

# The Daily Telegraph

## US ski resorts face severe staff shortages

New restrictions on foreign working visas could leave top US ski resorts without enough staff to operate.

By James Holt  
31 Oct 2008



Many Britons head for jobs in Colorado's \$2.6 billion ski industry Photo: AP

Hundreds of British skiers have been denied work in American resorts after the US Congress enforced a visa capping system – a move which could leave US ski resorts seriously short of qualified ski instructors, lift staff and resort workers.

Earlier this year the US Government decided to cap the number of seasonal work visas (known as H-2B), to restrict the influx of foreign employees - a decision that has left many Britons looking at home or to Europe for seasonal work.

The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) and other industries has warned Congress that the allocation of 33,000 visas is nowhere near enough to serve the needs of resorts which rely on the recruitment of skilled foreign workers to help run their resorts. The allocation was filled by July, long before any Britons applied.

"British workers offer short-term help and return to their home country at the end of their season," said Senator for Maryland, Barbara Mikulski. "Even with the current allocation, it still does not meet the labour needs of seasonal businesses."

Although an emergency amendment is being pushed for by the ski resorts and the Save Small Business in America group, it is unlikely that, in election year, it will be passed in time for applications to be processed before the season starts.

Rob Stammaas, 22, from Bournemouth, said he was now forced to look elsewhere for work.

"It has completely forced me to re-think my plans, and left me out of pocket," he said. "I'd made a number of arrangements and it has been very frustrating. I may now look to Canada or Europe."

Most British workers head for jobs in Colorado's \$2.6 billion ski industry. The state has long relied on an international work force and the cap has forced resorts such as Vail and Steamboat to try to find alternatives.

Through a partnership with the American Hospitality Association, they are introducing a "Cultural Ambassador" programme (Q-1 visa) first used by Disney's theme parks.

It means the handful of Britons who manage to get hold of a Q-1 will be required to attend classes on the service industry, before being allowed to work in resorts.

But even with this visa, the number of British workers in American resorts is expected to drop by almost 75 per cent from last year.