

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION®

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**The Honorable Deb Haaland**

Secretary of the Interior  
United States Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20240

**Mr. Chuck Sams, III**

Director  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

June 6, 2022

Dear Secretary Haaland and Director Sams,

On behalf of the global travel and hospitality industry, we write to ask you to address challenges with the visitor reservation systems in the national parks that threaten to stall the recovery of international inbound travel.

During the pandemic, several parks saw record-breaking visitation from domestic visitors, which, coupled with staffing and operational limitations, threatened both the conservation of parks lands and the visitor experience. This led several of our largest and most popular parks to implement reservation systems for visitors.

National parks are an undeniable attraction for international travelers, too. Overseas travelers made up more than a third (35%) of the 327 million visitors to national parks in 2019. The U.S. is one of the few places in the world that protects and conserves its natural resources, while also allowing visitation and recreation. For international travel to recover, foreign travelers and tour operators must be able to plan their trips in advance.

Inbound travel cannot fully resume until international travelers can reliably plan their visits to our national parks. While we understand the need to implement new procedures to protect both parks and visitors during the pandemic, the new reservation systems have created significant challenges for the travel industry.

Specifically, the short lead-in times and inconsistent procedures threaten to prolong the already-slow recovery of international inbound travel. Reservation systems with short booking windows and inconsistent procedures are not workable for international travelers and international tour operators, many of whom plan for their travel a full year in advance. As we emerge from the pandemic and inbound travel resumes, it is imperative that reservations be allowed 10 to 12 months in advance. It is also imperative that reservation systems be consistent across parks that implement them. We hope you will work with us to extend reservation lead-in times and create consistency in a way that encourages and enables the resumption of inbound travel.

This is crucial due to the slow recovery of the U.S. travel industry. Prior to the pandemic, the travel industry generated \$2.6 trillion in economic output, supported 16.7 million American jobs, and generated a \$53 billion trade surplus for the United States. While some parts of the travel industry are recovering, international inbound travel remained down 78% in 2021, and the combined loss in industry spending from 2020 and 2021 totaled \$755 billion. The return of international inbound travel is essential to the industry's economic recovery, as well as the recovery of the broader U.S. economy.

The travel industry is ready to partner with you to implement visitation procedures that work for all of the National Parks Service's interests while also facilitating the return of inbound visitors. We recognize that environmental and conservation protections are part of what makes a quality visitor experience at the national parks. We further recognize that parks vary widely in size, location and infrastructure, eliminating any opportunity for a one-size-fits-all visitation policy. We request the opportunity to collaborate and partner with NPS during the planning and development process when considering changes that will impact parks operations and visitation in the future.

We respectfully request your engagement on this issue and stand ready to collaborate with you to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Respectfully,

U.S. Travel Association