

INCREASE IN TOURIST ARRIVALS IN THE PHILIPPINES STILL BEHIND OTHER ASIAN COUNTRIES



According to the Department of Tourism Secretary Ramon Jimenez, Jr., foreign tourist arrivals in the Philippines are expected to increase by 18 percent more than last year. It is expected that 4.5 million foreign tourist arrivals will be reached this year.

This predicted 18 percent increase in tourism is achievable according to Secretary Jimenez because of the promising growth noted in the first semester of this year. The country's new and catchy tourism slogan, "It's more fun in the Philippines" has been attributed to the DOT Secretary.

Department of Tourism data showed that the number of tourist arrivals in the Philippines during the first half of this year reached 2.14 million. This is up by 11.68% from last year's nearly 1.92 million tourist arrivals during the same period. The total number of tourist arrivals in the Philippines in 2011 was 3.917 million.

Jimenez added that the peak season for tourist arrivals in the country is actually the second semester thus; it is highly likely that tourist arrivals for 2012 will hit 4.5 million.

So far, the largest number of tourist arrivals was recorded in January, totaling 411,064, which reflects a growth rate of 17.54 percent.

At the end of June, tourists from South Korea occupied the top spot on the country's list of tourist arrivals, the total number being 474,684. This represents 22.15% of foreign tourists from January to June 2012. The second largest number of foreign visitors was from the United States, totaling 354,259 tourist arrivals, equivalent to 16.53%. Japanese tourists accounted for 9.12% of the country's tourist arrivals (195,504 tourists), while Chinese tourists made up 7.03% or 150,749 tourists in total. Other countries that have contributed to tourist arrivals in the Philippines include Australia (92,648), Singapore (73,015), Canada (65,503), Hong Kong (57,790), and the United Kingdom (57,181).

However, despite the increasing number of tourist arrivals in the Philippines, the numbers are still way below those of neighboring Southeast Asian countries.

In Malaysia, the Tourism Minister Dato Sri Dr. Ng Yen Yen revealed that as of June 2012, Malaysia has received a total of 11,632,483 tourists, reflecting a growth of 2.4% compared to 2011. The bulk of tourist arrivals in Malaysia have come from the ASEAN region, accounting for 73.8% of the total foreign tourist arrivals.

The top ten countries that have contributed greatly to Malaysian tourism include: Singapore, Indonesia, China, Thailand, Brunei, India, Australia, Philippines, Japan, and the United Kingdom.

Ironically, while Malaysia has not been identified by the DOT data as a major contributor to foreign tourist arrivals in the Philippines, the number of Philippine tourists visiting Malaysia has been on the

rise every year. In fact, the Philippines has the highest growth rate of tourist arrivals in Malaysia (45.3%) followed by China (34.2%), Japan (32.5%), Indonesia (20.0%), India (6.9%), and the United Kingdom (5.9%).

Minister Ng Yen Yen has identified solid support from trade partners and the increased accessibility by air as the factors responsible for the growing appeal and increased tourist arrivals of Malaysia.

Tourist arrivals in Thailand have likewise increased this year. They have seen an 8.66% increase in international tourist arrivals for the period covering January to August 2012, the actual number being 14.3 million tourists. The Thai Tourism Department expects this momentum to be sustained throughout the rest of 2012.

Indonesia has also enjoyed a 7.75% increase in tourist arrivals during the first semester of 2012. Indonesia has received a total of 3.87 million tourists for the first six months of 2012, most of who come from Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, China, and Japan. There has also been a recorded increase in the number of tourists from Great Britain (4.5%), Germany (6.7%), and the United States (9.9%). This goes to show that despite the crisis experienced in the Western part of the world, citizens from these countries continue to travel. Tourism and Creative Economy Minister Mari Elka Pangestu is certain that Indonesia will reach their goal of 8 million tourist arrivals for 2012.

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