

GOVERNMENT POLICY STIFLING INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL RECOVERY AND HARMING U.S. COMPETITIVENESS

Long visa wait times and vaccine requirements are deterring travelers akin to a travel ban

International visitors who need a visa for travel 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.

Long visa wait times and vaccine requirements deter international travelers and make the U.S. less competitive for international travelers who have a choice.

- **First-time visitor visa (B-1/B-2) applicants from top inbound markets face average interview wait times of roughly 400 days.**
 - **BRAZIL** // Avg. wait times of 451 days // Due to long interview wait times and other factors, visitation from Brazil is still 31% below 2019 levels
 - **INDIA** // Avg. wait times of 577 days // Demand is strong from India, but high wait times deter travelers
 - **MEXICO** // Avg. wait times of 517 days // Due to long interview wait times and other factors, visitation from Mexico is still 30% below 2019 levels
- **Vaccine requirements are outdated and make the U.S. less competitive for highly sought international travelers.** The U.S. is the only remaining market requiring proof of vaccination for travel, adding difficulty and confusion to travelers who can easily avoid requirements by choosing competing destinations.

Deterring international travel will harm the economy and further delay recovery.

Tourism Economics forecasts that, in **2023, American businesses would attract 2.6 million fewer international visitors and \$7 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.

Industry pressure has helped, but more is needed from the government.

- High wait times seem to have peaked in October 2022, but remain unacceptably long for top inbound markets.
- At the insistence of the travel industry, the State Department extended authority to waive interview requirements for low-risk, known, and renewing visa applicants. (Dec. 2022)
- The travel industry recommended directing staffing resources to high-demand, high-wait time consulates and the State Department has begun directing new staff to Mexico and India and begun holding Saturday processing to expand capacity.

Practical government solutions can reinstate the U.S. as a top destination and accelerate industry recovery.

- The Biden Administration should immediately remove the vaccine requirement for inbound travel.
- The State Department should set clear goals for processing and strict timelines:
 - Set a goal to process visitor visas within 21 days and require adding resources to consulates with wait times over 60 days, similar to a previous Executive Order.
- Develop a dedicated process for 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:
 - Authorize the State Department to test and implement video conferencing capabilities to add technological efficiency capabilities.
 - Permanently authorize the State Department to broadly waive interview requirements for applicants who are low-risk, have already been interviewed, or issued a valid visa, regardless of visa category.

THE GOVERNMENT CAN ACCELERATE RECOVERY OF INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND WELCOME INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS BY SETTING GOALS AND IMPLEMENTING SOUND POLICY.