

FIFA World Cup 2026 is going to be a travel event as much as it is a sports event. Millions of international visitors. Multiple host countries. Packed airports. Packed land borders. Packed consulates. And a lot of people realizing a little late that “having a ticket” is not the same thing as “being allowed to board the plane and enter.”

This guide is meant to help visitors get ready early, reduce the risk of delays, and avoid the worst case scenario: denied boarding, refused admission at the airport, or getting stuck in a visa appointment backlog that cannot be fixed in time.

Immigration and travel rules can change quickly and they also vary by individual circumstances. This is general information only, not legal advice. Always confirm details through official government resources or qualified legal counsel for guidance specific to your situation.

Start here: confirm what kind of U.S. entry authorization you actually need

Before you book anything else, confirm what category you fall into for U.S. entry. Requirements vary by nationality and sometimes by travel history. If you guess wrong here, everything downstream gets messy.

In broad terms, most visitors will fall into one of these buckets:

Visa Waiver Program travelers (VWP)

If you are a national of a Visa Waiver Program country, you may be able to enter the U.S. without a traditional visa **if** all of the following are true:

- You have an approved **ESTA** before travel
- The ESTA is connected to your **current, valid passport** (not an old one)
- You are coming for tourism or a short visit and your stay is **90 days or less**

Do not assume you are VWP eligible because your friend is, or because you visited once years ago. Confirm your nationality is on the U.S. Department of State list of VWP eligible countries, and verify the passport you plan to use.

Also worth saying plainly. ESTA is not a visa, and approval does not guarantee admission. It is permission to travel to a U.S. port of entry to ask to be admitted.

Non VWP travelers

If you are not eligible for VWP, you generally need a [B 1 or B 2 visitor visa](#) to enter the U.S. for the World Cup.

Even with a valid visitor visa, entry is not guaranteed. Every traveler is subject to inspection by [U.S. Customs and Border Protection \(CBP\)](#) on arrival, and CBP makes the final admissibility decision at the port of entry.

So yes, you can do everything “right” and still face questions. Which is exactly why preparation matters.

If you need a U.S. visitor visa, look into FIFA PASS early

The U.S. Department of State created a FIFA Priority Appointment Scheduling System, commonly referred to as **FIFA PASS**, to help World Cup visitors who need B 1 or B 2 visas access priority visa interview scheduling.

This is practical, because regular appointment wait times in some locations can already be long. Add World Cup demand on top of that, and the calendar fills up fast.

A few important points about FIFA PASS:

- **It does not guarantee visa approval.** It is a scheduling tool, not a waiver of eligibility.
- Applicants must still qualify for the visa and pass security screening.
- The FIFA PASS information must match the visa application details, including **name and passport number**. Even small mismatches can create access issues and prevent priority scheduling.

There are also FAQs addressing issues like whether FIFA PASS overrides restrictions under Presidential Proclamation 10998, and whether applicants can interview outside their country of residence. If you are in a complicated scenario, do not wait until a month before travel to read those.

Visa bond requirement: a waiver exists for certain World Cup travelers

Some nationals applying for B 1 or B 2 visas can be subject to a [visa bond](#) requirement under the Department of State's bond program. For certain World Cup travelers, the Department of State will waive the bond requirement.

The waiver may apply to:

- Nationals of competing countries who purchased tickets by **April 15**, opted into FIFA PASS, and meet all visa eligibility requirements
- Athletes and team members (including coaches, support staff, immediate relatives), nationals of competing countries, who qualify for a visitor visa

If you think this might apply, confirm the current bond program country list on the Department of State website and review the waiver conditions carefully. "World Cup visitor" alone is not enough. The details matter.

Travel ban related restrictions and heightened screening: do not ignore this part

Some travelers may face additional restrictions or entry limitations based on nationality, passport type, or even recent travel history. These [country-specific restrictions](#) can show up in a few ways:

- Ineligibility for ESTA even if you are from a VWP country
- Additional screening requirements
- Visa issuance limitations or processing delays

If there is any doubt, confirm whether your nationality or travel history affects U.S. entry eligibility before you buy non refundable flights or match tickets. And if you cannot get a clear answer from official sources, get qualified help early. Waiting is usually what turns a solvable issue into a deadline problem.

Essential pre travel checks that actually prevent problems

This is the part where most travelers think they are fine, and then get surprised at the airport.

