



The Attractions Industry and Summer Work Travel Program **A Mutually Beneficial Partnership**

The Summer Work Travel (SWT) Program, a public diplomacy and cultural exchange program that began in the 1960s, is administered by the U.S. Department of State and is part of its J-1 Exchange Visitor Program. It operates without relying on federal appropriations and bears no cost to U.S. taxpayers. Over the past 20 years, more than one million international university students from over 100 countries took advantage of this opportunity to improve their English, gain new skills and learn about America firsthand. The work component of the program provides these young people with temporary, seasonal jobs, that allow them to offset their living and travel expenses. Exchange visitors earn the same wages and work under the same conditions and protections as their domestic counterparts. One of the main requirements of the program is that exchange visitors not displace American workers.

Many businesses in the attractions industry around the United States utilize the SWT program to supplement their domestic workforce with short term positions to help meet high volume needs during peak seasons. Whether it is due to the seasonal nature or geographic remoteness of the business, many are not able to attract enough American applicants to successfully fulfill their staffing needs. For example, Morey's Piers, an amusement park located in Wildwood, NJ needs about 1,500 employees to fully staff their operations each summer. In comparison, their local high school graduates about 50 students a year. Even with a robust recruiting effort, many of park's jobs remain unfilled. Just like many other businesses in this resort town, Morey's has relied on exchange students to supplement their workforce for over 40 years. The ability to host SWT participants allows businesses to expand their services, dedicate additional staff to ensure an overall positive guest experience, open more facilities and expand operations into shoulder seasons. In many cases, SWT staffing results in additional revenue that helps businesses retain and hire additional full-time staff, diversify their employment benefits, invest in capital projects and community improvements and expand operations. According to a 2017 [EurekaFacts](#) Review, 50% of employers stated the absence of SWT participants would have a negative effect on their revenues; 25% reported it's likely they would not be able to stay open without the SWT program; 39% of employers said it is likely they would have to reduce hours of operation; and 22% of employers were likely to lay off permanent American staff members after the season.

The exchange visitors are fully immersed in American culture and way of life. They experience the American sense of freedom and charity while making lasting friendships

and learning new skills. They travel locally and nationally, try new food, attend sporting events and concerts. Host employers also provide additional, personalized cultural exchange opportunities, such as hosting themed parties, participating in volunteer community events, providing tours of cultural landmarks and holding educational workshops. These students, future change-makers and leaders, take the experiences and values they gained firsthand in the United States back to their native countries, sharing their learnings and the positive impact America and its citizens with their own families and communities.

A clear and positive byproduct of the SWT program has been the great wealth of cultural benefits American citizens experience by working and living alongside international students. Through hearing about the students' culture, traditions and their ways of life in countries beyond our own, American staff, guests and community members develop respect for foreign cultures and people while also gaining a better understanding about interacting in an increasingly globalized world. Without a doubt, the program helps support the State Department's public diplomacy goals.

Moreover, international seasonal workers contribute to the local economy by filling otherwise vacant apartments, using public transportation and shopping at local businesses. According to the same Eureka Review, SWT contributes approximately \$5,300 per participant to local economies, more than a half-billion dollars nationally.

Over the years SWT program has proven to be a mutually beneficial partnership for its international participants and U.S. attractions industry employers and communities alike.

IAAPA, the global association for the attractions industry, is the premier trade association representing the diverse and ever-changing attractions industry. With over 6,000 member companies from over 100 countries IAAPA represents amusement parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, aerial adventure courses, zoos, science centers, aquariums, and manufacturers and suppliers.

To learn more about the attractions industry and the Summer Work Travel program, please contact Erika Scheffer at escheffer@iaapa.org.