

CHANGES IMPROVING TOURIST EXPERIENCE FOR VITAL ASIAN MARKETS

Changes to Australia's key entry and departure points are helping revolutionise the travel experience of international tourists, a report into Visitor Visas for Asian markets has found.

The Griffith Institute for Tourism paper was commissioned by peak industry body Tourism Accommodation Australia (TAA) to look into visa costs and processing times for potential tourists from the key markets of China, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Taiwan.

TAA CEO Carol Giuseppi said changes initiated by the Federal Government were making a real difference.

"Pleasingly, Australia is actually among one of the most competitive countries when it comes to visa processing times," Ms Giuseppi said.

"Continued improvements in creating a seamless, automated experience for travellers are also making a real difference to the travel experience. Initiatives such as the removal of outgoing passenger cards, a global roll-out of online visas, multiple entry visas, the roll-out of next generation Smart Gates and trials of biometric processing are all helping to simplify the process for travellers.

"Improvements to access and maximising airline capacity, as well as investment through bi-lateral air agreements (including the historic open aviation market arrangement with China) and increased airline partnerships are not often talked about but are also having an impact.

"The Federal Government have done a lot of work in this area and should be congratulated."

The report sought to benchmark Australia against competitive nations and found Australia could do more to remain competitive when it came to reducing visa fee costs.

"While Australia was one of the cheapest nations for actual visa fees, once passenger movements' fees and other charges were added, we are actually amongst the top three most expensive nations for Asian travellers (along with the USA and UK)," Ms Giuseppi said.

Recommendations in the report include reducing visa fees to compensate for the increases in the passenger movement charge, committing to a fixed country specific processing time, extending online application options to all visitor visa categories and extending visa validity periods.

"TAA looks forward to working closely with the Government to further increase the attractiveness of Australia as a destination for the Asian markets," she said.

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