

Notes on getting a research permit in Indonesia

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Bob Elson and I recently returned from three weeks doing research in Indonesia. Because we planned to spend much of our time working in the Arsip Nasional, where we hoped to find documents concerning Indonesia's campaign to become an archipelagic state, we applied for a research permit. In these notes I will not describe the ten months it took before RISTEK (the ministry responsible for issuing research permits) approved our application. Instead I will give a brief account of what we had to do AFTER we arrived in Indonesia.

TRAVEL DIARY

Sunday, 9 November: Arrived in Jakarta.

Monday, 10 November: Took taxi from hotel in Central Jakarta to RISTEK. There we met the official who administers the Foreign Researchers Program. He patiently explained that we needed to go to the police headquarters in South Jakarta to apply for a travelling permit (Surat Keterangan Jalan). We would also need to go to Immigration in North Jakarta to apply for a special visa known as a KITAS and to Home Affairs to apply for a Surat Pemberitahuan Penelitian. Once we had received all these documents we would need to return to the police to apply for a Surat Laporan Diri. He explained that since we planned to spend just three weeks in Indonesia we would never receive this last document but that it was important that we applied for it. At some point in this conversation he also explained to us that the police insist on red-background passport photos. Since we had brought the usual white-background sort we would have to have red-background photos made before going to the police. These, he said, we could have made at the Sarinah Plaza. He also told us that we would need to submit a report about our research to RISTEK before leaving the country but that we could do this via email the day before we left. After handing over US\$100 each for our research permits (which, he said, we would receive after we had received our travelling permit from the police), we headed off to Sarinah.

There was, we discovered, no photo shop in Sarinah. But, someone told us, there was one across the road just "ten metres" away. Ten metres became fifty or a hundred as we walked down Jalan Sabang, the street where, we learned, one can have photos and photocopies made, buy SIM cards and phone cards, and use the internet at minimal cost. We each had four red-background photos made at the Globe photo shop. (The quality was excellent.) We also photocopied various documents that we had collected by this stage. And we bought several bottles of water.

We then headed off to police headquarters. As we entered, the guards asked us to leave some form of ID with them. I could not do this because the only ID I had was my passport, which I needed to show inside the building, but fortunately Bob had his driver's licence with him. We then entered a tiny room packed with people trying to apply for various documents from the police. Fortunately we were served quite quickly and

after filling in a long form (and paying Rp50,000 each) we lodged our applications. We were told that the travelling permit would be ready the next day.

We then took a taxi to Immigration, Jalan Merpati II, Kemayoran, North Jakarta. The driver had never heard of this street and it did not appear in Bob's street directory, but eventually we found it (and from then on Bob used a tall blue building that is nearby as a reference point). Much to my horror (for brevity's sake let's just say that I am decrepit) I realized that we would have to climb at least one long flight of stairs to get to the office we wanted (they had run out of money before they could build a lift, someone explained to Bob). As it turned out, I had to stumble and pull myself up three flights of stairs. Once we reached the top we were directed to a window where we were had to buy a folder and the forms we had to fill in (Rp7,500 each). We filled in the forms as best we could. In some cases it was unclear what was being asked for. Does "alamat" refer to one's address in Indonesia or Australia? Which of those numbers on the visa issued by the embassy in Canberra was the one they wanted? As it turned out, we made many mistakes but with the help of white-out various officers patiently put us on the right path until we were finally able to submit the forms. We were told to come back the next day. We then headed back to the hotel feeling satisfied at having achieved so much in just one day. Since there were no taxis outside Immigration, we had to take a sputtering bajai out to a main road where we could catch a taxi.

Tuesday, 11 November: We took a taxi back to Immigration. On this occasion Bob offered me his strong arm to lean on and so together we ascended Gunung Imigrasi in what seemed to me just a few moments. When we got to the summit we were told that we had to go back to the ground floor by way of the back stairs to pick up the relevant documents. We eventually found them in a smoke-filled cubby-hole of an office near the bottom of the stairs. We then had to take the documents (and my body) back to the top. Soon after this Bob disappeared into an office and soon I was summonsed to enter as well. There each of us was fingerprinted and photographed. (The charge was Rp15,000 each; as I recall, the FBI had fingerprinted me for free.) At this point we both thought we were on the verge of receiving our KITAS, but we were then told to come back "in three days", which, on closer enquiry, we were told meant anytime after 2 PM on Friday. Since Immigration now had our passports, Bob asked them to give us some sort of receipt that we could show in case we were asked for our passports by some other department. They put their stamp on copies of the first page of our passports.

After Bob paid an ojek to go and find a taxi for us, we then crossed Jakarta to the police headquarters. This time we went to an office on the second floor. Much to our surprise the officials in this office gave us our travelling permit just moments after we had arrived. Filled with admiration for the efficiency of the police, we took a taxi back to RISTEK, where the official who administers the Foreign Researchers Program quickly issued us with our research permits (and told us about some important research that he himself was doing). At this point we were free to do our research, but of course Immigration still had our passports, we still had to go to Home Affairs to apply for a Surat Pemberitahuan Penelitian, and once we had that we would need to return to the police to apply for the document we would never receive.

