

Stats: 2008 a good year for U.S. tourism

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- A record number of foreign visitors, primarily Mexicans and Canadians on vacation or business trips, traveled to the United States in 2008, the government said.

U.S. Commerce Department statistics indicate half of the 50.5 million foreign visitors were from Mexico and Canada and the other half were from overseas, USA Today reported Monday.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and U.S. Travel Association say some Europeans, Asians, South Americans and Middle Easterners try to avoid visiting the United States because of the perceived bother of getting visas and clearing security.

"They do not see it as a welcoming destination," Angelo Amador, the Chamber of Commerce's immigration policy director, told USA Today. "If you look at the global travel market as a whole, travel and tourism have been going up but our market share has been shrinking."

U.S. Department of Homeland Security information indicates 75 percent of foreign visitors in 2008 were tourists and 14 percent were in the United States for business, USA Today said. The rest were temporary workers and students, or were on extended visits to relatives, the Homeland Security Department said.

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