

INDONESIA PLANS TO RELAX TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS



In a meeting held in Bali, Mari Elka Pangestu who is the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy stated that there are many people employed in the tourism sector. It is for this reason that the ministry is putting in place new measures to boost tourism.

In a bid to promote the growth of tourism, Indonesia intends on minimizing the restrictions placed on tourist visa application. However, it is not yet clear on how the government intends to ease the process.

The tourism sector accounts for 9% of the economy of Indonesia. During the period between January and August, 5.64 million foreign tourists visited Indonesia. This represented an 8.3% increase as compared to a similar period the previous year. Ngurah Rai International Airport in Bali is the main arrival point of foreign tourists. The airport accounts for approximately 37% of all foreign visitors. This is according to figures from Central Statistics Agency (BPS).

At present, visitors from one region and 64 other countries such as China, United States, Britain, Brazil, and Japan may pay \$25 on arrival for a 30 day visa.

According to a report from World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) as well as United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), improved visa processing will lead to an increase of 2.6 million jobs within the 21 member countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) by the year 2016. An additional 57 million foreign tourists would visit the region, consequently bringing in a further \$89 billion.

Going by the report, 21 percent of foreign tourists planning to visit APEC countries between 2014 and 2016 will still be obligated to get the conventional visa under the same visa policy that exists today.

“Going by the report, it is clear that easing visa processing needs to be a national priority. This will lead to increase in tourism. Socio-economic benefits derived from this include more jobs and increased income,” said Taleb Rifai, the secretary general of UNWTO.

“Our biggest challenge is to establish coordination among officials in the finance, tourism, security, customs, immigration, airport, and transport authorities who at the moment are working independently,” said Mari.

The report from UNWTO states that areas that need improvement include information and communication technologies (ICT), delivery of information, establishing electronic based visa programs, easing current visa processes, and setting up regional agreements on visa facilitation.

Mari also said that the infrastructural development such as roads, seaports, and airports, also need to be improved in order to increase the number of tourists visiting Indonesia.

According to Henley and Partners Visa Restrictions Index 2013, Indonesia is lowly ranked at number 73 in terms of travel freedom experienced by citizens .This position is shared with countries such as Togo and Guinea. The country ranks slightly higher than India. The July release indicates that the top countries in the Index are Sweden, Finland, and Britain.

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