

THE VISA FUNCTION

One of the important functions of the Foreign Service of the United States is the administration abroad of our immigration laws. Congress first charged consular officers with the responsibility of issuing visas to certain aliens in the Act of July 5, 1884. In 1917, a general requirement that all aliens seeking to enter the United States obtain visas was instituted and has been continued since that time under successive immigration laws. With certain exceptions, therefore, aliens desiring to come to the United States are required to obtain appropriate visas from U.S. consular officers stationed at some 210 Foreign Service posts throughout the world.

Although consular officers are directly responsible under the law for the issuance or refusal of visas, the Department of State is charged with the general administration of the functions vested in the Foreign Service by the immigration laws. In fulfilling this responsibility, the Department's Visa Office in the Bureau of Consular Affairs prepares regulations that are published in the *Federal Register*; instructs consular officers regarding interpretations of law; establishes standardized procedures; provides on-the-spot guidance through regional conferences, workshops, and field trips; and furnishes advisory opinions concerning all phases of visa work. A review procedure is set in motion by consular requests for the Department's advice on material points of law, or when the Department requests a report from a consular post with a view to determining whether the action taken or proposed in a specific case is in accordance with the applicable provisions of the law. All immigrant and nonimmigrant visa processing at consular posts is now automated, thus providing visa issuing offices with a comprehensive and secure system for managing cases and determining applicant eligibility. Although the vast majority of visas are issued at overseas posts, a few categories of nonimmigrant visas may be issued or renewed by the Diplomatic Liaison Division of the Visa Office and by the U.S. Mission to the United Nations.

For many people in foreign lands, the call at the American consular office is the first personal contact with the United States. A courteous reception by an American official and fair and reasonable attention to the application for a visa serve to create an atmosphere of good will and help to promote our foreign relations.

In recent years successive Presidents have stressed the importance of facilitating international travel. At the same time, a thorough clearance process and application assessment is intended to insure that visas are provided only to individuals who are fully qualified under the law. The procedures for the issuance of visas to persons wishing to visit the United States have been kept as comprehensible as possible, and every effort is made to expedite necessary action to the extent practicable. Before a visa is issued, an applicant's written application is reviewed or the applicant is interviewed by a consular officer to determine eligibility for a visa appropriate to the purpose of the planned journey to the United States. If necessary, documentary evidence is requested to establish that the applicant intends to return to a residence abroad, does not come within any of the excludable classes, and has adequate financial resources for the proposed journey. To assist the travel of nonimmigrants, visas are issued incorporating the most liberal provisions possible with respect to validity period on the basis of reciprocity, that is, the treatment accorded by the applicant's country to U.S. citizens. Necessary clearance procedures are handled as expeditiously as possible. There is moreover a program under which certain citizens of several countries are permitted to visit the United States for up to 90 days without needing to obtain a visitor visa in advance of travel.

Applicants who are entitled to one of the immigrant classifications and who are chargeable to an oversubscribed foreign state or category are registered on waiting lists, in the order in which they have qualified, to establish a priority for consideration when visa numbers become available. The priority date for preference applicants is ordinarily that on which the petition to establish a preference was filed with the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The National Visa Center, located in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is designed to relieve Foreign Service posts of a substantial amount of the clerical workload required to process immigrant visa applications. Immigrant visa petitions are sent directly from the Immigration and Naturalization Service to the Center for initial screening, record-keeping, and instructions to the visa applicant before being forwarded to overseas posts for further processing and visa issuance. If an applicant's priority date does not allow immediate visa availability, the petition is stored at the Center until the case priority date permits visa processing to begin.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service primarily, the Public Health Service and the Department of Labor, and other agencies to a lesser extent, share in the administration of the immigration laws. The jurisdictions of those agencies are complementary in most respects, and close liaison is maintained between and among them and the Department of State to insure a uniform interpretation of the law and to coordinate practices. Officers of the Immigration and Naturalization Service are stationed at a number of Foreign Service posts abroad to carry out more effectively certain functions that come within the Service's area of responsibility.

In preparation for their visa duties abroad, consular officers take a visa services course at the Department of State's Foreign Service Institute as part of their basic Foreign Service training. Advanced consular training for experienced officers is also offered. A correspondence course in visa work is available for officers and clerical personnel assigned to overseas posts. The Department also makes available to visa personnel worldwide frequent technology updates and training, to support maximum operational efficiency and integrity.

**Top Ten Immigrant and Nonimmigrant
Visa Issuing Posts
Fiscal Year 2001**

Immigrant ¹		Nonimmigrant	
Ciudad Juarez	63,266	Seoul	406,973
Manila	29,738	Ciudad Juarez	336,290
Guangzhou	20,052	Mexico	335,225
Ho Chi Minh City	17,757	Tijuana ²	330,136
Santo Domingo	14,607	Monterrey	307,645
Port au Prince	13,441	Nuevo Laredo	279,833
Mumbai	12,517	Taipei ³	235,526
Islamabad	11,922	Matamoros	193,026
Warsaw	11,011	Bogota	186,629
Moscow	9,208	Guadalajara	171,510

¹ Replaced visas are not included in the immigrant figures.

