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U.S. Tourism: Recent Developments and Data

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U.S. Tourism: Recent Developments and Data

Tourism—both international and domestic—contributes millions of jobs and billions of dollars of spending to the national economy. In the past decade, the tourism industry has experienced a period with some disruptions. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sudden, dramatic decrease in tourism worldwide, including in and among the United States. By many measures, U.S. tourism spent the ensuing years rebounding from those losses. For example, international arrivals to the United States rose every year from 2020 through 2024.

In 2025, international arrivals to the United States fell 5.5% from 2024. This made the United States one of two countries among those with the 10 most international arrivals to see a decline in international tourists from 2024 to 2025. In addition, U.S. domestic airline passengers declined 1.0% from 2024 to 2025. Possible developments factoring into these trends include increased immigration enforcement, travel restrictions, new fees on nonimmigrant visas, and reduced funding for tourism promotion entities.

In Congress, various committees and subcommittees, including those of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, have held hearings touching on different aspects of U.S. tourism in recent years, including rural tourism, the impact of daylight saving time on tourism, and pandemic recovery efforts relative to tourism. P.L. 119-21, the FY2025 reconciliation act, reduced the annual cap on federal funds provided to Brand USA—a public-private entity promoting international tourism to the United States—from \$100 million to \$20 million. Subsequent bills, including H.R. 6128 and S. 3220, would restore or increase Brand USA funding. Previous Congresses have also passed legislation related to U.S. tourism. For example, the 117th Congress passed the Visit America Act (Subtitle A, Title VI, Division BB of P.L. 117-103, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022) which, among other things, authorized the creation of a new Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism within the Department of Commerce.

Several considerations concerning tourism may be of interest to Congress. They include

- **The U.S. tourism outlook.** As noted, both international arrivals to the United States and U.S. domestic airline passengers decreased in 2025 from 2024, making the United States an outlier among major tourism destinations. These developments come as the United States prepares to host the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and 2034 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.
- **Tourism-related leadership positions.** Although the Visit America Act established the position of the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism, to date, the position has not yet been filled. In addition, the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (a Federal Advisory Committee Act body that provides recommendations related to tourism to the Secretary of Commerce) appears to not have met since October 2024—despite its charter calling for meetings twice annually.
- **Brand USA funding.** As mentioned, legislation in the 119th Congress reduced the annual cap on Brand USA’s federal funds. In addition, Brand USA’s statutory funding structure—that allows it to access federal funding—is set to expire at the end of FY2027 unless Congress acts.

Contents

Introduction	1
Recent Developments Related to Tourism	2
Tourism Data and Recent Trends.....	5
Domestic and International Visitor Levels.....	5
Country-Specific Arrivals to the United States	9
Exports and Visitor Spending.....	10
Tourism-Related Departments and Programs.....	11
Department of Commerce (DOC).....	11
Brand USA.....	13
Funding	14
Legislation and Debates.....	14
Issues for Congress.....	15
U.S. Tourism Outlook	15
Tourism-Related Leadership Positions and Funding.....	16
Brand USA Funding.....	17
Concluding Observations	19

Figures

Figure 1. U.S. Domestic Airline Passengers, 2016-2025	6
Figure 2. U.S. Domestic Airline Passengers, June 2024-May 2026.....	7
Figure 3. International Arrivals to the United States, 2016-2025.....	8
Figure 4. Percentage Change in International Arrivals to the United States	9
Figure 5. U.S. Travel and Tourism Exports and Trade Balance, 2016-2025	11
Figure 6. Brand USA Return on Investment Per Dollar Spent, FY2016-FY2025.....	18
Figure A-1. Direct and Total Tourism Employment, 2014-2023.....	24
Figure A-2. U.S. Travel and Tourism Value Added Growth Rate and U.S. GDP Growth Rate, 2019-2023	27
Figure A-3. U.S. Travel and Tourism Output, 2019-2023	28

Tables

Table A-1. Employment and Compensation in Tourism-Related Industry Sectors, 2023	25
Table A-2. Travel and Tourism Value Added, 2019-2023	26

Appendixes

Appendix A. Impact of and Reaction to COVID-19 Pandemic	20
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Appendix B. Further Data	24
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Contacts

Author Information.....	29
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Introduction

Tourism to and within the United States—from both domestic and international travelers—contributes millions of jobs and billions of dollars of spending to the national economy. For example, in 2025, travel and tourism generated \$248.8 in U.S. exports, or money that international tourists spent in visiting the United States.¹ In addition, tourism may help shape views of the United States among foreign citizens, for example, those that attended the 2026 World Cup (cohosted by the United States) and those that may travel for the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, CA (and other sites) or the 2034 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, UT.²

Congress has taken an interest in tourism generally for decades, and has specifically been interested in the industry’s recovery following the pandemic. This report details Congress’s recent activities related to tourism, provides data on recent tourism trends, outlines the federal government’s role in tourism and tourism promotion, and presents issues for congressional consideration.

Defining Tourism

There is no standard definition of “tourism.” Instead, there are multiple definitions of “tourism” and related terms among federal departments and other bodies tracking tourism. They include

- The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), which has definitions for
 - “domestic tourism” (“travel-related expenditures by U.S. residents traveling within the United States”);
 - “inbound tourism” (“travel-related expenditures by nonresidents traveling within the United States and expenditures by nonresidents on international transportation purchased from U.S. providers”); and
 - “visitor” (“a person who travels outside of his or her usual environment [more than 50–100 miles from the area of normal, everyday activities] for less than a year or who stays overnight in a hotel or motel”).³
- The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), which defines “long-distance travel and tourism trips” as “any overnight leisure or business trip greater than 50 miles using any mode, or combination of modes, of transportation.”⁴
- The U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), which defines “tourism” as “the economic output of goods and services sold to visitors who travel 50 miles or more or who stay overnight in a paid accommodation.”⁵
- UN Tourism (part of the United Nations), which defines a “visitor” as “a traveler taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited.... A visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor), if his/her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise.”⁶

¹ International Trade Administration (ITA), *Monthly Travel and Tourism Trade Statistics (Exports, Imports, and Trade Balance)*, <https://www.trade.gov/international-travel-receipts-and-payments-program>. (ITA, *Monthly Travel*.)

² For example, see Sarah Raza, “International Visitors Came to the United States for Soccer. Some Saw Beyond the Clichés, Too,” Associated Press, July 18, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/world-cup-united-states-fans-tourists-0cbe947fd7560490864ff6b88f9ccf>.

³ BEA, *U.S. Travel and Tourism Satellite Account for 2017–2021*, February 9, 2023, <https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2023/02-february/0223-travel-tourism-satellite-account.htm>.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Travel and Tourism: DOT Should Improve Strategic Planning and Data Collection*, GAO-23-105967, May 24, 2023, p. 4, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105967>. (GAO, *Travel and Tourism*.)

⁵ GAO, *Travel and Tourism*, p. 4.

⁶ UN Tourism, *Glossary of Tourism Terms*, <https://www.untourism.int/glossary-tourism-terms>.

Recent Developments Related to Tourism⁷

Some recent developments may have affected or have the potential to affect tourism to and within the United States. These include increased immigration enforcement, travel restrictions, new visa and admission fees, and tariffs and other economic considerations. As discussed in more depth in “Tourism Data and Recent Trends,” international arrivals to the United States declined by 5.5% in 2025 as compared to 2024, and the number of domestic airline passengers declined by 1.0% in 2025 as compared to 2024.⁸ In addition, 2026 year-to-date international arrivals to the United States through June 2026 were 0.4% lower than year-to-date through June 2025.⁹

The Trump Administration’s focus on immigration enforcement has led to some concerns about a dampening effect on U.S. tourism.¹⁰ There have been reports of tourists and other noncitizens being detained while traveling to the United States.¹¹ Additionally, in December 2025, the Trump Administration proposed a five-year social media review for Visa Waiver Program travelers.¹² Some Members of Congress objected to the proposal in a January 2026 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, stating that “leading hospitality industry groups and international travel advocates have raised serious concerns that the breadth of this data collection could deter lawful, international visitors and impose significant new barriers to travel.”¹³ More recently, in September 2026, the Department of State (DOS) announced that it will expand its existing review of certain visa applicants’ social media history to include additional nonimmigrant (temporary) visa categories, though tourist visas are not subject to this review.¹⁴ Several countries, including Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom, later adjusted travel advisories for their citizens wishing to visit the United States.¹⁵

⁷ Jill H. Wilson, Analyst in Immigration Policy, contributed to this section.

⁸ Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration (ITA), *International Visitor Arrivals Program—ADIS I-94*, <https://www.trade.gov/i-94-arrivals-program> (ITA, *International Visitor Arrivals Program*); and Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), *Monthly Transportation Statistics, U.S. Airline Traffic—Domestic—Seasonally Adjusted*, https://data.bts.gov/Research-and-Statistics/Monthly-Transportation-Statistics/crem-w557/about_data.

⁹ ITA, *I-94 Monthly Summary and Analysis Reports, Final Release (Overseas, Mexico, and Canada)*, <https://www.trade.gov/i-94-arrivals-program>.

¹⁰ For example, see Lindsey Galloway, “Why Some Travellers Are Rethinking Trips to the US,” *BBC*, April 7, 2026, and Michael Sainato, “Trump’s Immigration Siege Is Rattling Hospitality Industry, Workers Say,” *The Guardian*, February 18, 2026.

¹¹ For example, see Sarah Betancourt, “Green Card Holder from New Hampshire ‘Interrogated’ at Logan Airport, Detained,” WGBH, March 16, 2025, <https://www.wgbh.org/news/local/2025-03-14/green-card-holder-from-new-hampshire-interrogated-at-logan-airport-detained>; and Jamie Grierson, “British Tourist Detained in US After Visa Mix-Up Returns to UK—reports,” *The Guardian*, March 18, 2025.

¹² U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Agency Information Collection Activities; Revision; Arrival and Departure Record (Form I-94) and Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA),” 90 *Federal Register* 57208, December 10, 2025. For more on the Visa Waiver Program, see CRS Report RL32221, *Visa Waiver Program*, by Abigail F. Kolker.

¹³ Congresswoman Susie Lee, “Congresswoman Lee, Nevada Delegation Urge Department of Homeland Security to Revise Proposed Travel Rule,” press release, January 15, 2026, <https://susielee.house.gov/media/press-releases/congresswoman-lee-nevada-delegation-urge-department-homeland-security-revise>.

