

Beat: Travel

LAUNCHING OF THE 2016 U.S.-CHINA TOURISM YEAR AND REMARKS AT OPENING CEREMONY

BY U.S. DEPUTY SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

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An outcome of President Xi's 2015 visit, the U.S.-China Tourism Year aims to increase travel and tourism between the two countries by enhancing the traveler's experience, increasing the traveler's cultural understanding, and expanding the traveler's appreciation of natural landscapes in each other's countries.

Remarks from U.S. Deputy Secretary of Commerce Bruce Andrews :

Ni hao. Thank you, Chris Thompson, for your kind introduction. BrandUSA is one of our government's best industry partners, and I want to acknowledge their partnership "" along with Visa and United Airlines "" in making tonight such a special event.

Ambassador Baucus and his China Mission team at the embassy and consulates "" as well as our Commercial Service team "" also play an invaluable role in this initiative. Chairman Li, thank you for being here. This is an incredible opportunity for both countries.

I just came from a meeting with Vice Premier Wang Yang "" who warmly welcomed me and the U.S. delegation at Zhongnanhai to help launch the 2016 U.S.-China Tourism Year. I want to personally thank the Vice Premier for his commitment to expanding travel and tourism between our two nations. Secretary Pritzker regrets she couldn't be here herself, but she is looking forward to visiting Beijing next month.

On behalf of the United States Government, it is my honor to be here this evening in celebration of the largest services export for both the United States and China: travel and tourism. President Obama and President Xi recognize the potential for cooperation between our two countries. If there was ever an area of opportunity for mutual benefit, this is it.

When our leaders made the U.S.-China Tourism Year one of their key strategic and economic deliverables for 2016, they sent a clear message: expanding travel and tourism is critically important to both of our countries "" not just to foster people-to-people exchanges, but as a key pillar of economic development.

The United States remains deeply committed to strengthening our economic cooperation with China. The success of our bilateral commercial relationship is critical to global economic growth and stability. Our two markets are the largest on the planet. Together, we account for nearly 35 % of global GDP. And combined trade in goods and services adds up to about one-fifth of all international trade. As the agency responsible for strengthening America's economic ties around the world, the Department of Commerce leads the Obama Administration's efforts to increase our commercial engagement with China. To achieve this, we have placed a particular emphasis on expanding travel and tourism between our nations.

China is already the fastest growing market for inbound travelers to the United States. Yet despite our remarkable progress over the last decade, there is still far more to do to increase travel between the United States and China.

That is why our leaders made the historic announcement in late 2014 that we were extending the validity of most tourist and business

visas from 1 year to 10 years, and student visas from 1 year to 5 years. This agreement is a very big deal. By better facilitating travel between our two countries, the agreement fosters people-to-people interactions, building important relationships and greater trust.

Shortly after the visa validity extension was announced, the U.S. government hosted an event focused on travel and tourism during the 2014 Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade in Chicago “” the premiere forum for addressing bilateral trade and investment issues between our countries. Together, we discussed our important cooperative relationship in travel and tourism and how to maximize the opportunities created by the extension of visa validity and increased travel.

From the U.S. perspective, we intend to pay close attention to identifying and meeting the preferences of Chinese travelers. We want to ensure that their experience in America is enjoyable from the beginning to the end and that they return many more times.

As part of the Tourism Year, the United States government is working with our industry partners like BrandUSA to ensure that we are ready to welcome visitors from China. As this year progresses, I hope that we will continue to work together to develop new aviation policies and services that meet our needs for immediate and long-term growth. These efforts aim to make our country a more attractive destination for Chinese visitors.

We want to welcome you to the United States and share with you all that America has to offer. There are thousands of reasons to visit the United States. We offer countless, diverse experience across our country “” from small towns to big cities, from national parks to beaches.

In just one vacation to the United States, you could enjoy the sun and surf at Venice Beach before heading up the California coast to see the tallest trees in the world at Redwood National Park. If you’re a sports fan, you can catch a Yankees game and watch Jeremy Lin play for the Charlotte Hornets in one trip. In New York State alone, you can take in a Broadway show, ride a boat behind Niagara Falls, and try some of the best barbeque in the world at Dinosaur BBQ in my hometown of Syracuse.

Whether you plan to stay in a single destination or visit several states, the United States offers you incredible urban gems and rustic getaways “” as well as the uniquely American sense of openness. Americans have a proud tradition of warmly welcoming the world to share in our cultural traditions, natural resources, and architectural achievements. This is the American experience that BrandUSA and its partners are sharing with the world.

Yet even with all of our country’s assets, we do not take our visitors for granted. We are focused on continually improving the visitor experience. The U.S.-China Tourism Year is a tremendous opportunity for both of our countries to advance initiatives that create a higher quality visitor experience for travelers to and from both nations. But more than that, this is a chance to enhance our peoples’ understanding of each other’s culture and share what makes each of our countries unique.

The late, great American writer Henry Miller once said about travel: 'One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.' Truly, there is no better way to build friendship & understanding between our peoples, to see things from each other’s perspective, than to promote more travel between our nations.

United States & China already enjoy a uniquely close relationship in travel & tourism, & I am confident this Tourism Year will further strengthen the bonds between our two peoples. Tonight is a celebration of all we will achieve in the year ahead. I hope you have a wonderful time this evening, & I look forward to welcoming you all to the United States in the near future. Xie xie.

Ruby BIRD
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