
Understanding Indonesia's Complex Bureaucracy: Gaining a Research Permit

Sharyn Graham Davies

Part I:

If you are reading this, you are probably contemplating applying for an Indonesian research visa and permit. Good luck, you will need it!¹ I suspect any tips given below will now be superseded by an even more inefficient way of doing things, but at least this rant will give you an idea of the arduous trip you are about to undertake.² The process of getting an Indonesian research visa and permit epitomize the nation's unofficial philosophy: 'why make it easy when you can make it hard.' To conduct research in Indonesia you first need to apply for a research visa. You do this from your home country and the visa is stamped in your passport. Part One of this article outlines this process. When you arrive in Indonesia, you then need to apply for a research permit. Part Two of this article outlines this process. Once you have finished your research you need to apply for an Exit Permit Only (EPO) before you can leave the country. Part Three of this article outlines this process.

¹ The last thing I want to do is discourage anyone from conducting research in Indonesia. I have heard that some universities are prohibiting students from conducting research in Indonesia because of the laborious nature of getting the research visa and the research permit. Rather than discourage potential researchers, this article aims to give you information so that you know what you are in for; it is much easier to deal with obstacles when you are expecting them. And I must reinforce that the hassle of getting the visa and permit are well worth it for the rewards of researching in Indonesia.

² I emailed an early draft of this article to both RISTEK and the Indonesian Embassy in New Zealand for their feedback. RISTEK provided comments at a number of places throughout the article. For instance, RISTEK noted that 'Ristek is committed to improve the permit service. For example: within 2 weeks the applications are processed to get the decision for approval/disapproval, application documents can be sent via email, or even using online registration system, the result of approval meeting are displayed in our website within 3 days since the meeting' (Email comment by RISTEK, 7 September 2011).

My New Year's Resolution for 2011 was to start applying for my Indonesian research visa. I was not going to Indonesia until July but I did not want to leave it too late – I had heard that it can take more than six months to receive your visa (with someone's visa taking 10 months) but RISTEK assures me that you need no more than three months (email communication from RISTEK, 7 September 2011). But, I did not want to apply too early; once the visa is approved you have to enter Indonesia within three months. Surely, I thought, starting the process in January was about right. This assumption was my first mistake – if only I had started the process in December everything would have worked out just fine!

There are numerous documents that you need to get ready before you can apply for the visa. These documents are generally easy enough to compile; it is just time consuming and annoying. And then, of course, once you have all of the documents you have to photocopy each of them, six times.¹ On the bright side, though, I have never heard of anyone's complete application being rejected. Even the required short summary of my research topic, which encompasses policing and corruption, did not receive requests for amendment.² While the process of getting research and ethics approval from my home university nearly led me to change my focus to something as innocuous as public perceptions of the weather, Indonesia does not seem concerned with the actual topic of research (as long as it is outside of conflict zones). Rather, Indonesia seems to take the approach that if you can successfully negotiate the surrounding, suffocating visa and permit bureaucracy, you are fit to conduct research; surviving this rite of passage confirms your research potential.

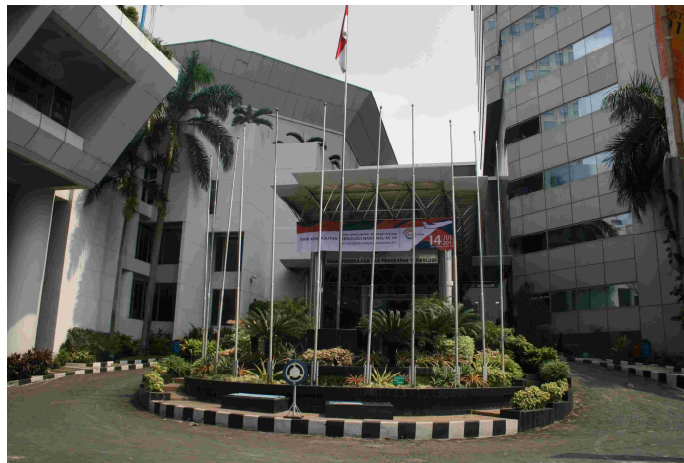
¹ RISTEK commented on a draft of this article that 'It was required six copies for the research proposal and the CVs only, not for all the documents! Now it is not necessary anymore, has been revised' (Email comment by RISTEK, 7 September 2011).

² Since writing this I have heard of a case where someone's research was deemed too sensitive and they were denied a research permit. I emailed RISTEK in October 2011 to seek further clarification on what topics may not get approval but after a number of follow-ups I am still awaiting their response (June 2012).

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RISTEK is the name of the organization that arranges research permits. RISTEK is the abbreviation of *Kementerian Riset dan Teknologi* (Ministry of Research and Technology). The *Sekretariat Perizinan Peneliti Asing* (Secretariat for Foreign Researcher Permits) is one part of RISTEK. RISTEK is located at Jl. M. H. Thamrin, Number 8, Gedung 2 BPPT, Level 8, Jakarta. When you actually go there to arrange the Indonesian side of the research permit do not be fooled into thinking that RISTEK is actually in the main BPPT building upon which the name RISTEK appears in large letters. Oh no, the actual RISTEK office, as the address states and which I did not pay particular attention to, is in a second BPPT building, which is right the way around the back (Figure 1). But there is much to do before you get anywhere near getting lost trying to find the RISTEK office.