¹⁴ Department of State (DOS), *Announcement of Expanded Screening and Vetting for Visa Applicants*, September 18, 2026, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/announcement-of-expanded-screening-and-vetting-for-visa-applicants.html>.

¹⁵ Rachel Chang, “Countries Are Warning Their Citizens About Traveling to the US Amid ICE Protests,” *Conde Nast Traveler*, February 3, 2026.

In addition, the Trump Administration has acted to directly restrict U.S. entry for nationals of certain countries.¹⁶ For example, in June 2025, President Trump issued a proclamation suspending the entry of certain foreign nationals from 19 foreign countries.¹⁷ A December 2025 proclamation expanded these restrictions to nationals of 39 foreign countries.¹⁸ In July 2025, DOS reduced nonimmigrant visa validity (the period during which a visa is valid for travel to the United States) for new visas issued to nationals of certain countries.¹⁹ Visas allow the visa holder to travel to a U.S. port of entry and apply for admission, including, in the case of nonimmigrant visas, for tourism.

Other actions have also impacted or sought to impact nonimmigrant visas. In the 119th Congress, P.L. 119-21, the FY2025 reconciliation act, created a new “visa integrity fee.”²⁰ The law mandated the fee be at least \$250 and increase annually with inflation. In August 2025, DOS, citing existing statutory authority to require visa bonds from certain applicants for nonimmigrant visas, created a new visa bond pilot program to “to assess the operational feasibility of posting, processing, and discharging visa bonds ... and to inform any future decision concerning the possible use of visa bonds to ensure nonimmigrants using these visa categories comply with the terms and conditions of their visas and timely depart the United States.”²¹ As of May 2026, DOS had applied visa bonds to nationals of 50 countries.²² DOS issued a final rule making the program permanent in August 2026.²³ Under the rule, bonds could be set as high as \$20,000. In January 2026, 75 Members of Congress signed a letter to DOS and DHS that, among other things, objected to the visa bond program.²⁴

Following COVID-19-related delays in visa processing, visa interview wait times at many U.S. consulates around the world have decreased. Some posts, however, continue to experience lengthy backlogs for tourist visas. For example, as of September 2026, the average wait time for an interview for a tourist visa at the U.S. consulate in New Delhi was seven-and-a-half months, and in Mexico City it was six-and-a-half months.²⁵ In addition, in February 2025, the Trump Administration narrowed eligibility for waivers of the in-person nonimmigrant visa interview

¹⁶ For more information on these developments, see CRS Report IR10004, *Nationality-Based Immigration Restrictions*, by Jill H. Wilson.

¹⁷ Executive Office of the President, “Restricting the Entry of Foreign Nationals To Protect the United States From Foreign Terrorists and Other National Security and Public Safety Threats,” 90 *Federal Register* 24497, June 10, 2025. See also CRS Insight IN12561, *Presidential Proclamation of June 4, 2025, Restricting the Entry of Certain Foreign Nationals*, by Jill H. Wilson.

¹⁸ Executive Office of the President, “Restricting and Limiting the Entry of Foreign Nationals to Protect the Security of the United States,” 90 *Federal Register* 59717, December 19, 2025. See also CRS Insight IN12631, *Expanded “Travel Ban” to Take Effect January 1, 2026*, by Jill H. Wilson.

¹⁹ See CRS Report IR10004, *Nationality-Based Immigration Restrictions*, by Jill H. Wilson.

²⁰ 139 Stat. 370. The law directs this fee to be paid by all nonimmigrant visa applicants at the time of visa issuance. CRS could not verify that this fee had been implemented as of the date of this report.

²¹ DOS, “Visas: Visa Bond Pilot Program,” 90 *Federal Register* 37378, August 5, 2025. The statutory authority is 8 U.S.C. §1201(g).

²² DOS, *Countries Subject to Visa Bonds*, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/countries-subject-to-visa-bonds.html>.

²³ DOS, “Visas: Visa Bond Program,” 91 *Federal Register* 48757, August 3, 2026.

²⁴ Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, “CAPAC Chair Meng Calls on Trump Administration to Reverse Visa Suspensions for 75 Countries,” press release, January 29, 2026, <https://capac.house.gov/press-release/capac-chair-meng-calls-trump-administration-reverse-visa-suspensions-75-countries>.

²⁵ DOS, *Global Visa Wait Times*, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/global-visa-wait-times.html>. Accessed September 25, 2026.

requirement, and in December 2025, it required applicants to attend interviews in their home countries.²⁶

The Corporation for Travel Promotion, which does business as Brand USA, markets international tourism to the United States by distributing information on U.S. entry policies and promoting leisure, business, and scholarly travel to and within the United States. Brand USA is funded in part by federal grants. (For more details see “Brand USA.”) Prior to July 2025, grant amounts were capped at \$100 million annually. However, P.L. 119-21 lowered the annual cap to \$20 million.²⁷ Other bills in the 119th Congress, including H.R. 6128 and S. 3220, would restore some funding to Brand USA. (See “Legislation and Debates.”)

Economic conditions may also be impacting tourism. According to the U.S. Travel Association (U.S. Travel), a travel industry advocacy group, as of September 2026, travel prices were 29.9% above 2019 rates.²⁸ Higher fuel and airfare prices accounted for the largest portion of those increases. News reports suggest higher prices may be negatively impacting travel, especially for lower- and middle-income travelers.²⁹ Other developments may be affecting travel to the United States from particular places. Between 2000 and 2024, Canada was the country with the most arrivals to the United States every year other than 2020 and 2021. However, in 2025, Canadian arrivals to the United States decreased 20.9% from 2024.³⁰ This decline may reflect broader dynamics in the U.S.-Canada relationship, including trade tensions.³¹ Certain entities, including Brand USA, have tried to stoke Canadian tourism to the United States, with uncertain results to date.³² Some Members of Congress have also expressed concern at the decline of Canadian tourists to the United States.³³

Prior to these developments, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected tourism throughout the world, including in the United States. Congress and executive branch agencies took actions related to the pandemic and tourism. These included Congress authorizing a new Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism in the Department of Commerce in the Visit America Act (Subtitle A, Title VI, Division BB of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, P.L. 117-328) and the Secretary of Commerce publishing a National Travel and Tourism Strategy

²⁶ DOS, *Interview Waiver Update*, February 18, 2025, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/interview-waiver-update-feb-18-2025.html>; and DOS, *Adjudicating Nonimmigrant Visa (NIV) Applicants in Their Country of Residence*, July 16, 2026, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/adjudicating-niv-applicants-in-their-country-of-residence.html>.

²⁷ 139 Stat. 136.

²⁸ U.S. Travel Association (U.S. Travel), *Travel Price Index*, <https://www.ustravel.org/research/travel-price-index>. Accessed September 25, 2026.

²⁹ For example, see Joel Rose, “How Rising Costs Are Changing the Way Americans Travel,” NPR, October 2, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/02/nx-s1-5553637/rising-costs-travel-scaling-back>.

³⁰ ITA, *International Visitor Arrivals Program*.

³¹ For more information on U.S.-Canada trade, see CRS In Focus IF12595, *U.S.-Canada Trade Relations*, by Kyla H. Kitamura.

³² For example, see Rio Yamat, “U.S. Tourism Groups Want to Win Canadian Visitors Back. A Testy Trade War Isn’t Helping,” PBS, September 6, 2026, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/u-s-tourism-groups-want-to-win-canadian-visitors-back-a-testy-trade-war-isnt-helping>.

³³ Joint Economic Committee Democrats, “Report: Amid Trumps Tariffs, Declining Canadian Tourism Is Harming Businesses in Every State Along U.S.-Canada Border,” press release, December 10, 2025, <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/democrats/2025/12/report-amid-trump-s-tariffs-declining-canadian-tourism-is-harming-businesses-in-every-state-along-u-s-canada-border>.

in June 2022 that called for increasing the annual number of international tourists to the United States to 90 million by 2027.³⁴ The **Appendix A** provides more details on these events.

Tourism Data and Recent Trends

International and domestic tourism in the United States both experienced relative turmoil since 2020. On certain data points, U.S. tourism had nearly recovered its pandemic-era losses but has seen some recent setbacks. This section presents data and recent trends for U.S. tourism. Other data related to U.S. tourism, including on employment and economic activity, are not currently available beyond 2023. These data are presented in **Appendix B**.

Domestic and International Visitor Levels

The U.S. tourism industry includes domestic and international tourists. By at least some measures, the numbers of both had increased in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, although those trends appear to have slowed or reversed in 2025 and into 2026.

What Factors Affect Tourism?

Researchers note that tourism is influenced by a confluence of factors. For example, some point to inflation as impacting travel decisions.³⁵ Other factors that may affect tourism include

- economic conditions such as exchange rates and household savings;
- labor availability and supply chain dynamics;
- weather and natural disasters;
- international relations and safety concerns;
- immigration policy; and
- travel infrastructure.

These variables can be fluid. For example, research suggests that currency exchange rates, particularly relative to U.S. dollars, can be important drivers of tourism.³⁶ Some exchange rates, including the U.S. dollar/euro rate, tend to fluctuate over time.³⁷ Monitoring these factors may help policymakers better understand tourism's dynamics.

There are more domestic travelers than international tourists in the United States. According to data from the Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics, there were approximately 841.6 million seasonally adjusted domestic airline passengers in 2025.³⁸ That compared to about 68.3 million international visitors to the United States in that same year.³⁹ (Not all airline passengers travel for tourism; for example, some travel for work. In addition, some domestic tourism takes place by transportation modes other than flying.)

³⁴ Department of Commerce (DOC), *National Travel and Tourism Strategy 2022*, June 6, 2022, <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/National-Travel-Tourism-Strategy.pdf>. (DOC, *Strategy*.)

³⁵ OECD, *OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2022*, August 12, 2022, p. 27, <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-20767773.htm>.

³⁶ For example, see Ding Ding and Yannick Timmer, *Exchange Rate Elasticities of International Tourism and the Role of Dominant Currency Pricing*, International Monetary Fund, Working Paper No. 2022/024, February 4, 2022, p. 2, <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/WP/2022/English/wpica2022024-print-pdf.ashx>.

