

The U.S. government shapes hospitality standards, tourism safety protocols, and international promotion to enhance competitive global positioning

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Abstract

Tourism and hospitality form one of the most dynamic sectors of the U.S. economy, driving revenue, employment, and cultural exchange. As global competition intensifies, sustaining leadership in this sector requires deliberate coordination between government policies and industry practices. At a broad level, the U.S. government plays a strategic role in shaping hospitality standards, implementing safety protocols, and promoting tourism internationally, thereby reinforcing the nation's competitive edge. These interventions not only ensure quality and consistency in service delivery but also build global trust in the United States as a premier destination. Hospitality standards, including accreditation systems and service benchmarks, promote reliability across accommodations, dining, and attractions, ensuring visitors experience high levels of professionalism and satisfaction. Safety protocols covering areas such as health, emergency response, and cybersecurity further enhance traveler confidence, particularly in light of global challenges like pandemics and geopolitical uncertainties. Equally important, international promotion initiatives led by agencies and partnerships highlight the diversity of U.S. destinations, aligning marketing campaigns with cultural diplomacy to attract global travelers. Narrowing the focus, these combined efforts reflect a government-industry partnership that balances regulatory oversight with market innovation. By institutionalizing safety, maintaining high service standards, and strategically promoting its destinations abroad, the United States strengthens its global positioning. This coordinated approach ensures that tourism contributes not only to economic growth but also to cultural influence, international competitiveness, and long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Hospitality Standards; Tourism Safety Protocols; International Promotion; U.S. Government Policy; Global Competitiveness; Sustainable Tourism

1. Introduction

1.1. Background: U.S. tourism and hospitality as a global economic driver

The U.S. tourism and hospitality industry has long been recognized as one of the world's most influential economic drivers [2]. Generating hundreds of billions of dollars annually, it supports millions of jobs and contributes significantly to both state and federal tax revenues [1]. The industry's size and scope extend beyond domestic consumption, as international visitors view the United States as a premier destination for culture, business, and recreation [2].

Beyond its fiscal contributions, tourism acts as a tool of cultural diplomacy, projecting American values and traditions to global audiences [3]. Destinations such as New York City, Las Vegas, and the national park system exemplify how tourism fosters identity while attracting sustained international attention [4]. The hospitality sector also reinforces the U.S. position in global trade, as conferences, exhibitions, and conventions bring investors and innovators from diverse fields [5].

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Moreover, the industry plays a stabilizing role in regional economies. Rural areas benefit from heritage tourism and local festivals, while coastal states leverage beaches and ports to attract global travelers [5]. This multi-layered impact confirms that tourism is not simply leisure it is a strategic sector tied to economic resilience and international influence [3].

1.2. Policy influences on competitiveness in tourism

Government policy significantly shapes the competitiveness of the U.S. tourism sector. Federal initiatives, including visa facilitation programs and international marketing campaigns, have expanded market access while streamlining travel processes for foreign visitors [3]. At the state level, targeted tax incentives, grants, and destination branding campaigns ensure that local tourism industries remain competitive in a global marketplace [2].

Infrastructure investments, such as airports, highways, and digital connectivity, have also reinforced competitiveness. By reducing barriers to mobility, policies ensure that destinations remain accessible and appealing to both domestic and international tourists [1]. Similarly, regulatory frameworks governing safety, sustainability, and consumer rights build traveler confidence, making the U.S. an attractive and reliable destination [6].

Policy influence extends into innovation. Incentives for sustainable practices, such as green certifications for hotels and eco-tourism programs, demonstrate how regulation can simultaneously improve competitiveness and address environmental concerns [7]. Moreover, policies that support workforce training programs strengthen service quality, which is critical for global differentiation [5].

Thus, the role of government extends far beyond oversight; it actively shapes the conditions under which tourism thrives [4]. By aligning economic goals with innovation and resilience, policy ensures the U.S. hospitality sector maintains a competitive global edge [8].

1.3. Research aim, objectives, and scope

This research aims to examine the dynamic relationship between U.S. government policy and the competitiveness of the tourism and hospitality industry [4]. It investigates how interventions at federal and state levels influence innovation, economic performance, and resilience in a sector integral to national prosperity [2].

The objectives are threefold. First, to analyze the historical development of government involvement in tourism, highlighting milestones that shaped today's industry [7]. Second, to evaluate how contemporary policies including sustainability mandates, workforce development programs, and digital infrastructure investments affect sectoral competitiveness [4]. Third, to explore the long-term implications of policy frameworks for economic resilience and global positioning [5].

The scope of this research encompasses both domestic and international dimensions. While the central focus is the U.S. industry, the study situates its analysis within global tourism trends, drawing lessons from comparative policy approaches [4]. By combining historical context with contemporary analysis, the article seeks to provide a holistic understanding of how governance sustains and enhances U.S. tourism [6].

Ultimately, the study contributes to the academic and policy debate on how governments can balance regulation with innovation, ensuring tourism remains both competitive and resilient in an unpredictable global environment [7].

2. Historical development of U.S. government involvement in tourism

2.1. Early frameworks: tourism promotion and service regulation in the 20th century

In the early 20th century, U.S. tourism governance took shape through initiatives that combined promotion, regulation, and cultural preservation [8]. The establishment of the U.S. Travel Bureau in the 1930s marked a formal recognition of tourism as a national economic asset, coordinating marketing campaigns and destination branding to attract both domestic and international visitors [6]. These campaigns sought to project the United States as both modern and culturally rich, creating a balance between economic growth and identity-building.

Simultaneously, governments began regulating hospitality services to protect consumers. Early lodging regulations, sanitation requirements, and transport safety measures ensured that the expanding tourism sector aligned with public health and safety priorities [12]. For example, legislation supporting food safety in restaurants reflected the growing

importance of quality standards in shaping visitor confidence [7]. These regulations provided consistency across regions, which was crucial in establishing national trust in tourism services.

State-level policies complemented federal programs by developing localized tourism boards, investing in roadside infrastructure, and preserving historical landmarks [10]. These efforts highlighted the dual role of government stimulating demand while regulating the standards of supply. The mid-century expansion of the highway system and airport modernization further reinforced tourism's position as a strategic sector [11].

