

MarketWatch

This country sent the most foreign fiancées to the U.S. in 2016

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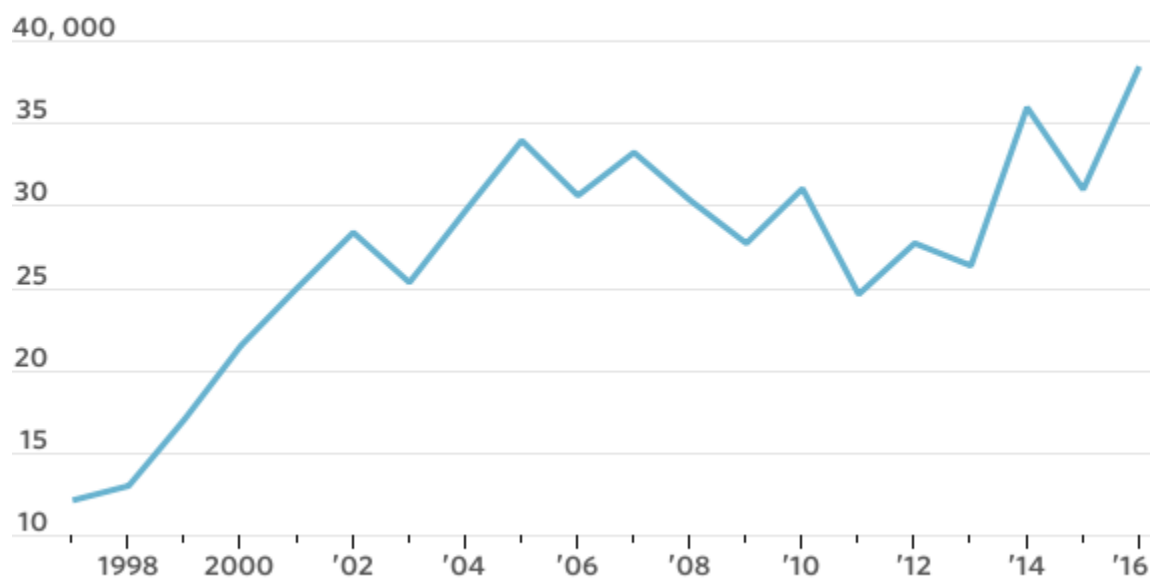
Finding a significant other in a foreign country has become more common for Americans.

The number of fiancée visas issued to foreign nationals has tripled from 12,088 to 38,403 a year since the late 1990s, signifying the trend in the past two decades. The K-1 visa allows American citizens to bring a foreign fiancée into the country.

So where are Americans most likely to find their international romance?

International marriage is on the rise

Number of fiancée visas issued to foreign nationals



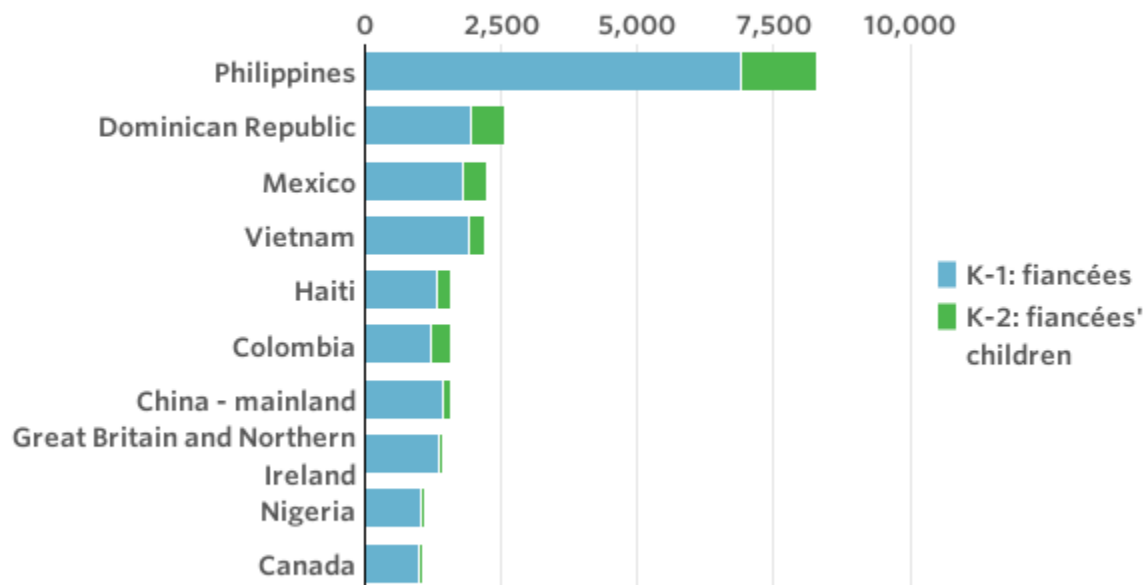
Source: U.S. Department of State
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A closer look at data from the Department of State reveals that a stunning 18% of the fiancée visas issued last year — that’s a total of 6,926 — went to citizens from one country, the Philippines. The second and third place countries, the Dominican Republic and Vietnam, each accounted for only about 1,900 fiancées.

If the fiancée has any children under the age of 21, they may also travel as derivatives on a K-2 visa. An even higher rate — over 24% of these minors — are from the Philippines, according to the 2016 data.

Married from overseas

Countries with most K-1 & K-2 visas issued in 2016



Source: U.S. Department of State
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The increasing number of Filipino-Americans might have contributed to the large numbers: Many immigrants prefer to get a husband or wife from their home country for cultural reasons. Social media and online matchmaking sites have made finding bride or groom abroad easier than ever.

Immigration attorney Karin Wolman said she is “not so surprised” to hear the high rates. Culturally, the Philippines is fertile ground for long-distance relationships, she said: “It is a devout country, over 90% Catholic, with a very poor economy and a very large expat population working abroad and supporting relatives back home on remittances,” Wolman said.

But sharing the same cultural root might not be a necessity for many couples. According to Rio Guerrero, an immigration lawyer who handles about 100 Filipino K-1 cases each year, roughly two thirds of these cases are marriages of Filipinos to non-Filipino-Americans.

“Filipinos, generally, wish to marry other Filipinos. However, I believe there is a desire among many to marry an American, irrespective of ethnicity,” said Guerrero, who himself is a second-generation Filipino-American.

There is no record whether these fiancées are male or female, but according to Guerrero, most of the applicants he dealt with are females. He also noticed that the number of applicants for same-sex marriages has increased a lot in the past few years.

K-1 is not the only gateway for foreign spouses to enter the U.S. Couples can also get married abroad first and apply for a K-3 or CR-1 visa. The processing time for these visas ranges from 6 months to a year depending on the case, Guerrero said.

The 2015 San Bernardino shooting put the K-1 visa under public scrutiny, since one of the attackers, Tashfeen Malik, entered the U.S. on a K-1 visa and later shot and killed 14 people together with her husband.

Many have raised concerns about fiancées slipping into the country without due process, but the K-1 visa is among one of the safest visa categories, according to Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute’s Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity.

Despite being categorized as a nonimmigrant visa, K-1 visas are more similar to an immigrant visa. The cases are pre-processed in the immigrant operating system and applicants face the same security, biometric and background checks as green card applicants. Thus, it would be very difficult for terrorists with any suspicious records to obtain a K-1 visa. Malik is believed to be the first terrorist to have entered on a K-1 visa out of the 512,164 K-1 visas issued between 1989 and 2014, according to an article by Nowrasteh in 2015.