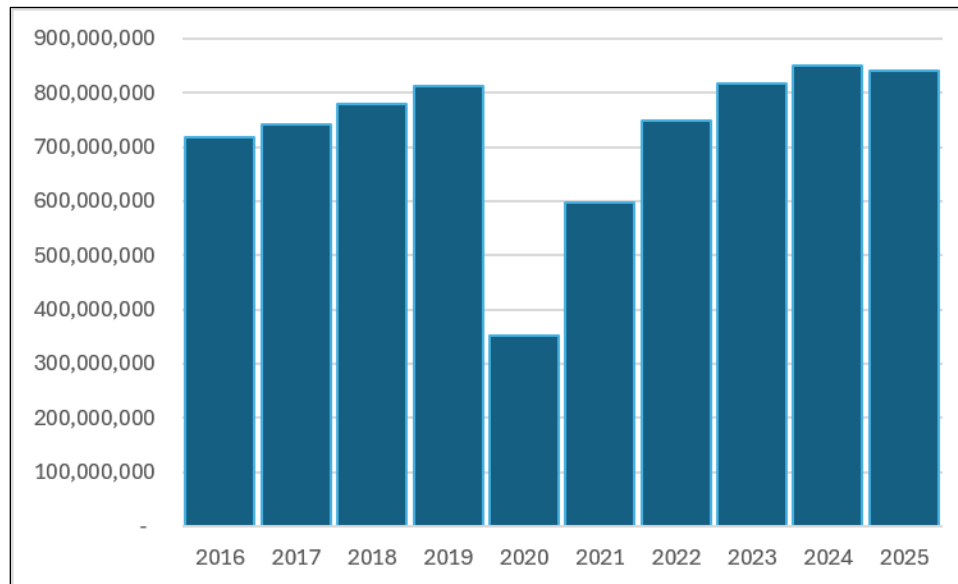
³⁷ Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve Bank System, *U.S. Dollars to Euro Spot Exchange Rate*, November 3, 2023, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/DEXUSEU>.

³⁸ Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), *Monthly Transportation Statistics, U.S. Airline Traffic—Domestic—Seasonally Adjusted*, https://data.bts.gov/Research-and-Statistics/Monthly-Transportation-Statistics/crem-w557/about_data.

³⁹ ITA, *International Visitor Arrivals Program*.

Although the number of seasonally adjusted domestic airline passengers exceeded pre-pandemic amounts by 2023, the 2025 number was 1.0% less than in 2024.⁴⁰ **Figure 1** presents seasonally adjusted domestic plane passengers from 2016-2025.

Figure 1. U.S. Domestic Airline Passengers, 2016-2025

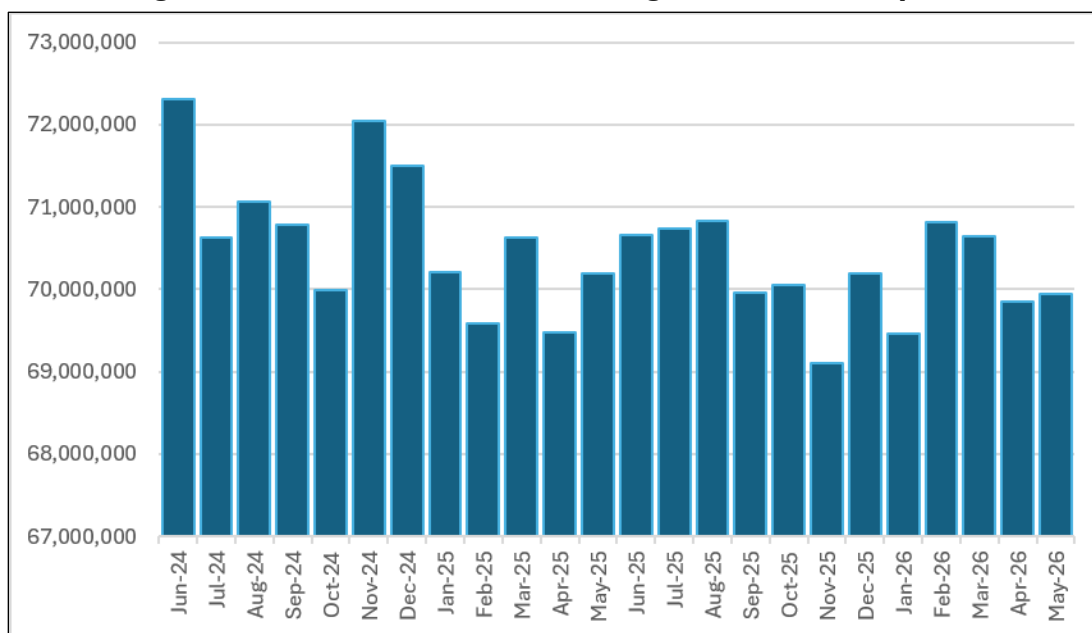


Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), *Monthly Transportation Statistics, U.S. Airline Traffic - Domestic - Seasonally Adjusted*, https://data.bts.gov/Research-and-Statistics/Monthly-Transportation-Statistics/crem-w557/about_data.

Note: Amounts are seasonally adjusted.

Monthly data also point to a slowdown in domestic airline travel. The number of domestic airline passengers for May 2026, the most recent available data, was 0.4% less than in May 2025. As **Figure 2** shows, dating back two years, domestic airline traffic was below June 2024 in every subsequent month.

⁴⁰ BTS, *Monthly Transportation Statistics, U.S. Airline Traffic—Domestic—Seasonally Adjusted*, https://data.bts.gov/Research-and-Statistics/Monthly-Transportation-Statistics/crem-w557/about_data.

Figure 2. U.S. Domestic Airline Passengers, June 2024-May 2026

Source: BTS, *Monthly Transportation Statistics, U.S. Airline Traffic—Domestic—Seasonally Adjusted*, https://data.bts.gov/Research-and-Statistics/Monthly-Transportation-Statistics/crem-w557/about_data.

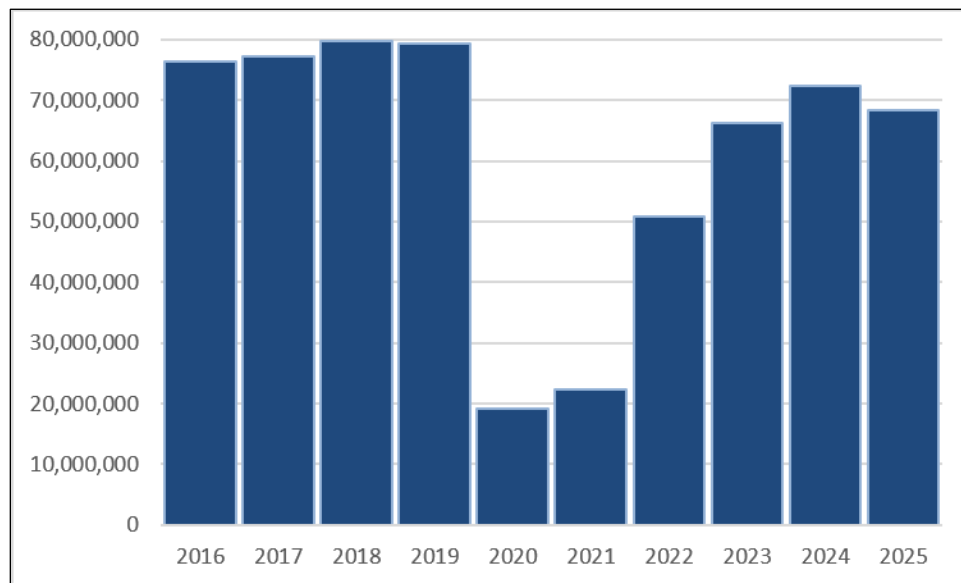
Note: Amounts are seasonally adjusted.

International tourism to the United States declined from 2024 to 2025, the first year with a drop since 2020. (See **Figure 3**.) In 2025, the United States had 68.3 million international visitors, down from 72.3 million in 2024, representing a 5.5% decline. This remained below the pre-pandemic high of 79.7 million in 2018.⁴¹ (Taking a longer view, international arrivals to the United States have grown significantly since the beginning of the 21st century; in 2003, for example, there were 34.5 million international arrivals.)⁴² According to UN Tourism, the United States was one of two countries among the 10 countries with the most international arrivals in 2025 to have a decline in international arrivals from 2024 (Thailand was the other).⁴³

⁴¹ ITA, *International Visitor Arrivals Program*.

⁴² ITA, *International Visitor Arrivals Program*.

⁴³ UN Tourism, *UN Tourism Data Dashboard, Compare Indicators—Countries*, <https://www.untourism.int/tourism-data/un-tourism-tourism-dashboard>.

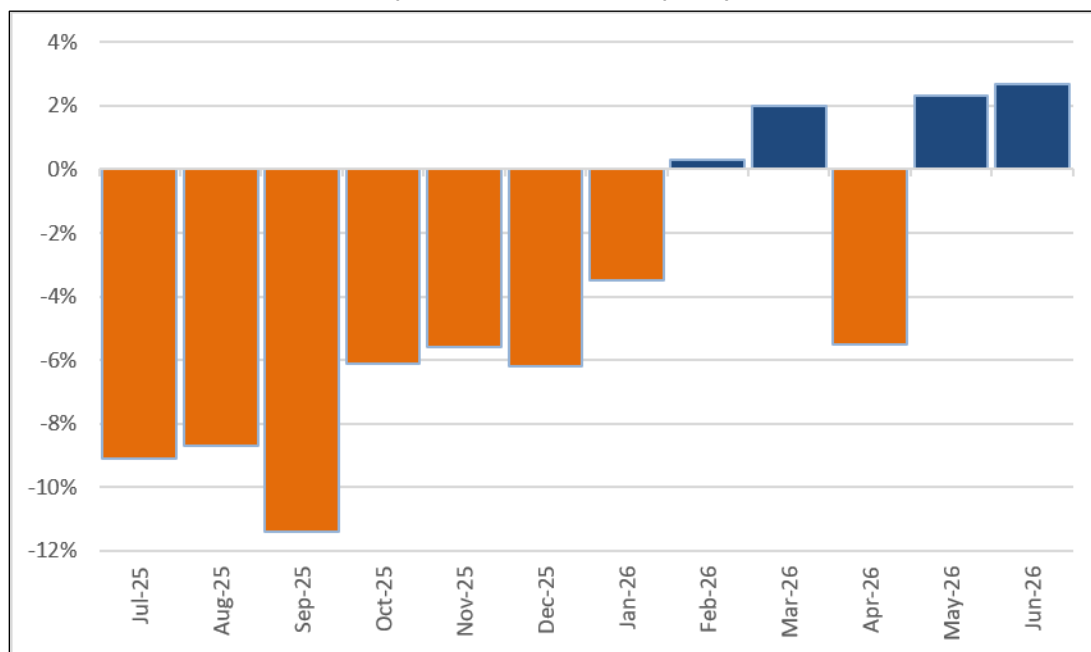
Figure 3. International Arrivals to the United States, 2016-2025

Source: Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration (ITA), *International Visitor Arrivals Program—ADIS I-94*, <https://www.trade.gov/i-94-arrivals-program>.

