

Opinion: U.S. should be embracing foreign tourists

By Matthew Yglesias, Slate

For a depressed economy, exports function as a magic elixir. Demand—and with it jobs—appears from outside, generating new income that cycles through the economy. This is why President Obama, as part of his recovery strategy, has set a goal of doubling exports over five years.

Talk of exports normally conjures up images of factories and container ships, but many of America's exports are services. The nation's biggest service export is in some sense not an export at all—it's travel and tourism, an industry begging for respect on National Travel and Tourism Week. I'm pleased to report that America's international travel export sector is healthy, with nominal revenues reaching an all-time peak last year of \$153 billion—about 1 percent of GDP. Still, despite recent successes, it's not clear that American tourism has ever really recovered from the tough blow it took after 9/11, suggesting there's plenty we could do to further boost the industry.

As far as the national balance sheet goes, tourism functions exactly like an export. Foreigners come here and spend money, leaving extra funds in American hands, with which we can purchase oil and Chinese toys. It's an export realm in which the United States has very strong fundamentals.

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