



Submission to the
Standing Committee on
Citizenship and Immigration

Temporary Resident Visas for Visitors

Canadian Chamber of Commerce

December 18, 2013

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is pleased to provide its comments on temporary resident visas for visitors.

Although many of our members are keenly concerned about the policies and processing of visas, we are going to illustrate the issue from the vantage point of the most travel-intensive sector of all: tourism and hospitality. For Canada's tourism industry, visitor visas and the complicated application process are significant barriers to success.

The tourism sector is intensely competitive and Canada is not successfully competing. A decade ago, Canada was one of the top 5 international tourist destinations, and now we find ourselves in danger of forfeiting our spot in the top 20.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce released a discussion paper this past July, [Restoring Canadian Tourism: Discussion Paper \(Updated: July 2013\)](#), which scrutinized the state of Canada's tourism industry. Our perspective is that Canada's decline is not because it has suddenly become less beautiful, rather, Canada has failed to respond to changing realities within the tourism sector.

To ensure Canada capitalizes on the strong growth from countries like Brazil, China, India and Mexico, the government must upgrade our visa application process to increase its capacity and reduce its complexity and inconvenience for potential visitors.

While there has been progress on this front, including the announcement in the 2013 federal budget of \$42 million over the next two years to increase visa capacity, Canada is still not competitive.

It is not clear whether these funds have been used to fill in previous spending reductions or to "plug holes" that required addressing during the strike by foreign service officers this year. In testimony to the committee, an official from Citizenship and Immigration Canada said the funding will "help alleviate some of this pressure (from the increased intake of applications between 2002 and 2012)" and has "allowed CIC to deploy additional resources overseas in a strategic manner to respond to new opportunities, including the timely processing of temporary resident visas" (underlining added). The remarks suggest the funding may have a limited impact toward properly and fully tackling the visa capacity and processing challenges.

Genuine speed and service enhancement of the visa application process is a critical piece of Canada's tourism strategy. If the government is unable to realize those goals with the current resources, then we urge the Committee to recommend the government explore a different financial architecture for the visa system.

Specifically, the Canadian Chamber recommends the government should reinvest some of the \$400 million it collects annually from visa administration fees and reinvest a portion in Canada's visa processing capacity.

Additionally, we note some of the recommendations of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), which include:

- waiving visa requirements for Mexico and Brazil
- allowing visa transferability from expired passports to new passports in order to maximize the use of 10-year multi-entry visas
- introducing paperless visas through an electronic travel authorization program, and
- optimize existing security infrastructure, including the potential of a Canada-U.S. reciprocal visa program and a transit without visa program or pilot with Canada's major hub airports.

The introduction of reciprocal visa arrangements with the U.S. is "crucial given the number of long haul travellers to North America and the potential for a Canadian portion of a U.S. focused trip," according to TIAC.

The U.S. has a significant competitive advantage over Canada: the ability for travellers to the U.S. to transfer the remaining visa validity period from an old, expired passport to a new one. While Canada has introduced a 10-year visa, it still requires travellers to reapply for a new visa if they get a new passport while the 10-year visa is still valid.

Security and system integrity are high on the agenda of countries such as the U.S. and yet they have found ways to stay competitive with their approach to visa requirements and processing.

The Canadian Chamber urges the government to take into account the competitive impact on Canada's tourism sector when making visa policy and processing changes. All kinds of sectors in Canada also have an urgent need for improvement in the processing of visitor visas, including consulting, architecture, engineering, law, sales, among others.