



## **News Release**

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### **Middle East Meltdown:**

#### **US travel to Islamic countries collapses in wake of Trump ban**

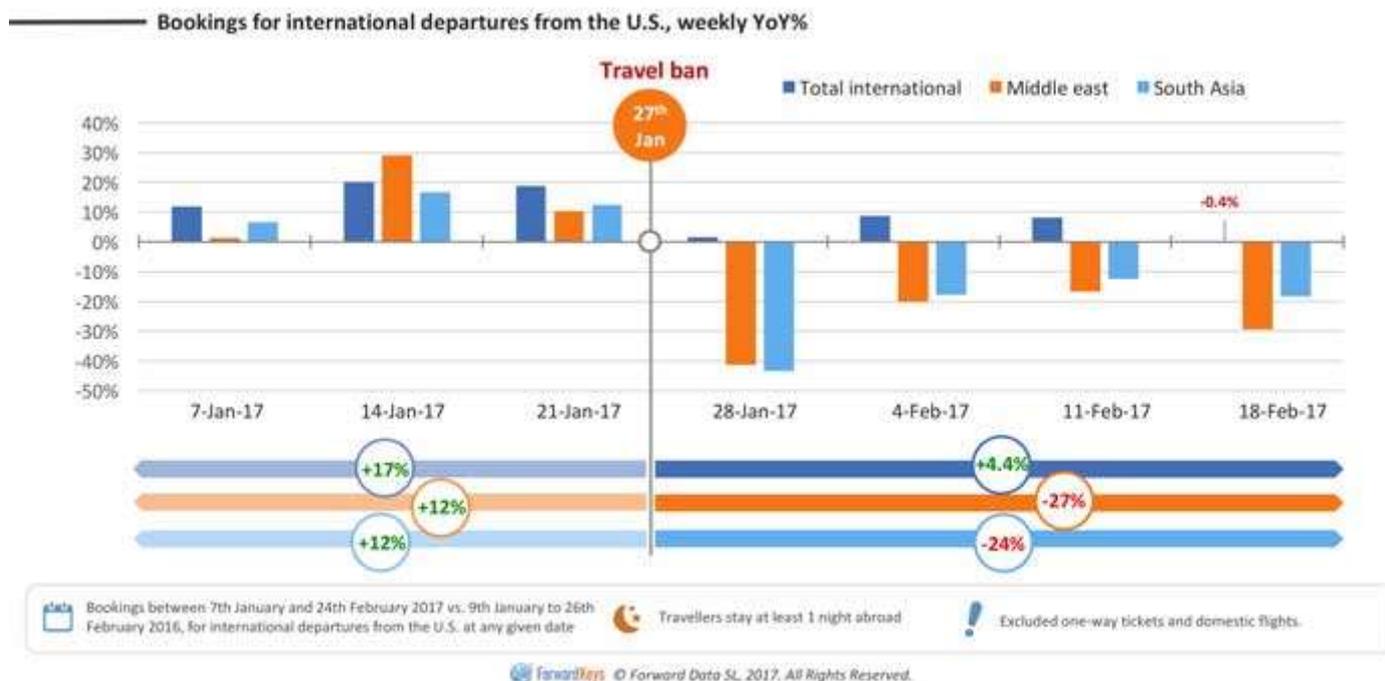
US bookings for travel to the Middle East collapsed in the wake of President Trump's travel ban, according to ForwardKeys, which monitors future travel patterns by analysing 16 million flight reservation transactions each day.

Olivier Jager, CEO, ForwardKeys, said: "It is interesting to note that the travel ban has not only impacted travel from the seven affected countries to the USA, as one would expect; it has also affected travel in the opposite direction too. At this point, we do not know why exactly but we suspect that United States citizens may be avoiding travel to Islamic countries, fearing that they will not be welcome or that Muslims based in the United States may be avoiding travel fearing re-entry problems or both. Nevertheless, whilst we cannot be sure of the cause, the effect, a 27% collapse in bookings to the Middle East, is substantial."

ForwardKeys also found that the travel ban on people from the seven Muslim-majority countries had a much wider than expected impact, as total international travel **to** the USA fell by 6.5% in the wake of the executive order. The intervention by the courts a week later to strike down the ban triggered a recovery; only for bookings to the USA to slump again when President Trump promised a new ban. Bookings for future arrivals are effectively flat.