Monthly data on international tourism to the United States over the past year also reveal some downward trends, although with some upward movement in more recent months. Through June 2026, the most recent month for which data are available, international visitors to the United States were below prior year levels in eight of the previous 12 months, although they were above prior year levels in May and June 2026. (See **Figure 4.**) Although uncertain, some of the increases in those months may be due to the 2026 World Cup, which the United States cohosted. Year-to-date international arrivals to the United States through June 2026 were 0.4% lower than year-to-date through June 2025.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ ITA, *I-94 Monthly Summary and Analysis Reports, Final Release (Overseas, Mexico, and Canada)*, <https://www.trade.gov/i-94-arrivals-program>.

Figure 4. Percentage Change in International Arrivals to the United States
Compared to same month in prior year



Source: ITA, *I-94 Monthly Summary and Analysis Reports, Final Release (Overseas, Mexico, and Canada)*, <https://www.trade.gov/i-94-arrivals-program>.

Note: Blue bars denote increases.

Country-Specific Arrivals to the United States

In 2025, the United States had 68.3 million international arrivals, the second highest of any country, after Spain.⁴⁵ However, while this represented a significant increase from 2020 and 2021, non-U.S. residents' share of total U.S. travel demand was 2.6% in 2023, the lowest share since at least 1998.⁴⁶ For context, non-U.S. residents' highest share of total U.S. travel demand during this period was 16.6%, in 2013 and 2015, and was at least 10% each year from 1998 through 2019.

Visitors from Mexico (18.0 million) and Canada (16.0 million) easily accounted for the highest number of international arrivals to the United States in 2025.⁴⁷ For Mexico, that was an increase of 6.4% from 2024; for Canada, that was a decrease of 20.9% from 2024. (For context, Mexican arrivals to the United States increased by 17.6% from 2023 to 2024, while Canadian arrivals decreased by 1.3% in that time.) Travelers from Brazil, China, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom also each had over 1 million arrivals in 2025.⁴⁸ Among the 20 countries with the most arrivals to the United States in 2025, eight had

⁴⁵ UN Tourism, *UN Tourism Data Dashboard, Compare Indicators—Countries*, <https://www.untourism.int/tourism-data/un-tourism-tourism-dashboard>.

⁴⁶ ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, table 3, demand for commodities by type of visitor, 2021, <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>; and ITA, *National Travel and Tourism Office: Economic Impact of Travel and Tourism*, <https://www.trade.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/TTSA-Fact-Sheet.pdf>. Travel demand measures the consumption of certain goods and services related to tourism such as traveler accommodations and air transportation services.

⁴⁷ ITA, *International Visitor Arrivals Program*.

⁴⁸ ITA, *International Visitor Arrivals Program*.

more arrivals than in 2024, and 12 had fewer. The percentage increase was highest for Argentina (14.9%) and Japan (6.7%). Canada (-20.9%) and Germany (-11.9%) had the biggest decreases.

Exports and Visitor Spending

Economists monitor travel and tourism exports. Travel and tourism exports are the amount of money that foreign visitors spend in the United States on passenger fares and travel-related goods and services such as food, lodging, recreation, gifts, entertainment, and local transportation, including travel to and from the United States on a U.S. airline. To improve the comparability of U.S. travel statistics with those of other countries, The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) in 2014 refined its travel statistics by expanding the definition of travel and tourism exports to cover all kinds of travel, including travel for health and educational purposes.⁴⁹

Goods and services purchased by international visitors to the United States constitute export income for the U.S. economy. Likewise, purchases by U.S. residents while outside the country constitute export income for that other country and import income for the United States.⁵⁰ The difference between U.S. travel and tourism exports and imports is the trade balance for travel.

U.S. tourism exports were approximately \$248.8 billion in 2025, down 1.2% from 2024.⁵¹ However, 2024 and 2025 had the largest amount of U.S. tourism exports dating back to at least 1999, surpassing the pre-pandemic high of \$240.5 billion in 2018.

From January through July 2026, year-to-date tourism exports were approximately \$145.4 billion, down 0.1% from the same period in 2025.⁵² U.S. travel and tourism exports in July 2025 accounted for 7.3% of total U.S. exports. (Travel and tourism exports' highest share of total U.S. exports on record was 9.6%, in April 2019.)⁵³ The U.S. travel trade balance went from \$102.8 billion in 2015 to \$14.1 billion in 2025. The 2025 U.S. travel trade balance was also down from \$29.2 billion in 2024, a 51.6% decrease.⁵⁴

Figure 5 presents U.S. travel and tourism exports and the U.S. travel trade balance.

⁴⁹ Maria Borga and Kristy L. Howell, *The Comprehensive Restructuring of the International Economic Accounts: Changes in Definitions, Classifications, and Presentations*, BEA, March 2014, https://apps.bea.gov/scb/pdf/2014/03%20March/0314_restructuring_the_international_economic_accounts.pdf.

⁵⁰ ITA, *National Travel and Tourism Office: Travel Exports*, p. 1, <https://www.trade.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Travel-and-Tourism-Exports.pdf>. (ITA, *Travel Exports*.)

⁵¹ ITA, *Monthly Travel*.

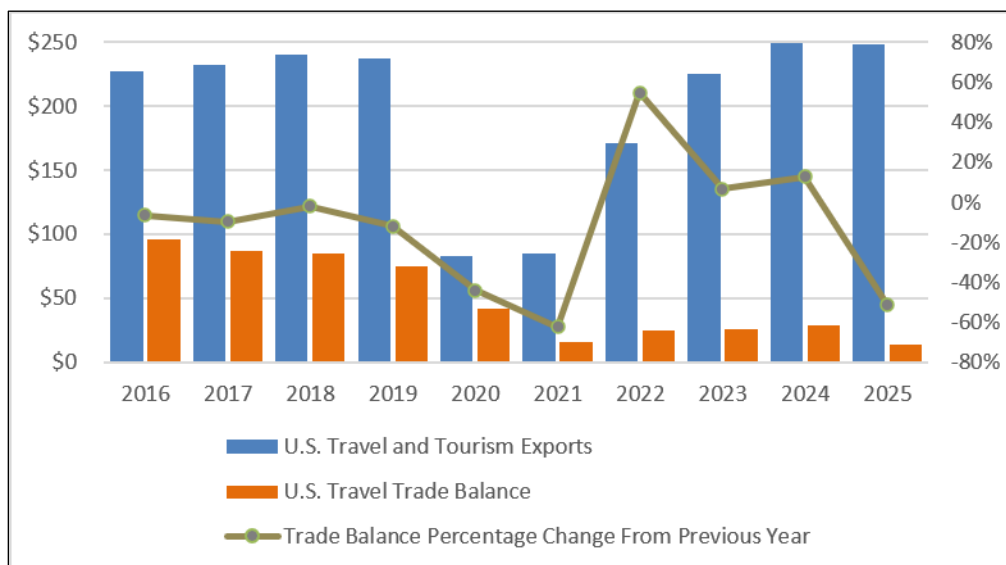
⁵² ITA, *Monthly Travel*.

⁵³ ITA, *International Travel Receipts and Payments Program, Share of U.S. Exports*, <https://www.trade.gov/international-travel-receipts-and-payments-program>.

⁵⁴ ITA, *Monthly Travel*.

Figure 5. U.S. Travel and Tourism Exports and Trade Balance, 2016-2025

Dollars in billions



Source: ITA, *Monthly Travel and Tourism Trade Statistics (Exports, Imports, and Trade Balance)*, <https://www.trade.gov/international-travel-receipts-and-payments-program>.

Tourism-Related Departments and Programs

Much of the federal government's involvement in tourism is done through DOC. Legislation in recent Congresses has realigned aspects of the federal approach to tourism.

Some federal programs may have goals that could benefit, but are not explicitly geared towards, tourism. For example, the National Park Service administers the National Park System, which includes 433 units valued for their natural, cultural, and recreational importance. Such programs are not covered in this report.

Department of Commerce (DOC)

The National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO), within DOC's ITA, has traditionally played a significant role in tourism promotion and tracking core measures of U.S. tourism activity. NTTO manages the travel and tourism satellite accounts, serving as the official federal source for tourism statistics. In addition, NTTO works to enhance the competitiveness of international travel to the United States and increase the U.S. tourism industry's exports, including through marketing and coordination with other federal agencies through the interagency Tourism Policy Council (TPC).

The TPC (codified at 22 U.S.C. §2124) is an interagency federal committee whose goal is to "ensure that the national interest in travel and tourism is fully considered in federal decision-making."⁵⁵ By statute, the Secretary of Commerce acts as the TPC chair.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Tourism Policy Council, <https://www.trade.gov/tourism-policy-council>.

⁵⁶ 22 U.S.C. §2124(b)(1).

The U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (TTAB) is a Federal Advisory Committee Act body that provides recommendations related to tourism to the Secretary of Commerce.⁵⁷ The Visit America Act gave the TTAB statutory authorization.⁵⁸ The TTAB is made up of no more than 32 members selected by the Secretary of Commerce and includes private sector members who relate the industry's views on government policies affecting tourism.⁵⁹

The 117th Congress passed the Visit America Act (Subtitle A, Title VI, Division BB of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 [P.L. 117-328]), which authorized the creation of a new Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism (Assistant Secretary) within DOC.⁶⁰ In creating the new Assistant Secretary position, the House report for the standalone House version of the Visit America Act (H.R. 6965) noted that, "Currently, the United States is the only G-20 nation not to have a federal agency or cabinet-level official in charge of tourism policy."⁶¹

The Assistant Secretary's responsibilities include

- establishing an annual goal for international visitors to the United States and developing recommendations to meet that goal;
- consulting with the Secretary of Labor and BEA on improving travel and tourism workforce and industry data;
- increasing and facilitating international business travel to the United States, in coordination with other relevant federal agencies;
- developing and implementing a pandemic tourism recovery strategy and a strategy to address potential future disruptions to tourism such as natural disasters;
- producing an annual forecast on the tourism industry.⁶²

As of September 2026, no individual had yet been appointed to the Assistant Secretary role. In the 119th Congress, the committee report for H.R. 5342, the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2026, specified that the bill would include \$3.5 million "to carry out activities associated with sections 604 and 605 of the Visit America Act."⁶³ (The Assistant Secretary position was established in section 604.) In the 118th Congress, the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 118-42, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, stated that "The agreement provides up to the requested level of \$3,500,000 for ITA to implement the 'Visit America Act,'" which included the Assistant Secretary position.⁶⁴

To support the new Assistant Secretary position, the Biden Administration's FY2024 budget request proposed that all NTTO functions and staffing be folded into a new Travel and Tourism

⁵⁷ For more information on the Federal Advisory Committee Act, see CRS In Focus IF12102, *Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA): Committee Establishment and Termination*, by Meghan M. Stuessy.