Overall, early frameworks provided the foundation for today's governance models by institutionalizing both promotional campaigns and consumer protections. By the end of the 20th century, the United States had firmly established tourism as an industry requiring government partnership for credibility and growth [9].

2.2. Post-9/11 focus on safety and global trust

The events of September 11, 2001, represented a turning point in U.S. tourism governance. The immediate decline in international arrivals underscored how quickly perceptions of safety could undermine the industry [6]. Federal responses reshaped the regulatory landscape, placing unprecedented emphasis on security measures and global trust-building [12].

The creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) redefined travel through enhanced screening, identity verification, and airport security protocols [10]. While these measures were initially disruptive, they became integral to restoring confidence in the safety of U.S. destinations [8]. Hospitality businesses adapted to new compliance requirements, such as staff security training and emergency preparedness plans, aligning private operations with national security goals [7].

Tourism marketing also took on new dimensions. Campaigns led by Brand USA emphasized both cultural appeal and the safety of travel to the United States, positioning the country as a secure yet welcoming destination [9]. At the same time, policies expanded international collaborations, with U.S. agencies working closely with global organizations to standardize aviation and hospitality security measures [11].

Domestically, new regulations required hotels and convention centers to develop crisis management strategies, integrating security as a core operational component [13]. These initiatives demonstrated how safety concerns had permanently entered the governance framework, reshaping industry norms.

The post-9/11 era thus marked the evolution of governance from promoting growth alone to embedding security into every aspect of tourism and hospitality regulation. The integration of safety protocols into governance frameworks ensured that competitiveness could not be decoupled from resilience [12].

2.3. Contemporary policy directions in tourism governance

Contemporary U.S. tourism policy reflects the cumulative influence of past frameworks while adapting to emerging challenges such as sustainability, digital transformation, and global competition [7]. Federal and state initiatives increasingly focus on balancing growth with environmental responsibility, workforce development, and equitable representation across communities [13].

Digital innovation has become a centerpiece of governance. Investments in broadband and digital booking systems have made tourism more efficient while enabling small businesses to compete globally [8]. Policies also encourage smart tourism initiatives, such as real-time visitor data platforms, to enhance planning and crisis responsiveness [6]. These innovations reflect how governance adapts to both technological trends and shifting consumer expectations.

Sustainability represents another key policy focus. Programs supporting green building certifications for hotels, incentives for eco-tourism, and conservation-oriented tourism corridors demonstrate how governance now integrates environmental stewardship with economic goals [10]. At the same time, inclusivity initiatives highlight minority-owned tourism businesses and promote cultural authenticity, ensuring competitiveness aligns with social equity [12].

Figure 1 illustrates the timeline of government involvement in tourism and hospitality regulation, showing the progression from early promotion and safety standards to post-9/11 security frameworks and modern innovation-oriented policies [11]. The trajectory underscores how governance has expanded from narrowly focused promotion to multidimensional regulation supporting resilience.

Ultimately, contemporary policy directions emphasize agility. By aligning digitalization, sustainability, and inclusivity with longstanding security and promotional frameworks, U.S. governance ensures that tourism remains globally competitive while responsive to future disruptions [9].

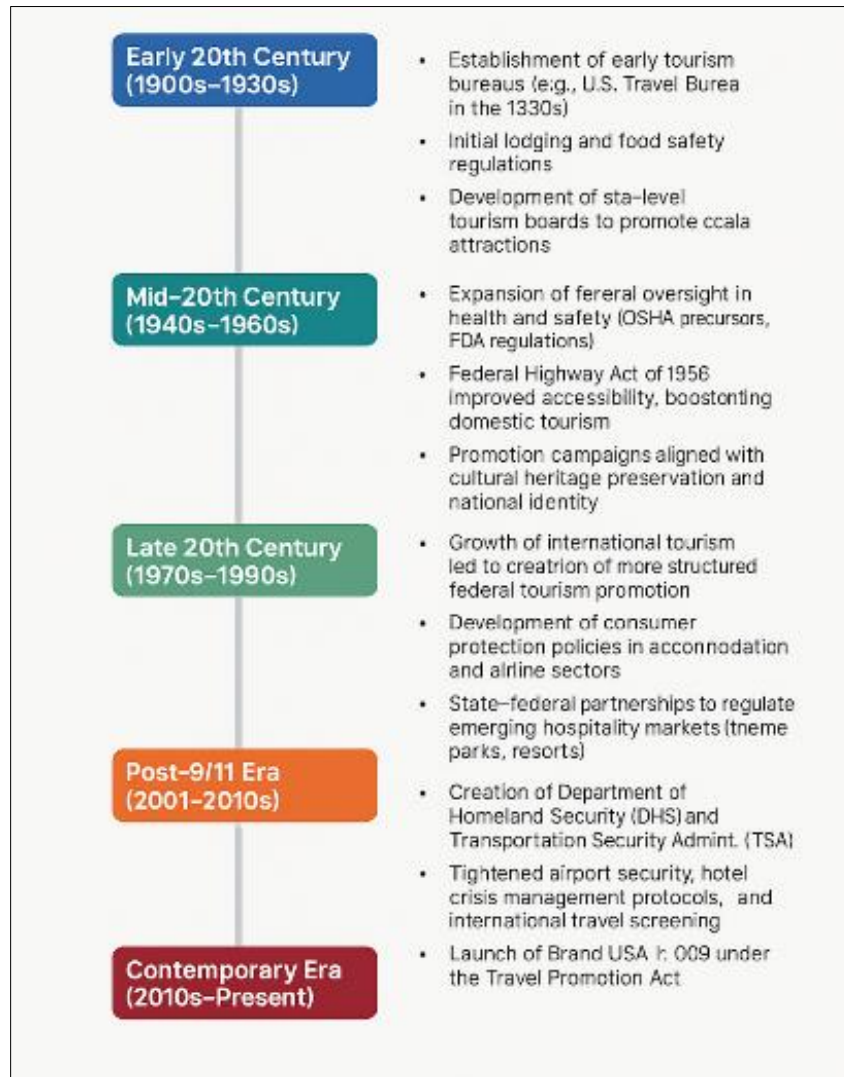


Figure 1 Timeline of U.S. government involvement in tourism and hospitality regulation [7]

3. Hospitality standards and regulatory frameworks

3.1. Defining hospitality standards: accreditation, benchmarking, and service expectations

Hospitality standards in the United States are defined through accreditation frameworks, benchmarking systems, and evolving service expectations that guide the industry's performance [13]. Accreditation bodies, such as the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute, have long provided certifications that codify service quality, workforce competence, and operational practices [16]. These frameworks are critical in ensuring consistency across a sector that spans from luxury resorts to budget accommodations [12].