#### **Outbound travel bookings before and after the ban**

The impact of the ban on outbound travel is demonstrated by the fact that accumulated USA bookings to the Middle East three weeks before the ban were up by a very healthy 12% on last year. However, in the four weeks following the ban they were down 27%, a 39% meltdown!



The same pattern was observed in bookings to South Asia, which, prior to the travel ban were 12% up and in the period afterwards fell to 24% down, a 36% reversal. (ForwardKeys' geographic definition, following UNWTO, puts Iraq, Yemen and Syria in the Middle East and Iran in South Asia). As a benchmark, total outbound bookings from the USA made during the peak January booking season, prior to the imposition of the travel ban, were unusually healthy, 17% up on last year. The surge was likely driven by pent-up demand for travel to Europe, which was negatively affected in 2016 by a series of terrorist incidents. In the four weeks after the imposition of the ban, the rise in total outbound bookings had fallen back to 4.4%.

### Bookings for outbound travel during the coming three months

Looking ahead at bookings for future travel during the upcoming three months, March-May, there has also been a significant stall in bookings from the USA to the Middle East and South Asia. On January 27<sup>th</sup> forward bookings for travel to the Middle East were 23% ahead of the same point last year but by February 28<sup>th</sup>, they had fallen to 2.4% behind, a 25.4% slow-down. Bookings for travel to South Asia during the March-May period were 8.8% ahead prior to the imposition of the ban; by February 28<sup>th</sup>, they were 6.6% behind, a 15.4% slow-down. As a benchmark, overall USA outbound travel for the next three months is, as of February 28<sup>th</sup>, a very healthy 11% ahead but prior to the ban it had been an even healthier 20% ahead, a 9% slow-down.

Whether the overall slow-down in forward bookings has been caused by the travel ban is debateable – it could simply be the consequence of an unusually strong peak booking season in January. However, the collapse in bookings to the Middle East is very difficult to explain without reference to the travel ban.

Departures from the U.S. to selected countries during the next 3 months, booking situation before and after the travel ban (YoY%)



## Inbound travel to the USA

Looking more closely at total international travel **to** the US, ForwardKeys data shows that the imposition of the travel ban on January 27<sup>th</sup> caused a 6.5% slump in bookings to the USA in the following eight days. However, when the ban was struck down by the courts on February 4<sup>th</sup>, there was a recovery and in the 12 days after that, bookings rose to 2.2% over the same period last year. But, as soon as plans for a new ban were announced on February 17<sup>th</sup>, bookings again fell and in the 9 days since, they have been 4% down on the equivalent period last year. The Middle East and Africa were particularly hit by a reluctance to travel to the USA, as was Europe.

%Variation of net international bookings to U.S.A. by origin region



## Bookings for inbound travel during the coming three months

Looking ahead, forward bookings for total international arrivals in the USA during the next three months, are currently slightly, 0.4%, behind where they were at the same time last year. Inbound travel from Europe, the Middle East and Africa is significantly behind whereas travel from Asia Pacific and the Americas is ahead. As a benchmark, on January 27<sup>th</sup>, the day before the imposition of the travel ban, three-month forward bookings were 3.4% ahead.

Forward looking international arrivals in the U.S.A. next 3 floating months as of Feb 25<sup>th</sup> 2017



Olivier Jager, concluded: “Donald Trump’s on-off travel ban has created a rollercoaster ride for the travel industry. Some passengers do not know where they stand as they await President Trump’s promised new order. It’s not at all clear when that will come. In the meantime, uncertainty reigns and the presidential rhetoric appears to be deterring visitors to the USA.”

To download the full research, [click here](#) Not published yet until 6 March.

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## About ForwardKeys

ForwardKeys predicts future travel patterns by crunching and analysing 16m booking transactions a day. It is used by travel marketers, retailers, hotels, destination marketing organisations (DMOs), financial institutions, car rental companies, tour operators, online travel agents (OTAs), and other traveller-focussed businesses worldwide to monitor and anticipate traveller arrivals and stay ahead of the trends from a particular origin market at a specific time. The analysis enables them to anticipate the impact of events, better manage their staffing levels, fine tune supply requirements, adjust and measure the effectiveness of their marketing efforts and predict future market trends. ForwardKeys’ data is retrieved daily from all the major global reservation systems worldwide.

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