# British and Irish travellers warned of potential device searches at US borders



British and Irish travellers planning trips to the United States are being advised that their mobile phones and other electronic devices may be subject to searches at US airports and border checkpoints. This development follows President Donald Trump’s executive order focused on “enhanced vetting,” which has coincided with an increase in the number of passengers asked to surrender their devices upon arrival in the US.

US immigration authorities have announced a new policy set to take effect from April 2025, which will allow officials to review travellers’ social media accounts as part of the visa and residence permit application process. Under this policy, individuals could be denied entry based on content they share or engage with on social media platforms. Particular attention appears to be on expressions of support for groups the US designates as terrorist organisations, including Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Yemen’s Houthi movement (Ansar Allah).

Reports have emerged of incidents highlighting the impact of such policies. For example, last month, a French scientist was reportedly refused entry to the US for allegedly posting critical comments about the Trump administration on social media, a claim made by the French Government.

As awareness of device searches grows, travellers have voiced concerns about the privacy of their information when encountering US border officers. Some discussions circulating online have even suggested deleting social media apps before travel or, in extreme cases, leaving devices behind entirely.

Brian Honan, CEO of BH Consulting, explained on Newstalk radio that border agents possess legal authority similar to customs officials when it comes to inspecting electronic devices. He said: “Border agents in many countries do have the legal authority to search your devices. So, if they do find material that is illegal or offensive, it could mean you are either detained or refused entry.”

Despite this, Mr Honan noted such searches are not deployed on every traveller routinely. Supporting this perspective, Ronan Murphy, chair of cybersecurity firm SmartTech247, told RSVP Live that broad, indiscriminate phone checks seem improbable due to the complexity and resources involved. He explained: “The level of sophistication required to filter out specific individuals, and the time and capacity needed to search every device, makes it seem not overly realistic to me.”

Meanwhile, reports have emerged of more assertive questioning by US officials at international airports. Patti Shields, chair of Democrats Abroad, shared with Extra.ie her knowledge of frequent travellers who were subjected to what she described as “aggressive scolding and questioning” by US border officials at Dublin airport in recent weeks.

In response to concerns and claims about politically motivated device searches, the US Department of Homeland Security issued a statement categorically denying such allegations. The department asserted: “These reports are categorically false.” They emphasised that all travellers undergo customs procedures, and that Customs and Border Protection conducts electronic media searches only rarely and under strict regulations targeting serious crimes such as terrorism, smuggling, human trafficking, and visa fraud. The department further stated: “Any claims of politically motivated searches are completely unfounded.”

This evolving policy landscape marks a significant shift in the way travel security and immigration checks are conducted, particularly concerning privacy and the use of social media monitoring in immigration decisions. British and Irish travellers heading to the United States are advised to remain aware of these developments when preparing for their journeys.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/advisories> - Corroborates the general information about electronic device searches at US border checkpoints and highlights customs procedures for international travelers.
* <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/10/28/2021-23391/enhanced-vetting> - Discusses enhanced vetting procedures which have led to an increase in device searches and scrutiny of immigrants, aligning with the context of President Trump’s policies.
* <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visasocial-media.html> - Provides details about the collection of social media information as part of the visa application process, supporting the policy on reviewing travellers’ social media accounts.
* <https://www.dhs.gov/topic/immigration> - Corroborates the evolving immigration policies and security measures including those related to electronic device searches and social media review.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/22/us-french-scientist-denied-entry-trump-administration-criticism> - Reports on incidents where travelers faced issues related to their social media posts, such as the case of a French scientist denied entry due to critical comments.