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## LITTLE BALI HOTEL AND RESORT COMPANY CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT RETHINK ON BALI TRAVEL ADVISORY

While it seems the rest of the world has re-discovered Bali in droves, Australian visitor numbers, while slowly improving, still lag a long way behind their international counterparts.

The disappointing Australian figures, still almost 35 per cent down on 2005 levels, have again prompted The Little Bali Hotel & Resort Company (LBHRC) to call on the Australian government to revise its current level four travel advisory.

LBHRC co-founder Brett Morgan said that for the rest of the world, Bali is very much back in business but a large slice of what was formerly Australian business is gradually being replaced by other nationalities.

"According to figures recently released by the Indonesian government, international visitor arrival figures for the period January-June jumped by a massive 35 per cent over the same period in 2006 to reach an all-time 746,000," he said.

"But Australian visitor arrival figures are still almost 35 per down on the 130,875 figure recorded for the period January-June 2005 and that we attribute directly to the current Australian government level four travel advisory," he said.

Mr Morgan said he felt the current DFAT advisory was unfair, created a great deal of confusion and was long overdue for a much-needed revamp.

The Japanese, along with the Australians, he said, were in fact the slowest of the key source markets to return to the destination.

"But since the Japanese government has downgraded its advisory to Indonesia, Japanese travellers have been returning in huge numbers."

"The Japanese travel advisory model works perfectly – people travel or they don't."

"There is no 'in between' threat-laden message," he said.

Mr Morgan's comments have been endorsed by two of the LBHRC's founding members, Australian expatriates Adrian Forsyth, General Manager of the Bali Garden Hotel in South Kuta and Katrina Simorangkir who has owned and operated specialist wedding company, Bali Weddings International for 20 years.

Mr Forsyth, who is also chairman of the South Kuta Beach Business Association's security committee, said he believed the negative mass media press coverage for the recent DFAT advisory upgrade had again done some serious damage to Bali's slowly recovering profile in the Australian marketplace.

"The current travel advisory acts as a deterrent, especially for certain market segments such as first time visitors, seniors and the family market," he said.

"It has often made me curious as to why Indonesia and Bali seemed to get singled out with the travel advisories while the UK and London never rate a ban?

"Indonesia as a country has done a great deal to reduce the terrorist threat. The national police set up the anti terror unit Detachment 88 which has arrested many potential terrorists."

"The country has also made a very big point of advising the huge number of upgrades carried out across its entire security systems, the appointment of more than 1000 extra police officers in Bali and the installation of CCC cameras in many areas in Bali."

"Denpasar Airport's security too has been massively upgraded."

"Given all of that, the Australian government's advisory is unfair and needs to be reviewed given the security advances that have been made."

Bali Weddings International's Katrina Simorangkir said while her Australian business was slowly creeping back, her activity today was a far cry from four years ago when the company was handling in excess of 400 wedding events annually for a predominantly Australian clientele.

"The DFAT advisory had done little to affect Australians who had previously travelled to the destination but it has had a profound impact on those who have never been to Bali before."

"Potential first timers are less secure about travelling to Bali."

"They simply don't know the lay of the land and much if not all of their knowledge is based on what they see and hear in the media and this usually, and especially when related to DFAT advisories, is negative," she said.

Mr Morgan said it was on record that the Indonesia government has approached its Australian counterparts requesting the current DFAT advisory be downgraded as soon as possible.

"Both the Bali Hotel Association and the Bali Tourism Authority have also requested the removal or lightening of the current Australian government advisory but nothing has happened."

"It's high time the Australian government got serious about the advice it gives people but until that time we will need to remain very dependent on informed people making informed decisions when it comes to visiting Bali," he said.

Report by The Mole