

The Irish Short-stay Visa Waiver Programme



Information Note – March 2012

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 commenced on 1 July 2011. The programme will run up to end October 2016 but may be amended or expanded at any point.

1. What does the Programme do?

Under the Programme, persons

- (i) who are nationals of one of sixteen countries covered by the scheme,
- (ii) who have entered the UK on foot of a UK 'C' General visa, and
- (iii) have been granted leave to remain in the UK for up to 180 days,

may

- (iv) travel to Ireland, within the time remaining on a current leave to remain in the UK, without the requirement to obtain an Irish visa, and
- (v) be granted permission to remain in Ireland up to a maximum of 90 days or the time left on their UK leave to remain, whichever is the shorter.

Each distinct period of leave to remain in the UK (up to a maximum of 180 days each time) requires a prior legal entry into the UK before travel to Ireland under the Programme, no matter what the duration of the UK visa.

2. What nationalities are covered?

Nationals of the following countries are included 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

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.

3. What type of UK visas are covered?

The categories of visitors covered by the programme are tourists, business persons (including holders of 'C' long-term, multi-entry business visas), sportspersons and academics who, as set out above, are in possession of the required UK visa type and who are the subject of a leave to remain in the UK. 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.

4. How long will I be able to stay in Ireland under the Programme?

The maximum 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. Holders of UK long-term business visas should note that the visit to Ireland must take place within a current period of leave to remain (see paragraph 9 below for more details).

Travellers who wish to visit Ireland as part of this programme and who intend eventually to depart from the UK after their stay in Ireland is complete should ensure that their permission to remain in the UK remains valid to cover their date of departure from the UK. When making travel plans, such travellers are strongly advised allow to enough time before the date of expiry of their leave to remain in the UK so that they can legally enter and be present in the UK to begin their planned departure journey from there.

5. Are there circumstances where I would still need an Irish visa?

It should be stressed that the need for a visa to visit Ireland is not eliminated in all circumstances by this programme. Visitors from visa-required countries will still require an Irish visa for direct travel to Ireland unless they are availing of this Programme. What is eliminated by this programme is the need to have **both** an Irish and UK visa when visiting Ireland via the UK (or visiting Ireland following a visit to the UK in certain circumstances – see paragraphs 7, 8 and 9 below).

Travellers should also note that this programme does **not** amount to a common UK and Irish visa regime and that possession of an Irish visa does not allow travellers to enter the UK. Anybody who is visa required by the UK and who wishes to enter the UK, must be in possession of a valid UK visa. This includes those wishing to visit Northern Ireland.

6. What conditions will I have to fulfil to avail of the Programme?

The person travelling will be required to have landed in and gained lawful entry to the UK, on foot of the current visa, prior to undertaking the journey to Ireland. Lawful entry to the UK 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.

7. Can I return home or go to another country from the UK and then travel to Ireland on foot of the UK visa?

Yes, as long as both the UK visa and leave to enter and remain are still valid and current and the person travelling has passed through UK immigration at least once on foot of them, the UK visa may be used for travel to Ireland.

Please see advice at 4 above on allowing enough time for those wishing to make return journeys from the UK.

8. Can I visit Ireland from the UK more than once during my stay?

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 set out at paragraph 10 below, the immigration officer at port of entry has the ultimate decision on the length of stay.

9. What is the position regarding holders of UK long-term multi-entry business visas?

Holders of long-term multi-entry business visas (i.e. of up to 10 years' duration) are covered by the Programme. However, they must travel to Ireland within a current period of "leave to enter (and remain)" in the UK (i.e. maximum 180 days) and they must have legally entered the UK under that current leave. Within that period, it is possible for the visa-holder to return to their home country, or a third country, and subsequently travel to Ireland directly without the requirement for an Irish visa as long as the conditions above are met including that it is within the maximum 180 days' leave to remain. However, the first occasion of use of the visa in any particular period of leave to enter and remain must be to land in and enter the UK.

Please see advice at 4 above on allowing enough time for those wishing to make return journeys from the UK.

10. What will happen when I arrive in 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 i.e. a visa, either Irish or UK, will not automatically grant entry.

11. What if I want to visit Northern Ireland?

Subject to the rules and procedures laid out else where in this Information Note regarding possession of a valid UK visa and current leave to remain there, 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 (i.e. double entry or multi-entry) will be required to allow a second entry into Northern Ireland

12. Can I travel home directly from Ireland?

Yes, 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).

Please see advice at 4 above on allowing enough time for those wishing to make return journeys from the UK.

13. I am resident in one of the countries covered by the Programme but a national of another country. Can I avail of the Programme?

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.

14. I hold a diplomatic or special passport for one of the countries covered. Can I avail of the Programme?

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. However, it is advisable, in order to avoid possible problems at the port of entry into Ireland, for such passport holders, who are posted in the UK, to obtain the appropriate "exempt vignette" from the UK authorities prior to travel and for those who are not posted in the UK, to have a UK entry stamp on their passport.

