

Australia looks to take advantage as tourists turn away from Trump's US



China is close to overtaking New Zealand as Australia's biggest tourism market.



by [Mark Ludlow](#)

Australian tourism bosses are moving to capitalise on the declining popularity of the United States as a visitor destination, [as China's love affair with Australia shows no sign of abating](#).

With federal Tourism Minister Steven Ciobo and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop to attend the annual "G'day USA" events in Los Angeles next week, Australian operators are keen to continue to lure tourists away from the US, which has been on the decline in the past few years.

The US and Turkey are the only country in the top dozen global travel destinations to experience a decline in inbound visitors since 2015, while other countries such as Australia, Spain and Britain have been experiencing a record boom in visitors.

While the higher US dollar is partly to blame for the fall in tourists, some fear the aggressive rhetoric and nationalistic policies of Donald Trump have damaged the country's brand for travellers.

The US is still ranked No. 2 in the World Tourism Organisation ranking of international tourist arrivals, after France, but its share has fallen 2.2 per cent since 2015-16. The US remains the biggest earner, reaping \$US206 billion (\$256 billion) in 2016 alone, but its falling market share has some US industry groups worried.

The US Travel Association said the country's share of international long-haul travel fell to 11.9 per cent last year, down from 13.6 per cent in 2015, with the smaller share equating to 7.4 million visitors and \$US32.2 billion in spending.

In a bid to avert the decline, 10 business organisations, including the US Chamber of Commerce, US Travel and the National Restaurant Association, have created a travel industry group, the Visit US Coalition, to attempt to convince the Trump government to introduce friendlier visa and border-security policies.

"America isn't winning when we're falling behind our global competitors," US Travel's president Roger Dow told Bloomberg this week. "Our goal is to make America the most secure and visited country on earth – and we can do both."

'Blue skies' and open spaces

Australia's tourism industry is becoming increasingly dependent on China's growing love affair with its "big blue skies" and open spaces.

The latest arrivals figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on Friday showed China closing in on New Zealand as our most important tourism market.

In the year to November last year, 1.34 million Chinese tourists came to Australia, an increase of 11.7 per cent. New Zealand still remains the No. 1 visitor market, with 1.36 million but its growth rate is a lot lower, on only 1.6 per cent.

But with a difference of only 18,000 visitors, China – whose nationals spent \$10 billion in Australia for the first time last year – is expected to become the No. 1 market in the next few months.

The US remains a crucial market for Australia, with 777,500 visitors in the year to November – an increase of almost 10 per cent.

Mr Ciobo said record funding to Tourism Australia, combined with the competitiveness of the Australian dollar, was making Australia a more attractive proposition for international travellers.

Strong growth

"We're doing better converting people from aspiration to actually visiting Australia," Mr Ciobo said. "Together with the tourism industry, we are focused on providing compelling reasons for people to come holiday in Australia. As a result, we've seen strong growth across all key markets for the past several years."

Tourism Australia managing director John O'Sullivan said while China had been attracting all the attention in recent years, there was solid visitor growth from other countries, including the US.

"This is another solid set of numbers, with strong growth from both eastern and western markets," he said. "Everybody talks about China, and for good reason, but it's worth noting the equally impressive numbers coming out of the United States. This is a market benefiting from strong aviation capacity and competitive airfares, and will certainly be a big focus for us in 2018."

Australia did not crack the top 10 tourism destination countries, but it crept into No. 10 of the biggest earners, with \$US32.4 billion in 2016.

Read more: <http://www.afr.com/news/politics/australia-looks-to-take-advantage-as-tourists-turn-away-from-trumps-us-20180118-h0kreu#ixzz54yIAOeFj>

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