

Vietnam's foreign tourist numbers reach record highs

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International arrivals to Vietnam will surpass a record-breaking 10 million on December 25, an impressive surge from 2015, the country's tourism watchdog announced on Thursday.

Total domestic visitors in 2016 reached 62 million, while total tourism revenue topped VND400 trillion (US\$17.86 billion), the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) said in a report.

The 10 millionth arrival of 2016 is expected to be a British national scheduled to enter Vietnam via the Phu Quoc International Airport on Phu Quoc Island off the southern province of Kien Giang on Christmas Day, according to the VNAT.

The tourism industry will hold a ceremony to receive the special visitor, as well as the 9,999,999th and 10,000,001st visitors.

The boost in tourism is seen as a significant milestone for the country.

This year's number is 25 percent higher than the 8 million international holiday makers who visited Vietnam in 2015 and 1.5 million higher than VNAT's target of 8.5 million tourists in 2016.

In 2000 Vietnam's foreign arrivals were only 2 million, and 5 million in 2010.

The healthy growth can be credited to the government's 2015 15-day visa waiver policy program direct at German, French, British, Italian, and Spanish visitors. A 20 percent surge in the number of tourists from these markets led the government to extend for another year in summer 2016.

Vietnam is also poised to pilot online application, processing, and issuance of visas for foreign tourists for two years from January 1, 2017. Foreign visitors will then be able to apply for and receive visas within three days.

The online visa is applicable for all tourists and is expected to continue to boost Vietnam's foreign arrivals.

The tourism sector is targeting 11.5 million foreign tourists and 66 million domestic visitor for 2017, equating to VND460 trillion (\$20.54 billion) in tourism revenue.