1) Confirm your ESTA or visa status, and confirm it again

For ESTA travelers:

- Verify ESTA is **approved**
- Verify it is linked to your **current passport**
- Save a digital copy and also keep a printed copy available

For visa holders:

- Confirm the visa is valid for the date you plan to enter
- Confirm your passport will still be valid when you travel
- If you renewed your passport, check whether your visa is in an old passport and what you need to carry

If you are traveling as a group, do not assume everyone has done this. One person missing an ESTA approval can delay the entire trip.

2) Make sure your passport validity is not going to trip you up

Many countries and carriers apply passport validity rules. A common standard is passport validity at least **six months beyond the intended stay**, though this can vary based on agreements and the traveler's nationality. For instance, if you're planning a trip to [New Zealand](#), it's crucial to check their specific entry requirements.

Check early. If you need a new passport, you want to be in that line now, not in June.

3) Build a simple "entry packet" and keep it in your carry on

Even with proper authorization, incomplete documentation can slow down inspection. CBP officers may ask for supporting information to verify purpose and duration of stay.

Be ready to show, if asked:

- Proof of return or onward travel
- Accommodation details (hotel confirmations, address where you will stay)
- Evidence of ties outside the U.S. (this varies by case, but the general idea is showing you intend to depart on time)
- Event tickets and itinerary details

Keep these in your carry on. Not your checked bag. Not buried in an email that you cannot access because airport WiFi is struggling.

4) Understand identification requirements for your flight

Different airlines have different [identification ID requirements](#). It's essential to verify these beforehand to avoid any last-minute surprises at the airport.

4) Prepare for CBP inspection questions, because they are coming

All travelers are inspected at ports of entry. The questions are usually basic, but you want your answers to be consistent and calm:

- Why are you visiting?
- How long are you staying?
- Where are you staying?
- What do you do for work at home?
- Who are you traveling with?

Remember the key point: **a visa or ESTA does not guarantee entry**. CBP determines admissibility at arrival.

CBP also maintains a travel information page for FIFA World Cup 2026 visitors. It is worth reviewing close to your travel date, because that is where practical updates tend to show up.

Use **COMPASS** if you need official answers quickly

CBP created a secure virtual assistant for FIFA 2026 travelers called **COMPASS**. It is designed to provide quick official answers to common questions and point travelers to the right CBP resources.

COMPASS can help with:

- General U.S. entry requirements
- ESTA questions and troubleshooting
- Information about [Global Entry and other Trusted Traveler Programs](#)
- What to expect during CBP inspection
- Links to official CBP guidance for World Cup visitors

This is particularly useful when you are trying to avoid internet rumor loops. If your plan is to rely on social media comments for immigration advice, this is your off ramp.

Do not forget Canada and Mexico requirements if you are moving between host countries

Many visitors will plan a multi country trip. A few matches in the U.S., then Canada, then Mexico. Or the reverse. That is where people get caught off guard, because they prepare for one border and assume the other two are basically the same. They are not.

- Visitor visa requirements depend on nationality in **each** country.
- Mexico may require a **Forma Migratoria Múltiple (FMM)** entry form or a visa for certain travelers.
- Border officers in each country may request proof of onward travel, lodging, or ties abroad.

If you are connecting flights through a country, that can matter too. Transit rules can apply even if you are not “staying” there.

Timing reality check: the best time to fix this was months ago, the second best time is now

If you need a visa interview appointment, start now. If your passport expires soon, renew now. If you are unsure whether your travel history affects ESTA eligibility, check now.

World Cup travel is not normal summer travel. Volumes will surge. Customer service lines will get longer. Appointment calendars will clog. The system is not designed for everyone to wait until the last few weeks.

When to get professional help

Some cases are straightforward. Others are not, and pretending they are straightforward is how travel plans fall apart.

Consider getting qualified guidance if:

- You are not sure whether you qualify for ESTA or need a visa
- You have had a prior visa refusal, entry denial, overstay, or removal
- Your travel history could trigger additional screening or restrictions
- Your case involves a tight timeline and you need a realistic plan, not guesswork

Working with an immigration attorney or a business travel immigration team can help reduce last minute issues and keep travel compliant, especially for employers supporting employee travel around the tournament.

Final checklist (simple, but do it)

- Confirm whether you need ESTA or a B 1/B 2 visa for the U.S.
- If ESTA, confirm approval and correct passport linkage
- If visa required, plan for appointment timing and consider FIFA PASS if eligible
- Confirm passport validity and renew early if needed
- Keep return flight, lodging, and itinerary documents accessible in your carry on
- Review CBP's World Cup visitor guidance and use COMPASS for official Q and A
- Check Canada and Mexico entry requirements separately if traveling between host countries

The World Cup will be worth the trip. Just do not let paperwork be the thing that decides whether you get on the plane.