

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION®

APRIL 2024 | QUICK MESSAGING GUIDE

TRAVEL IS CRITICAL TO THE U.S. ECONOMY, BUT WE LAG GLOBAL COMPETITION AS WE SEEK TO REGAIN PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS OF INTERNATIONAL INBOUND TRAVEL.

- In 2023, U.S. welcomed nearly **67M** international visitors—down from 79M visitors in 2019.
- U.S. inbound visitation is just 84% recovered (as of 2023) and market share has declined (5.3% in 2023, down from 5.4% in 2019).
- Other competitor countries have **fully recovered** visitation levels and are **gaining** market share.

A WAKE-UP CALL: EUROMONITOR RANKS U.S. 17TH OUT OF 18 TRAVEL MARKETS IN TERMS OF GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS.

- The U.S. is hindered by **self-imposed barriers**: Restrictive visitor visa policies and lengthy wait times (avg. 400 days in top markets), lack of focused leadership at federal level and decades of underinvestment.

OTHER COUNTRIES ARE PRIORITIZING TRAVEL TO AGGRESSIVELY COMPETE FOR TRAVELERS.

- While we inch back to pre-pandemic travel numbers, countries such as the U.K., France, Canada and Saudi Arabia are advancing strategies to **ease barriers** and increase international visitation.
- Other nations are using technology to lift carry-on liquid bans and virtually eliminate Customs wait times, which can surpass 2 hours at peak times at U.S. airports.
- Only 42 nations can travel **visa free** to the U.S. while 102 countries can travel visa-free to U.K.

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION HAS LAUNCHED A “COMMISSION ON SEAMLESS AND SECURE TRAVEL” TO IDENTIFY SHORT TERM SOLUTIONS AND PUT FORWARD A TEN-YEAR VISION.

- Former Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan chairs the commission comprised of more than a dozen former government and private industry experts.
- The commission will make **policy recommendations** to maintain and enhance security measures while modernizing and improving the travel experience, increasing U.S. competitiveness, and facilitating travel growth (report coming in late 2024).

IT'S TIME THE GOVERNMENT TOOK BOLD AND DECISIVE STEPS TO GROW AND MODERNIZE TRAVEL.

- Congress must pass a **long-term FAA bill** rather than extend the deadline yet again.
- The U.S. State Department must set a goal to get visitor visa (B1/B2) wait times down to **30 days or less** as was done during the Obama administration.
- In 2024, the U.S. could gain **2.4 million** more international visitors if the market was unconstrained by visa wait times.
- Furthermore, we must accelerate the deployment of **biometric** entry-exit security screening systems at U.S. airports and utilize technology to enhance security while reducing Custom wait times.

EMPLOYMENT IN LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY HAS NOW RETURNED TO PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS, WELCOME NEWS FOR TRAVEL BUSINESSES AND A REFLECTION OF TRAVEL'S RESILIENCY.

- The positive March jobs report pointed to a surge in **travel employment**. The leisure and hospitality (L&H) sector has added an average of 37,000 jobs per month for the last 12 months, and now counts 16.9 million workers total.
- It is evidence of strengthening **travel demand**—particularly in domestic travel segments – and a positive indicator for the travel economy.