



America's National Parks

A Cornerstone of International Inbound Travel — and an

Urgent Operational Breakdown

1. National Parks Drive International Demand — and U.S. Economic Activity

America's National Parks are not simply attractions. They are one of the primary reasons international travelers choose the U.S. over competing destinations.

- In long-haul markets (Europe, Australia, South America), National Parks frequently appear in the top three trip drivers alongside iconic cities.
- Competing destinations (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa) actively market natural landscapes as core reasons to visit.
- If access friction increases, travelers can and will choose alternative long-haul destinations.

They are not an add-on — they are the draw.

And beyond their iconic status, National Parks are powerful economic engines.

International visitors to National Parks:

- ✓ Stay longer — often 10–14+ nights; Spend more – typically 2-3 times more per trip than domestic visitors
- ✓ Visit multiple states and regions
- ✓ Spend heavily on hotels, restaurants, guides, attractions, transportation, and retail
- ✓ Travel in shoulder and offseason periods critical to rural communities

Inbound travel is a U.S. export – visitors bring foreign currency into the country. Travel exports reduce the U.S. trade deficit.

In many gateway communities, international visitors represent 30–50% of offseason demand — stabilizing year-round employment.

National Parks are not just scenic assets. They are economic engines for rural America.

2. The International Fee Structure Is Creating Immediate Operational Problems

The goal of strengthening park infrastructure funding is widely shared. However, the rollout of the international surcharge and related pass requirements is creating **serious operational disruption for commercial group tours**.

Inbound group tours are typically sold 12 to 24 months in advance under fixed-price contracts governed by international consumer protection laws.

At the same time, operational systems to support the new structure are not yet fully functional causing confusion for visitors, tension for frontline staff, and delays at entrance stations.

Problems Already Occurring:

- No bulk purchase system for operators
- No centralized process for assigning passes to group travelers
- Payment required at entrance gates, creating bottlenecks
- Inconsistent understanding among park units
- Confusion over verification procedures

Peak Season Risk (Beginning April)

When spring and summer volume begins:

- Entrance delays will multiply
- Bus and group tour processing times will increase
- Visitor frustration will rise
- Park staff workloads will intensify
- Gateway community businesses will feel downstream disruption

Commercial tours operate on tightly timed itineraries and contracted schedules. A delay at a park entrance can cascade into lost reservations, increased costs, and visitor dissatisfaction. These aren't minor inconveniences – they are operational stress points that compound quickly.

The urgency: These operational gaps – if unresolved – will also **greatly impact Americans traveling during the America250 season**.

3. What NPS Has Acknowledged — But Cannot Yet Operationalize

The National Park Service has recognized:

- The need for **bulk pass purchasing capability**
- The importance of smoothing entrance gate procedures
- That the America the Beautiful International Pass should cover the passholder plus three additional non-residents in a commercial group setting

However:

- Systems to enable these commitments are not yet functional
- Operators cannot currently purchase passes for clients at scale
- Clear, systemwide implementation guidance has not been finalized

In short, the policy exists — but the infrastructure does not.

4. Recommended Solutions

We respectfully urge the National Park Service to take the following actions:

1. **Temporary exemption or deferral** of surcharge requirements for commercial group tours until systems are fully operational.
2. **Immediate bulk purchase portal** allowing licensed tour operators to pre-purchase and assign passes electronically.
3. **Immediate tour operator access to the *existing* wholesale portal** for purchase of \$250 physical passes (similar to the \$80 pass legacy process).
4. **Standardized, systemwide entrance procedures** with clear guidance to all park units.
5. **Digital verification tools** to reduce gate processing time.

Legislative / Oversight Action

Congressional engagement is critical to:

- Ensure implementation does not undermine international visitation
- Protect gateway community economies
- Provide NPS with operational flexibility and resources
- Avoid unintended economic consequences

Call to Action

America's National Parks are one of our strongest international demand drivers.

We urge policymakers and industry partners to:

- Encourage NPS and DOI to implement practical, scalable solutions before peak season.
- Support administrative flexibility to prevent disruption to contracted 2026 tours.
- Ensure that fee collection mechanisms do not unintentionally harm local and regional communities and U.S. small businesses that depend on international visitation.

With thoughtful implementation, we can protect park resources **and** preserve the economic vitality that international visitors bring to America's communities.