

## LONG VISA WAIT TIMES ARE A DE FACTO TRAVEL BAN

that deters international visitors and harms American businesses and workers.

#TheyWaitWeLose

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### INTERNATIONAL VISITORS FROM NON-VISA WAIVER COUNTRIES ARE VITAL TO THE U.S. ECONOMY.

In 2019, 35 million (43%) of international visitors and \$120 billion in spending (50%) came from countries where a visa is required to enter the United States. Brazil, India and Mexico are three of the top inbound markets that accounted for nearly 22 million (63%) of these visitors.

### FIRST-TIME VISITOR VISA APPLICANTS FROM TOP INBOUND MARKETS FACE AVERAGE INTERVIEW WAIT TIMES OF 400+ DAYS.

First-time B-1/B-2 applicants from the top inbound markets are facing average interview wait times of 400+ days because the Biden Administration has not made it a priority to efficiently process new visitor visas.

### IN 2023, THE U.S. WILL LOSE NEARLY 7 MILLION TRAVELERS AND \$12 BILLION DUE TO LONG VISA WAIT TIMES.

The U.S. Travel Association forecasts that, in 2023, American businesses would attract 6.6 million fewer international visitors and \$11.6 billion less in spending as a result of likely international travelers being unable to obtain a visitor visa in time to travel to the U.S.

## SOLUTIONS

**The Biden Administration must make it an economic priority to reduce interview wait times for first-time visitor visas.** We urge the Biden Administration and State Department to take the following steps:

- **Set clear timelines and goals to restore efficient visa processing.**
  - Lower interview wait times for visitor visas to 21 days in the three largest inbound markets (Brazil, Mexico, India) by April 2023.
  - By September 30, 2023, the President should reinstate the Executive Order to process 80% of visas worldwide within 21 days.
- **Increase consular staffing and resources in high-volume countries and for large international events taking place in the U.S.**
  - Reach full consular staffing levels in Brazil, India and Mexico by assigning new-hires and reassigning staff with previous consular experience to these markets.
  - Extend through 2024 the authority to waive interviews for nonimmigrant visa renewals and apply waivers more broadly to low-risk B-1/B-2 renewals.
  - Set up a dedicated process to provide faster visa processing for large tour groups, conventions and events taking place in the U.S.

**Congress must pass legislation to make visitor visa processing more modern and efficient.** We urge Congress to develop, support and enact legislation to:

- **Authorize the State Department to test and broadly implement videoconferencing technology.** Using videoconferencing to conduct visa interviews can increase processing capacity and reduce wait times at embassies. The State Department does not currently have the authority to use remote videoconferencing for visitor visa interviews.

- **Provide permanent authorization for the State Department to broadly waive interviews for low-risk B-1/B-2 visa renewals.** The State Department only has temporary emergency authority to waive visa interviews for low-risk B-1/B-2 renewals. Waiving renewal interviews can significantly increase the availability of in-person interview appointments for first time B-1/B-2 applicants and allow the State Department to focus on vetting new visa applicants.
- **Support legislation that requires the State Department to temporarily reassign staff to posts with the highest visitor visa wait times.** In the House, cosponsor H.R. 9141 that requires the State Department to allocate staffing to posts with the greatest need. In the Senate, introduce and support legislation that requires the State Department to allocate staffing to posts with the greatest need.

## DIG DEEPER: ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND ON VISITOR VISA WAIT TIMES

### VISA WAIT TIMES ARE AT RECORD HIGHS

In October 2022, nearly one year after inbound travel restrictions were lifted by the U.S., the largest inbound travel markets requiring visitor visas faced average interview wait times exceeding 449 days. As wait times soar, international visitation from many of these countries continue to lag behind 2019 levels, including:

- **BRAZIL** // Avg. wait times of 360 days // Due to long interview wait times and other factors, visitation from Brazil is still 50% below 2019 levels
- **INDIA** // Avg. wait times of 873 days // Due to long interview wait times and other factors, visitation from India is still 18% below 2019 levels
- **MEXICO** // Avg. wait times of 608 days // Due to long interview wait times and other factors, visitation from Mexico is still 31% below 2019 levels

### THE U.S. IS LOSING MILLIONS OF TRAVELERS AND BILLIONS OF TOURIST DOLLARS TO OTHER COUNTRIES

A new Morning Consult survey of likely international travelers found that of those who have at least some interest in visiting the U.S., but do not have a valid U.S. visa, the majority would likely choose another country to visit if wait times exceeded a year, including 61% of **BRAZILIANS**, 71% of **INDIANS** and 66% of **MEXICANS**.

According to a U.S. Travel Association analysis of the survey results, the U.S. is losing the opportunity to compete for millions of visitors and billions in spending from international travelers who say they won't tolerate long visa wait times and will choose another country to visit instead. In Brazil, India and Mexico alone, the U.S. is losing the ability to compete for:

- **BRAZIL** // 6 million visitors // \$15.6 billion
- **INDIA** // 3.5 million visitors // \$13.3 billion
- **MEXICO** // 7.1 million visitors // \$4.1 billion

### THE STATE DEPARTMENT CAN ACCELERATE RECOVERY OF INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY LOWERING INTERVIEW WAIT TIMES TO 21 DAYS OR LESS.

