



Travel and Tourism: The Visa Waiver Program



Background



























- The program allows citizens from designated countries to travel to the U.S. for business or leisure for up to **90 days** without first obtaining a “tourist” (B-1/B-2) visa from a U.S. Embassy or Consulate
- Allows for information sharing between participating countries
- Provides both security and economic benefits

Timeline



- Congress passed legislation in 1986 to create the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to facilitate tourism and short-term business visits to the U.S.
- The United Kingdom was the first country to participate in 1988
- Countries were added to the program in subsequent years
- There are now 38 participating countries

-  Andorra^[5]
-  Australia^[6]
-  Austria^[5]
-  Belgium^[5]
-  Brunei^[7]
-  Chile^[8]
-  Czech Republic^[9]
-  Denmark^{[5][10]}
-  Estonia^[9]
-  Finland^{[5][11]}
-  France^[12]
-  Germany^[13]
-  Greece^[14]
-  Hungary^[9]
-  Iceland^[5]
-  Ireland^[15]
-  Italy^[16]
-  Japan^[17]
-  Korea, South^[9]
-  Latvia^[9]
-  Liechtenstein^[5]
-  Lithuania^[9]
-  Luxembourg^[5]
-  Malta^[9]
-  Monaco^[18]
-  Netherlands^{[16][19]}
-  New Zealand^[5]
-  Norway^[5]
-  Portugal^{[20][21]}
-  San Marino^[5]
-  Singapore^[20]
-  Slovakia^[9]
-  Slovenia^[22]
-  Spain^[5]
-  Sweden^[13]
-  Switzerland^[12]
-  Taiwan^{[23][24]}
-  United Kingdom^{[25][26]}

Program Details



- In 2006, the government implemented a requirement for all passengers to have a machine-readable passport
- If passport was issued after October 2006, travelers must have a biometric passport



Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)



- All travelers from VWP countries must have ESTA approval
- An approved ESTA Travel Authorization is:
 - Valid for up to two years or until the traveler's passport expires
 - Valid for multiple entries into the U.S.
 - Not a guarantee of admissibility to the U.S. at a port of entry- CBP officers make determinations at ports of entry

Security Benefits



- VWP countries are required to:
 - Share information about known or suspected terrorists and criminals
 - Allow U.S. inspections of security standards and protocols
 - Issue machine-readable passports
 - Promptly enter data on all lost or stolen passports
 - Participate in ESTA- individually screening all travelers

Impacts on Your Business



- Visa Waiver Program facilitates international travel to the U.S., generating **billions** in economic output and supporting nearly **one million** jobs
- International travelers stay an average of **18** nights and spend **\$4,400** per person, per trip
- For every 35 overseas travelers, one job is created

Economic Impact of VWP Tourism



- In 2014 alone, more than 20.4 million travelers arrived through the VWP (59% of overseas visitors)
 - This generated \$190 billion in economic output and supported nearly one million jobs
- Thanks to the VWP, travel is the United States' number one service export, generating a trade surplus of \$74 billion in 2014

Overall Economic Impact of Travel



- Direct travel spending totaled \$927 billion in 2014, which generated \$2.1 trillion in economic output and more than \$141 billion in tax revenue
- Travel directly employed 8 million Americans, and was among the top 10 employers in 49 states and the D.C.



Legislative Initiatives



- On December 8th, the House of Representatives passed “The Visa Waiver Improvement and Terrorist Travel Protection Act of 2015” (HR 158)
- Sponsored by Congresswoman Candice Miller (R-MI)
- AAHOA was a leading advocate- part of the US Travel Coalition
- Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) proposed companion bill (S.2362)
- U.S. Senate will likely include this language in the end-of-year spending bill- last step before it becomes law

Major Provisions



- Strengthen security measures while maintaining the program's ability to facilitate foreign business travel and tourism
- Requires aliens to possess a valid machine-readable passport that is tamper resistant, incorporates document authentication identifiers
- Prohibits nationals of designated countries of terror (or have traveled to these countries in the last 5 years) from using VWP

Will This Pass Congress?



Senate expected to vote on FY 16 Appropriations Bill on Friday (December 17)



Next Steps



- Continue to evaluate security measures
- Expand VWP to other partners countries- currently 9 countries in between “road map and eligibility status”
- With the proper infrastructure, increasing access to more partnering countries will incrementally improve the travel and tourism industry, as well as enhance U.S. security

Resources



- [H.R. 158 Bill Text and Summary](#)
- [Legislative Update from the House Majority](#)
- [Fact Sheet from the U.S. Travel Association](#)
- [AAHOA Press Releases](#)

Questions?

