



DATE: April 5, 2013

TO: Office of Government
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Industry and Trade
Ministry of Planning & Investment
Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism
Advisory Council on Administrative Procedures Reform

Cc: Ambassador of the United States of America, Hanoi
Consul General of the United States of America, Ho Chi Minh City
Chairman, Vietnam Chamber of Commerce & Industry

SUBJ : Possible Elimination of Visa Waivers for International Visitors from Seven Countries and Vietnam's WTO Transparency Commitments

We have learned from the Soc Trang Province Department of Culture, Sport, and Tourism that consideration is being given to eliminating the current visa waivers for international visitors to Vietnam who are citizens of Japan, Korea, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland.¹

If this information is accurate, we believe that it would have very serious negative consequences for Vietnam's economy.

Just as the visa waiver resulted in sharp increases in international visitors coming from these countries, eliminating the visa waivers could sharply reduce the number of international visitors to Vietnam, thereby imposing damages on the hotel, tourism and travel sector in Vietnam, not to mention additional damages to the banking system that is very exposed to it.

The number of international visitors coming to Vietnam after the unilateral visa exemption policy was applied in order to stimulate and support the tourism and travel sector is very high: a 34% increase for the Korean market and 52% for Russia, with the others at around 40%. Japanese visitors to Vietnam increased 10.45 times from 2004, when the visa waiver was first launched, to 2011. The figure for Korea is almost 7.86 times; Denmark 7.31; Finland is 10.91 times; and Norway 8.54 times.

Below are some data on international visitor arrivals in 2011 and 2012, indicating that growth in visitors from Korea, Japan, and Russia is increasing very sharply, and accounts for a significant part of Vietnam's tourism and travel sector business.²

	2011	2012	% of Total
Korea	536,408	700,917	11.2%
Japan	481,519	576,386	9.2%
Russia	~ n.a.	174,287	3.2%
Subtotal		1,477,303	23.5%
Total	6,000,000	6,280,000	

¹ Đề xuất nhiều giải pháp hóa giải bất cập trong hoạt động du lịch (27/12/2012)

Hội nghị lấy ý kiến doanh nghiệp du lịch khu vực phía Bắc Riêng về chính sách visa, hiện nay Việt Nam đang áp dụng miễn visa song phương, đơn phương cho khách quốc tế một số nước trong khu vực. Đề xuất miễn đơn phương cho 7 nước là thị trường du lịch quốc tế quan trọng của Việt Nam. Tuy nhiên, chính sách miễn visa cũng sắp bị bãi bỏ, thêm vào đó lệ phí visa sẽ tăng từ 25- 45 USD/ người áp dụng từ ngày 1.1.2013. Ông Vũ Thế Bình, Phó chủ tịch Hiệp hội Du lịch Việt Nam, Chủ tịch Hiệp hội Lữ hành Việt Nam cho rằng: "Trong bối cảnh kinh tế khó khăn, khủng hoảng như hiện nay, thậm chí phải nới rộng diện miễn visa, thông thoáng về hải quan, đẩy mạnh hoàn thuế VAT... Việc tăng phí thủ tục visa sẽ làm tăng giá tour và không thể cạnh tranh với các nước trong khu vực. Dù là cần thiết nhưng việc tăng phí visa không nên áp dụng lúc này...".
http://www.sovhttdl.soctrang.gov.vn/wps/portal/lut/p/c4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gLR1dvZ09LYwOL4GAnA08TRwsfvxBdixdfQ_2CbEdFADhJNT8!/?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/sovhttdl/sitesovhttdl/linhvucdulich/sukie_ndulich/dexuatgiaiphap

² Source: <http://www.vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php?cat=0120>

In Vietnam's WTO Accession, certain commitments were made in services sectors, including Tourism and Travel Related Services and Air Transport Services. Furthermore, Vietnam made certain commitments regarding Transparency. In particular, the report of the Working Party on the Accession of Vietnam to the WTO, which is an annex to National Assembly Resolution No. 71, Nov 29, 2006,³ ratifying Vietnam's accession to the WTO included the following: "... the representative of Vietnam stated that from the date of accession [Vietnam] would fully implement Article X of the GATT 1994, Article III of the GATS and the other WTO transparency requirements, including those requiring notification, prior comment and publication. As such, all laws, regulations, decrees, judicial decisions and administrative rulings of general application pertaining to or affecting customs issues, trade in goods, services, intellectual property and the control of foreign exchange would be published promptly in a manner that fulfils the WTO requirements, and no such laws, regulations, decrees, judicial decisions and administrative rulings of general application would become effective or be enforced prior to such publication."

We have not seen any notification, opportunity for prior comment or publication regarding the possible elimination of the visa waivers for citizens of Japan, Korea, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland.

Since a large number of international visitors to Vietnam come from these countries, we believe that elimination of the visa waiver program could have very serious negative effects on the business of companies that are engaged in Tourism and Travel Services, Air Transport Services, and other businesses that are related to these services.

Accordingly, we would respectfully recommend that the visa waiver policy to promote international visitors to Vietnam be maintained.

Respectfully,



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American Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam
Ho Chi Minh City Chapter

³ <http://mic.gov.vn/vbqopl/Lists/Vn%20bn%20QPPL/DispForm.aspx?ID=6985>