Figure 1: RISTEK Building

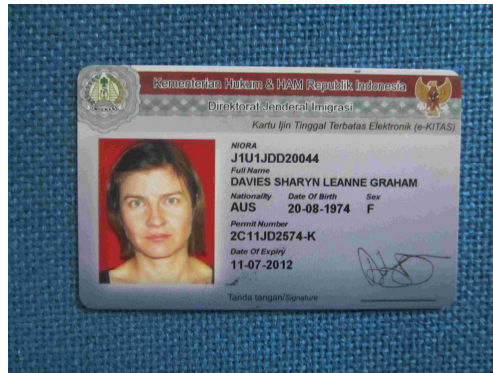


Now apparently the RISTEK website gives all the details you need for applying for a research visa: www.ristek.go.id. However, after searching the English and Indonesia sites, and emailing RISTEK (frp@ristek.go.id) to get help, I had to resort to the website of the Indonesian Embassy in New Zealand to find the guidelines.

The guidelines you are looking for are for applying for a Limited Stay Visa (sometimes referred to as a Temporary Stay Permit). The guidelines I received from the Indonesian

Embassy in New Zealand refer to A Limited Stay Visa (VITAS). Is this meant to be KITAS, as the ID-style card I have ended up with is called a KITAS (*Kartu Ijin Tinggal Terbatas Elektronik* or Electronic Limited Stay Visa)? The electronic KITAS cards (which have replaced the paper booklets) are quite new and, as I found out in Lombok, officials have seemingly not been notified of this new format and persistently doubted the veracity of my KITAS card, but that is another story! The KITAS is *the* card you need, but in order to get it, you must jump hurdles, a lot of hurdles. As you can see from the attached image of my KITAS (Figure 2), by the time they took my KITAS ID photo I was feeling more like an imminent criminal than enthusiastic researcher.

Figure 2: KITAS Card



The guidelines from the Indonesian Embassy in New Zealand for applying for the visa continue by stating that a 'VITAS is given to persons intending to work in Indonesia. It is a single entry visa and valid for a maximum stay of 1 (one) year.' However, the guidelines then state on the same page, bullet point number 5, that the fee for a 'Limited Stay Visa is NZ\$80.00 for up to 6 (six) months; NZ\$160.00 for up to 1 (one) year or NZ\$280 for up to 2 (two) years.' It does state that Limited Stay Visas can be extended in Indonesia, but then why do you have the option to pay upfront for a 2 year stay if the maximum is 1 year? This discrepancy is but one of the many unresolved points of confusion I came across in the application process. The fees mentioned above are *per passport*, so even a one-year-old accompanying you has to

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pay this fee. You need to pay in full upon application and in New Zealand you can only pay by money order or bank cheque.

There are all sorts of fees that you have to pay along the way to getting your KITAS, in addition to the fee listed above payable to your local Embassy before you leave home. Once in Indonesia you have to pay a fee to the Indonesian Police, which is Rp300, 000(around US\$50) per passport. There is an Immigration fee. I paidRp2.3 million (around US\$400) for myself and 2 small children. There is also a fee for RISTEK, which is currently US\$250 for a stay of up to 5 months. From 5 months to 12 months the fee is US\$500. Each person accompanying you has to pay US\$100. RISTEK tell me that on their website you should be able to find a full list of their fees. If you are going to Indonesia for one year expect to pay around US\$1000 in total for your visa and research permit. Each accompanying person will have to pay around US\$600. Then you have to add in the costs of staying in Jakarta, transport to and from all the different offices, photocopying, postage, phone calls, and I am expecting a hefty exit permit fee.

I can see why the SosBud (*Sosial-Budaya* or Social-Cultural) visa, which is valid for 60 days, is so attractive. The SosBud is much cheaper at a total price of around US\$50 and all the paper work is done before you even land in Indonesia. I have heard rumored that you can now obtain a SosBud without even a sponsor's letter. It is also relatively easy to extend a SosBud,at least it was in Lombok when my husband Tom had to do it. He had to go to the Mataram Immigration office on five different days (the computer was down one time and the power off another). On the first day you need to fill in your application and attach photos and a photocopy of the ID card of a sponsor, which can seemingly be anyone. You will also be fingerprinted and photographed each renewal. You need to come back the next day to pay; no, you can't pay on the same day that you submit the application! You can collect your passport and visa usually 4 working days after that.Tom had to extend his SosBud once a month and he could do this four times,for a total maximum stay of six months. It costsRp255,000per month

to extend a SosBud. The fee for a *wakil*(representative)¹ to do much of the leg work for you in Lombok is around Rp350,000.²You also have to report to the local police station each time you renew your visa. There is no fee for this but depending on who stamps the letter you might be taken to a back room and asked to pay an 'administration fee', which will beliterally pocketed right in front of your eyes – who wants a messy paper trail! Tom's 'administration fee' was usually around Rp50,000. The irony of me researching police corruption and Tom's coerced complicity did not escape me.