Benchmarking plays an equally significant role. Performance indicators like occupancy rates, customer satisfaction indices, and RevPAR (revenue per available room) allow businesses to measure themselves against industry averages [17]. These quantitative measures not only guide managerial decision-making but also provide regulators and investors with transparent data on sectoral health [14].

Service expectations represent the third dimension of hospitality standards. Guests expect safety, cleanliness, and efficiency, but also increasingly demand cultural authenticity, inclusivity, and sustainability in their experiences [18].

For example, eco-certifications and diversity training programs are now embedded in many accreditation standards, demonstrating how visitor expectations influence institutional frameworks [15].

Thus, the U.S. system of hospitality standards blends technical metrics with broader cultural and social goals. Accreditation, benchmarking, and service norms together create a multilayered regulatory environment that reflects both market competitiveness and evolving consumer values [12].

3.2. Federal, state, and industry collaboration on hospitality regulation

The institutionalization of hospitality standards relies on collaboration between federal agencies, state governments, and industry associations. Federal involvement typically focuses on health, safety, and consumer protection, with agencies like OSHA and the FDA shaping sanitation and occupational regulations that directly impact hotels and restaurants [16]. These national frameworks provide consistency across the sector, ensuring compliance with minimum service expectations [13].

At the state level, regulatory bodies enforce licensing, zoning, and labor laws that influence hospitality operations. States often tailor these standards to local tourism economies, such as coastal regions prioritizing environmental compliance or urban centers emphasizing event safety [14]. This localized governance allows standards to remain flexible and responsive to regional challenges [17].

Industry associations play a bridging role, translating government policies into practical guidelines for operators. The American Hotel and Lodging Association, for example, develops voluntary codes of conduct that complement legal requirements while promoting higher levels of service quality [15]. Collaborative initiatives, such as public-private partnerships, have also enabled innovation, with joint efforts in digital booking systems, sustainability reporting, and customer data protection [18].

By combining regulatory authority with industry self-governance, U.S. hospitality standards represent a hybrid model. This collaborative structure balances national consistency with local adaptability, ensuring both competitiveness and resilience in the face of evolving challenges [12].

3.3. Impacts of standards on visitor satisfaction and trust

The effectiveness of hospitality standards can be measured by their impact on visitor satisfaction and trust. Accreditation systems and service benchmarks create transparency that reassures travelers of consistent experiences across destinations [13]. Guests are more likely to return to, and recommend, destinations that clearly adhere to recognized standards, strengthening brand reputation [14].

Trust is particularly critical in the post-pandemic era. Standards relating to sanitation, digital safety, and emergency preparedness have become central to reassuring visitors that the U.S. remains a safe and reliable destination [17]. For example, certification programs highlighting enhanced cleaning practices in hotels increased consumer confidence and accelerated recovery after COVID-19 disruptions [12].

Visitor satisfaction also extends to inclusivity. Standards that emphasize accessibility for persons with disabilities, cultural authenticity in marketing, and diversity in staffing ensure that broader demographic groups feel represented and valued [16]. These elements reinforce long-term trust, as they demonstrate that hospitality operators respect and reflect the diversity of their clientele [18].

Figure 2 models how U.S. hospitality standards emerge from collaboration between federal authorities, state regulators, and private stakeholders, illustrating how layered governance fosters visitor confidence [15]. This interplay ensures that standards are not static rules but evolving instruments shaped by consumer expectations and industry innovation.

In this way, hospitality standards serve as both protective mechanisms and marketing tools, directly linking regulation with visitor loyalty and global competitiveness [13].

3.4. Comparative global analysis of hospitality standards

Comparing U.S. hospitality standards with global frameworks highlights both strengths and gaps. The European Union, for instance, emphasizes harmonization across member states, ensuring that hospitality benchmarks are consistent from Spain to Germany [14]. In contrast, the U.S. model is more decentralized, balancing federal oversight with state-

specific adaptations [12]. While this flexibility allows responsiveness, it can also create fragmentation in service expectations [17].

The Asia-Pacific region presents another contrast, where rapid tourism growth has led to innovation in digital governance systems. Countries such as Singapore and Japan integrate smart technologies into accreditation, monitoring real-time service metrics through government-supported platforms [18]. The U.S. has begun adopting similar approaches, but the scale and diversity of its industry present challenges in achieving uniformity [15].

Sustainability also differentiates global models. The EU prioritizes eco-certifications and carbon reduction as mandatory components of hospitality standards, whereas in the U.S. many such practices remain voluntary, encouraged primarily through incentives [16]. This divergence underscores how policy frameworks reflect broader societal priorities.

Table 1 compares U.S. hospitality standards with EU and Asia-Pacific frameworks, highlighting differences in regulation, sustainability integration, and digital innovation [13]. By analyzing these comparisons, it becomes evident that U.S. governance excels in flexibility and industry collaboration but could strengthen standardization in sustainability and technology integration.

Ultimately, global benchmarking demonstrates that while the U.S. remains competitive, continuous adaptation to international best practices will be essential to maintain its leadership in hospitality innovation [14].

