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New \$250 “Visa Integrity Fee” to Be Introduced for U.S. Non-Immigrant Travelers

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The United States government will introduce a new \$250 Visa Integrity Fee for most non-immigrant visa applicants beginning as early as October 1, 2025. The fee, part of a broader immigration and budget initiative, aims to strengthen compliance with U.S. visa rules but has already drawn criticism from the travel industry and international visitors.

The new surcharge was enacted under the “One Big Beautiful Bill” and will apply to widely used visa types, including B-1/B-2 (business and tourism), F and M (student), H (temporary worker), and J (exchange visitor) categories. It will be collected in addition to existing visa application fees, fraud prevention charges, and machine-readable visa costs.

Nationals from countries participating in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, such as the United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany, will be exempt from the fee, along with most Canadian and Bermudian citizens. The measure is designed to encourage lawful visa behavior and deter overstays by offering reimbursement to applicants who fully comply with visa terms, such as leaving the U.S. on time, obtaining legal extensions, or transitioning to lawful permanent resident status.

The fee is non-waivable, and officials say it may be adjusted for inflation beginning in fiscal year 2026. However, the federal government has not yet specified which agency, likely either the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of State, will be responsible for collection or refunds. The process for reclaiming the fee remains unclear.

Travel industry leaders warn that the policy could hurt tourism and international business travel just ahead of major global events in the U.S., including the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympics. U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Geoff Freeman called the fee “foolish,” arguing it could act as a barrier to entry for millions of potential visitors.

For travelers from countries like India, the cost of a U.S. B-1/B-2 visa could rise from approximately \$185 to over \$470, depending on other consular charges. Immigration attorneys say the increase may deter

students, skilled workers, and tourists who already face lengthy wait times and burdensome requirements.

Supporters of the policy argue that it reinforces accountability in the visa process and offsets immigration enforcement costs. Critics contend it creates a financial barrier for legitimate travelers while offering limited improvements to the visa system's functionality.

As implementation nears, both sides are watching closely to see how the policy will impact international travel, compliance, and America's global reputation.