

Nov 04, 2016 by *Adam Clayton Powell, III*

Man Bites Dog: International Visitors to U.S. Up for Second Straight Year ^[1]

JOHANNESBURG -- Regular readers of this blog no doubt saw the headlines last week expressing concern about the drop in the percentage of international travelers who head for the U.S.

In the Financial Times, for example, the headline on September 4 was "US tourism 'needs a warmer welcome.'" And there was this quote: "The image of the US is at an all-time low in many parts of the world."

And yesterday's Los Angeles Times reported the U.S. "share of global tourism is plummeting."

That is entirely incorrect.

In fact, quite the reverse is correct: the percentage of international travelers coming to the U.S. *increased* for the second straight year, exceeded only by France and Spain.

Further, the data show the U.S. is number one by far when it comes to money spent by visitors: 12 percent of all worldwide spending by international travelers is spent in the U.S., according to the Commerce Department, 65 percent more than Spain and 83 percent more than France.

And since international travel is increasing, that increased share means the total number of visitors to the U.S. has also risen over the past two years.

This growth has been taking place during the war in Iraq and despite the new, strict U.S. visa restrictions that are at least extraordinarily burdensome for visitors.

So the Times and other news accounts would lead you to conclude that the percentage of international travelers who head for the U.S. is plunging. That is only true only if you go back thirteen years to compare 2005 to 1992. In 1992, the U.S. attracted a peak 9.2 percent share of total international travelers. Then the percentage began a slide that lasted through the 1990's -- before 9/11 and the Iraq War -- plunging to 6 percent by 2001.

This leads to some obvious questions: Why did visits to the U.S. decline so rapidly in the 1990's -- *before* 9/11 and before the war in Iraq? And why is that trend now reversing?

This is not to suggest answers. There's no cause for these effects that jump out at you. This is just to raise some interesting questions.

But in Journalism 101, this is what would be called a man-bites-dog story: Dog bites man?

That is what we expect, and it's not news. But when man bites dog, that's news.

More visitors coming to the U.S. over the past few years? Travel to the U.S. plunging during the 1990's ? That is not what we have been led to expect.

And whatever the reason, *that* is news.

Editor's note: Comments on this post are [here](#), appended to Geoff Freeman's [reply](#).
