

Vietnam May Expand Its Visa Waiver Program for 9 More Countries

According to Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Transport have made proposals to the government of Vietnam to expand its waiver scheme for tourists from nine more countries. If the proposal is approved, visitors from Canada, India, New Zealand, Australia, Italy, Spain, UK, Germany and France travelling to Vietnam would enjoy visa exemptions.



According to VNAT, the aim of visa exemptions is to boost the attractiveness of Vietnam in foreign tourism markets. According to a survey conducted by the tourist board, tourists from Western European countries have a history of long-term stays and high spending, while visitors from New Zealand and Australia have a history of high international travelling especially in the low season and are categorized as Vietnam's potential tourism market. Meanwhile visitors from Canada have remained on top of the list for international tourist markets for Vietnam. On the other hand, India is being regarded as an important market in future due to its large population.

VNAT statistics indicate that international tourists spend on average between US\$1,200 and 2,500. Tourist experts suggest that the visa exemption will create more job opportunities for the Vietnamese and generate additional revenue to the government of Vietnam. Currently, tourists from the ASEAN countries can apply a Vietnam visa exemption program for a period of 30 days. This excludes Brunei visitors for 14 days and 15 days for visitors from Russia, South Korea, Japan, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark.



According to VNAT, the Vietnam visa exemption program has significantly contributed to the development of domestic tourism sector. In addition, during the first eight months of 2014, the total number of tourists visiting the Southeast Asian country has increased. VNAT has said that 42 percent of

visitors were tourists from countries enjoying the visa exemptions. This has led to a 5.47 million tourism revenue income, a 12.2% increase compared to the same period in 2013.

According to data taken by tourism promoting agencies of Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand, more international tourists are enjoying the visa exemption programs. Thailand visa waiver program is now available to 61 countries. Out of 61 countries, 49 have signed a unilateral visa waiver agreement with Thailand. On the other hand, Malaysia visa exemption program is now available to 155 territories and countries. Out of 155 territories and countries, 85 have signed a unilateral visa waiver agreement with this country. The same applies to Singapore visa waiver program which is applicable to 165 territories and countries of which 83 have signed an agreement with Singapore.



According to a report of World Travel and Tourism Council and World Tourism Organization, provision of visas to the visitors is regarded as a procedure to impose cost including indirect charges on tourists and direct expenses for the visa fees. If the imposed costs exceed a certain threshold, visitors are discouraged from making trips to that country and are forced to choose an alternative destination. The report recommended the implementation of visa on arrival system. This recommendation can increase the number of international tourists visiting the ASEAN countries to 10 million, create between 333,000 and 654,000 new jobs and bring US\$7–12 billion additional revenue by 2016.

The report also indicates that if the Vietnamese government adopts the visa waiver program and implements the visa on arrival system, they will increase their international arrivals by 8–18 percent.

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