



Preserving America's Heritage

February 28, 2012

Jennifer Pilat
Deputy Director, Office of Advisory Committees and Industry Engagement
International Trade Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., N.W., Suite 4043
Washington, DC 20230

Attn: Tourism Strategy Comment, FR Doc 2012-3400, February 14, 2012

Dear Ms. Pilat:

On behalf of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, an independent federal agency charged with advising the President and Congress on historic preservation matters, we have the following comments on the referenced Tourism Strategy that is under development to help implement Executive Order 13597.

Comments have been solicited on what the federal government can do “on its own to improve the competitive position of the U.S., including growing domestic travel and tourism,” in both the short- and longer-term, and what metrics should be used to measure progress.

The history, culture, and special places of the United States that reflect our past as well as our diverse cultural traditions and values are among the significant and unique attractions for visitors to the United States from around the world. It is absolutely critical that any short- or long-term strategy to promote domestic and international travel opportunities throughout the United States take advantage of these national assets and focus a major portion of promotional efforts on such localities and regions.

Certainly we have the iconic cultural monuments, such as the Statue of Liberty or the National Mall in Washington, D.C., that foreign visitors already know about and are drawn to. The challenge is to promote lesser known but interesting regions and destinations that have compelling stories and experiences for both international and domestic travelers. While the U.S. National Park system and areas near the parks provide a starting point, it is only a beginning.

Some specific things that can be done:

- Highlight the diversity of American culture by working closely with state tourism offices and promoting opportunities for travelers to experience regional food, music, arts and crafts, and other aspects of culture;
- Use the 21 U.S. World Heritage sites with their international brand recognition to attract international visitors and use them as the nucleus of regional tourism strategies to draw foreign visitors to nearby destinations on extended visits;
- Promote the 49 National Heritage Areas, units of the National Park System that are “off the

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beaten path” and designated for their historic associations, and other prominent historic and cultural places (including designated small to mid-size historic communities like designated Preserve America Communities, Main Streets, and large historic districts) that can offer special American charm, a great story and experience, and local hospitality;

- Feature high-profile historic districts or localities as well as important historic and cultural anniversary events, and consider selecting and highlighting “cultural cities” or regions on an annual basis to help attract visitors to less-visited cities;
- Assist with incentives for establishing national or regional “open doors” events for historic and cultural attractions during selected weeks throughout the travel season; and
- Improve federal-state-local travel promotion coordination and find ways to cooperate actively with State, local, and regional travel offices, including establishing and maintaining a consolidated events calendar.

To help measure progress, the federal government could offer financial support and technical assistance to states and other entities, such as Convention and Visitors Bureaus, as well as to federal land managers to collect data on visitation and visitor preferences more systematically and comprehensively than is currently being done. A focused discussion about standardizing more of this measurement would also be helpful, perhaps with the assistance and involvement of the Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA).

In 2005, the U.S. Department of Commerce co-sponsored the U.S. Cultural & Heritage Tourism Summit. The Summit drew attendees from throughout the country, and there were many good ideas, examples, and specific recommendations for next steps that emerged from that conference. We urge Commerce to review some of the findings and recommendations that emerged and were largely directed to state and local action.

The Preserve America Program was initially established in large part to promote heritage tourism at the community and regional level as a means of realizing the long-term economic and other benefits of historic preservation. In particular, the responsibilities of the Task Force on Travel and Competitiveness that has been established under the Executive Order echo and complement Section 5 of the Preserve America Executive Order (E.O. 13287), which directed the Secretary of Commerce, “working with the [Advisory] Council [on Historic Preservation] and other agencies, [to] assist States, Indian tribes, and local communities in promoting the use of historic properties for heritage tourism and related economic development in a manner that contributes to the long-term preservation and productive use of those properties.” A rededication of the Commerce Department to supporting the Preserve America program could further the goals of the Tourism Strategy. The ACHP would be delighted to assist in that effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have questions or wish to follow-up on these recommendations, please feel free to contact me at jfowler@achp.gov, or Ronald D. Anzalone, Director, Office of Preservation Initiatives, at ranzalone@achp.gov (tel. 202-606-8523).

Sincerely,



John M. Fowler
Executive Director