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Visas to the United States, and Obama Administration Continuing its Efforts to Increase Travel and Tourism in the United States

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President Obama and the White House have taken important initiatives to make the United States of America as the top tourist destination in the world as a way to create jobs and strengthen the U.S. economy, given that the U.S. travel and tourism industry is a substantial component of U.S. GDP, exports, and employment. On January 19th, 2012, President Obama signed an Executive Order and announced new administrative initiatives to significantly increase travel and tourism in and to USA.

Travel and tourism in and to USA promotion efforts have already begun in Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom, and are planned for South Korea and Brazil later this year.

As an effort to promote and facilitate traveling to USA, considerations are underway to improve various immigration options such as:

1. **The Visa Waiver Program (VWP):** strengthening and expanding VWP eligibility to nations with low visa refusal rates and rapidly growing economies, as consistent with national security requirements.
2. **Shortening Visa Interview Wait Times**: Internationally, wait times for visa interviews are generally short, and have dropped dramatically even for travel markets where demand for visas is highest. For example, the wait time for an appointment at U.S. consulates in China; and Brazilian cities of Brasilia, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro, is currently less than a week; and 30 days or less for São Paulo, Brazil. The U.S. Department of State is adding staff and streamlining its operations to continue keeping a low wait time for visa interview.
3. **Streamlining the Visa Process**: In an effort to streamline visa processing to free up more interview slots for first-time applicants and allow consular officers to more effectively spend their time evaluating higher-risk visa applicants, a new pilot program

is now underway at the U.S. Department of State for Consular offices. In this pilot program, Consular officers may waive in-person interviews for certain low-risk, qualified individuals, such as those renewing their visas within 48 months of the expiration of their previous visas, and Brazilian applicants below the age of 16 and age 66 and older. Waiver of in-person interview is at the consular officers' discretion, and consular officers retain the authority to interview any applicant in any category if security or other concerns are present.

4. **Increasing Consular Staffing and Implementing Innovative Hiring Programs**: In its efforts to offer visa services in a timely manner and with low wait time, the U.S. Department of State is doubling the number of diplomats performing consular work in China and Brazil over the next year; and the first group of newly hired consular adjudicators, who already speak Portuguese or Mandarin, have already recently arrived at U.S. consulates in Brazil and China.

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We represent employers, and individuals and their families in green card and work visa matters in U.S. immigration law. We also have a focus on self-petition green card cases such as extraordinary ability and national interest waiver.

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