Table 1 Comparison of U.S. hospitality standards with EU and Asia-Pacific frameworks

Dimension	United States	European Union (EU)	Asia-Pacific
Governance structure	Decentralized: federal oversight with significant state-level adaptations.	Harmonized framework across member states under EU directives, ensuring consistency.	Mixed: centralized in some (e.g., Singapore, Japan), decentralized in others (e.g., India, Australia).
Accreditation systems	Industry-driven certifications (e.g., AHLA, private accrediting bodies); often voluntary.	EU-wide hotel classification and standardization; accreditation often mandatory and legally binding.	Rapidly developing, with government-led schemes in advanced economies and voluntary systems elsewhere.
Benchmarking practices	Strong reliance on RevPAR, ADR, and guest satisfaction indices.	Integrated benchmarking through Eurostat and national tourism boards.	Increasing adoption of international KPIs, with technology-supported benchmarking in advanced markets.
Service expectations	Focus on consistency, safety, inclusivity, and growing emphasis on sustainability.	Strong emphasis on sustainability, eco-certifications, and accessibility standards.	High emphasis on efficiency, digital integration, and culturally tailored service norms.
Sustainability standards	Voluntary programs promoted through incentives; limited mandatory regulations.	Mandatory eco-certifications and carbon-reduction requirements embedded in EU law.	Strong uptake in advanced economies (e.g., Japan, Singapore); voluntary in emerging markets.
Digital integration	Growing emphasis on smart booking, data analytics, and cybersecurity requirements.	Moderate uptake; strong GDPR-driven digital governance with data privacy protections.	Advanced adoption of smart tourism platforms, AI monitoring, and real-time data systems.
Strengths	Flexibility, strong industry collaboration, and global brand influence.	Consistency, sustainability leadership, and legal enforceability.	Innovation in technology and efficiency, adaptability in fast-growing markets.
Limitations	Fragmentation across states; voluntary sustainability standards create inconsistency.	Slower responsiveness to local needs due to harmonization across member states.	Uneven quality and enforcement in developing countries; wide regional disparities.



Figure 2 Model of U.S. hospitality standard-setting across federal and private stakeholders

4. Tourism safety protocols and traveller confidence

4.1. Health and safety regulations in accommodations and attractions

Health and safety regulations form the backbone of tourism governance, ensuring that accommodations and attractions provide environments that safeguard public well-being [19]. In the U.S., standards are influenced by both federal and state authorities, with bodies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) setting frameworks for workplace safety in hotels, resorts, and entertainment venues [18]. These policies extend to building codes, fire safety standards, and water quality monitoring in recreational facilities [20].

Hotels are particularly subject to rigorous sanitation and hygiene standards. Regulations require clear protocols for cleaning, food handling, and guestroom maintenance, while many states implement periodic inspections to ensure compliance [17]. These measures are vital in reducing risks of foodborne illness, accidents, and facility-based hazards, reinforcing the image of U.S. destinations as trustworthy and secure.

Attractions such as theme parks and cultural landmarks also face specialized safety oversight. Ride inspection regimes, visitor capacity limits, and emergency evacuation drills are standardized to ensure that large-scale venues maintain resilience against both everyday risks and extraordinary incidents [21]. These frameworks not only reduce liability for operators but also foster a culture of accountability across the hospitality sector [23].

By consistently updating and enforcing regulations, U.S. governance ensures alignment with evolving visitor expectations. While enforcement varies by jurisdiction, the integration of safety regulations into operational norms demonstrates a proactive approach that links tourism's competitiveness directly with health and safety assurance [24].

4.2. Emergency preparedness: terrorism, natural disasters, and pandemic responses

Tourism resilience requires comprehensive emergency preparedness protocols that anticipate diverse crises. In the U.S., terrorism, natural disasters, and pandemics have each shaped how emergency management is integrated into tourism governance [20].

After the September 11 attacks, the Department of Homeland Security collaborated with hospitality and travel industries to develop standardized preparedness plans [18]. Hotels near major airports and landmarks began integrating surveillance technologies and emergency evacuation systems, while visitor attractions adopted risk assessment tools to strengthen readiness [21]. These policies aligned private operations with federal counter-terrorism strategies, reinforcing visitor confidence in safety [19].

Natural disasters have also spurred regulatory innovation. Coastal states vulnerable to hurricanes enforce strict building codes, mandatory insurance policies, and evacuation drills in lodging establishments [22]. Similarly, western regions exposed to wildfires and earthquakes have incorporated regional hazard maps into tourism planning, linking environmental forecasting with industry compliance [24].

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated safety protocol development. Policies introduced sanitation certifications, mandatory mask requirements, and digital contact tracing measures in hotels and airports [17]. Emergency funds provided by the federal government supported operators in adopting these protocols without compromising financial stability [23]. Such measures demonstrated that governance frameworks could be adaptive, balancing public health imperatives with industry recovery needs.

These experiences underscore the multidimensional nature of emergency preparedness. By embedding crisis management within tourism governance, the U.S. ensures that responses to terrorism, disasters, and pandemics remain coordinated, scalable, and credible [20].

4.3. Role of technology and cybersecurity in tourism safety

Technology has become central to U.S. tourism safety, with digital systems increasingly relied upon for monitoring, communication, and resilience. Hotels and attractions deploy surveillance cameras, biometric access systems, and smart sensors to detect threats in real time [19]. These systems improve operational efficiency while reducing reliance on manual oversight [21].

Cybersecurity has emerged as a critical dimension, as tourism businesses manage vast amounts of sensitive data from guests, employees, and vendors [24]. Breaches involving credit card data, personal identification, or booking systems can undermine visitor trust and expose operators to liability [20]. In response, federal and state governments have strengthened compliance requirements for data security, mandating encryption protocols and breach disclosure policies [18].

Hospitality companies also invest in AI-driven threat detection systems to monitor unusual patterns in payment transactions or access control networks [17]. This proactive approach demonstrates how digital innovation is reshaping both physical and cyber domains of safety. Cloud-based platforms further allow real-time coordination between hotels, local law enforcement, and emergency services, ensuring rapid responses to potential crises [23].

Figure 3 illustrates the U.S. layered model for tourism safety and crisis management, integrating physical health protocols, cybersecurity defenses, and emergency coordination systems [22]. This holistic framework reflects how governance has evolved to address both traditional risks and emerging digital vulnerabilities.

By embedding technology and cybersecurity into tourism safety governance, the U.S. strengthens resilience while aligning its strategies with global best practices. This dual focus ensures that safety is not only about preventing accidents but also about protecting trust in an increasingly digitalized sector [21].

4.4. Evaluating effectiveness of U.S. safety frameworks in global comparison

The effectiveness of U.S. tourism safety frameworks becomes more evident when viewed against global counterparts. European Union models prioritize harmonized safety regulations, ensuring uniform standards across member states. While this creates consistency, it sometimes lacks the flexibility seen in the U.S., where states adapt protocols to specific regional risks such as hurricanes or wildfires [18].

