

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Smarter visa policy could create more than one million U.S. jobs

Increasing travel to the United States is the most effective form of economic stimulus—supporting communities, injecting billions into the U.S. economy and creating millions of new American jobs.

Recapturing America’s historic share of worldwide overseas travel would create up to an additional **1.3 million U.S. jobs by 2020** compared with 2010 and produce \$859 billion in cumulative additional economic output.

International travel to United States will increase exports

America’s travel industry is our economy’s leading industry export. International travel to the United States generated more than \$134 billion last year in exports and supported 1.8 million U.S. jobs.

Every dollar spent by an overseas visitor in the United States counts as an export, making travel an easy export industry to expand and a key to closing our trade deficit. Increasing international travel could help achieve the national goal of doubling exports within five years. Recapturing a 17 percent share of overseas travel—the U.S. share in 2000—would boost American exports by a cumulative \$390 billion over 10 years.

Self-imposed barriers deter visitors, cost American jobs

Despite travel’s critical role in driving U.S. exports and creating American jobs, the United States imposes unnecessary barriers on international visitors that inhibit economic growth. Specifically, a burdensome U.S. visa system drives millions of potential travelers to other countries at an enormous cost to our economy. The U.S. visa application process can take as long as 145 days in Brazil and 120 days in China, two of the fastest-growing markets for outbound overseas travel.

These barriers put the United States at an alarming disadvantage when it comes to competing in the international travel market.

In part because of these restrictions, the United States failed to keep pace with the dramatic growth in global travel over the last decade. Between 2000 and 2010, the world travel market grew by more than 60 million annual travelers. Yet in 2010, the United States welcomed essentially the same number of travelers as it did in 2000—a “lost decade” for the U.S. travel industry and the U.S. economy.

By failing to keep pace with the growth in global long-haul international travel between 2000 and 2010, the United States lost the opportunity to welcome 78 million more visitors and generate \$606 billion in direct and downstream spending—enough to support more than 467,000 additional U.S. jobs annually over these years.

RECOMMENDATIONS:**A four-step plan to grow our share of global travel**

The U.S. Travel Association believes a comprehensive, four-step plan can help the United States achieve our goal of becoming more competitive in the global travel market, which in turn will expand U.S. exports, create new jobs and drive economic growth. We believe security and efficiency are compatible. With better planning, budgeting and use of technology, our visa process can be secure, effective and competitive.

1.**America must align State Department resources with market demands**

- Prioritize inbound travel to increase economic activity and create jobs by issuing a Presidential Directive to recapture 17 percent of the global long-haul travel market and match Western Europe's current market share in Brazil, China and India by 2015.
 - Incorporate export growth and competitiveness into the mission and performance measures at the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs.
 - Expand the reach of consular services through the use of technology such as videoconferencing for visa interviews.
 - Implement mobile interviews to assist potential visitors in cities with no U.S. consulate.
 - Prepare a strategic plan for opening additional visa offices in countries with the greatest potential demand, notably Brazil, China and India.
 - Make online consular services more user-friendly by improving all consular websites, standardizing websites worldwide and allowing visitors to submit applications in their native languages.
 - Provide customer service training to consular officers and treat every visa application as a public diplomacy opportunity.
-

2.

America must reduce visa interview wait times to 10 days or fewer

- Implement a more flexible staffing model to build a corps of “Limited Non-career Appointment” (LNA) consular officers dedicated to processing visas in high-growth markets.
- Increase staffing to alleviate visa demand pressures; hire 437 additional LNAs by 2015 and dedicate them to fast-growing markets in Brazil, China and India.
- Reassign consular officers from countries currently capable of meeting traveler demand to high-demand markets.
- Make it more efficient for travelers to renew visas by developing fast track or easy renewal processes wherever possible.
- Allow existing visa holders, including many business travelers and student and exchange visitors, to renew visas in the United States instead of returning to their home countries.
- Utilize demand management tools and techniques to analyze and predict periods of high user demand and lower wait times.
- Improve productivity by dedicating LNA consular officers to processing visa applications; offer Saturday and extended interview windows to reduce wait times to 10 days; and employ double shifts to make greater use of existing interview space.
- Incentivize visitors to submit applications during low-peak seasons by creating tiered-peak and off-peak visa fees.
- Provide an option to expedite visas at a higher cost that is sufficient to cover expanded visa processing capacity at consular offices.

3.

The U.S. State Department must improve planning, measurement and transparency

- Measure performance relating to visa wait times and processing speeds to better guide decision-making and resource allocation.
- Conduct annual evaluations based on a consistent set of metrics that indicate the efficiency, effectiveness and consumer friendliness of the visa application process.
- Improve tracking of applicant backlogs to provide more reliable information and better understand and manage workload, staffing and throughput requirements.
- End artificial limits on interview dates that mislead visa applicants about actual wait times.
- Make the visa process more transparent by improving information sharing with potential travelers.
- Act on performance reviews in order to set benchmarks and improve performance at consular offices.

4.

America must expand the Visa Waiver Program (VWP)

- Begin formal bilateral VWP negotiations with potentially qualifying nations such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Poland and Taiwan which are interested in, but not yet eligible for, inclusion in the program.
- Use overstay rates, not visa refusals, for VWP qualification as outlined in S. 497/H.R. 959.
- Eliminate “I” visa requirements for journalists from VWP countries traveling to the U.S. for media activities.

Country-specific recommendations

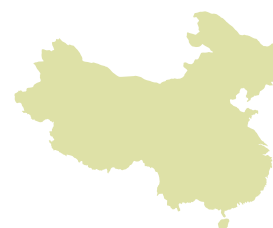
Brazil

- Expedite visa processing for business travelers by expanding the Business Travel Program, Business Travel Plus and the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) Program throughout all Brazilian consulates.
- Strengthen alliance with travel agents by expanding the Travel Agency Program and making it available at all consulates.
- Make consular services more affordable and accessible to travelers by providing visa interview locations outside consulates.



China

- Extend the visa validity period from one year to at least five years and eventually increase to 10 years.
- Encourage more group travel by increasing the number of group travel visa appointments.
- Immediately implement the Consular Affairs' global support strategy to make better use of existing resources at Chinese consulates.



India

- Expand the Business Executive Program by lowering the company size threshold for participation and assisting companies that offer incentive travel awards to the United States.
- Encourage more group travel by creating a preferred tour operator program for visa interview appointments and making it available at all consulates in India.
- Increase foreign language training for consular officers so more visa interviews can be conducted in travelers' native languages.