² Includes combination B-1/B-2 visitor visa/Border Crossing Card issuances processed at the Mexicali and Tijuana Temporary Processing Facilities.

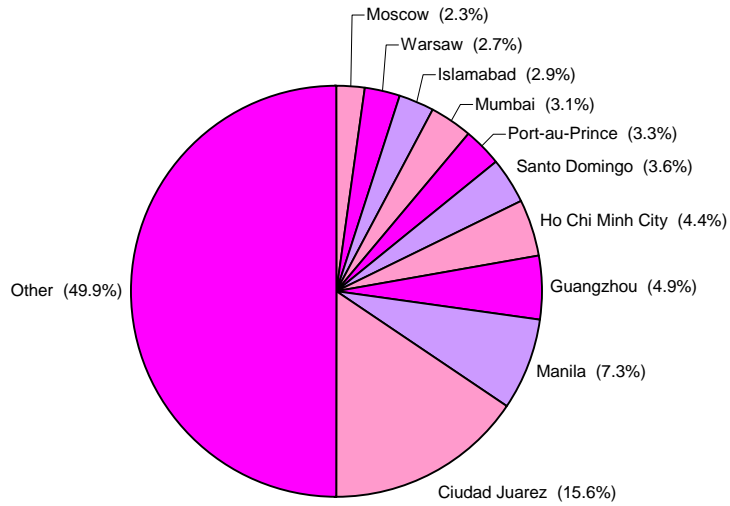
³ The Taipei office of the American Institute in Taiwan, although an unofficial instrumentality, has been authorized to process visa applications for residents of Taiwan.

**Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Visas Issued
Top Ten Countries
Fiscal Year 2001**

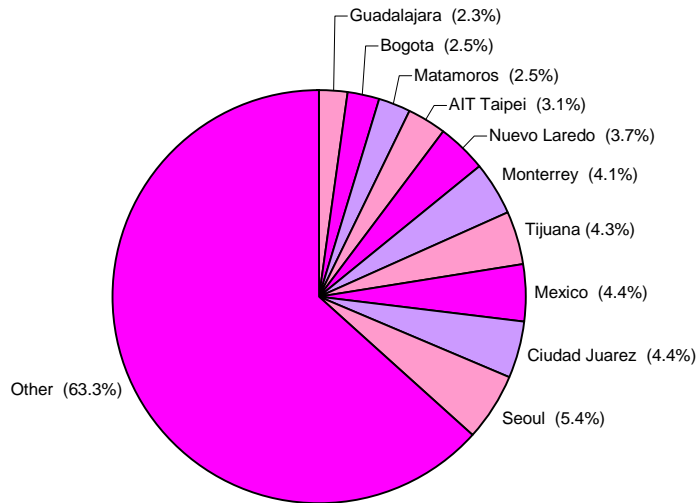
Immigrant ¹		Nonimmigrant	
Mexico	63,028	Mexico	2,220,330
Philippines	31,077	South Korea	430,855
India	28,041	India	416,559
China (mainland born)	23,147	China (mainland)	345,748
Vietnam	18,634	China (Taiwan)	242,547
Dominican Republic	14,606	Brazil	240,609
Haiti	13,487	Colombia	197,407
Pakistan	11,835	Philippines	195,328
Jamaica	8,404	Great Britain and Northern Ireland	158,112
Russia	7,233	Israel	147,745

¹ Replaced visas are not included in the immigrant figures.

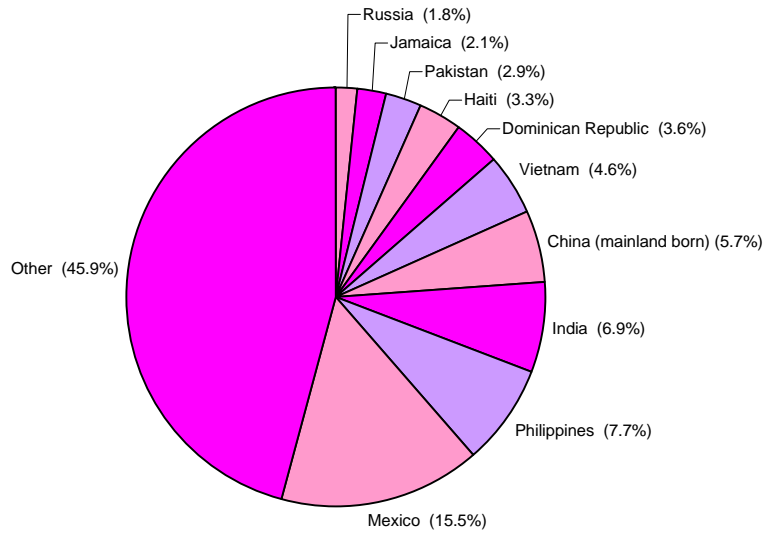
**Immigrant Visa Issuances
at Top Posts
Fiscal Year 2001**



**Nonimmigrant Visa Issuances
at Top Posts
Fiscal Year 2001**



**Immigrant Visas Issued at Foreign Service Posts
by Country of Birth/Chargeability
Fiscal Year 2001**



**Nonimmigrant Visas Issued
by Nationality
Fiscal Year 2001**