Table 2 Safety protocols across leading tourist destinations: U.S., EU, and Asia-Pacific

Dimension	United States	European Union (EU)	Asia-Pacific
Governance structure	Layered federal-state system; DHS, TSA, OSHA, and state tourism boards enforce safety.	Centralized EU directives with national implementation; strong harmonization across member states.	Mixed: strong central governance in advanced economies (e.g., Japan, Singapore); fragmented in developing states.
Health and sanitation	OSHA and FDA enforce sanitation, food safety, and workplace health; certification programs post-COVID-19.	Mandatory EU hygiene packages; standardized inspection systems; strict compliance in accommodations and attractions.	Rapid adaptation in advanced economies; uneven enforcement in emerging markets.
Emergency preparedness	Robust crisis management plans: terrorism (post-9/11), natural disasters, pandemic protocols.	EU-wide Civil Protection Mechanism; strong cross-border coordination for disasters and public health.	Frequent regional drills in Japan, Australia, Singapore; variable preparedness elsewhere.
Security measures	TSA-led airport screening, surveillance, and emergency evacuation drills at attractions.	Schengen-related travel controls, standardized aviation and venue security protocols.	High-tech surveillance (e.g., Singapore's smart systems); reliance on traditional policing in less advanced regions.
Cybersecurity protocols	Strong focus on data protection (PCI compliance, FTC oversight); adoption of AI threat detection.	GDPR-driven data protection; integrated cybersecurity in hospitality operations.	Advanced integration in Japan, South Korea, Singapore; uneven adoption in developing destinations.
Sustainability and safety link	Limited integration; mostly voluntary eco-safety practices.	Strong alignment between safety and sustainability (climate adaptation embedded in safety governance).	Advanced in some economies (Japan's disaster-resilient eco-tourism); weaker in developing states.
Strengths	Flexibility, layered resilience, and integration of federal and industry protocols.	Consistency across EU; strong cross-border collaboration and legally binding frameworks.	Rapid adoption of digital safety technologies; advanced models in crisis-prone regions.
Limitations	Fragmentation across states; voluntary sustainability linkages.	Slower responsiveness to local nuances; bureaucracy can delay adaptation.	Wide disparities between advanced and developing countries; inconsistent enforcement and resourcing.

The Asia-Pacific region, by contrast, emphasizes technology integration in safety governance. Countries like Singapore and Japan utilize smart surveillance systems and digital emergency management platforms to monitor visitor safety at scale [20]. The U.S. has adopted comparable measures but faces challenges in harmonizing implementation across diverse jurisdictions [19].

Sustainability-oriented safety also distinguishes global approaches. EU frameworks increasingly link environmental resilience with tourism safety, embedding disaster preparedness into broader climate adaptation policies [22]. While

U.S. frameworks are robust, they often separate safety protocols from environmental governance, limiting opportunities for synergy [23].

Table 2 compares safety protocols across leading destinations in the U.S., EU, and Asia-Pacific, highlighting distinctions in emergency preparedness, cybersecurity integration, and sustainability alignment [24]. This comparative analysis suggests that the U.S. excels in layered, flexible governance but could strengthen coordination to match the harmonization seen in the EU and the digital centralization of Asia-Pacific.

Ultimately, U.S. tourism safety frameworks remain globally competitive, balancing regional adaptability with federal oversight. However, the global landscape underscores the need for continuous refinement, particularly in linking cybersecurity, environmental resilience, and standardized international best practices [17].

