

# The International Worker in Today's Economy

**W**ith the unemployment rate skyrocketing past 9 percent, HR departments are facing increasing pressure to help fill employment gaps from within their local communities. This often means reducing or completely eliminating the array of international applicants who arrive at the resort each year to fill a variety of seasonal positions.

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Without these critical seasonal imports, however, many departments struggle to staff certain positions shunned by Americans, even in this economy. Whether it's due to the resort's isolated location, seasonality or the nature of the work, some jobs remain an HR headache.

Because of this reality, for many, using internationals to fill in gaps left void by domestics is a much-needed hiring option.

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Despite the recession, Keystone Ski Resort in Colorado will continue using internationals to staff critical positions.

“Our international employees have always been and will continue to be an important part of our company's culture, and as the economic environment improves, I would anticipate that we will work to increase our international workforce in the future. We are bringing them in through new recruitment channels like our college program, which provides formal training and career path educational opportunities,” said Bob Chapman, director of recruiting for Vail Resorts.

Other domestic applicants are apprehensive to fill jobs that only last a few months. Thorin Magbie, HR director for Mount Snow, has experienced this problem. “I think most of the folks who have been displaced in this economy are still primarily looking for year-round work...A seasonal job as a housekeeper is not what these folks are interested in doing.”

Magbie also plans to continue with the international program this year. He is not expecting to fill certain positions domestically due to the isolated location of Mount Snow and the nature of the work involved. Although he uses international applicants for less than 15 percent of his total hires, he says that internationals “fill critical positions [for which] we continue to see a decrease in local candidates, and they are absolutely critical positions.”

Ski resorts are not the only industry experiencing this problem, either. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article denounced the U.S. government's scaling back of short-term visas, stating that “Americans won't or can't do certain jobs...[perhaps because] they didn't want to work with their hands, get dirty, or sweat.”

However, this isn't to say that the economic crisis will not largely affect the work and travel programs. Due to the diminished economy, most ski resorts will try to fill as many spots as possible locally, which will in turn force resorts to make major changes to their international programs.

Many employers are carefully reviewing their hiring needs and delaying confirmation of winter hiring numbers. Work and travel companies are seeing as many as 50 percent fewer employer confirmations as at this time last year, with more confirmations for job fairs held later in the season.

In the end, it all comes down to finding the right balance. As Magbie says, “I think that as much as we enjoy the J1 program, we would never want it to be at the detriment to the local candidates, so we're very cautious of that and try our best to balance those needs.”

Magbie added, “Employing local candidates is always going to be our top priority. However, if we cannot fill a position domestically, we must hire J1 applicants.”

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