

BALI: REVITALIZING TOURISM BUT AT WHAT COST?

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With the surge in COVID-19 cases worldwide, countries relying on tourism faced a huge economic hit. While the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of Indonesia introduced vaccine tourism to rejuvenate the economy, the repercussions are yet to be unveiled.

In 2020, the infectious coronavirus disease began spreading across six continents, causing severe respiratory illness and killing 3.9 million across the globe. When Governments chose to impose lockdowns and curfews as a last resort to contain the spread of the virus, it severely deteriorated the economies. Similarly, in Indonesia, Bali took a huge economic hit, as the borders closed on March 20, 2020, and heavy restrictions were levied on travel and tourism. Bali, being the center of Southeast Asian tourism, relying heavily on the fuel of foreign visitors for 80% of the economy, has been finding it difficult to overcome this crisis.



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To set up economic recovery, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy concluded a tourism enhancement plan. The plan incorporates a package for allowing tourists to enter Bali for travel and tourism, with the additional benefit of full-dose vaccination. CEO of Destination Tour, Yento Chan, said he was inspired by the mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio who was luring travellers by offering COVID-19 vaccines. The domestic tourism package would conventionally include a stay for 14 days at any local tourism spot to spend the time between the first and the second jab. After the second jab of the vaccine, they can return home. The Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno, said:

“Vaccine tourism is a necessity in the scope of tourism and the creative economy. We can confirm that the vaccine is free for Indonesian citizens, which we can confirm with the tour package.”

Sources note that while such a step would encourage the maximum number of people across the globe to get timely vaccinated, it would further facilitate rejuvenation of the economy. In countries like India, wherein people have been frustrated with the tight slots for the vaccine, such a plan may attract many potential tourists. Anastasia Yenny, general manager of the tour at Wahana Tour & Travel, stated how the opportunity seemed to market packages for leisure travelers and the corporate market. Similarly, Russia and Maldives have begun a resonating policy to attract potential tourists.



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While 11.3 million people have vaccinated themselves in Indonesia, the country hopes to achieve herd immunity by vaccinating 70 percent of the population by 2022. However, with the delta variant's surge nearly bringing the country's health system to another collapse, experts are highly critical of the policy and strongly oppose it. Experts suggest that such a policy would worsen the already deteriorating status quo of COVID-19 cases, which may jeopardize its positive potential for the economy. The plan, however, faces skepticism because the quality of the healthcare and vaccine promised may get compromised. The conundrum of whether it is a sound idea to risk traveling after the delta plus variants' surge furthers the reluctance. As experts suggest, the plan might end up diminishing the healthcare facilities for the local population and people at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid.

At the outset, the plan may duly encourage people who are reluctant or concerned about getting immunized against the coronavirus. It will attract the attention of employers who would prefer a job overseas for their top executives than prolonged waitlists at home. However, ensuring a prior distribution strategy to guarantee an equal quantity of vaccines for the tourists and the local citizens is pertinent. While vaccine tourism stands as a potential trend of the decade for economies heavily relying on tourism, verifying the efficacy to prevent manipulation of quality by people with money or connections is indispensable. With efficient planning and vision, if the benefits tend to absolutely outweigh the repercussions, the plan could be a wise innovation of the decade.

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