

## US to add \$250 visa fee in October

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Dhaka: A recently introduced \$250 "visa integrity fee" for travelers heading to the United States is raising concerns within the international travel sector, already under pressure from declining visitor numbers and increasingly restrictive U.S. immigration policies.

Official figures show that overseas arrivals to the U.S. dropped by 3.1pc in July compared to the same period last year, with just 19.2 million foreign visitors recorded.

The downturn marks the fifth consecutive monthly decline in 2025, frustrating industry hopes that this year would finally see international tourism recover to pre-COVID levels—last recorded at 79.4 million arrivals in 2019.

The sustained fall in numbers is being attributed in part to the hardline immigration stance taken by President Donald Trump, as well as the

administration's increasingly adversarial tone toward several foreign nations.

The new visa fee, set to go into effect on October 1, adds an additional hurdle for travelers from non-visa waiver countries like Mexico, Argentina, India, Brazil and China. The extra charge raises the total visa cost to \$442, one of the highest visitor fees in the world, according to the U.S. Travel Association, a membership organization.

"Any friction we add to the traveler experience is going to cut travel volumes by some amount," said Gabe Rizzi, President of Altour, a global travel management company. "As the summer ends this will become a more pressing issue, and we'll have to factor the fees into travel budgets and documentation."

International visitor spending in the U.S. is projected to fall below \$169 billion this year, down from \$181 billion in 2024, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council.

The visa fee reinforces a bleak perception of the U.S. under Trump, whose immigration policies, cuts to foreign aid and sweeping tariffs have eroded America's appeal as a destination - even with major events like the 2026 FIFA World Cup and Los Angeles 2028 Olympics on the horizon.

The Trump administration on Wednesday proposed government regulation that aims to tighten the duration of visas for students, cultural exchange visitors and members of the media.

In early August, the administration said the U.S. could require bonds of up to \$15,000 for some tourist and business visas under a pilot program effective August 20 that will last for approximately a year, in an effort to crack down on visitors overstaying their visas.

Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics consultancy, forecast in December 2024 that overseas travel to the U.S. in 2025 would increase more than 10pc year-over-year. Instead, it is on track to fall 3pc, said Aran Ryan, director of industry studies at Tourism Economics.

"We see it as a sustained setback, and we anticipate much of it is in place throughout the administration," Ryan said.