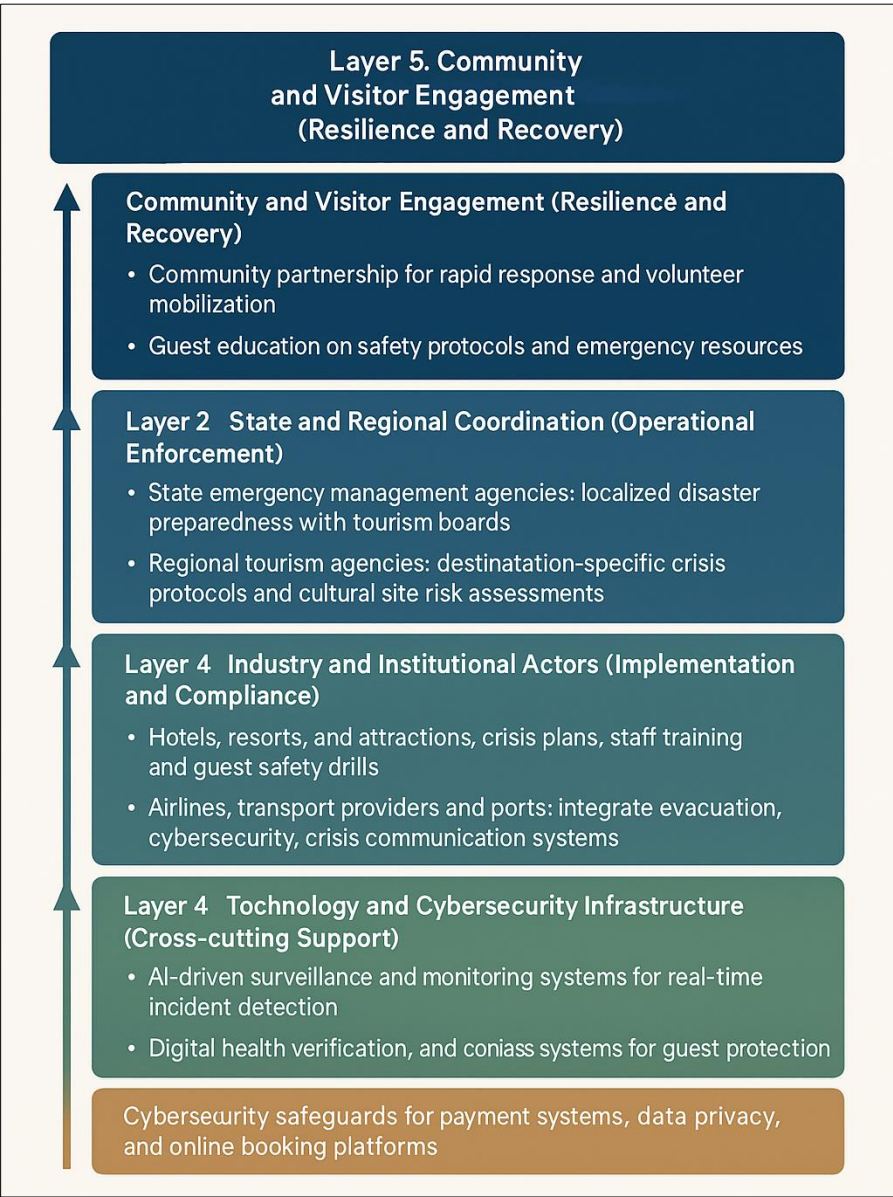


Figure 3 U.S. layered model for tourism safety and crisis management

5. International promotion and global positioning

5.1. Federal promotion agencies: Brand USA, State Department initiatives

Federal promotion agencies form the backbone of U.S. international tourism outreach, ensuring that the country remains visible and competitive in a global market [24]. Among these, Brand USA is the flagship destination marketing organization, established through the Travel Promotion Act of 2009. Its campaigns, such as “Discover America,” highlight the country’s cultural diversity, landscapes, and attractions while targeting high-value international markets [26].

The State Department also plays a complementary role, embedding tourism promotion into cultural diplomacy efforts [23]. U.S. embassies frequently collaborate with Brand USA to organize cultural showcases, support bilateral travel agreements, and align tourism campaigns with broader foreign policy goals. This integration of soft power with tourism promotion helps the U.S. foster stronger relationships with international partners [25].

Federal promotion also includes collaboration with the Department of Commerce, which provides market intelligence on tourism flows and trends. By aligning statistical insights with campaign strategies, agencies ensure that promotion is data-driven and responsive to changing international demand [28]. Additionally, visa policies coordinated by the Department of Homeland Security influence tourism flows, underscoring how promotional strategies must work hand-in-hand with regulatory frameworks [27].

Together, federal agencies create a comprehensive system where destination marketing, diplomacy, and policy intersect. This collaborative governance framework enables the U.S. not only to attract tourists but also to reinforce its global identity through tourism promotion [26].

5.2. Marketing U.S. diversity: cultural diplomacy and destination branding

Marketing the diversity of the United States is central to its tourism promotion strategy. Campaigns increasingly highlight the country’s multiculturalism, positioning it as a destination that reflects both global and local identities [23]. For example, Brand USA has showcased minority-owned businesses and regional festivals in promotional materials, emphasizing authentic community experiences beyond traditional tourist attractions [25].

Cultural diplomacy plays a critical role in this branding. Through initiatives like international arts exchanges, culinary diplomacy, and partnerships with global cultural institutions, the U.S. projects its diversity as both an asset and a value system [28]. These initiatives complement tourism marketing by aligning cultural engagement with travel promotion, presenting the U.S. as not just a destination, but also a partner in cultural exchange [27].

Destination branding also emphasizes regional differentiation. Campaigns highlight iconic cities such as New York and Los Angeles, while also promoting rural, indigenous, and heritage sites. This strategy ensures that diverse geographies and communities contribute to the national brand, fostering inclusivity and broadening the economic benefits of tourism [24].

The challenge lies in balancing diversity with coherence. A fragmented brand risks diluting the overall image of the United States. However, coordinated campaigns that integrate cultural diplomacy with destination marketing achieve synergy, presenting diversity as a unifying strength rather than a source of inconsistency [26].

Ultimately, marketing diversity allows the U.S. to compete with other global destinations not just on attractions but also on values, reinforcing its reputation as a country that celebrates and embodies cultural plurality [23].

5.3. Partnerships with airlines, tour operators, and digital platforms

Partnerships with private industry are vital for extending the reach and impact of federal tourism promotion. Airlines, for instance, collaborate with Brand USA and state tourism boards to co-brand campaigns, often using inflight media, loyalty programs, and global networks to highlight U.S. destinations [25]. These partnerships directly connect tourism marketing with transportation access, enhancing visibility in high-potential markets [27].

Tour operators also serve as critical intermediaries. By packaging travel itineraries, they align promotional messages with practical visitor experiences. Many operators collaborate with U.S. agencies to develop themed tours around

cultural heritage, eco-tourism, or urban innovation, ensuring that federal marketing strategies translate into bookable products [24].

Digital platforms have transformed the scale of tourism promotion. Partnerships with technology companies enable the use of targeted advertising, virtual reality previews, and data-driven insights to attract younger, tech-savvy travelers [28]. Social media campaigns amplify this reach, as influencers and content creators bring authenticity to promotional messages [26]. Such collaborations demonstrate how digital tools extend the life cycle of federal campaigns beyond traditional advertising.

Figure 4 illustrates the international promotion network linking U.S. agencies, industries, and global audiences, highlighting how federal leadership and private sector innovation intersect to sustain global competitiveness [23]. By visualizing these relationships, the model underscores the interdependence of state and market actors in driving tourism promotion.

Through these partnerships, the U.S. leverages industry expertise, technological innovation, and logistical infrastructure to ensure that its promotional strategies resonate with diverse global audiences. This collaborative ecosystem positions the U.S. as a leader in destination marketing while reinforcing its competitive advantage in an increasingly digital and interconnected marketplace [27].