⁵⁸ 136 Stat. 5569-5570.

⁵⁹ For a current list of TTAB members, see U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board, <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-advisory-board-members>.

⁶⁰ 136 Stat. 5566-5567.

⁶¹ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, *Visit America Act*, Report together with minority views to accompany H.R. 6965, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., September 28, 2022, H.Rept. 117-508, p. 5.

⁶² 136 Stat. 5567-5569.

⁶³ U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, *Report Together with Dissenting Views to Accompany H.R. 5342*, 119th Cong., 1st sess., September 12, 2025, H.Rept. 119-272, p. 8.

⁶⁴ U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024—Committee Print of the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives on H.R. 4366/P.L. 118-42*, committee print, 118th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: GPO, 2024), p. 393.

business unit within ITA.⁶⁵ (To date, NTTO has been part of ITA’s Industry and Analysis business unit.) The new business unit would provide expertise, analytical capability, and data on the tourism industry. In addition, the Travel and Tourism business unit would manage the TPC and TTAB and represent DOC and ITA in interagency and international forums related to international travel to and within the United States.⁶⁶ However, ITA’s FY2025 budget request did not include material related to the new business unit and stated that budget reductions in FY2024 and potential reductions in FY2025 “may slow progress in ... elevating the NTTO under an Assistant Secretary.”⁶⁷ ITA’s FY2026 budget justification also did not mention any reorganization, noting that ITA’s travel and tourism activities are conducted by the Industry and Analysis business unit.⁶⁸

The Trump Administration’s FY2026 budget request included \$84.4 million for ITA’s Industry and Analysis business unit but did not specify how much was specifically to be used for NTTO or other work related to travel and tourism.⁶⁹

Brand USA

Congress first created an entity to promote tourism to the United States in the International Travel Act of 1961 (P.L. 87-63), which authorized the U.S. Travel Service (USTS). Congress increased appropriations to USTS until 1977 but eliminated federal funding for tourism advertising in 1996, when it dissolved the U.S. Travel and Tourism Administration, USTS’s successor.⁷⁰ However, during and after the Great Recession, Congress revived its interest in an entity that would promote tourism to the United States. The 111th Congress authorized the Corporation for Travel Promotion, a nonprofit, public-private entity, in the Travel Promotion Act of 2009 (TPA).⁷¹

The Corporation for Travel Promotion, which does business as Brand USA, markets international tourism to the United States by distributing information on U.S. entry policies and promoting leisure, business, and scholarly travel to and within the United States. Brand USA has an 11-member board of directors, who are selected by the Secretary of Commerce in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Secretary of State.⁷² Brand USA must also establish annual objectives each fiscal year, which are subject to the Secretary of Commerce’s approval, and must submit an annual report to the Secretary of Commerce (who forwards the report to Congress).⁷³ Brand USA’s FY2027 objectives, for example, include generating at least \$524

⁶⁵ ITA, *International Trade Administration, Budget Estimates, Fiscal Year 2024*, p. ITA-105, <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/ITA-FY2024-Congressional-Budget-Submission.pdf>. (ITA, *Budget Estimates 2024*.)

⁶⁶ ITA, *Budget Estimates 2024*, p. ITA-106.

⁶⁷ ITA, *Budget Estimates, Fiscal Year 2025*, pp. APPR-14, <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/ITA-FY2025-Congressional-Budget-Submission.pdf>.

⁶⁸ ITA, *Budget Estimates, Fiscal Year 2026*, pp. ITA-12, <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/ITA-FY2026-Congressional-Budget-Submission.pdf>. (ITA, *Budget Estimates 2026*.)

⁶⁹ ITA, *Budget Estimates 2026*, p. ITA-8.

⁷⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, *Travel Promotion Act of 2009*, Report of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on S. 1023, 111th Cong., 1st sess., June 5, 2009, S.Rept. 111-25 (Washington: GPO, 2009), p. 3.

⁷¹ Sec. 9 of the United States Capitol Police Administrative Technical Corrections Act of 2009, P.L. 111-145.

⁷² 124 Stat. 56.

⁷³ 124 Stat. 62.

million in new federal tax receipts from U.S. international tourism and creating \$3.3 billion in U.S. travel and tourism export revenues.⁷⁴

Funding

Brand USA has two funding streams. First, it is funded by nonfederal sources, including state tourism offices and private travel brands. These nonfederal contributions provide half of Brand USA's funding through annual cash contributions of at least 30% of the organization's budget as well as in-kind contributions such as advertising, tickets, and donated products.⁷⁵

Second, the federal government matches those cash and in-kind contributions with an annual grant capped at no more than \$20 million. This money comes from the Travel Promotion Fund, an account within the Department of the Treasury that was established in TPA.⁷⁶ As noted in "Recent Developments Related to Tourism," prior to July 2025, the grant was capped at \$100 million annually, but P.L. 119-21, the FY2025 reconciliation act, lowered the cap to \$20 million.⁷⁷ The money is generated from a fee charged for use of the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), which is required of international travelers who visit the United States for short business or leisure stays from countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). Each traveler from a VWP country who uses ESTA is charged an approximately \$40 fee. Of that, \$17 is available to fund travel promotion through Brand USA. (TPA authorized \$10 of each ESTA fee to be available to Brand USA, but the Brand USA Extension Act increased the amount to \$17.)⁷⁸

Legislation and Debates

TPA authorized the collection of fees for Brand USA through ESTA through FY2014.⁷⁹ The Travel Promotion, Enhancement, and Modernization Act of 2014 (Division B, Title VI of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 [P.L. 113-235]) reauthorized TPA through FY2020.⁸⁰

The Trump Administration's FY2018 budget proposed eliminating the federal government's annual grant to Brand USA and instead allocating the funding toward homeland security.⁸¹ Congress ultimately did not take up the proposal, and instead reauthorized TPA and Brand USA again, this time through FY2027, in the Brand USA Extension Act.

As the pandemic reduced international tourism to the United States, certain segments of the tourism industry advocated for increased federal support of Brand USA to help boost depressed travel figures.⁸² The 117th Congress passed the Restoring Brand USA Act as part of the FY2022

⁷⁴ Brand USA, *FY27 Business Plan*, p. 20, <https://www.thebrandusa.com/about/governing-documents/fy27-business-plan/>.

⁷⁵ Brand USA, *Restoring Brand USA Act Funding Plan*, May 2022, p. 6, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1akRexLZre2u4cD_8GYye0QwoDmq0-EWI/view.

⁷⁶ 124 Stat. 61.

⁷⁷ 139 Stat. 136.

⁷⁸ 133 Stat. 3029. The Brand USA Extension Act is Division I, Title VIII of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94).

⁷⁹ 124 Stat. 65.

⁸⁰ 128 Stat. 2219.

⁸¹ Executive Office of the President, *Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2018*, May 23, 2017, p. 35, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2018-BUD/pdf/BUDGET-2018-BUD.pdf>.

⁸² For example, see U.S. Travel, "U.S. Travel Applauds Brand USA Bill Committee Passage," press release, November 17, 2021, <https://www.ustravel.org/press/us-travel-applauds-brand-usa-bill-committee-passage>.

consolidated appropriations law.⁸³ The law provided access to \$250 million in one-time funding to Brand USA using funds from ESTA fees between 2010 and 2020 that exceeded the then-maximum \$100 million available to Brand USA annually.⁸⁴

The 119th Congress displayed interest in Brand USA. As noted, P.L. 119-21 lowered the annual cap on federal matching funds for Brand USA from \$100 million to \$20 million. Subsequently, the VISIT USA Act (H.R. 6128 and S. 3220) would transfer \$160 million in unobligated balances from ESTA fees directly to Brand USA, while the Brand USA Restoration Act (H.R. 6202) would transfer \$80 million from the general fund to the Travel Promotion Fund for use in FY2026.

Despite multiple reauthorizations, Brand USA has not been without critics. Shortly before Congress passed TPA in March 2010, then-Senator Jim DeMint described Brand USA as unnecessarily subsidizing advertising for a private industry.⁸⁵ Some outside groups have also made similar points.⁸⁶ In 2012, six Senators signed a letter to then-Secretary of Commerce John Bryson questioning certain of Brand USA's spending practices.⁸⁷ Conversely, some Members of Congress have argued that Brand USA has been effective at increasing international tourism to the United States.⁸⁸ Some Members of the 119th Congress, including sponsors of the VISIT USA Act and Brand USA Restoration Act, cited concerns about potential impacts of reduced Brand USA funding on tourism to the 2026 World Cup (cohosted by the United States) and 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.⁸⁹

Issues for Congress

U.S. Tourism Outlook

As noted, the number of international arrivals to the United States in 2025 declined from 2024 numbers, making the United States one of two countries among the 10 countries with the most international arrivals in 2025 to have a decline in international arrivals from 2024 (see “Domestic and International Visitor Levels”). In addition, U.S. domestic airline passengers fell in 2025 from 2024.

These developments have had economic impacts. As shown in **Figure 5**, U.S. tourism exports (goods and services purchased by international visitors to the United States) fell from \$248.9

⁸³ The Restoring Brand USA Act is Division FF of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103).

⁸⁴ 136 Stat. 1111-1112.

⁸⁵ Jim DeMint, “Travel Promotion Bill Is Not What U.S. Needs,” *Washington Post*, September 7, 2009.

⁸⁶ Luke Gelber, “Brand USA: A Gravy Train Keeps Rolling,” Citizens Against Government Waste, July 15, 2013, <https://www.cagw.org/thewastewatcher/brand-usa-gravy-train-keeps-rolling>.

⁸⁷ Chuck Grassley, “Grassley, Colleagues Seek Answers on Spending, Other Practices of Government-Sponsored Travel Promotion Agency,” press release, June 15, 2012, <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-colleagues-seek-answers-spending-other-practices-government-sponsored>.

