

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. 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. The procedures for the issuance of visas to persons wishing to visit the United States have been kept as simple as possible; every effort is made to expedite the necessary action; and, in many cases, the personal appearance of the applicant is not required. 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 and fees 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 pilot program under which 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.

**Top Ten Immigrant and Nonimmigrant
Visa Issuing Posts
Fiscal Year 2000**

Immigrant¹		Nonimmigrant	
Ciudad Juarez	68,438	Seoul	452,919
Manila	29,336	Tijuana ²	318,316
Guangzhou	26,030	Ciudad Juarez	272,670
Port-au-Prince	18,434	Taipei ³	271,024
Ho Chi Minh City	16,565	Mexico	266,672
Warsaw	13,087	Monterrey	253,275
Santo Domingo	11,705	Nuevo Laredo	219,006
Mumbai	11,381	Bogota	186,858
Islamabad	10,428	Manila	140,642
Kingston	9,748	Beijing	136,431

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.

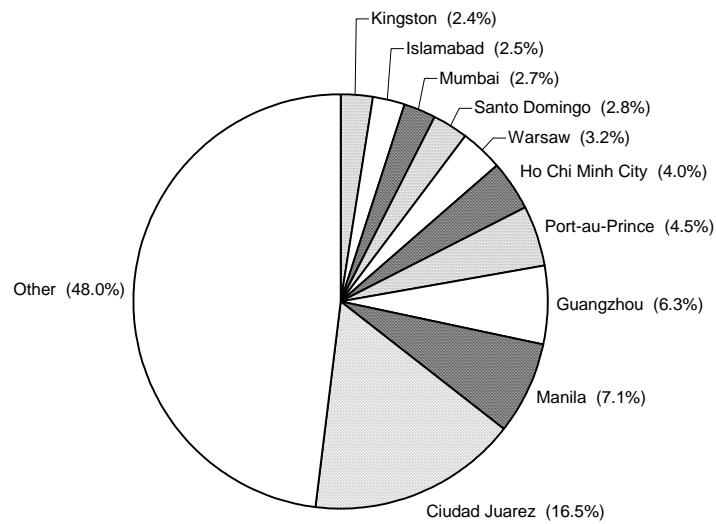
³ The Taipei office of the American Institute in Taiwan, although an unofficial instrumentality, has been authorized to process visa applications for residents of Taiwan.

**Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Visas Issued
Top Ten Countries
Fiscal Year 2000**

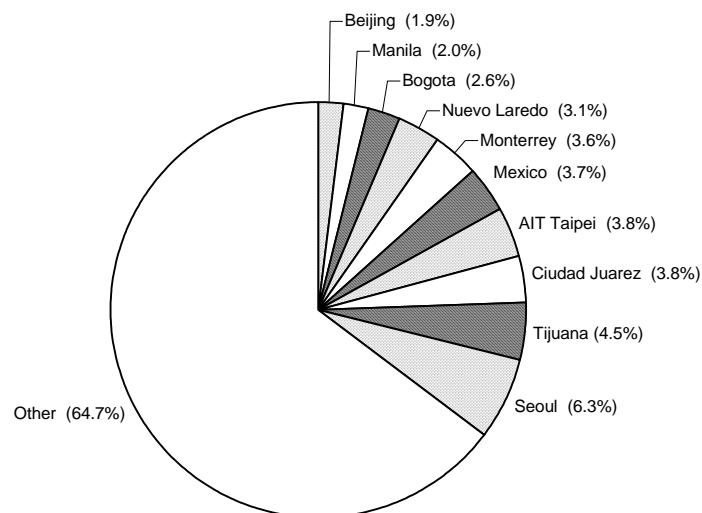
Immigrant¹		Nonimmigrant	
Mexico	68,412	Mexico	1,762,402
Philippines	30,280	South Korea	479,205
China (mainland born)	28,993	India	396,853
India	24,201	China (mainland)	315,536
Haiti	18,495	China (Taiwan)	279,153
Vietnam	17,813	Brazil	261,096
Dominican Republic	11,685	Colombia	195,058
Pakistan	10,256	Philippines	169,408
Jamaica	9,923	Great Britain and Northern Ireland	163,150
El Salvador	8,611	Israel	143,297

¹ Replaced visas are not included in the immigrant figures.

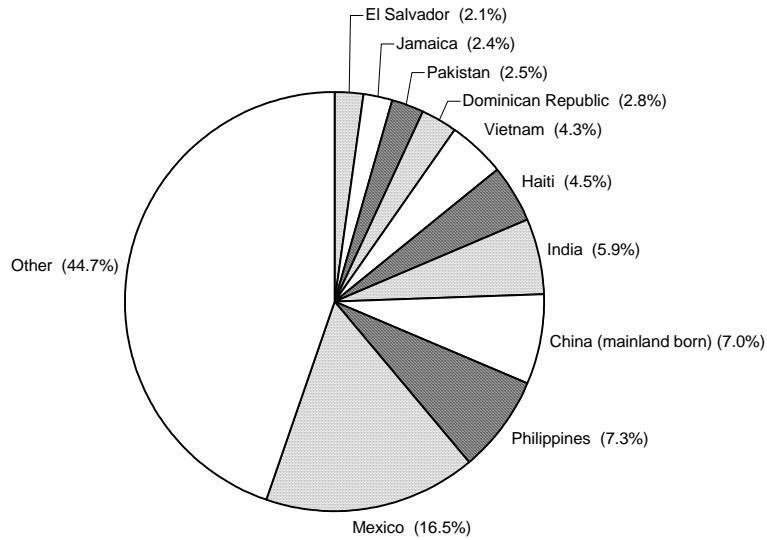
**Immigrant Visa Issuances
at Top Posts
Fiscal Year 2000**



**Nonimmigrant Visa Issuances
at Top Posts
Fiscal Year 2000**



**Immigrant Visas Issued at Foreign Service Posts
by Country of Birth/Chargeability
Fiscal Year 2000**



**Nonimmigrant Visas Issued
by Nationality
Fiscal Year 2000**

