

New Figures from Dept. of Commerce Show Continued Decline in Overseas Travel to U.S.

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U.S. Loses Travelers in 5 out of Top 8 Overseas Markets - New Senate 9/11 Bill May Improve Travel Process for Millions

Figures just released from the U.S. Department of Commerce show that far from enjoying a 'full recovery,' America's travel economy continues to lose millions of overseas visitors, costing America billions in revenue and preventing the U.S. from utilizing its greatest public diplomacy tool.

'We have lost nearly 60 million international travelers since 9/11 and the problem is only getting worse,' said Geoff Freeman, Executive Director of the Discover America Partnership, a coalition of American business leaders working to strengthen America through the power of travel. 'As travel around the world skyrockets, the U.S. is mired in a slump. It is time for Congress to address this growing problem in a way that both strengthens our security and improves the efficiency of the travel process.'

The Department of Congress figures reveal that overseas travel to the U.S. remains below pre-9/11 levels in six of the top eight overseas markets. Travel to the U.S. in 2006 fell further in five out of the top eight overseas markets. A 2006 survey of overseas travelers conducted by the Discover America Partnership found negative perceptions of the U.S. entry process to be the greatest deterrent to visiting the country.

While the overall number of international visitors to America finally returned to pre-9/11 levels in 2006, travelers from Canada and Mexico account for the increase. Overseas travel has declined by 17 percent since 2001.

Origin of Visitor	2000 (000s)	2005 (000s)	2006 (000s)
International Total	51,238	49,402	51,061
1. Canada	14,667	14,865	15,993
2. Mexico	10,596	12,858	13,400
3. United Kingdom	4,703	4,345	4,176
4. Japan	5,061	3,884	3,673
5. Germany	1,786	1,416	1,386
6. France	1,087	879	790
7. South Korea	662	705	758
8. Australia	540	582	603
9. Italy	612	546	533
10. Brazil	737	485	525

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries

The Commerce figures come as the U.S. Congress is beginning to take action. On March 13th, the U.S. Senate passed positive reforms to America's travel process as part of legislation (S. 4) designed to strengthen the nation's security by implementing concepts included in the 9/11 Commission report. These improvements, consistent with the proposals outlined in the Discover America Partnership's Blueprint, demonstrate an increasing desire on Capitol Hill to reverse the decline.

The importance of overseas travel is reflected in countless studies showing that those who have visited America have more favorable opinions of the country and are more likely to support U.S. policies. Moreover, an increase of 10 million more visitors could create 190,000 new American jobs, \$16.5 billion in new spending and nearly \$3 billion in new tax revenue.

In addition to the critical improvements contained in the Senate bill, many more steps are necessary to regain the 60 million travelers lost over the past five years, including:

- œ Developing an International Registered Traveler program;
- œ Requiring the U.S. State Department to report to Congress on the resources it requires to process visa applicants in 30 days or less;
- œ Providing the U.S. State Department with the ability to conduct video conferencing and 'mobile' consulate operations;
- œ Introducing customer service techniques at the nation's airports; and
- œ Creating global promotion program to better explain U.S. policies and express the nation's desire to welcome more visitors.

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