⁸⁸ Amy Klobuchar, “Klobuchar, Blunt Legislation to Revive Brand USA Passes Committee,” press release, September 21, 2021, <https://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2021/9/klobuchar-blunt-legislation-to-revive-brand-usa-passes-committee>.

⁸⁹ See U.S. Senator for Alaska Dan Sullivan, “Sullivan, Colleagues Introduce VISIT USA Act to Restore Brand USA Funding, Promote U.S. Tourism,” press release, November 20, 2025, <https://www.sullivan.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/sullivan-colleagues-introduce-visit-usa-act-to-restore-brand-usa-funding-promote-us-tourism/>; and United States Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, “Congressman Krishnamoorthi Introduces the Brand USA Restoration Act to Restore Funding for America’s International Tourism Marketing Program,” press release, November 20, 2025, <https://krishnamoorthi.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-krishnamoorthi-introduces-brand-usa-restoration-act-restore>.

billion in 2024 to \$248.8 billion in 2025, the first year-over-year decline since 2019. The World Travel and Tourism Council, a nonprofit organization that advocates for and researches global tourism, found that North America was the slowest-growing region for tourism globally in 2025, primarily due to the slowdown of international visitors to the United States. Travel and tourism's contribution to GDP in North America increased by 1.0% in 2025 from 2024, the lowest growth rate of the seven regions assessed.⁹⁰

It remains unclear when and to what degree U.S. tourism trends may shift from their current trajectory. In its May 2026 travel forecast, U.S. Travel predicted that international arrivals to the United States would not surpass 2019 levels until 2029.⁹¹ That would also remain below the National Travel and Tourism Strategy's goal of attracting 90 million annual international visitors by 2027.

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about U.S. tourism's slowdown.⁹² These concerns come as the United States cohosted the 2026 World Cup and is to host the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and the 2034 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. Some reports on World Cup tourism suggest mixed results. For example, one analysis found that total 2026 World Cup attendance was nearly twice as high as the previous record. However, arrivals from countries participating in the World Cup in June and July 2026 were 1.1% less than arrivals from those same countries in June and July 2025; arrivals from non-participating countries in June and July 2026 were 8.9% lower than in June and July 2025.⁹³ (In addition to the United States, these numbers included arrivals to cohosts Canada and Mexico.)

Congress may choose to try to boost U.S. tourism. Some bills in the 119th Congress seek to do so. For example, the American Music Tourism Act of 2025 (H.R. 617, which passed the House, and S. 195, which passed the Senate) would direct NTTO (in the House version) and the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism (in the Senate version) to promote tourism to U.S. locations known for music. Congress may also choose to evaluate 2026 tourism data before considering any potential actions.

Tourism-Related Leadership Positions and Funding

In the Visit America Act, the 117th Congress established a new Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism position within the Department of Commerce (Assistant Secretary; see "Department of Commerce"). A persistent critique of U.S. tourism policy is that it has been the only large nation without a federal agency or cabinet-level official responsible for tourism.⁹⁴ While not cabinet-level, the Assistant Secretary position represents the most senior U.S.

⁹⁰ World Travel and Tourism Council, "Travel & Tourism Sees Best Year Ever and Emerges as the World's Fastest Growing Sector, Outpacing the Global Economy in 2025," press release, April 14, 2026, <https://wtcc.org/news/travel-tourism-sees-best-year-ever-outpacing-the-global-economy-in-2025>.

⁹¹ U.S. Travel, *U.S. Travel Forecast*, May 7, 2026, <https://www.ustravel.org/research/travel-forecasts>. Accessed September 28, 2026.

⁹² For example, see Kyle Chouinard, "Tourism Slide Prompts Cortez Masto to Demand White House Response," *Las Vegas Sun*, January 14, 2026; and Joint Economic Committee Democrats, "New: U.S. Local Businesses and Communities Hit by Declining Tourism, Job Losses Under President Trump," press release, May 4, 2026, <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/democrats/2026/5/new-u-s-local-businesses-communities-hit-by-declining-tourism-job-losses-under-president-trump>.

⁹³ Tourism Economics, *World Cup Bump to Overseas Arrivals and Hotel Performance*, <https://www.tourismeconomics.com/research/world-cup-bump-to-overseas-arrivals-and-hotel-performance/>.

⁹⁴ For example, see U.S. Congress, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, *Visit America Act*, Report together with minority views to accompany H.R. 6965, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., September 28, 2022, H.Rept. 117-508, p. 5.

government official whose job revolves around tourism. The Assistant Secretary must be nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.⁹⁵

The Assistant Secretary position has not been filled to date. As noted, reports accompanying appropriations measures in the 119th Congress (H.R. 5342) and 118th Congress (P.L. 118-42) noted that the bills included funding for Visit America Act provisions and/or the Assistant Secretary position.⁹⁶ While the Biden Administration’s FY2024 budget request proposed reorganizing ITA and NTTO to support the Assistant Secretary, the Trump Administration’s FY2026 budget request did not mention the reorganization or Assistant Secretary. (See “Department of Commerce (DOC).”)

Separately, the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (TTAB) is a Federal Advisory Committee Act body that provides recommendations related to tourism to the Secretary of Commerce. (See “Department of Commerce (DOC).”) According to TTAB’s charter, the entity is required to meet at least twice a year. However, as of September 2026, TTAB appears not to have met since October 2024.⁹⁷ In a September 2026 letter to the Secretary of Commerce, eight Senators urged TTAB to resume its regular meeting schedule.⁹⁸

Congress could address these issues. For example, Congress could include specific funding for the Assistant Secretary directly in appropriations acts, rather than in report language. Congress could also amend TTAB’s authorizing statute to establish a particular meeting schedule. Conversely, Congress could determine that the Assistant Secretary position may be unnecessary, and potentially amend the position’s statutory authority, or determine that TTAB’s meeting schedule is not within Congress’s purview.

Brand USA Funding

In the 116th Congress, the Brand USA Extension Act (Division I, Title VIII of P.L. 116-94, the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020) extended Brand USA’s funding structure, including its access to the Travel Promotion Fund, through FY2027.⁹⁹ As noted, Brand USA was the subject of legislative activity in the 119th Congress, including reducing the cap on Brand USA’s annual federal funds from \$100 million to \$20 million; subsequent proposals would restore or increase funding. (See “Brand USA.”)

Given the upcoming expiration of Brand USA’s current funding structure, Congress faces a choice on whether to extend that structure, let it lapse, or amend it to a different form. In addition to the 119th Congress, recent Congresses have acted relative to Brand USA’s finances. In the 117th Congress, the Restoring Brand USA Act provided Brand USA with one-time access to \$250 million. (See “Legislation and Debates.”) However, that money appears to be running out: Brand USA’s proposed budget for FY2027 was \$165 million, a decrease from \$252 million in

⁹⁵ ITA, *Budget Estimates 2024*, p. ITA-109.

⁹⁶ U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024—Committee Print of the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives on H.R. 4366/P.L. 118-42, committee print, 118th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: GPO, 2024), p. 393.

⁹⁷ General Services Administration, *Doc 25137—United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board*, <https://www.facadatabase.gov/FACA/s/FACACCommittee/a10t0000001gzmvAAA/com000220>. Accessed September 28, 2026.

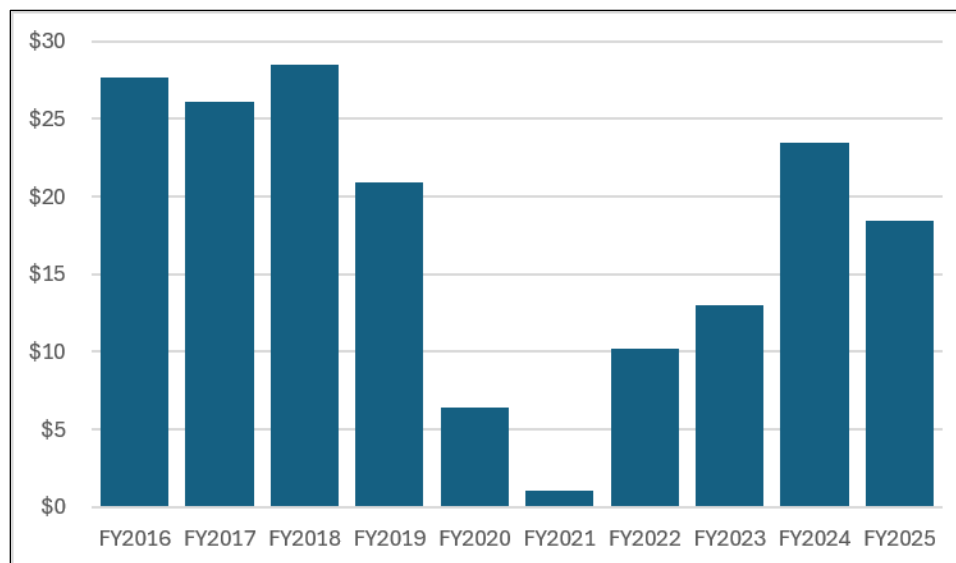
⁹⁸ Senator Ruben Gallego, “Gallego, Colleagues Urge Trump Administration to Reconvene Essential Travel and Tourism Board,” press release, September 16, 2026, <https://www.gallego.senate.gov/news/press-releases/gallego-colleagues-urge-trump-administration-to-reconvene-essential-travel-and-tourism-board/>.

⁹⁹ 133 Stat. 3029.

FY2025.¹⁰⁰ Some Members of Congress have argued that it is unnecessary for the federal government to provide funding to assist the travel industry.¹⁰¹ Others counter that Brand USA provides economic benefits.¹⁰²

In assessing Brand USA funding, Congress may consider Brand USA's effectiveness at attracting international visitors. Brand USA annually commissions a private firm to determine Brand USA's return on investment (ROI) per total dollar spent. Brand USA's annual ROI per dollar spent is shown in **Figure 6**.

Figure 6. Brand USA Return on Investment Per Dollar Spent, FY2016-FY2025



Source: Tourism Economics, *The Return on Investment of Brand USA Marketing, Fiscal Year 2025*, March 2026, [https://thebrandusa-corporate-prod.storage.googleapis.com/s3fs-public//2026-04/Brand%20USA%20ROI%20\(FY2025\)%20TE-Oxford%203-6-2025.pdf](https://thebrandusa-corporate-prod.storage.googleapis.com/s3fs-public//2026-04/Brand%20USA%20ROI%20(FY2025)%20TE-Oxford%203-6-2025.pdf).

