



SECURING OUR BORDER CONTROLLING MIGRATION

COMING TO THE UK TO WATCH THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

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INTRODUCTION

This guide provides advice on:

- Visas
- What happens at the UK border
- VAT reclaim
- Arriving at Heathrow Airport
- What you can bring into the UK
- While you are in the UK

VISAS

Do I need a visa?

If you are planning to come to the UK to watch the London 2012 Games, you may need to get a visa before you travel. Please see the front page of the [UK Border Agency website](#) and use the ‘do I need a visa?’ tool to check if you need a visa.

IMPORTANT

Please note - the UK is not a member of the Schengen group of countries, so a Schengen visa (applicable in other European countries) will not be valid for travel to the UK.

When can I apply for a visa?

You can apply now. You can make your visa application and if requested we can post date your approved visa for up to 3 months from the date of your application. For example; if you are travelling on 1 August, you can apply for your visa on 1 March, and if your visa is approved we can delay the valid from date to 1 June. You will normally be allowed to stay in the UK 6 months from the valid from date on your visa and you must leave before the given expiry date.

In the lead up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games we are expecting over a million visa applications so you should apply as early as possible.

How do you apply for a visa?

Details of how to apply, what type of visa to apply for, the visa application fee and guidance on supporting documents can be found at on the visa pages of the [UK Border Agency website](#). Some of the information on this website about how to apply for a visa has been translated. Please read the information on this website carefully so that you can prepare your visa application for the Games.

IMPORTANT

When completing the application form you should ensure all the information is correct before signing the legal declaration on your visa application form.

Any visa applications without supporting documents will be refused if the visa officer is not satisfied. Submitting counterfeit documents or providing false information may lead to a 10 year ban from being able to apply for a UK visa.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE UK BORDER?

When you arrive at the UK border, you will need to show the following items to a UK Border Agency officer:

- A valid travel document (for example your passport)
- A valid visa (if required)
- A completed landing card (not required for EU/EEA or British nationals)

You must satisfy a UK Border Agency officer that you meet the requirements of the Immigration Rules, so even if you do not need a visa you may need to show the officer certain documents to support your request to enter the UK. Your passport will be scanned and your landing card and visa will be checked. The officer may ask you for more information about your visit before allowing you to enter. If you hold a visa, your fingerprints will also be verified.

If you are an EU/EEA national, with a chipped, biometric passport can enter the UK using the e-passport gates, which are available at a number of UK airports. E-passport gates are a secure and convenient self-service alternative to the conventional border control process.

Over 100 million passenger journeys are made to the UK each year and we work hard to get you through the border securely and with as little delay as possible. The London 2012 Games coincide with the summer period when our ports are always busier than normal, so please make sure that you allow time for passing through the border. **More information about arriving at the border.**

HEATHROW AIRPORT – OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC LANES

During the Games, you may notice that special Olympic and Paralympic lanes have been set up at Heathrow airport. Please **do not** use these lanes as they are for athletes, coaches, accredited media and other officials coming to the UK to take part in the Games, and the arrivals process is different. Please follow the signs in the arrivals hall to the appropriate desks.

WHAT CAN YOU BRING TO THE UK?

If you are planning to travel to the UK, there are rules about what goods you can bring with you without paying duty or value added tax (VAT). Some items are also banned or restricted by law. These restrictions apply even if you are a UK citizen who is returning from abroad. You can find out about the restrictions on our **customs** page. Never bring in counterfeit goods, illegal drugs, offensive weapons (including knives) or indecent or obscene material.

Food and plants

You are not allowed to bring any meat or dairy products into the UK from most countries outside the EU. If you are travelling to the UK from within the EU, there are no restrictions on food and plant products as long as they are free from pests or diseases, are for your own use, and have been grown in the EU. For more information please see the **Bringing food products into the UK leaflet** which is available to download from the **UK Border Agency website**.

Carrying cash

If you are carrying cash equivalent to 10,000 euro or more you must declare it when you enter the UK from a country outside the EU. Please complete a cash declaration form at the UK port or airport. For more information please visit the [HM Revenue & Customs website](#).

WHILE YOU ARE IN THE UK

Working and studying

As a tourist visitor from a visa national country (a citizen from a country who would normally require a visa to enter the UK) you will **not** be allowed to work or study in the UK. Non visa nationals are able to visit the UK and take a short course providing their stay is less than 6 months. Non visa nationals will not be able to work. You can check if you need a visa by using the 'do I need a visa' tool on the [UK Border Agency website](#).

National Health Service

As a visitor, you can only have emergency treatment provided by the UK's National Health Service (NHS). The NHS will pursue you for costs if you use the service which you are not entitled to or fail to pay. We will refuse your visa application if you owe money to the NHS from a previous visit. You should ensure that you have enough medical insurance to cover your stay.

VAT RECLAIM

In the UK, Value Added Tax (VAT) is charged on many goods and services. If you are visiting from another country you may be entitled to a refund of the VAT on goods you buy from shops that offer Tax Free Shopping (also known as the Retail Export Scheme). For further information, see the guidance on VAT refunds for travellers departing from the European Community (EC) on the HM Revenue & Customs website. If you want to claim a refund as you leave the UK, most ports and airports have signs directing travellers to the UK Border Agency. If not, ask airport or port staff to direct you to the Customs VAT Reclaim Office.



For all the latest news and information about visiting the UK for the Games, please visit the [UK Border Agency website](#).