According to Tourism Economics, if visa interview wait times are lowered to less than 30 days, international visitation to the U.S. would accelerate by 2.2 million visitors and \$5.2 billion in spending within 6 months.

## THE STATE DEPARTMENT IS MAKING PROGRESS FOR OTHER VISA CLASSES, BUT NOT FIRST-TIME VISITOR VISAS.

The State Department is prioritizing efficient processing for certain non-immigrant visa classes and is taking steps to reduce the backlog of appointments, including:

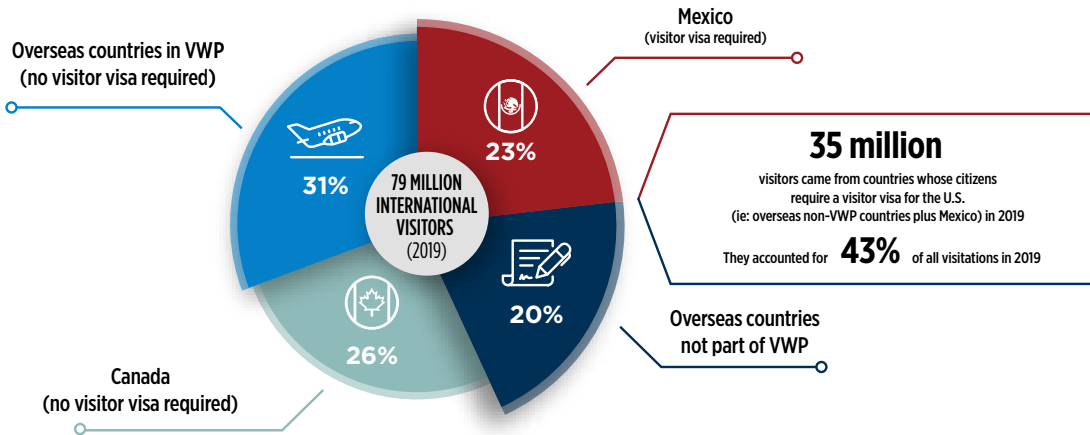
- **Temporarily waiving interviews for certain visa renewals:** Through the end of 2022, consular officers have the temporary authority to waive interviews for visa renewals, including B-1/B-2 visas.
- **Increasing consular staffing:** The State Department's goal is to increase consular staffing by 7% by end of 2023 and has begun directing new hires to high-volume consulates.
- **Increased hours of operation:** U.S. embassies and consular offices are increasing processing hours, including holding interview appointments on Saturdays.
- **Processing visa applications remotely for high-demand locations:** For high demand consulates and embassies, the State Department is conducting remote processing of applications in the U.S. to speed adjudication, including for certain visitor visa renewals that qualify for an interview waiver.

**However, visitor visa wait times are still increasing. More can and must be done to streamline visa processing.**

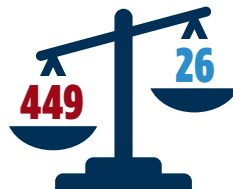
- **From May to October 2022**, average wait times for the top 10 inbound markets that require a visitor visa continued to get worse, growing from 419 days in May to 449 days in October.

*See next page for additional data and insights*

## ADDITIONAL DATA AND REFERENCES



Inbound Market	Rank Among Top Inbound Markets	2019 Visitation Volume	2019 Spending in U.S. in Billions (Total Travel Exports)	U.S. Embassies/ Consulates Open (As of 5/3/22)	Avg. Visa Interview Wait Time in Days	2019 Non-Immigrant Visas Issued in 'Visitation' Categories
MEXICO	2	18,328,181	\$17.6	10 Open	608	1,137,480
CHINA (EXCL. HONG KONG)	5	2,829,970	\$33.2	4 Open, 1 Closed	14	1,060,604
BRAZIL	7	2,104,617	\$10.2	5 Open	360	573,028
INDIA	10	1,473,517	\$14.2	5 Open	873	501,136
COLOMBIA	13	944,013	\$3.3	1 Open	885	196,423
ARGENTINA	15	854,442	\$3.4	1 Open	283	211,496
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	19	488,703	\$1.7	1 Open	380	89,494
EQUADOR	21	456,741	No BEA Data	1 Open	409	172,823
ISRAEL	23	450,572	\$2.0	1 Open	227	172,979
VENEZUELA	24	400,530	\$1.5	1 Closed	Closed	3,693
		<b>Total: 28,331,286</b>	<b>Total: \$87 BILLION</b>		<b>Average: 449 Days</b>	<b>Total: 4,119,156</b>



**WHY WAIT?** Of the top 10 global destinations, Brazilians can travel to eight countries and Mexicans to six countries without a visa interview. Meanwhile, average wait times for travelers who need a visa to visit the U.S. exceed 449 days.

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