

# 2018 Southeast Tourism Society Travel & Tourism Policy Priorities

Travel and tourism is a powerful engine of economic growth for communities large and small across the Southeast and the nation. The U.S. Travel Association's *U.S. Travel & Tourism Overview* found that in 2017 domestic and international travelers spent \$1,036 billion in the United States.

This spending directly supported 8.8 million jobs, generating \$259 billion in payroll income and \$165 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenues. As powerful as these numbers are, tourism doesn't just happen – it requires smart strategy, strong research, and creative promotion.

Partnerships with key government agencies help tourism communities better tell their stories and deliver exceptional travel experiences. Southeast Tourism Society (STS) has set these policy priorities for 2018 to ensure travel and tourism reaches its full potential as an economic generator for local communities, states, and the nation.

## **Address the National Parks Deferred Maintenance Backlog**

Due to years of chronic underfunding, the National Park Service (NPS) has deferred maintenance for a year or more on visitor centers, rest stops, trails and campgrounds, as well as transportation infrastructure operated by NPS such as the Blue Ridge Parkway.

NPS maintains more than 75,000 assets across the country, including campgrounds, natural lands, historic trails, irrigation and electrical systems, as well as thousands of miles of roads. Of these, 41,000 (more than half) are in need of repairs. A solution is needed to provide dedicated annual funding to address national park deferred maintenance needs on a long-term basis and ensure NPS continues to preserve our nation's heritage and recreation opportunities. This funding will drive the visitation gateway communities depend on for their economic vitality.

✓ *Support the Restore Our Parks Act (S.3172)*

## **Support The Explore America Act**

The Explore America Act will empower gateway communities to leverage local cultural and heritage tourism assets, thus promoting visitation and a chance to better tell the stories of these communities. The Explore America Act authorizes the provision of technical assistance, under the Preserve America Program to direct the Secretary of the Interior to enter into partnerships with communities adjacent to units of the National Park System.

✓ *Co-sponsor the Explore America Act (S.2395/H.R. 5608)*

## **Correct the Discrepancies in International Visitation Data to Allow for Timely and Accurate Travel Reports**

Since the [I-94](#) (international arrivals data) was automated more than 3 years ago, a series of discrepancies have caused inaccuracies in the reports from the Department of Homeland Security. These discrepancies have hindered the ability of the Department of Commerce to provide quality and timely international visitation reports and to calculate the nation's balance of trade. As a result, Commerce has suspended its monthly and annual visitation reports. These visitation reports are essential for tourism communities as they plan for providing services and travel experiences to international travelers.

- ✓ *STS calls on Congress to direct the Department of Homeland Security to resolve international visitation data issues and providing ongoing quality control analysis of all its data.*

## **Boost International Travel to the U.S.: Maintain Brand USA**

Since 2011, Brand USA has served as the nation's destination marketing organization, providing an essential platform for promoting the wonders of travel to the United States.

Operating as a public-private partnership, to promote travel to America from around the world, Brand USA is funded through a combination of industry contributions and a \$14 fee on international travelers entering the U.S. from Visa Waiver countries (that are not subject to the much higher visa application fees). Brand USA is designed to complement the efforts of corporate tourism, to ensure communities large and small, rural and urban, are able to leverage the economic benefits of international tourism.

- ✓ *Support continuing the authorization and funding framework for Brand USA through Fiscal Year 2027*