

Visa waived for Chinese, Russians

By Amritha Alladi

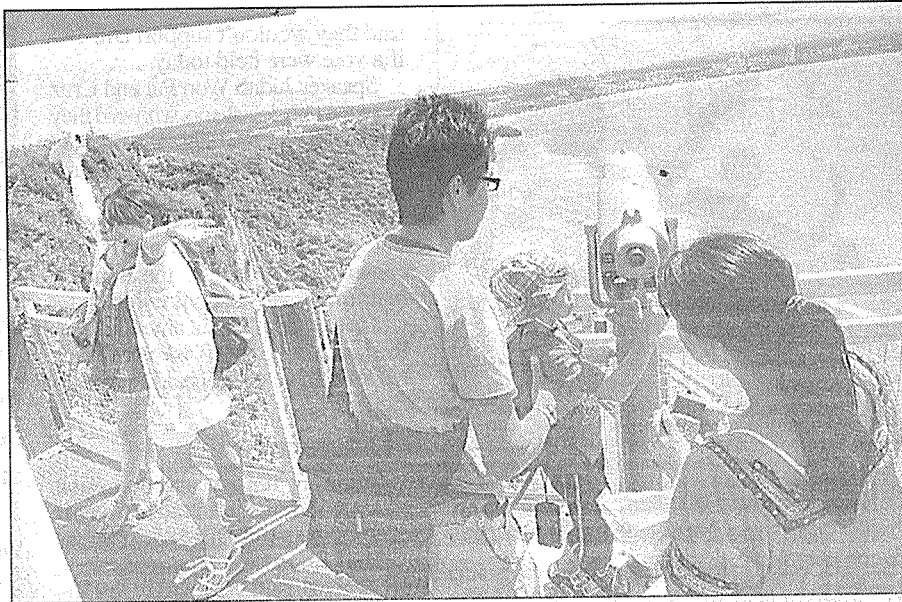
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Tourists from the People's Republic of China and Russia can visit the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands for up to 45 days through a visa-waiver parole program that will take effect on Nov. 28, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

On Wednesday, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano issued a statement that exercises her parole authority to admit citizens of Russia and China into the CNMI on a case by case basis, until a final rule is issued by DHS, the press release stated. The interim rule will take affect Nov. 28, and would allow citizens of Russia and China—if granted parole—to stay in the CNMI for up to 45 days.

Additionally, the interim rule would allow citizens from Hong Kong to enter Guam or the CNMI under the new joint visa waiver program, the release stated. That's because Hong Kong was formerly a British colony, its residents hold either British National Resident or Special Administrative Region passports, said Guam Visitors Bureau General Manager Gerry Perez.

Mary Torre, president of the Guam Hotel and Restaurant Association, said the parole program for the CNMI



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Program: Tourists explore the view at Two Lovers Point yesterday. The Department of Homeland Security granted parole to allow mainland Chinese and Russian tourists into the Northern Marianas without a visitor visa while Guam has not been granted its request for a visa waiver for the same type of tourists.

is good news for Guam. It means that Guam may be able to benefit from a similar program if the one in the CNMI proves successful.

"We've been working diligently with those in Congress to get the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program in place with the rights elements (Russia and China)," Torre said. "Should the

CNMI parole program be successful, we could ask for the same thing in the future."

ON THE NET

▲ Learn the differences between the Guam Visa Waiver Program and the joint Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program at www.dhs.gov.

▲ Find out visa requirements at www.visitguam.org.

This is not the first time that the islands have admitted visitors on a parole authority basis, according to a release issued by Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo's office.

From May 1, 2000 through Oct. 30, 2000, visitors from Japan to Guam

were admitted under parole provisions after the then-temporary visa waiver program expired and before the 106th Congress had adopted a new visa waiver program, the release stated.

Under the current Visa Waiver Program, Guam allows visitors from certain countries to stay up to 15 days, and admission is limited only to Guam. The program does not provide for onward travel to the rest of the U.S., and the list of countries includes Taiwan.

However, the joint

Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program, which goes into effect Nov. 28, would allow visitors to stay up to 45 days, and would admit visitors to Guam or the CNMI. It would also allow visitors to enter from Hong Kong — visa-free.

The CNMI had been seeking the visa waiver to continue receiving Chinese and Russian tourists after U.S. immigration law is phased in at the commonwealth on Nov. 28.

Meanwhile, Guam has continued to request a waiver for mainland Chinese tourists to diversify the island's visitor markets because of slowing tourist numbers from Japan, according to Pacific Daily News files.

Perez told Pacific Daily News in late September that the DHS had been reviewing a visa waiver program with mainland China and the Russian Federation.

"The interim final rule that they issued during the Bush Administration is being reviewed by the incoming Obama administration to see if it is consistent with the Congressional intent of allowing markets having economic significance—China and Russia, to wit—to be included in the visa waiver program," Perez said. "Results of this review, and a final decision from the Department of Homeland Security, is yet to be made and announced."