BRAND USA

NEWS RELEASE

# Travel and Tourism Leader Christopher L. Thompson Named President and CEO of Brand USA Brings nearly 30 years of tourism expertise and leadership to the organization

*Washington, DC - September 27, 2012*

The board of directors of Brand USA today announced the appointment of Christopher L. Thompson to president and CEO of the public private partnership responsible for spearheading the United States' first nationally coordinated tourism marketing effort.

Prior to Brand USA, Thompson led the state of Florida's destination marketing efforts as president and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA, one of the nation's most successful destination marketing organizations. He will succeed Caroline Beteta, who has been interim president of the organization since June 21, 2012, in addition to her role as president and CEO of Visit California and her role on the Brand USA board of directors.

Thompson is currently working with the board of directors of VISIT FLORIDA to ensure a smooth transition from his current role to Brand USA and will be announcing an official start date soon.

The news of Thompson's appointment comes at a pivotal time in Brand USA's growth. The organization enters fiscal year 2013 on October 1, 2012, with a great deal of momentum and on the heels of its successful inaugural campaign (in Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom); the establishment of international representation in eight markets (the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil); the completion of its first sales mission (in India); and the launch of a Tourism Exchange Year with Japan. Operationally, Brand USA has strengthened its operational infrastructure and cost efficiencies, as well as elevated its responsiveness to industry and government stakeholders. In addition, over the past year, the organization has successfully established key partnerships with more than 260 travel brands and destinations representing a cross section of the industry. These partnerships are generating millions of dollars in contributions to support the nation's tourism marketing effort.

Thompson has nearly three decades of experience in the tourism industry. In his most recent role as president and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA, he led the organization's growth and success in a number of areas, including exponential year over year record growth, numerous operational and marketing awards, and extensive international tourism expertise.

"We are thrilled to welcome Chris as Brand USA's president & CEO," said Caroline Beteta, chair of the Brand USA board of directors. "Chris is a proven leader with extensive strategic and operational experience who is widely respected throughout the travel industry and by elected and government officials. Moreover, he has extensive experience in generating nearly unprecedented growth in international travel to the United States and establishing mutually beneficial partnerships that have resulted in record growth. We are fortunate to have someone of his caliber at the helm of Brand USA," Beteta added.

In his role as president & CEO of Brand USA, Thompson will be responsible for accelerating the organization's efforts on building and executing effective marketing strategies to increase inbound travel to the United States, resulting in increased U.S. exports and increased employment. These programs consist of marketing, public relations, and partnership programs critical to the overall marketing of the United States as the world's premier travel destination, as well as communications programs to provide travelers with vital information that inspires and makes it easier to explore the vast range of experiences and destinations available in the U.S.A.

"I am honored to be entrusted with leading Brand USA as its president and CEO," said Thompson. "Brand USA has achieved significant milestones over the past year, and has an ambitious set of goals charted to become the world's leading global destination marketing organization. I look forward to collaborating with the travel industry and our partners in the United States government in order to generate globally leading job creation, GDP, export growth, and revenue for our nation through the power of travel."

Thompson was one of the industry leaders who helped lead the effort to gain support for the passage of the Travel Promotion Act, which was signed into law in March 2010. He subsequently became a key member of the task force charged with guiding the launch of the Corporation for Travel Promotion created by the Act (and which today does business as Brand USA).

Thompson began his career in tourism with the Division of Tourism in the former Florida Department of Commerce in April 1983. He was appointed bureau chief over domestic tourism in April 1986 and in November 1988 joined the the Leon County (Florida) Tourist Development Council as the organization's first executive director. In April 1991, Thompson took leadership of the Tallahassee (Florida) Area Convention and Visitors Bureau as president and CEO.

In August 1995, Thompson founded MarketServe, Inc., a professional management, marketing and planning services company based in Tallahassee, Fla. Two years later, he joined VISIT FLORIDA as senior vice president, partner development and was promoted to chief operating officer in May 2003. In May 2009, he was named the organization's president and chief executive officer where he led VISIT FLORIDA's impressive growth on a local, state, national, and international level.

Throughout his career, Thompson has been honored with a number of industry awards and recognized for numerous accomplishments, including being named one of the "Top Twenty Five Most Extraordinary Minds in Sales & Marketing" by the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International in 2009.

An active member of the community and the industry, Thompson is a Certified Destination Management Executive and currently serves as a member or board member of some of a number of influential business and travel industry associations and organizations, including the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board of the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Travel Association, Destination Marketing Association International, the Association of Travel Marketing Executives, International SKAL, the Southeast Tourism Society, and the Travel and Tourism Advisory Council, Miami Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

Thompson earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from the University of Florida in 1980. He and his wife, Susan, have two grown sons, Christopher and James.

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**About Brand USA**
Brand USA is the nation's destination marketing organization, dedicated to attracting legitimate international inbound travel to strengthen the U.S. economy, increase exports, create quality jobs, and promote community prosperity. By running data-driven campaigns and unifying messaging across industry and government, Brand USA positions the United States as a top global destination while providing current visa and entry information.

Over the past 13 years Brand USA has driven 11.3 million additional international visitors who spent $38.1 billion in the United States, leading to $82.9 billion in total economic impact and sustaining an average of more than 40,000 jobs each year. These efforts have generated nearly $11 billion in attributable tax receipts at the federal, state, and local levels.