


## Travel Firms Bemoan New Immigration Rule

 Local travel agencies have voiced outcry over a new immigration rule that requires the period between two visa-exempt entries into Vietnam by foreign passport holders to be at least 30 days.

The new rule makes it hard for foreign tourists to take regional tours arranged by local companies. Domestic travel companies had attracted many foreign guests to buy such trips before the rule took effect in January this year.

The regulation, which was passed by the National Assembly in June last year, allows foreign visitors enjoying a unilateral visa waiver to enter Vietnam as many times as wished, but the interval between two entries must be 30 days or longer.

Nguyen Van Tran, general director of APEX Tourist Co., one of the biggest travel joint venture companies serving Japanese tourists in Vietnam, said foreign tourists often buy regional tours in Vietnam and that these tour programs last several days only.

After they complete their tours, they will return to Vietnam for flying back **home**.

Tran said those foreign buyers of regional tours would be required to pay a visa fee of US\$45 per person if they re-enter Vietnam within a period of less than 30 days.

Local travel companies described the rule as a major barrier to the local tourism sector's effort to promote tours that take in Vietnam and other countries in the region.

A travel firm said it is difficult for Vietnam to woo international travelers to the tours connecting three to four countries it has promoted if guests pay for re-entry visa and spend more time completing related procedures.

Nguyen Thi Khanh, vice chairwoman of the HCMC Tourism Association, said association members have suggested the association ask authorities to solve the problem.

Previously, local tour operators complained about another new immigration regulation requiring international cruise passengers to spend more time and money for applying individual visas instead of group visas if they wanted to go ashore for a local tour. Later, the Prime Minister approved a US\$5 visa fee each, instead of US\$45.

Source: <http://businesstimes.com.vn/>