



## U.S. TRAVEL'S LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES: IT'S TIME TO REVIVE THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

Domestic business travel spending remained **56% below 2019 levels** in 2021 and international travel spending remained **78% below 2019 levels**. **When travel thrives, so does America's economy**. It is imperative that Congress does all it can to **revive these critical sectors of the travel economy**.

**Prior to the pandemic**, the U.S. travel industry experienced 10 straight years of growth due to the strength of the domestic leisure travel, domestic business travel and international inbound travel segments. **Travel was a significant economic driver in every region of the country, representing one in 10 jobs** and generating a travel trade surplus.

**The U.S. travel industry suffered unparalleled losses amid the COVID-19 pandemic** and the recovery remains uneven across travel sectors. Domestic business travel and international inbound travel spending remain severely depressed, dragging the overall industry's recovery.

We not only need to get back to pre-pandemic levels but also make up for **years of lost growth**. While we are years away from returning to 2019 levels, the right stimulative policies can **return us to the trajectory of growth**. U.S. Travel has outlined our legislative priorities for the months ahead below.

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### REBUILD THE WORKFORCE

Persistent labor shortage, particularly for seasonal workers, is threatening travel's recovery and will only prolong the economic pain of the pandemic—especially ahead of the busy summer travel season.

### U.S. TRAVEL IS ENCOURAGING CONGRESS TO:

- **Provide H-2B Cap relief the travel industry's workforce desperately need.** The H-2B Returning Worker Exemption Act (H.R. 3897) would permanently increase H-2B visas by exempting returning workers from the cap.
- **Support language in FY23 appropriations** that require DHS to issue additional visas above the cap.
- **Encourage long-term structural reforms** to temporary worker programs that would provide the travel industry with dedicated, increased and predictable access to temporary seasonal work visas.
- **Explore moderated immigration reform measures** specific to the industry's workforce needs.

## REIGNITE IN-PERSON BUSINESS MEETINGS AND EVENTS

**Business travel was still 56% below pre-pandemic levels in 2021 and remains severely depressed. This is having a disproportionate impact on the overall travel industry's recovery.** Despite making up 20% of total trip volume, business travelers account for 40-60% of lodging and air revenue (pre-pandemic). It is time for corporate leaders and the federal government to get back to business to reignite these valuable face-to-face connections and restore this critical segment of the U.S. economy.

### U.S. TRAVEL IS ENCOURAGING CONGRESS TO:

- **Help revive business travel spending** in restaurants and entertainment venues by ensuring any year-end tax package:
  - **Restores the deductibility of entertainment business expenses** to spur recovery in the live entertainment and events sector.
  - **Extends full expensing for business meals beyond 2022** to support recovery in the restaurant sector, similar to Senator Tim Scott's (R-SC) Supporting America's Restaurant Workers Act.
- **Provide a more stable environment** for large in-person meetings, conferences, conventions, trade shows and exhibitions, by enacting legislation that ensures event cancellation insurance continues to cover losses related to disease outbreaks and other public health risks.

## RESTORE THE PRE-DEPARTURE TESTING REQUIREMENT

**In 2021, international travel spending was a staggering 78% below pre-pandemic levels**—remaining severely depressed and damaging communities around the country. Surveys show that pre-departure testing requirements are a deterrent for travelers. In fact, according to a recent survey by Morning Consult, nearly half of respondents (47%) who are unlikely to travel abroad in the next 12 months cited pre-departure testing requirements as one of the reasons and more than half of international travelers (54%) said the added uncertainty of potentially having to cancel a trip due to U.S. pre-departure testing requirements would have a big impact on their likelihood to visit the U.S.

**In the same survey, a large majority of adults (71%)** agreed that they prioritize traveling to destinations without cumbersome entry requirements.

With pandemic-era restrictions such as the pre-departure testing requirement still in effect, international inbound travel cannot fully recover.

### U.S. TRAVEL IS ENCOURAGING THE ADMINISTRATION TO:

- **Remove the pre-departure testing requirement for inbound travel to the U.S.**
  - **Recent progress:** Over 260 organizations signed a letter led by U.S. Travel, urging White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha to immediately remove the inbound testing requirement for vaccinated air travelers.

## MODERNIZE VISITOR VISA PROCESSING

**Inefficient visa processing acts as a deterrent to valid inbound international travel**, discouraging ordinary people from coming to the U.S. and spending money on local businesses. According to a January 2022 survey by Destinations Analysts, excessive visa wait times, the cost of visa fees, and an overall cumbersome visa application process are some of the top reasons international travelers are discouraged from coming to the United States.

**Even before the pandemic, wait times for visa interviews regularly exceeded 25-60 days in places like Colombia, India, and Israel.** The pandemic only made the problem worse, with wait times now exceeding 280 days on average across the U.S.'s top 20 inbound markets. As of May 2022, 33% of our consulates in our top 20 markets had wait times exceeding a year on average.

### U.S. TRAVEL IS ENCOURAGING CONGRESS TO:

- **Modernize the security and efficiency of non-immigrant visa processing by:**
  - **Developing** a pilot program for the use of videoconferencing technology in visa interviews with low risk, returning visa applicants and visa applicants with urgent or time sensitive travel.
  - **Prioritizing** visa processing resources to the embassies and consulates that have a high demand for visas or facilitate a high amount of travel exports (through B1/B2 visas).
  - **Temporarily extending** all tourist visas for a year or waiving visa interview requirements for applicants seeking a valid renewal particularly for those presently in the U.S.
  - **Allowing** certain low-risk visa holders, such as returning temporary workers and students, currently in the U.S. to renew their visa while staying in the U.S. rather than adding inefficient and unnecessary barriers to renewal; contributing to increased wait times abroad.
  - **Developing** new ways to make the visa process more efficient for medium-to-large group travelers.
  - **Delaying and reconsidering** the proposed non-immigrant visa fee increase, at least until international travel has recovered.

## REIMAGINE THE ROLE OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM IN IMPROVING GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

The pandemic decimated the travel industry, resulting in a two-year loss of \$755 billion in travel spending from which the industry is not expected to fully recover until 2024. Proactive government planning will be necessary to shortening that timeline, restoring jobs more quickly and reclaiming significant losses in export income.

### U.S. TRAVEL IS ENCOURAGING CONGRESS TO:

- **Cosponsor the Omnibus Travel and Tourism Act of 2021 (S. 3375)**, and support companion legislation in the House. The bill would establish an Assistant Secretary of Travel and Tourism at the Department of Commerce, focused on working across government to consistently develop strategies that increase travel to the U.S.—creating opportunities to increase America's export income while enhancing the country's global competitiveness.