

Speech by Ambassador Peter Doyle
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When Australians think of overseas holiday destinations, I want Timor-Leste to be at the top of their list. Australians already account for the majority of tourists in Timor-Leste. But this number can increase dramatically – if Timor attracted just a small proportion of the more than one million Australians who visit Indonesia each year.

I want Australians to experience sunrise at the top of Mount Ramelau, the tropical fish and colourful coral of Jaco and Atauro and appreciate our shared history at Balibo, Dare and many other locations. I want all Australians to see the Timor-Leste I have been so privileged to discover over the past three years – a country rich in culture, awash in natural beauty and warm with hospitality.

Tourism powers economies and supports communities. The Timorese Government has already recognised the economic boost a strong tourism industry can deliver. In its Strategic Development Plan, the Government identifies tourism, and in particular eco-tourism, as a future major contributor to the national economy. And it has begun to pave the way for this to become a reality, with a new policy, and sparkling new website, logo and slogan.

As I am sure we all know, the tourism sector is in its early stages – it has small, but growing, numbers of international tourists. The foundations have been laid. Timor-Leste is ready – there are tourists who want to see Timor-Leste as it is now.

I'm constantly talking with visitors to Timor-Leste. And all of them tell me they love their experience here. We need more people to hear about Timor-Leste and what it offers travellers.

This spreads by word of mouth, but marketing is also important. The international tourist market is truly global and highly competitive. Timor-Leste must compete for attention. Now that policy and marketing are in place, I encourage the Government to devote greater effort and more resources to increasing tourist numbers.

One idea for consideration is to establish a national tourism authority – a private-public body tasked with marketing the country to the world. This practice has been successful in Australia and other countries.

The government could start by marketing to people who already have easy access to Timor-Leste – people in Darwin looking for a weekend escape, Bali holiday-makers who want to add an adventurous twist to their beach getaway, or the scuba divers and hikers looking for something different to add to their Singapore city-break.

As tourist numbers increase, so will the confidence of businesses to invest. Investment in turn improves the tourist experience and enables more choices to be offered.

We know that businesses and investors are watching closely. The Citilink director recently said the airline's decision to offer the new Jakarta-Denpasar-Dili flight was made based on data showing that more and more tourists and business travellers are coming from Dili to Indonesia.

Just last month I signed, on behalf of the Australian Government, an Air Services Agreement with Timor-Leste. This agreement paves the way for airlines to open international flights between our countries.

Increasing cooperation with neighbours is another great way to increase tourist numbers. Australia is working with Indonesia and Timor-Leste to explore ways to create and market a regional tourism destination. As part of this trilateral cooperation, some of the people in this room will soon go to Papua New Guinea to study how it has rapidly expanded its market for cruise ship arrivals.

Visits from cruise ships also allow people to experience Timor-Leste. And they contribute to the economy. A recent study found that in just one day, cruise ship tourists arriving in Dili spent over US\$100,000.

All this being said, it is essential that we protect the precious environment that draws tourists in the first place. The coral reefs off Atauro were recently recognised as one of the most diverse eco-systems in the world. They must be protected. Recognising this, Australia is supporting the Coral Triangle Initiative to ensure Atauro tourism is developed in accordance with international eco-tourism standards.

Beyond economic benefits, tourism builds links between people. It challenges stereotypes. It opens up new worlds and greater understanding.

I want tourism to grow to make the bonds of friendship between Australia and Timor-Leste even stronger. Tourism will bring investment, encourage people to develop their skills and provide employment opportunities for many Timorese, particularly young people. It should make an important contribution to Timor-Leste's future.

To conclude, I look forward to our connections growing closer as more and more tourists are able to discover the beauty of this land. A land I am so privileged to live and work in and enjoy so much.