

# AMERICAN TOURISM LIKELY TO SUFFER SINCE ESTA REQUIRES TO DISCLOSE TRAVELERS' PROFILES



International arrivals in the United States are on a downward slope, and not just because of COVID-19, as the trend was detected as early as December 2019. Today, and after the euphoric performances over the last 5 years, the American tourism sector fears the worst.

The reason for the decrease in tourism numbers is the requirement for travelers to disclose their profiles on social networks as a part of the ESTA. The Electronic System for Travel Authorization is an official document allowing all nationals of Visa Waiver Program member countries to travel to the USA.

\*\*\* facebook video \*\*\*

**Tourism in the United States has seen better days!** International visits decreased by 1.9% in the first three months of the year, according to preliminary data shared by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Travel and Tourism Office. The impact of Covid-19 was not significant in the first quarter. Market share is also declining, with the U.S. Travel Association trade group reporting a drop in global long-haul market share to 11.3% this year, down 2 points from 3 years ago. They forecast that this figure will fall to 10.9% by 2022, costing the United States \$180 billion.

To make matters worse, American tourism marketing arm, Brand USA, has still not been renewed. It is in this context that a proposal by the Department of Homeland Security to make the collection of profiles on social media a requirement of the ESTA is of concern to travel officials.

Tori Barnes, executive vice president of public affairs and policy at U.S. Travel, said the group is concerned that this could have a chilling effect on visitors from some of the major U.S. markets, including Europe: "We are concerned that this policy could discourage 'legitimate' travelers from visiting the United States ... at a time when we want to encourage more people to visit the country because we are seeing a slowdown in the growth of the international market."

Since December 2016, visa waiver applicants, are invited to include their social media account on a voluntary basis, in an optional field on the ESTA form. This year, this field became mandatory. That said, it is possible to declare that you do not have social media accounts if you do not wish to disclose them. However, there is a chance that your ESTA request will be denied.

In this regard, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) states that it will "continue to rule on forms that do not contain social network information, but failure to provide the requested data may either delay or make it impossible for CBP to determine a person's eligibility for the benefit requested".

Tourism is a highly volatile sector. Trade tensions, a slowdown in the world economy, acts of terrorism... are all factors that can put a damper on tourist activity. In the United States, there is talk of "uncertainty surrounding the Trump administration". While some critics have explicitly stated

that the Trump administration's anti-immigrant and "America first" policies are deterring visitors, Barnes said that there is currently no data to inform travelers' perceptions of the new social media policy. "We're looking at whether it has an effect ... from a data perspective," Barnes said. "But we don't have any data to indicate that it is having a negative effect," she said.

**However, there are many privacy concerns with this policy.** Raya Koreh, the co-author of the Brennan Center's report, regrets that the obsession with collecting private data has continued from Obama to Trump. Mrs. Koreh explains that a 2016 privacy impact assessment released by the Department of Homeland Security indicates that information collected by social media from visa waiver applicants will not only be used to review people's posts on social networks ... but also the activity of people they have interacted with or followed.

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<https://www.tourism-review.com/american-tourism-authorities-require-social-media-profiles-news11605>