

30 EXTRA COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN INDONESIA'S VISA-FREE TRAVEL POLICY



The government of Indonesia has announced new measures designed to help boost the number of tourists visiting the South East Asian country. Beginning in April, visa requirements will be waived for nationals from additional 30 countries, making a total of 45, allowing them to visit Indonesia for short-term stay without visas. However, once again, Australia has been omitted from that list.

According to the Minister of Tourism, Arief Yahya, **allowing visa-free travel is among the easiest ways of boosting the number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia.** While Malaysia offers the same to nationals from a total of 164 nations, Thailand has a similar waiver to 56 countries across the globe, with both nations attracting far more foreign tourists annually.

The government hopes that by the end of this year, up to 10 million foreign tourists will have spent a minimum of \$1 billion. Official statistics show that Indonesia received 9 million foreign tourists in 2014, compared to the 8.8 million visitors recorded one year earlier. In contrast, Thailand received 26 million foreign tourists while Malaysia had 27 million foreign tourist arrivals in 2014 alone!

Arief says that with the new visa regulations, in two years Indonesia will surpass both Thailand and Malaysia in tourist arrivals per year.

The Tourism Minister denied that the Indonesian government's decision not to include Australia in the latest list of visa-free nations has anything to do with the pending execution of two drug convicts from Australia, adding that his country will give visa-free travel to Australia if the latter promises to reciprocate this gesture. In the meantime, ties between the two neighbors remain strained over the drug case.

If the government of Australia is keen on such a move, Arief assured that Indonesia's Foreign Minister, as well as the President, will almost certainly do the same.

Statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) show that **12% of visitors to Indonesia in 2014 came from Australia.** This makes them the third largest group of foreign tourists, with only Singaporeans and Malaysians surpassing them.

The visa waiver is meant to enhance tourist arrivals to Indonesia, but the government also admits that there is a risk of the new arrangement being abused. The Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Yasonna Laoly, has indicated that the government has worries that when this new policy comes into effect, some tourists may try circumventing immigration laws, especially those from China. 3,300 such cases involving Chinese tourists were reported in 2014.

Yasonna also said that only five international airports in Medan, Jakarta, Batam, Surabaya and Bali will be available for the implementation of the new visa-free regulations, with monitoring of travelers being made tighter in all of them. Any foreign tourist who will be found smuggling any illegal items like drugs into the country will suffer serious consequences.

Concerning the same issue of visa-free travel, Indonesia's Chief of Armed Forces, Gen. Moeldoko, has added his voice, saying that the government had had lengthy discussions about any security

matters related to the new policy. He said the cabinet had come to the conclusion that there is no problem with it being implemented, assuring the country that his officers were ready for any eventuality.

Before the extra 30 states were added to the visa-free travel plan, the original 15 were the 10 member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations, and Macau, Hong Kong, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. The 30 countries that are joining this list as from next month include China, South Korea, Japan, the US, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, Oman, Bahrain and South Africa.

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