

National Business Travel Association Calls Visa Waiver Expansion a Victory

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The National Business Travel Association (NBTA) praised the expansion of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) currently underway to include eight more nations in the program, which will enable travelers from those countries to travel to the United States for 90 days or less for business or pleasure without obtaining a formal visa.

The visa-free travel made possible by VWP enables the free flow of between the United States and its most important business and trade partners around the world. The expansion is taking place under a new framework established for the program last year that creates a stronger, more open U.S. border by applying more robust security standards to VWP.

The United States and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) are expected to announce a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) today that will pave the way for the Republic of Korea to become a participant in VWP. The announcement follows the signing of similar bilateral MOUs in recent months between the United States and each of the following countries: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and the Slovak Republic. Together, the eight nations being added to the program represent more than one million travelers to the United States annually, a number that is expected to grow under VWP status.

'The expansion of the Visa Waiver Program is a victory for the people and the economy of the United States and for the eight countries to be added to the program,' said NBTA President & CEO, Kevin Maguire. 'As a long-standing advocate for the expansion of VWP, NBTA congratulates the Administration, particularly Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, for spearheading the expansion, the Congress for having the vision to pass the law laying the groundwork for expanding VWP participation while strengthening the program's security standards, and the leaders of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Republic of Korea and the Slovak Republic.'

The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade estimates entry into VWP will save Korean travelers to the United States a minimum of US\$102.7 million spent annually obtaining U.S. visas. That savings represents additional moneys that U.S.-bound Koreans are likely to spend while visiting the United States. While the amounts will vary, a similar story will play out among all eight nations being added to the program. Moreover, cheaper and easier travel to the U.S. will lead to increased numbers of travelers from those nations and will boost partnerships between businesses in those countries and the United States.

NBTA's Maguire said, 'We often hear stories about deals lost by U.S. companies, or large meetings held in other destinations, because the costs for getting a U.S. visa are too high. By adding new VWP countries we can avoid some of these bad-news stories and instead create more good-news stories for American companies working with businesses abroad. We look forward to the addition of these eight nations to VWP, and we encourage further expansion of the program in the near future.'

The National Business Travel Association (NBTA) is the world's premier business travel organization. U.S.-based NBTA and its regional subsidiaries - NBTA Asia Pacific, NBTA Canada and NBTA Mexico - serve more than 3,200 members in 30 nations around the globe. NBTA has 41 U.S. Chapters with more than 5,000 members. NBTA members are corporate and government travel and meetings managers, as well as travel service providers, who collectively manage and direct more than US\$170 billion of global business travel expenditures annually. The association provides industry-leading networking, education & professional development, research, news & information, and advocacy. For more information, visit www.nbta.org.

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