

# Three 'n' Out, Goal To Go

*Tourism to the USA is in the doldrums. Without question, it's a beautiful country and worth visiting. In the last decade, though, more tourists are going elsewhere. To bring 'em back, some things need to change. Here's my take on the issue....*

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Tourism, especially the global kind, is not just big business: it's humungous. And despite increasing travel costs, the industry is booming. But not for all countries – there are big winners and big losers. Currently, the USA is among the latter.

This was made abundantly clear with [a report in the Washington Post](#) recently which had a leader thus: “A record one billion people — one in seven on the planet — traveled to another country last year. So why aren't more tourists coming to America?” That's a good question. What's needed are some real answers, despite the brouhaha of Brand USA now operating to lure back tourists.

The USA, for two hundred plus years, has beckoned to millions of immigrants and probably an equal number of tourists. The attractions, then and now, are obvious to most, seeing as how the USA still dominates the world financially and militarily. Like it or not, you can't escape its influence, and it just won't go away. On balance, both of those conditions are fundamentally beneficial for countless millions around the world, beginning with the Internet, without which this world would grind into an ignominious, stuttering, economic coma – and one far worse than what we have now.

As the report shows, however, tourists have been staying away by the millions ever since 9/11. As we all know, after that heinous attack, the Department of Homeland Security was established, the Patriot Act was rushed through Congress, and the USA essentially went into lock-down. The WaPo article pointed to 9/11 as one of the culprits that has caused the drop in tourist trade: simply because the US government just made it too difficult and time-consuming for many tourists to go through the required security checks before beginning travel to the USA. Specifically, the visa process for tourists had become so burdensome that, over the decade after 9/11, the “growth in tourism to the United States has not kept pace with growth in global tourism.” And it was that growth in tourism to and from *other* countries that, according to the report, helped push the tide against traveling to USA.

Perhaps that is so, although there is no empirical evidence to support the claim – other than the tourists went elsewhere. But that's almost like saying things fall to earth because they do – a tautology that evades the real cause. For sure, the security and visa requirements were a pain in the posterior, but maybe two other factors came into play.

In March, 2003, for example, then President George W. Bush decided to invade Iraq using trumped up “evidence” of weapons of mass destruction. Despite most experts' opinions to the contrary, the invasion proceeded, resulting in a war of diminishing

expectations for all concerned. It's no surprise to most that the truth is now apparent: that war was launched on a tissue of lies, half-truths and blatant misinformation. The reputation of the USA suffered severely. Its image sullied even more when the debacle of torture – aka 'enhanced interrogation techniques' – of prisoners was revealed. And the bombing and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan merely served to reinforce the perception that the USA was hell-bent on a war against Islam. So, why would tourists feel comfortable visiting a country that went to war on a will o' the wisp - or two? Or now even three, given the growing rumble in some circles about the need to curtail – with war, if necessary – Iran's quest for nuclear power.

The third aspect about the USA that is troubling to many foreigners is the continual news of mass shootings at random places within the country. No other country has a record like that of the USA. Since January 2012, **there has been a mass shooting every month**, on average, somewhere in USA. On the other hand, the murder rate in USA has been decreasing for decades; and that's positive news. Unhappily, single murders and murder rates aren't good copy; but massacres are. And when a mass shooting occurs, as it does every month, the whole world knows about it. And cringes, once again, with screaming headlines.

To be sure, other countries have mass shootings: recall the horror in Norway, in July, 2011, when a single gunman killed 78 people. Remember the lone shooter in Tasmania, in 1996, who shot and killed 36 people. Neither of those places has a reputation for mass shootings, however. The key point is this: perceptions tend to discount facts. So, when a country is perceived as having a history of mass shootings – and in fact, *does* – that's a death knell for tourism, amongst other things. And it doesn't help the tourist at all to know that the USA has, like, 300 million guns in the country – more than any other in the world and almost one for every citizen. And, all that in the land of the free?

Hence, with those three downers – fortress USA, unending wars abroad, and gun-crazy America – it's little wonder that many tourists have been unwilling to risk visiting. Arguably, the loss of so *much* tourism trade is perhaps irrational. But that's hardly the point: it's up to the people and government of the USA to change those perceptions for the better. And that's what Brand USA is trying to do.

So, the gravity of the situation is clear and present. But now it's fourth down, no time-outs left, and a safety is unacceptable: it's gotta be a touch down to win.

How *can* Team USA do it?

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