

## City Leverages New International Air Terminal to Attract Overseas Visitors

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Jesus Garcia, manager, and Brandon Barnes, director, of international sales and marketing at the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Although Atlanta ranks 13th nationally in attracting international visitors, their importance to the local economy is increasingly realized as the city leverages its new international air terminal.

Brandon Barnes, director of international marketing and sales at the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau, told members of the Atlanta City Council's Advisory Committee on International Relations that international visitors spend on average \$4,500 per person per trip.

He spoke at ACVB headquarters in Peachtree Center downtown at the committee's Feb. 22 monthly meeting, which is held at different locations around the city through the year.

The focus on leveraging the new international terminal at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport is just one of several objectives the ACVB has made a top priority, according to Mr. Barnes.

Other ACVB objectives, he said, include developing the city's logistics, healthcare and financial sectors as well as expanding its reputation as a venue for sporting events and moving tourists around the city more efficiently.

International tourists are especially attractive, he added, because they have more private vacation time and stay longer while visiting the city than domestic travelers.

The prospects of more visitors also are good, he said, as the ACVB prepares to celebrate its 100th birthday in April.

The U.S. Commerce Department projects that international tourists to the U.S. will climb steadily through 2017 to 80.5 million from 66.5 million in 2011.

In view of the growth of international visitors, several attendees recommended that the city increase its number of bilingual employees, especially among the city's "ambassador force," which helps patrol the city and provide directions and information to visitors.

The city welcomed almost 1 million international visitors in 2011 (the most available figures) with 340,000 coming from Canada, 50,000 from Mexico and 590,000 from overseas, according to figures from the Office of Travel and Tourism, a branch of the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration.

The city trailed Philadelphia, which was ranked 12th, but tied with Houston and the Grand Canyon National Park at 13th.

According to figures compiled by Visa Inc., which did not include figures for travelers from Canada, visitors from the United Kingdom spent the most, \$49.6 million of the 15 countries tracked with Bermuda, the least with \$6.1 million.

The list ranked in descending order the following countries in addition to the U.K. and Bermuda: South Korea, Brazil, India, China and Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, France, Germany, Australia, Nigeria, Venezuela, the Bahamas and Russia.

The greatest percentage increases according to the Visa figures from 2010-11 were: Venezuela, 53 percent; China/Hong Kong, 45 percent; Nigeria, 42 percent; Mexico, 16 percent and Brazil, 12 percent.

Besides Mr. Barnes, the ACVB's international sales staff includes Jesús Garcia, manager, and Samantha Vina, specialist.