

US travel sector remains...

PAGE A4 ◀

with the passage of the Travel Promotion Act (TPA). Once it is passed into law this year, it's designed to stimulate public-private partnerships that would promote travel to the US throughout the world.

For the first time in many years, travel executives had an audience with US President Barack Obama in the White House. Obama, said Dow, was very receptive since he understood tourism's importance as a much-needed stimulus to jumpstart the ailing US economy.

"Long-haul overseas market is critical," he added. "It's the darling of everyone's economy because people stay longer and spend more."

Last year, overseas visitors spent \$142 billion in the US. Long-haul travelers spend on average \$4,500 per visit (including air fare and hotel accommodations) versus \$1,000 for North American travelers.

Shopping habits
In a related survey commissioned by Taubman Centers and Shop America Alliance regarding shopping habits of 1,760 tourists coming from America's top five markets, 30 percent of respondents said shopping was a factor in their choice of a US destination.

Surprisingly, Mexicans emerged as the biggest shoppers, spending an average of \$1,310 on shopping out of \$3,249 spent on the entire trip. The Japanese were a close second: \$1,200 on shopping out of \$4,722 for the total trip.

Which was why Dow welcomed with open arms last year's expansion of America's Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to include such countries as South Korea, Hungary, Czech Republic and Estonia, among others.

The total brings the number to 35, as citizens of these countries join the ranks of tourists from the UK, Germany, France, Japan, Italy, Australia, Singapore, Switzerland and even tiny Brunei, who are allowed visa-free travel to the US for as long as 90 days.

USTA is looking to expand VWP by pushing for the inclusion of Greece, Brazil and Argentina. No mention was made of the Philippines. At the same time, consular offices all over the world are working to drastically cut waiting time for the is-

suance of tourist visas to China, India and Brazil.

Further expansion of VWP is contingent on the establishment of a biometric (fingerprint) system to verify exiting foreigners. And the US, with the introduction of a new, improved system to more international airports, is also making headway in this area.

"Pow Wow isn't just about getting more people to come to the US to spend more money,"

said Dow. "It's about how we build understanding and relationships. Travel is so critical to the long-term survival of our economy and our way of life."

Northwest/Delta flies daily from Manila to Miami via Japan. US travel industry leaders Jonathan Tisch, chair and CEO of Loews Hotels; Caroline Beteta, president and CEO of California Travel and Tourism Commission and Roger Dow, US Travel Association president and CEO. ■



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