

Thumbnail Image:



Jan 12, 2026 by [Andrew Dubbins](#)

Public Diplomacy in the News: A Year of Mega-Events, Tourism as Diplomacy, & More ^[1]

“Public Diplomacy in the News” is a CPD Blog series by Andrew Dubbins that spotlights noteworthy stories on public diplomacy topics such as cultural diplomacy, nation branding, exchange programs, international events and conferences, digital diplomacy, and strategic global communications.

Mega-events fuel a global travel surge — From the Winter Olympics and FIFA World Cup to tennis majors, marathons, Formula 1, and blockbuster concert tours, 2026 is shaping up to be a banner year for event-driven travel as fans plan trips around once-in-a-lifetime

experiences. Travel experts say more than a third of travelers now intend to journey for cultural events, with surveys showing major sporting events and concerts strongly influencing destination choices as consumers embrace a “one big trip” mindset. Early data already point to sharp booking spikes around host cities for the Milan-Cortina Winter Games and the North America–hosted World Cup, while brands and airlines roll out exclusive packages and experiences, signaling how sports tourism, music “gig-tripping,” and experiential travel are reshaping the global travel economy in 2026.

Kelly McCarthy / ABC News

Global kickoff across three nations — Soccer’s biggest tournament returns on an unprecedented scale in 2026, with the FIFA World Cup running from June 11 to July 19 across the United States, Mexico, and Canada, featuring an expanded 48-team field spread over 16 host cities. With 42 teams already qualified and six more to be decided via playoffs in March, the draw outlines a geographically and competitively diverse tournament, from traditional powerhouses like Brazil, Germany, France, and Argentina to emerging contenders such as Curaçao, Haiti, and Uzbekistan. The competition will culminate with the final at New York–New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, as broadcasters prepare wall-to-wall coverage of what promises to be the most expansive and globally representative World Cup in history.

Fox Sports

Tourism as diplomacy in a fractured world — As global travel rebounds and geopolitics grow more strained, leaders argue that tourism can serve as a powerful engine for peace, cultural understanding, and shared prosperity if its growth is guided with intention. With more than 1.1 billion international trips recorded in the first nine months of 2025 and the sector contributing \$10.9 trillion to global GDP, travel’s scale brings both opportunity and responsibility: to ensure benefits reach local communities, cultivate globally minded talent through educational mobility, and use technology to deepen—rather than dilute—cultural exchange. Examples from Nepal, Colombia, Europe, and Singapore show how inclusive models, youth programs, and digital tools can transform tourism from passive consumption into meaningful human connection, underscoring a central challenge facing the industry as leaders convene at Davos: whether travel’s renewed momentum will merely move people across borders, or help bridge them.

Jane Sun / World Economic Forum

Climate diplomacy under strain as populism rises — With global temperatures climbing and emissions cuts falling short, multilateral cooperation is facing its toughest test just as it is most urgently needed. Writing ahead of a pivotal year for climate talks, Fiona Harvey of The Guardian argues that the spirit of collective action underpinning UN climate diplomacy has been weakened by populism, geopolitical rivalry, and the U.S. rejection of multilateralism under Donald Trump, whose administration skipped Cop30 and applied heavy pressure in parallel negotiations on shipping emissions. While the Cop30 Belém deal produced only modest progress and deferred binding commitments on fossil fuel phaseouts, it nonetheless showed that fragile cooperation is still possible, even as disputes over carbon border tariffs, stalled shipping levies, and the rise of “coalitions of the willing” signal a fragmented future for climate governance heading into Cop31 and beyond.

Fiona Harvey / The Guardian

Cultural exchange or cheap labor pipeline? — Designed to foster mutual understanding through work-and-travel experiences, the J-1 visa program is drawing renewed scrutiny as participants describe a mix of life-changing opportunity and workplace exploitation. Reporting from Colorado for *The Denver Post*, Sam Tabachnik recounts how many J-1 holders celebrate exposure to American culture, travel, and relationships, yet also face low wages, overcrowded housing, harassment, and limited recourse against abusive employers, with some lawsuits alleging the promised cultural exchange never materialized. While more than 9,000 J-1 participants worked in Colorado last year across sectors from ski resorts to child care, critics argue the program increasingly functions as a steady labor supply rather than an exchange, even as most participants still recommend it—with caveats—amid proposed Trump administration rules that could further limit student visas.

Sam Tabachnik / The Denver Post
