

The Explore America Act of 2018 (S. 2395)

Sponsored by Senators Schatz, Cassidy and Reed

Expanding Heritage Tourism. Heritage tourism is attracting and accommodating visitors to experience the historic, cultural, and natural places that authentically represent the history and people of our nation. Visitation to heritage assets benefits surrounding communities by creating jobs and spurring economic growth. The Explore America Act will enhance heritage tourism opportunities and help local communities play a greater role in the development and promotion of tourism to premiere American landscapes and cultural heritage sites in our National Parks system (NPS).

Local/Rural Community Empowerment. Gateway communities, including Native American communities and National Heritage Areas, must be empowered to share their local knowledge and unique stories with international visitors and domestic travelers. It is vital for local stakeholders to participate further in the economic infrastructure and capacity-building benefits of tourism. We must promote tourism opportunities more evenly to encourage visitation to more distinct NPS sites.

Supporting Economic Growth. The National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) seeks to attract 100 million visitors per year by 2021, but tourism in the U.S. has been decreasing. Recent data from NTTO shows a 3.3 percent drop in travel spending and a 4 percent decline in inbound travel last year. This led to 40,000 lost jobs and \$4.6 billion in lost revenue. The Explore America Act will help reverse this downward trend. The bill will strengthen economic development across the United States by supporting cultural heritage tourism and historic preservation activities, bringing new jobs and tourism revenue to some of the most rural and remote locations in our nation.

Federal-Private Collaboration. The Explore America Act supports the expansion of heritage tourism by amending the Preserve America Grant Program to attract more visitors, enhance existing programs, and increase collaboration between communities and the federal government.

Bill Summary

The Explore America Act will strengthen the Preserve America Grant Program, amending it as follows:

- **Provide technical assistance** – The bill directs the Departments of Commerce and Interior, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) to provide technical assistance in lieu of monetary funds.
- **Focus on economic growth** – It directs the Secretary of Commerce to coordinate with the Secretary of the Interior and the ACHP to evaluate how the program can increase job creation, boost economic growth, and promote tourism.
- **Increase accountability** – It establishes program metrics to measure effectiveness and report findings to Congress.
- **Prioritize community coordination** – The bill directs collaboration with gateway communities (communities adjacent to National Parks) by providing financial and technical assistance, tourism development and promotion, visitor management services, and access to federal resources.

Preserve America Grant Program Background. The Preserve America Program was established by Executive Order in 2003 to support state, tribal, and local governments' efforts to preserve and enhance heritage tourism. The grant component of the Preserve America Program is a matching partnership, jointly administered by the ACHP and the Department of the Interior that supports heritage tourism at the state and local levels.

Key Supporters. U.S. Travel Association, Destinations International, National Parks Conservation Association, Alliance of National Heritage Areas and the Southeast Tourism Society.