15. I am a national of one of the countries covered but am a long-term resident in the UK or the Schengen Area. Can I avail of the Programme?

Nationals of the countries above, who are long-term legal residents in the UK or the Schengen area, will still require an Irish visa but will have the visa fee waived as part of the Programme. The visa fee is usually €60 per person, including children, for a single visit, or €100 for a multi-entry visa.

Visa applicants will see comprehensive guidelines on making a visa application and may follow links to make an online application at:

www.inis.gov.ie

Additional Information for Carriers – what to look for from persons seeking to avail of the Programme.

Carriers should satisfy themselves as to the following in relation to travellers claiming to be availing of the Visa Waiver Programme:

1. The traveller holds a passport of one of the sixteen countries covered.
2. They have a valid current UK visa in one of the categories covered. On the visa, the “Type of Visa” should be “C”. Under “Remarks”, one of the following should appear:
 - “C – visit”
 - “C – visit – general”
 - “C – visit – business”
 - “C – visit – academic”
 - “C – visit – sport”
3. The traveller must have used the current visa to enter the UK at least once in order to avail of the Visa Waiver Programme. A stamp of the UK Border Agency evidencing the use of the visa to enter the UK is, therefore, required.
4. Holders of diplomatic and special passports from the sixteen countries are also covered by the Programme. Such passport holders have been advised to obtain an “exempt vignette” from the UK authorities prior to travel to Ireland or to have a UK entry stamp on arrival in Ireland.

Do I need an Irish Visa? Some scenarios:

Note: all of these scenarios assume that the person in question is a national of one of the sixteen countries covered by the Short-stay Visa Waiver Programme.

1. I have a new unused UK Visa, but would firstly like to make a trip to Ireland for one week before I go to the UK. I hope to fly into London and then transit onwards to Dublin. Do I need an Irish Visa?

A – Yes, you are not proposing to enter the UK, only transit it, therefore you must have a valid Irish Visa.

2. I have a new unused UK Visa and would like to go to Ireland first. I am hoping to fly direct to Ireland or via a Schengen/3rd country to get there. Do I need an Irish Visa?

A – Yes. You will not have entered the UK before arrival in Ireland, therefore you cannot use the UK visa to enter Ireland beforehand.

3. I spent two weeks in the UK on holidays on my UK Visa and I would like to visit Ireland for one week before returning to Russia. Do I need to have an Irish Visa?

A – No, you have successfully entered the UK. Therefore you can use the UK Visa to present yourself for entry to Ireland. You do not need to apply for an Irish Visa.

4. I visited the UK three months ago and returned back to the UAE. I have been invited by a friend to visit Ireland next month, and hope to fly directly there or via UK/ Schengen/3rd country. My UK Visa is still valid for 3 months. Do I need to apply for an Irish Visa?

A – No, you have been previously successfully cleared to enter the UK on this visa so you can use this visa to present yourself for entry to Ireland, either travelling direct to Ireland or transiting a UK/Schengen/3rd country airport.

5. I am an Indian national on a long term resident's visa in Switzerland and would like to visit Ireland. Do I need a visa to do so?

A – Yes, this scheme does not apply to holders of UK or Schengen Long Term visas so you must apply for an Irish Visa at the Irish Embassy. However, as part of the Programme, the visa fee will be waived.

6. I have spent 150 days in the UK and would like to visit Ireland. Will I get 90 days to stay in Ireland?

A – The length of time you get to stay in a country is decided by the Immigration Officer at the port of entry. On the basis of a maximum allowable stay of 90 days in Ireland and a combined total of 180 days within the Irish/UK Common Travel Area, it is likely that you will only be given a maximum of 30 days to stay in Ireland.

7. I am a tour operator and am organising a tour group to travel to a Schengen country first, then the UK and, finally, Ireland. Will my group need Irish Visas?

A – If your group is from one of the countries covered by the Programme and is entering the UK before going to Ireland, they will not need an Irish Visa. However, the Schengen Visa would not be valid for entry to Ireland.

8. I am a tour operator and would like to bring a tour group from one of the countries covered by the Programme to Ireland first and then to the UK. Will I need an Irish Visa?

A - Yes, unless individual members of the group have current valid UK visas, that will be valid on the date of the trip to Ireland and they have already used that visa at least once to enter the UK, they will have to apply for Irish Visas.

9. I travelled to the UK on my UK Visa and afterwards made a short trip to Ireland on this same visa. My UK visa is expired, and I am applying for a new UK visa and would like to visit Ireland first this time. Do I need an Irish visa also on this occasion?

A – Yes. The requirement to have entered the UK applies to each visa issued. So, if you wish to travel to Ireland, you will have to make at least one successful trip to the UK on the new visa in order to validate it for use to travel to Ireland. Otherwise, if you wish to go to Ireland first, you will have to apply for an Irish visa.