

Bali tourism industry looks rosy for 2011 (The Jakarta Post, Indonesia / Asia News Network)

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Jan. 05--DENPASAR -- The tourism industry on Indonesian island of Bali could continue to see good growth this year, as stakeholders predict a greater number of foreign tourist arrivals and higher investments in the industry compared to last year.

The Bali Tourism Agency said 2.27 million foreign tourists visited the island between January and November last year.

Following a significant upsurge in December, with an average of 6,000 tourist arrivals per day, agency head Ida Bagus Kade Subhiksu said he was optimistic the total number would exceed the target of 2.3 million foreign visitors.

"We expect that the final figures show 2.4 million foreign visitors for the whole year," he said recently.

He said the agency would wait for the final statistics and evaluation before setting a target for this year, adding that he expected conditions this year to be similar to or better than last year.

Bali Statistics Agency head Gede Suarsa said the island welcomed around 200,000 visitors per month last year, adding that he was also upbeat the target of 2.3 million visitors would be surpassed, with Australian tourists making up the biggest chunk of foreign arrivals.

In 2009, tourist arrivals reached 2.22 million, up 13.3 per cent compared to the 1.96 million tourists in the previous year.

Nationally, the total number of foreign tourist arrivals reached 5.78 million between January and October last year, an 11.88 per cent increase from 2009, Tourism Ministry head of human resources development Gde Pitana Brahmananda said.

"Overall, and especially for Bali, we expect better conditions this year. Our evaluation from various aspects shows a positive outlook. The conditions will be better if security, services and facilities are maintained," Pitana said.

Each tourist spent at least US\$1,000 per visit last year, less than 2008's high of \$1,178. In 2009, tourists spent an average of \$1,000.

The chairman of the Denpasar branch of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI), Ida Bagus Gede Sidharta Putra, said he was also optimistic, citing an upward trend in hotel bookings.

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"From January to February, 80 per cent of our hotels are close to fully booked and other hotels show similar trends. As long as the situation is favorable, this year can be as good as last year, even better," he said, adding that high occupancy rates were due to good relations between hotels and guests, as many were repeat customers.

I Gede Ardika, a member of the ethical council of the World Tourism Organization, warned the tourism industry to not focus only on increasing the number of tourist arrivals, but also prioritizing quality.

"Quality is not only about how much tourists spend, but also about their interaction with locals so that they absorb our cultural values."

The tourism sector remains attractive for investors as well, with tourism accounting for 80 percent of total investments in Bali, the Bali Investment Agency said.

"Although last year we pushed for more investment in agriculture, most investors put their money into tourism," agency head Nyoman Suwirya.

The total investment in Bali last year reached Rp 7 trillion from 300 business units, 80 per cent of which were foreign investments.

Suwirya emphasized that Bali needed to implement a moratorium on hotel development in Denpasar, Badung and Gianyar since the number of available rooms in those areas outnumbered existing demand.