Brand USA's ROI increased after the pandemic through FY2024, but declined in FY2025, potentially reflecting larger slowdowns in tourism at that time. (Brand USA's ROI has been positive each year since at least FY2016.) The Brand USA ROI study was conducted by consultants commissioned by Brand USA.

In prior years, some—including supporters of Brand USA—have questioned the accuracy of the ROI figures.¹⁰³ It can also be difficult to isolate the effects of tourism promotion on international travel, as tourism can be influenced by many factors, including the global economy, current events, and current exchange rates. Further, some pre-pandemic studies have found that Brand

¹⁰⁰ Brand USA, *FY27 Business Plan*, p. 22, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X_15Ph3NeA4vNikthrt68vilnDx5usca/view; and Robert Silk, "The Travel Industry Fights for Brand USA—and Its Survival," *Travel Weekly*, May 30, 2026, <https://www.travelweekly.com/Travel-News/Government/Brand-USA-fights-for-restored-funding-and-its-own-survival>.

¹⁰¹ For example, see Patrick Coffee, "Congress Asks Itself: Should the Government Help Market America to Tourists?," *Wall Street Journal*, October 17, 2025.

¹⁰² For example, see Senator Catherine Cortez Masto, "Cortez Masto Joins Bipartisan Visit USA Act to Restore Brand USA Funding, Promote U.S. Tourism," press release, January 8, 2026, <https://www.cortezmasto.senate.gov/news/press-releases/cortez-masto-joins-bipartisan-visit-usa-act-to-restore-brand-usa-funding-promote-u-s-tourism/>.

¹⁰³ Dennis Schaal, *Brand USA's 47-to-1 Return on Investment Claim Attracts Doubts Even Among Supporters*, Skift, April 1, 2014, <https://skift.com/2014/04/01/brand-usas-47-to-1-return-on-investment-claim-attracts-doubts-even-among-supporters/>.

USA's marketing efforts have little impact on international visitors to the United States.¹⁰⁴ Considering these factors, Congress may be interested in authorizing an updated, third-party evaluation of Brand USA.

Concluding Observations

Congress has indicated an interest in tourism to and within the United States for decades. Events in recent years, including tourism's dramatic decline following the COVID-19 pandemic, its recovery in the ensuing years, and reversal—at least on some measures—in 2025 and into 2026, mean that the U.S. tourism industry may continue to be an area of congressional interest for the foreseeable future.

¹⁰⁴ Staci M. Zavattaro and Daniel L. Fay, "Brand USA: A Natural Quasi-Experiment Evaluating the Success of a National Marketing Campaign," *Tourism Management*, vol. 70 (February 2019), pp. 42-48.

Appendix A. Impact of and Reaction to COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected tourism throughout the world, including in the United States.¹⁰⁵ To cite one example, the tourism industry fell from accounting for nearly 3% of U.S. GDP in 2019 to accounting for about 2.2% of U.S. GDP in 2020 (see **Table A-2**).

Like other countries, the United States took steps to reduce the number of incoming international visitors in an attempt to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus (each of which has since been canceled). For example

- in January 2020, a presidential proclamation suspended entry into the United States for most visa holders traveling from China;¹⁰⁶
- in March 2020, a presidential proclamation suspended entry into the United States of all foreign nationals traveling from certain European countries;¹⁰⁷
- in May 2020, a presidential proclamation suspended entry into the United States of non-U.S. citizens from Brazil;¹⁰⁸
- in December 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced the requirement of a negative COVID-19 test or documentation of recovery from COVID-19 for all air passengers to the United States from the United Kingdom;¹⁰⁹
- in January 2021, the CDC expanded the requirement of a negative COVID-19 test or documentation of recovery from COVID-19 to all air passengers to the United States from any foreign country;¹¹⁰ and
- in May 2021, a presidential proclamation suspended entry into the United States of non-U.S. citizens from India.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ For example, see Adam Behsudi, *Wish You Were Here*, International Monetary Fund, December 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/12/impact-of-the-pandemic-on-tourism-behsudi>, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Rebuilding Tourism for the Future: COVID-19 Policy Responses and Recovery*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/rebuilding-tourism-for-the-future-covid-19-policy-responses-and-recovery-bced9859/>.

¹⁰⁶ Executive Office of the President, “Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus and Other Appropriate Measures to Address This Risk,” 85 *Federal Register* 6709-6712, February 5, 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Executive Office of the President, “Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus,” 85 *Federal Register* 15045-15048, March 16, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Executive Office of the President, “Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus,” 85 *Federal Register* 31933-31936, May 28, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “CDC to Require Negative COVID-19 Test for Air Travelers from the United Kingdom to the U.S.,” press release, December 24, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s1224-CDC-to-require-negative-test.html>.

¹¹⁰ CDC, “CDC Expands Negative COVID-19 Test Requirement to All Air Passengers Entering the United States,” press release, January 12, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0112-negative-covid-19-air-passengers.html>.

¹¹¹ Executive Office of the President, “Suspension of Entry as Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus Disease 2019,” 86 *Federal Register* 24297-24300, May 6, 2021.

Legislation and Plans Related to the Pandemic and Tourism

Congress acted to support certain segments of the tourism industry and related sectors. In the 116th Congress, the Coronavirus Economic Stabilization Act of 2020 (Title IV, Division A of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security [CARES] Act, P.L. 116-136) authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to make loans, loan guarantees, and other investments to air carriers. That financial assistance was capped at \$25 billion for loans and loan guarantees to passenger air carriers, ticket agents, and aircraft repair businesses, and \$4 billion for loans and loan guarantees to cargo air carriers.¹¹² In the 117th Congress, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA, P.L. 117-2) also included support for the tourism industry. The law appropriated \$8 billion to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to provide grants to airports to help with operations costs and debt service.¹¹³ ARPA also appropriated \$3 billion to the U.S. Economic Development Administration to help state and local governments respond to economic injury as a result of the pandemic.¹¹⁴ Of that amount, \$750 million was reserved for states and local communities that were specifically affected by job and GDP losses in the travel, tourism, or outdoor recreation industries.¹¹⁵

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, P.L. 117-58) also appropriated funding for airport improvement projects. This included \$15 billion to FAA for grants for airport infrastructure projects that increase safety and expand capacity.¹¹⁶ IIJA also appropriated \$5 billion to FAA for competitive grants for airport terminals, including replacing aging terminals and airport-owned control towers.¹¹⁷

National Travel and Tourism Plans

Congress authorized the creation of national-level plans to address issues regarding the transportation and business aspects of tourism to guide the tourism industry's recovery following the pandemic. Those included plans from DOT and DOC.

Department of Transportation (DOT)—National Travel and Tourism Infrastructure Strategic Plan

In the 114th Congress, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (P.L. 114-94) required the Secretary of Transportation to develop and publish a national travel and tourism infrastructure strategic plan within three years of the law's enactment.¹¹⁸ Among other things, the plan was to include an assessment of the condition and performance of the national transportation network; an assessment of the issues on the national transportation network that create congestion and barriers to long-haul passenger travel and tourism; and forecasts of long-haul passenger travel and tourism over 20 years.

¹¹² 134 Stat. 470.

¹¹³ 135 Stat. 96.

¹¹⁴ 135 Stat. 93. Also see CRS Insight IN11712, *The Economic Development Administration's American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Grant Programs*, by Julie M. Lawhorn.

¹¹⁵ 135 Stat. 93.

¹¹⁶ 134 Stat. 1416.

¹¹⁷ 135 Stat. 1418.

¹¹⁸ 125 Stat. 1428.

The plan's release exceeded the initial timeline set forth in P.L. 114-94 and it was ultimately published in January 2021.¹¹⁹ Although the plan took some of the pandemic's effects into account, much of its substance was developed before the pandemic. Congress amended the FAST Act in IIJA to require the Secretary of Transportation to update the plan within 180 days of IIJA's enactment.¹²⁰ The updated plan was required to include immediate- and long-term strategies across all modes of transportation for DOT and other agencies to use infrastructure investments to revive the tourism industry following the pandemic.¹²¹ IIJA also authorized the creation of a Chief Travel and Tourism Officer within the Office of the Secretary of Transportation.¹²² The new position has responsibility for carrying out the updated plan (along with DOT's Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs) and for other travel and tourism-related issues related to DOT. The position was filled in 2023,¹²³ although it is unclear if it is filled at the time of this report.

Department of Commerce (DOC)—National Travel and Tourism Strategy

The Visit America Act (Subtitle A, Title VI, Division BB of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, P.L. 117-328) required the Secretary of Commerce, at least every 10 years and in consultation with the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board and the interagency Tourism Policy Council (TPC, both described in more detail in "Department of Commerce (DOC)"), to develop and submit to Congress a 10-year travel and tourism strategy. The Visit America Act requires the strategy to establish goals for the number of annual international visitors to the United States and the annual amount of travel and tourism commerce in the United States.¹²⁴

Separate from the requirements of the Visit America Act, the Secretary of Commerce—on behalf of the TPC—published the National Travel and Tourism Strategy (hereinafter "Strategy") in June 2022.¹²⁵ The Strategy set a goal of attracting 90 million international visitors annually to the United States by 2027—up from the 68.3 million international visitors who came to the United States in 2025—estimating that those visitors would spend \$279 billion each year.¹²⁶ The Strategy is comprised of four "pillars" to help achieve those goals:

- Promoting the United States as a travel destination by leveraging existing programs and assets to promote U.S. tourism to international visitors and broaden marketing efforts towards underserved communities.
- Facilitating travel to and within the United States by reducing barriers to trade in travel services to make it easier for visitors to enter and travel around the United States.

¹¹⁹ Department of Transportation (DOT), *National Travel and Tourism Infrastructure Strategic Plan for FY 2020-2024*, January 2021, <https://www.transportation.gov/policy-initiatives/NTTISP>.

¹²⁰ 135 Stat. 874-875.

¹²¹ As of the date of this report, the updated plan has not been published.

¹²² 135 Stat. 875.

¹²³ DOT, *Oversight and Implementation of Travel and Tourism Legislation*, June 13, 2023, <https://www.transportation.gov/oversight-and-implementation-travel-and-tourism-legislation>.

¹²⁴ 136 Stat. 5569.

¹²⁵ Department of Commerce (DOC), *National Travel and Tourism Strategy 2022*, June 6, 2022, <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/National-Travel-Tourism-Strategy.pdf>. (DOC, *Strategy*.)

¹²⁶ DOC, *Strategy*, p. 3.