So we then headed off to Home Affairs. We eventually found the relevant office on the fifth floor of a new building at the back of the Home Affairs compound. There we applied for the Surat Pemberitahuan Penelitian. For a moment we thought we might be able to receive these on the spot but because the official authorized to sign these documents was not available we were told to come back the next day.

We then headed back to the hotel, having completed another day's work. We then spent two days doing research (more on that later) before returning to the fray on Friday.

Friday, 14 November: After visiting LIPI in the morning we headed off to Immigration early in the afternoon. We ascended the three flights of stairs. Bob then had to go down two flights of stairs to pay for our KITAS (there were, he says, two windows, one for "asli" and one for "asing" but no one cared which one anyone used). He came back very quickly and after just a short wait we received our passports, KITAS, and little passport-like booklets for keeping track of our movements. We then took a taxi to Home Affairs. Within moments of entering the office we received three envelopes. One envelope contained Bob's letter and one contained mine, while the third was a document that we were asked to deliver to the Governor's office.

Tuesday, 25 November: Lurking in the back of our minds was the knowledge that we had still not gone to the police to apply for the document we would never receive. We decided to go to the police the next day.

Wednesday, 26 November: After seeing someone in LIPI we headed off to the police headquarters. There we entered the same tiny room, which seemed to be packed with even more people this time. We filled in the same form we had already filled in a couple weeks earlier. We were eventually told that we had not supplied copies of the right documents (I had made copies of the passport-like document rather than the KITAS itself). We were also given yet more copies of the form that by now we had already filled in twice. Because we had to go to another appointment at LIPI we would have to come back another time. When we got to LIPI we suggested to the person we met there that we might not return to the police but she advised against that, saying that our failure to apply for the document in question might return to haunt us at some stage.

Thursday, 27 November: After filling in the police form for the third time, we took a taxi to police headquarters. This time we thought we came armed with enough copies of everything to satisfy the most fastidious of bureaucrats, but we were told that each of us needed to supply two more red-background photos. Nevertheless, we were able to lodge what we had on the understanding that we would return with the photos. Somehow Bob managed to get two receipts from the official he was talking with. At this stage we had no idea whether we had finally done what we needed to do. After phone calls to a very helpful friend and to the official at RISTEK, Bob learned that we had applied not only for the document we had needed to apply for but also the one we had already received (that is why we got two receipts). We were assured that we had done what we needed to do. Even so, Bob went off to Jalan Sabang to make several more copies of various documents and to have more photos made (using the negatives we got on 10 November). In the meantime, I finished up our report to RISTEK and sent it off by email. Later that day I gave the photos and some of the copies of documents to one of our Indonesian counterparts, who will hold on to them in the unlikely event the police ask for them.

Friday, 28 November: We flew from Jakarta to Singapore. Because Immigration had taken our exit cards we had to fill in new ones at Sukarno-Hatta. I gave the immigration officer in my lane both my KITAS and my passport-like document and he took both; Bob gave the one in his only his KITAS and that is all he took.

Saturday, 29 November: We flew from Singapore to Brisbane.

SOME GENERAL COMMENTS

(1) Complicated though this may seem, this account does not do justice to what we had to do. At one time or another Bob spoke to someone at each of the seven or so windows on the top floor of Immigration. There was also a room where at one point we had to leave various documents for scanning.

(2) The guide for foreign researchers on the Indonesian embassy's website ("Research procedures for foreign university, research institute, enterprise and foreign national in Indonesia") may seem daunting but it

provides but a rough outline of the steps foreign researchers have to go take. Our understanding is that anyone working outside Jakarta will need to gain various documents from the authorities in the areas where they are doing research.

(3) No matter what the guide says, no matter what anyone tells you, ALWAYS make twice as many copies of documents and always make twice as many photos. If you are in doubt about whether to copy a document, copy it! You MUST have red-background photos for the police. We strongly recommend a visit to Jalan Sabang.

(4) Be sure to have more than one form of ID with you.

(5) Without exception the officials we dealt with were helpful. Many were in fact extremely generous in the assistance they gave us. Many of the officials we met went about their work with a sense of humour. No official that we dealt with asked for any improper payments or even hinted at making such payments.

A CONCLUDING NOTE

Now, you may be asking, did we find anything in the Arsip Nasional? After all, that was why we applied for a research permit, wasn't it? No, we found nothing whatsoever. We had hoped to find minutes of cabinet meetings and cabinet submissions from the 1950s and perhaps early 1960s as well. We found no such documents. They may be stored unnoticed somewhere in the ANRI but, if so, we were unable to track them down. When we told various scholars and former officials about our failure to find any documents, none was in the least bit surprised. Fortunately for us, the people we were able to interview while in Jakarta gave us a great deal of information, but we are told that any documents that have survived from that period are almost certainly in private hands. We very much hope that those who hold these documents donate them to some library or archive that will preserve them and make them available for future researchers.

Finally, I should mention, we have not quite made it to the Governor's office yet. As for the Surat Lapor Diri that we applied for at the police headquarters, we have no idea whether it will ever be sent to us and, if so, whether it will be sent to our home addresses or the hotel where we stayed. We found nothing in the archives but we learned much about the workings of the Indonesian bureaucracy.