

TRAVEL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

WASHINGTON, DC



Preserve and Expand the Visa Waiver Program

The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) permits visitors from 35 ally nations to travel to the United States for up to 90 days without the expense and wait of obtaining a non-immigrant tourist visa. In 2008¹, eight new countries were added to the VWP following the implementation of a series of new security measures and use of a waiver authority for visa refusal rates. **The U.S. travel community urges Congress to maintain federal policies that will allow Latin American partners to join the VWP.**

Economic Benefits

Overseas visitors from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries are the largest source of inbound overseas travel to the U.S.

- According to 2008 U.S. Commerce Department data, the total number of inbound travelers from VWP travelers to the U.S. totaled over 16 million – accounting for 65% of all overseas travelers.
- These VWP travelers spent more than \$51 billion in the U.S. in 2008, excluding international airfare. That spending generated 512,000 jobs, \$13 billion in payroll, and \$7.8 billion in government taxes for the U.S. economy in 2008, according to the U.S. Travel Association.
- On average, overseas travelers spend \$4,500 per person, per visit in the U.S. including airfare, expenses on hotels, meals, entertainment, retail shopping, and local transportation, providing important economic support to small businesses and local economies.

Public Diplomacy Benefits

In order to expand America's economic and foreign policy options, the U.S. must work to improve its image around the world. Welcoming thousands of new overseas visitors through the VWP can serve as an effective public diplomacy tool for our nation.

- Surveys show that those who have visited the United States are 74% more likely to have a favorable opinion of America and support U.S. policies.
- The public diplomacy of business and cultural exchange has a multiplier effect. Nearly 9 in 10 travelers tell their friends and relatives about their travel experiences.
- 61% believe that once people visit the United States they become friendlier toward the country and its policies.

The U.S. travel community urges Congress to ensure continued use of policies that allowed the recent entry of 8 countries into the VWP in order to admit key Latin American allies such as Argentina, Brazil and Chile into the VWP.

Argentina – Argentina's economy has sustained a robust recovery following the economic crisis it suffered in 2001/2002 which resulted in its expulsion from the VWP. With six consecutive years of 8% real growth in gross domestic product (GDP) and a visa refusal rate of 3.1%, the U.S. should reconsider Argentina's eligibility for the VWP.

Brazil – With a population of nearly 200 million people and annual gross domestic product of more than a trillion dollars, Brazil represents a massive market for travel to the U.S. Since 2001, the total number of arrivals to the U.S. from Brazil has increased by 39.5%. With a visa refusal rate of 5.5% in 2008, Brazil could qualify for the VWP under the program's waiver authority.

Chile – Chile has made significant economic progress over the last two decades producing notable economic growth and considerable reductions in poverty. The Administration has described Chile as one the United States' closest allies in the region. Fewer Chileans are traveling to the U.S. today than in 2001, and entry into the VWP would provide

¹ The following 27 countries have participated in the VWP for several years: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom. In 2008, the VWP was expanded to include the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Korea, the Slovak Republic and Malta.