- Ensuring diverse, inclusive, and accessible tourism experiences by supporting the development of diverse tourism products, with a focus on underserved communities and populations.
- Fostering resilient and sustainable travel and tourism by reducing tourism's contributions to climate change and building the tourism industry's resilience to natural disasters and public health threats.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ DOC, *Strategy*, pp. 5-6.

Appendix B. Further Data

Some data related to U.S. tourism, while useful, are not currently available beyond 2023. This includes certain data on tourism-related employment and economic activity.

Travel and Tourism Employment Trends

In 2023 there were 6.5 million people directly employed in tourism and 10.0 million indirectly employed in tourism. This exceeded the pre-pandemic high in 2019, when there were 6.4 million people directly employed in tourism and 9.6 million indirectly employed in tourism.¹²⁸

Figure A-1 presents direct and indirect tourism employment.

Figure A-1. Direct and Total Tourism Employment, 2014-2023

Numbers in thousands



Source: ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 7, “Employment by Industry, 2023,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>.

Many tourism-related jobs are in relatively low-wage sectors.¹²⁹ For example, in 2023, food services and drinking places was the sector with the largest tourism employment; average annual compensation per tourism employee for that sector was \$35,941.¹³⁰ Traveler accommodations, the sector with the second largest number of direct tourism employees, had an average annual compensation per tourism employee of \$54,223 in 2023.

¹²⁸ ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 7, “Employment by Industry, 2023,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>. Direct tourism employees are engaged in the production of direct tourism output (for example, hotel workers and airline staff), while indirect tourism employees are engaged in the production of indirect tourism output (for example, workers producing hotel toiletries).

¹²⁹ For example, see Tarik Dogru, Sean McGinley, Nathan Line et al., “Employee Earnings Growth in the Leisure and Hospitality Industry,” *Tourism Management*, vol. 74 (October 2019).

¹³⁰ ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 6, “Employment and Compensation of Employees by Industry, 2021,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>.

Table A-1 presents the five tourism-related industry sectors with the largest number of direct tourism employees in 2023 and the average annual compensation for employees in those sectors.

Table A-1. Employment and Compensation in Tourism-Related Industry Sectors, 2023

Industry Sector	Direct Tourism Employment	Annual Average Compensation Per Employee
Food services and drinking places	2,064,000	\$35,941
Traveler accommodations	1,441,000	\$54,223
Air transportation services	619,000	\$124,359
Retail trade services (excluding gasoline service stations)	415,000	\$52,224
Travel arrangements and reservation services	327,000	\$70,489

Source: ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 6, “Employment and Compensation of Employees by Industry, 2023,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>; and ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 7, “Employment by Industry, 2023,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>.

Tourism-Related Economic Activity

DOC’s International Trade Administration (ITA) maintains the travel and tourism satellite accounts, a dataset containing a range of statistics related to U.S. tourism.¹³¹ (BEA used to keep these statistics along with ITA, but as of February 2026 no longer does so.¹³²) Among the metrics collected is travel and tourism value added. Value added measures the size of various industries, including employee compensation and taxes as well as profit. An industry’s value added can be considered its contribution to the GDP.¹³³

Travel and tourism value added accounted for 3.0% of total U.S. GDP in 2023, the most recent year for which data are available.¹³⁴ This represented an increase from 2020, when travel and tourism value added accounted for 2.2% of total U.S. GDP, and matched the pre-pandemic figure in 2019.

Table A-2 presents travel and tourism value added as a share of U.S. GDP.

¹³¹ ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>.

¹³² BEA, *Travel and Tourism*, <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/travel-and-tourism>.

¹³³ BEA, “What Is Gross Output by Industry and How Does It Differ from Gross Domestic Product (or Value Added) by Industry?” <https://www.bea.gov/help/faq/1197>.

¹³⁴ Hunter Arcand and Sarah Osborne, *U.S. Travel and Tourism Satellite Account for 2018-2023*, BEA, February 6, 2025, <https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2025/02-february/0225-travel-tourism-satellite-account.htm>.

Table A-2. Travel and Tourism Value Added, 2019-2023

Dollars in billions

Year	Travel and Tourism Value Added	Travel and Tourism Value Added as Share of U.S. GDP
2019	\$655	3.0%
2020	\$463	2.2%
2021	\$653	2.8%
2022	\$771	3.0%
2023	\$840	3.0%

Source: Hunter Arcand and Sarah Osborne, *U.S. Travel and Tourism Satellite Account for 2018-2023*, BEA, February 6, 2025, <https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2025/02-february/0225-travel-tourism-satellite-account.htm>.

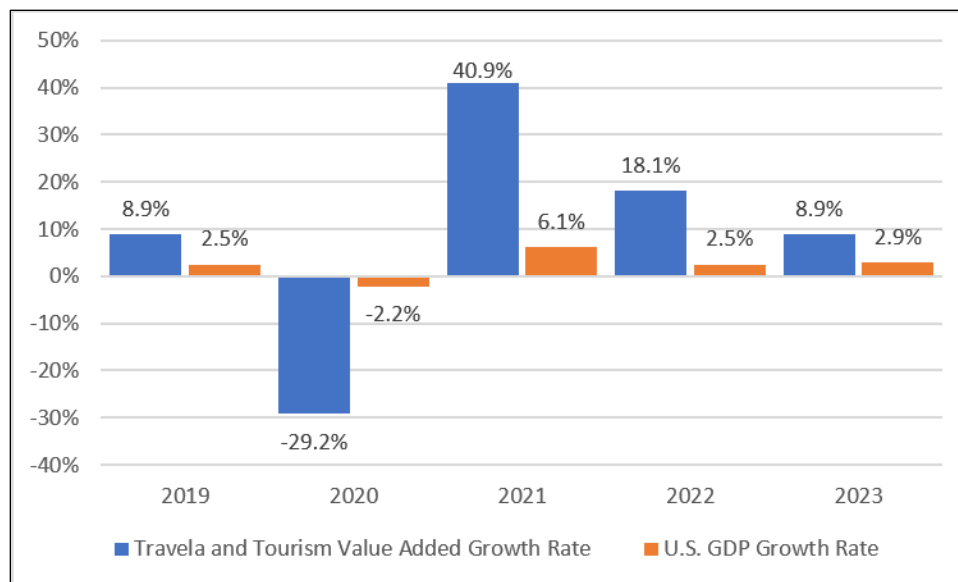
Growth in travel and tourism value added has often outpaced U.S. GDP growth. In 2023, the most recent year for which data are available, travel and tourism value added increased 8.9% from 2022, while U.S. GDP increased by 2.9%.¹³⁵ Some post-pandemic growth in travel and tourism value added may have resulted from pent-up demand for travel as the United States and countries eased pandemic restrictions on travel and as COVID-19 vaccines became widely available.¹³⁶ As more recent data become available, observers may want to note how travel and tourism value added growth compares to U.S. GDP growth as the effects of the pandemic continue to recede and other developments may have more impact on travel trends.

Figure A-2 presents the travel and tourism value added growth rate and U.S. GDP growth rate.

¹³⁵ ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 4, “Output and Value Added by Industry, 2023,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>; and Lisa S. Mataloni and Stephanie H. McCulla, *The 2025 Annual Update of the National Economic Accounts*, BEA, November 19, 2025, <https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2025/11-november/1125-nea-annual-update.htm>.

¹³⁶ For example, see OECD, *OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2022*, August 12, 2022, p. 20, <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-20767773.htm>.

Figure A-2. U.S. Travel and Tourism Value Added Growth Rate and U.S. GDP Growth Rate, 2019-2023



Sources: ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 4, “Output and Value Added by Industry, 2023,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>; Lisa S. Mataloni and Stephanie H. McCulla, *The 2025 Annual Update of the National Economic Accounts*, BEA, November 19, 2025, <https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2025/11-november/1125-nea-annual-update.htm>; and Lisa S. Mataloni and Stephanie H. McCulla, *The 2024 Annual Update of the National Economic Accounts*, October 31, 2024, <https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2024/10-october/1024-nea-annual-update.htm>.

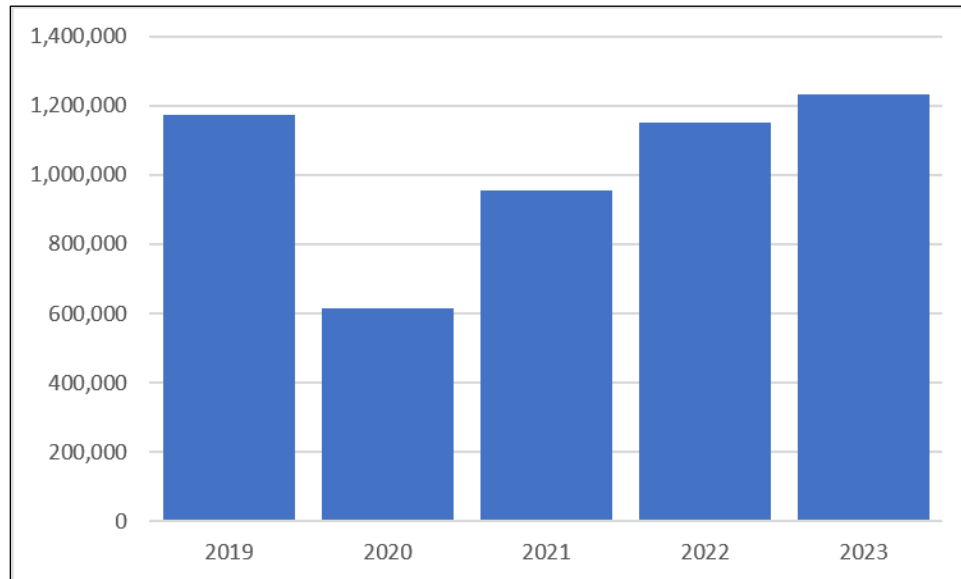
Output is another key metric for the tourism industry. Output represents total sales related to travel and tourism. In 2023, output exceeded 2019 numbers for the first time since 2020.¹³⁷

Figure A-3 shows travel and tourism output.

¹³⁷ ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 8, “Real Tourism Output, 2023,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>.

Figure A-3. U.S. Travel and Tourism Output, 2019-2023

Dollars in millions



Source: ITA, *Travel and Tourism Satellite Account (TTSA) Program*, Table 8, “Real Tourism Output, 2023,” <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-satellite-account-ttsa-program>.

Notes: Dollars are adjusted for inflation. Output represents total sales related to travel and tourism.

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