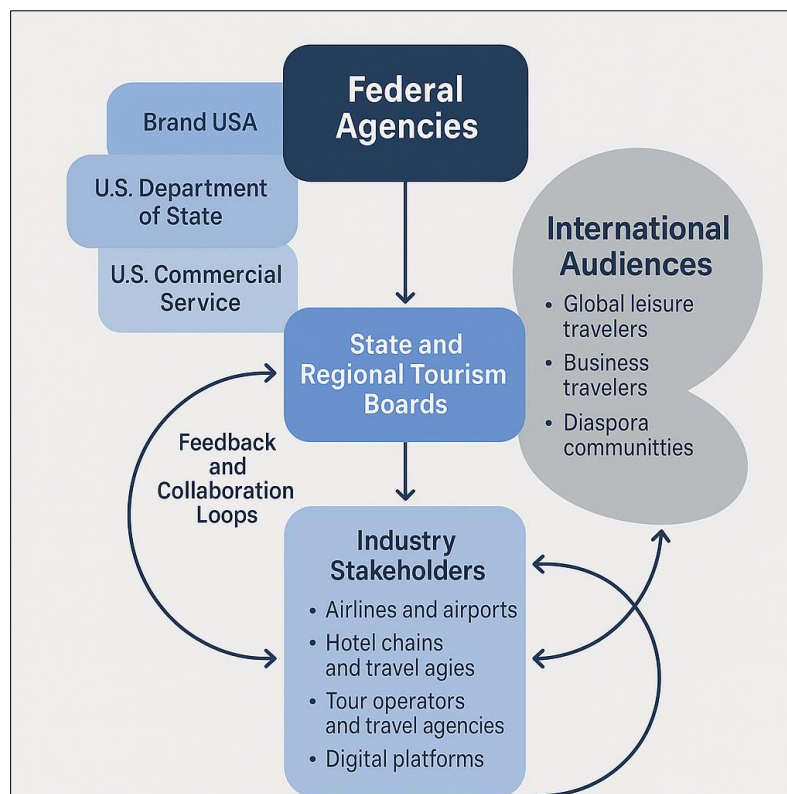


Figure 4 International promotion network linking U.S. agencies, industries, and global audiences [22]

6. Integrated impact on U.S. global competitiveness

6.1. Synergies among standards, safety, and promotion

The integration of hospitality standards, safety protocols, and international promotion creates a synergistic framework that strengthens U.S. competitiveness in the global tourism market [28]. Standards ensure consistent service delivery, safety protocols protect visitors from risks, and promotion amplifies the country's image abroad [30]. When coordinated effectively, these pillars generate a cycle of trust and attraction: high standards reassure visitors, safety measures sustain their confidence, and promotion communicates these strengths to global audiences [33].

The layered nature of this synergy is particularly evident in crisis contexts. For instance, after the COVID-19 pandemic, sanitation certifications (standards) and emergency preparedness (safety) became central to recovery campaigns (promotion), showcasing how interconnected pillars reinforce resilience [31]. Similarly, cultural authenticity embedded within accreditation programs provides material for international branding efforts, linking regulatory mechanisms with marketing narratives [29].

Industry stakeholders highlight that without integration, governance efforts risk fragmentation. Safety policies, if not aligned with promotional strategies, may appear burdensome, while marketing campaigns without regulatory backing lack credibility [32]. The U.S. model's strength lies in balancing these elements to produce a comprehensive tourism governance structure. This integration not only addresses immediate operational concerns but also positions the U.S. as a reliable, innovative, and secure destination in the global marketplace [34].

6.2. Contribution to U.S. tourism revenue, jobs, and soft power

The combined effect of standards, safety, and promotion directly translates into economic contributions. Tourism in the U.S. generates hundreds of billions annually, with government-supported governance structures ensuring that this revenue is sustained through credibility and competitiveness [27]. High service standards encourage repeat visits, boosting average spending per tourist, while robust safety frameworks reduce reputational risks that could otherwise destabilize markets [30].

Job creation represents another significant contribution. From hotel staff to marketing professionals, integrated governance creates employment across diverse sectors. Workforce training tied to accreditation programs ensures that employees are prepared to meet evolving visitor expectations [33]. Additionally, partnerships with airlines and tour operators expand opportunities in logistics and transportation, further embedding tourism as a key job generator [29].

Soft power is also enhanced through tourism governance. Promotion campaigns emphasizing U.S. diversity project the nation as an inclusive and culturally vibrant society [34]. This aligns with broader diplomatic objectives, as international visitors often carry positive impressions back to their home countries, reinforcing political and economic relationships [31].

Thus, the governance framework extends beyond economics, positioning U.S. tourism as both a domestic growth engine and a tool of international influence [35].

6.3. Comparative advantages against global competitors

In global competition, the U.S. leverages its unique integration of governance pillars as a comparative advantage. Unlike the European Union, where harmonization sometimes slows responsiveness, the U.S. benefits from federal-state flexibility, enabling adaptation to regional crises such as hurricanes or wildfires [28]. This decentralized approach allows rapid policy customization while maintaining overarching federal standards that ensure credibility [32].

Against Asia-Pacific competitors, the U.S. maintains strength in cultural diversity and scale. While countries like Singapore excel in digital governance, the U.S. offers a breadth of attractions and multicultural experiences unmatched in scope [30]. Promotional campaigns that highlight indigenous, minority, and regional identities enhance its global brand, differentiating it from destinations that rely more heavily on uniform branding [33].

Another advantage lies in safety integration. The layered governance model ensures that U.S. attractions meet rigorous regulatory requirements, while promotion communicates this reliability internationally [29]. This combination of resilience and visibility strengthens the country's competitive positioning, particularly in post-crisis recoveries [34].

By synthesizing standards, safety, and promotion, the U.S. secures a unique global identity: a destination that balances innovation, resilience, and cultural inclusivity while competing effectively in a dynamic international tourism landscape [31].

6.4. Limitations and critiques of U.S. government approaches

Despite these strengths, U.S. tourism governance faces limitations and critiques. One major challenge is fragmentation: while flexibility allows state-level adaptation, it can create inconsistency in standards and visitor experiences [27]. Tourists may encounter disparities in safety enforcement or service quality across regions, undermining the perception of national coherence [30].

Another critique concerns sustainability. Unlike the EU, where eco-certifications are often mandatory, U.S. initiatives remain largely voluntary, leaving gaps in climate resilience and environmental accountability [32]. This has raised questions about the long-term competitiveness of U.S. tourism if sustainability standards do not keep pace with global expectations [34].

Marketing strategies also face criticism for overemphasizing iconic destinations while underpromoting rural or marginalized communities [29]. This imbalance risks concentrating economic benefits while failing to fully leverage the cultural diversity emphasized in federal campaigns [31]. Furthermore, reliance on private sector partnerships for promotion raises concerns about equitable representation, as larger corporations often dominate collaborative initiatives [33].

