States-Mexico border.

APEC Business Travel Card

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation ("APEC") Travel Card is available to facilitate travel for U.S. citizens engaged in verified business in the APEC region.[2] APEC membership enables access to dedicated fast-track lanes for expedited immigration processing at foreign APEC member airports, and members are not required to individually apply for visas and entry permits in participating countries. U.S. members may also use Global Entry kiosks when returning to the United States.

APEC participants must also be a member of Global Entry, NEXUS or SENTRI, and therefore are subject to the pre-screening security clearances associated with membership in each of these trusted traveler programs. As an added requirement, APEC applicants must demonstrate that they are actively engaged in APEC business, such as in the trade of goods, the provision of services, or making investments in the APEC region.

APEC membership costs \$70 for three years and is recommended in combination with Global Entry access for travelers making frequent business trips to APEC nations.

Conclusion

For international travelers, ease of processing through busy airports can be of critical importance when booking tight connections or traveling during peak travel periods. Many frequent travelers would gladly pay an additional fee for avoiding the frustrations of long lines and intense scrutiny by security and immigration officials. The U.S. trusted traveler programs offer precisely this opportunity. While each of the above programs has unique benefits, the Global Entry program is the flagship CBP trusted traveler offering, with access to many of the benefits of the TSA Pre-Check, NEXUS and SENTRI programs. Application processing for each of these programs generally takes up to four to six weeks, in addition to an in-person screening, so international travelers should begin the application process now to secure trusted traveler status early in the new year.

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[1] TSA Pre-Check is presently offered to flyers using the following airlines: Air Canada, Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Hawaiian Airlines, JetBlue Airways, OneJet, Southwest Airlines, Sun Country, United Airlines, Virgin America, and WestJet.

[2] The APEC region includes the following countries: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

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