

THE 'ISLAND OF GODS' FLOODED BY TOURISTS



Growing tourism is the best news for most holiday resorts. Who would believe that there is such a thing as too many tourists? In the case of Indonesian Bali, it appears to have become reality.

Bali prides itself in a reputation of a haven of tranquility and peace, of wondrous beaches and spiritual atmosphere; recent movie 'Eat, Pray, Love' which partly takes place there only strengthens the image.

Often dubbed the Island of Gods, it lives off tourism and while the 2002 and 2005 terrorist attacks targeted Western travelers, the island has now returned to pre-2002 visitor numbers. Such news is fantastic, if only there were no side-effects of such great tourist influx.

The country should ideally hold a population of 1.5 million. In reality, 4 million inhabitants live there. **An additional 2.5 million tourists arrived there last year, which is a 25% increase on previous two years.**

With so much attention, problems are starting to pile up, including water shortages, increasing crime, polluted beaches, etc. Local officials are rather slow in admitting to these issues, and are currently planning to create a second airport to cater for a wave of Chinese middle-class tourists who are expected to start arriving soon.

While 'Eat, Pray, Love' starring Julia Roberts contributed to the return of U.S and Australian visitors, the planned visit of US President Barack Obama should be a definite confirmation Bali is safe again. Furthermore, the East Asia Summit takes place there in November, which is yet another event of great strategic relevance.

Being in the spotlight is crucial for Bali to retain its glamorous tourist status; however, many experts are starting to appeal to local officials to make them realize there is such a thing as too many tourists. As in a few years, crowded and dirty beaches are highly unlikely to mean 'tranquil, relaxing holiday'.

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