Finally, cybersecurity vulnerabilities remain a pressing issue. While governance increasingly integrates digital safety, fragmented enforcement exposes small operators to disproportionate risks [35]. Addressing these critiques is essential for refining the governance framework and maintaining U.S. leadership in global tourism competitiveness [28].

7. Future directions and policy innovations

7.1. Leveraging digital tools and AI for standards and safety

The future of U.S. tourism governance will be significantly shaped by digital transformation, particularly through Artificial Intelligence and smart technologies [35]. AI-driven monitoring systems can standardize hospitality service quality by analyzing real-time feedback, occupancy trends, and staff performance, thus improving accreditation and benchmarking processes [36]. These tools reduce subjectivity in evaluations and enhance transparency across the industry.

Safety governance will also evolve through AI-enabled predictive analytics. For example, hotels and attractions can use algorithms to forecast equipment failures, identify unusual patterns in visitor behavior, or simulate crisis scenarios [39]. Cybersecurity is equally critical, as tourism businesses continue to face threats from data breaches and digital fraud. By embedding AI into security protocols, the U.S. can maintain resilience in both physical and digital domains [34].

Digital integration further supports international competitiveness. Platforms powered by machine learning can tailor promotional strategies to specific markets, ensuring that U.S. campaigns remain adaptive to shifting global travel patterns [38]. However, this innovation requires strong regulatory oversight to safeguard privacy and ensure equitable access to technological advancements [40].

By embracing AI and digital tools, U.S. governance frameworks can simultaneously raise service standards, strengthen safety, and amplify promotional effectiveness, reinforcing their global leadership in tourism governance [37].

7.2. Embedding sustainability and inclusivity in tourism governance

Sustainability and inclusivity are increasingly seen as non-negotiable pillars of future tourism governance. While the U.S. has made strides in eco-tourism initiatives, critics argue that voluntary certifications fall short of global benchmarks [34]. Embedding mandatory sustainability standards into accreditation systems such as energy efficiency ratings for hotels or carbon neutrality goals for destinations would align the U.S. with best practices in Europe and Asia-Pacific [36].

Inclusivity is equally essential. Tourism promotion that authentically represents diverse communities, indigenous cultures, and minority-owned businesses strengthens social equity while broadening market appeal [39]. Policy frameworks that incentivize inclusive hiring, accessible infrastructure, and cultural preservation programs can institutionalize equity as a defining feature of U.S. tourism [35].

Governance must also adapt to environmental pressures. Rising climate risks, such as hurricanes or wildfires, threaten the viability of major destinations. Integrating disaster preparedness with sustainability policies ensures long-term resilience while reducing environmental impacts [38].

By embedding sustainability and inclusivity, U.S. tourism can shift from reactive strategies toward proactive, values-driven governance [40]. This evolution not only addresses ethical responsibilities but also enhances competitiveness, as global travelers increasingly prioritize destinations that reflect social and environmental responsibility [39].

7.3. Expanding U.S. leadership in global tourism policy

U.S. leadership in global tourism policy will depend on its ability to harmonize domestic innovation with international collaboration [40]. Participation in organizations such as the UN World Tourism Organization provides opportunities to influence global standards, ensuring that U.S. models of safety, promotion, and accreditation are represented in international frameworks [41].

Expanding leadership also requires deepening bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Joint initiatives with allies on crisis preparedness, cybersecurity, and cultural diplomacy enhance not only global tourism governance but also broader diplomatic relationships [42]. By exporting best practices in layered safety protocols and digital standardization, the U.S. can position itself as a thought leader in resilience-driven tourism [43].

Soft power remains central. Branding initiatives that emphasize inclusivity and sustainability reinforce the U.S. image as a responsible global leader [44]. At the same time, investing in capacity-building programs abroad such as training hospitality professionals or sharing digital governance tools demonstrates leadership through cooperation rather than unilateral dominance [45].

The challenge lies in balancing national competitiveness with global stewardship [46]. By embedding innovation, equity, and sustainability into governance, the U.S. can lead not only as a destination but also as a policymaker shaping the future of global tourism [47].

8. Conclusion

8.1. Summary of U.S. government role in shaping competitiveness

The U.S. government has played a pivotal role in shaping the global competitiveness of its tourism and hospitality sector through layered governance mechanisms. By institutionalizing hospitality standards, implementing comprehensive safety protocols, and advancing international promotion strategies, federal and state agencies have built a framework that ensures both resilience and growth. Standards provide credibility and consistency across a diverse industry landscape, while safety protocols reinforce visitor confidence in an era of heightened global risks. Simultaneously, promotional efforts led by agencies such as Brand USA project the nation's cultural diversity and innovative capacity, positioning the United States as a premier global destination. Together, these pillars form an integrated governance model that not only supports revenue generation and employment but also enhances the country's soft power and international reputation. This multi-dimensional approach underscores how governance serves as both an economic driver and a diplomatic instrument.

8.2. Practical implications for policymakers and industry

For policymakers, the institutionalization of tourism governance highlights the importance of coordination across federal, state, and private actors. Ensuring alignment between standards, safety, and promotion is essential to avoid fragmentation and to maximize global competitiveness. Future policy frameworks must address sustainability and inclusivity more directly, embedding them into regulatory systems to meet rising international expectations. Strengthening cybersecurity and leveraging digital innovations such as Artificial Intelligence will also be critical to enhancing safety and improving service delivery.

For industry leaders, the government-backed governance model offers both guidance and opportunity. Adherence to established standards not only ensures compliance but also builds consumer trust and brand reputation. Partnerships with federal agencies in promotion and crisis management expand market reach and resilience capacity. By aligning business strategies with governance priorities, industry actors can position themselves as contributors to both economic growth and national competitiveness.

8.3. Final reflections on sustaining global leadership

Sustaining U.S. global leadership in tourism and hospitality requires continuous innovation, collaboration, and adaptability. As global competition intensifies and traveler expectations evolve, governance must remain dynamic, integrating sustainability, inclusivity, and technological advancements into its frameworks. The ability of the U.S. to balance economic competitiveness with cultural authenticity and resilience will determine its long-term standing as a leader in the global tourism arena. By reinforcing synergies between standards, safety, and promotion while embracing forward-looking strategies, the United States can secure not only its market share but also its role as a global model of tourism governance.

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