The requirements for the initial application for a research visa will most likely include the following:

1. *A completed copy of the application form per person, which you need to submit to the local Indonesian embassy, along with 1 passport-size photo and your passport.*

The application is a short two page affair. Simple! The passport-size photo is another matter. All passport photos required in Indonesia need to have red backgrounds. For the entire visa and permit application process you may need up to 24 photosdepending on how many times your photo and/or form is lost in the towering piles of paperwork at the various places you have to trudge to – RISTEK wants me to make clear that paperwork is never lost while it is with them. Getting red background passport photos in Indonesia is pretty easy – although with two toddlers in tow nothing anywhere, especially in Indonesia, is easy. But getting the initial passport photo with red background in New Zealand was tricky. Did I say tricky? I meant near impossible. Other than at expensive photo studios,there is nowhere in Auckland that does passport photos with red backgrounds. So in desperation Iliterally stuck red cardboard on a wall at home and made each of my family members stand in front of it – somewhat problematic when my daughter was not yet

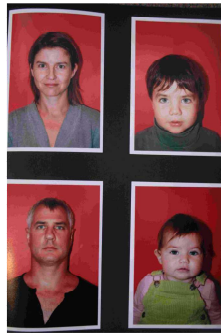
¹I should note here that I am not a linguist and these translations are my own and therefore prone to inaccuracies.

² A tourist visa is US\$25 on arrival, valid for 30 days, and Singapore is not too far if you need to extend.

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standing unassisted. While that worked, I could not master Photoshop enough to reduce the photos to passport size without rendering us all looking like aliens. So I printed out the 4 standard sized photos, glued them together onto a sheet of A4 paper, took a photograph of that, and miraculously when I printed that out, they cut neatly into 4 passport sized photos with red backgrounds (Figure 3). It does say on the guidelines that you need, and I quote, 'six copies of passport size (4x6cm) and (2x3cm) red background photographs' – do they mean 12 photographs altogether or do they mean 3 photographs of each different size? No one seemed particularly concerned with the specific sizes of the photos, though, as long as they had a red background and were of passport-ish size.¹

Figure 3: Passport Photos with Red Background



2. *The applicant's passport must be valid for at least 1 (one) year from the date of entry into Indonesia.*

I double checked my (i.e. the applicant's) passport expiration date and I had another 5 years of validity. What the application does not mention, and the reason my husband is on a SosBud visa, is that *everyone* needs to have more than 12 months' validity on their passport, not *just* the applicant. And everyone needs 12 months' validity even if

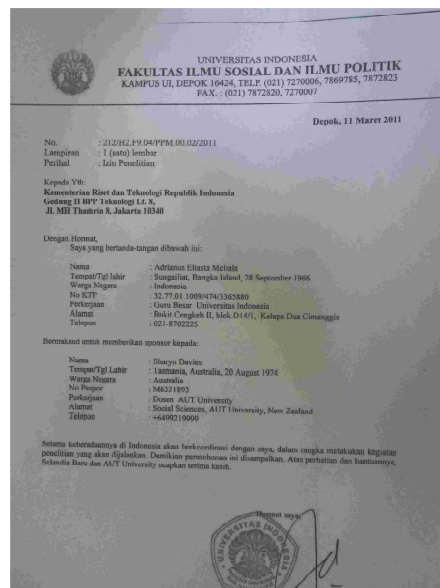
¹ RISTEK notes that this has been revised. They note that you need 'Four passport size (4x6) and two (2x3) red background photographs. Please check the information in our website' (Email comment by RISTEK, 7 September 2011).

you are only going for 5 months and the passport is valid for 11 months from the date of entry. Unfortunately, I did not find out this relatively important piece of information until 3 weeks before our scheduled departure; more on this later. RISTEK has just told me, though, that validity must now be for '18 months before [sic] the date of entry' (Email comment by RISTEK, 7 September 2011). The safest interpretation of this is that on the day you enter Indonesia your passport must have at least another 18 months' validity.

3. *A letter from the firm of sponsors [sic] from Indonesia stating the purpose of the visit/nature of business and a letter/statement of reference.*

A short letter from an Indonesian sponsor or colleague outlining their support for your project should be enough. I have heard rumored that the more prestigious the sponsor the faster the visa is granted. Attached is the letter from my sponsor at the University of Indonesia, which was taken from a template kindly given to me by Linda Bennet (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Sponsor Letter



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4. *A copy of your ticket or itinerary from a travel agent showing details of your journey INTO and OUT OF Indonesia or a ticket to continue travel to another country.*

Seemingly a hassle free requirement, but then I found out that I have to leave Indonesia via Jakarta, or at least I have to be in Jakarta to get the exit permitstamp – if only I had know this before I bought my return ticket! RISTEK notes, though, that ‘This is not always the case. You may leave the country from the city where you reported for the KITAS’ (Email comment by RISTEK, 7 September 2011).It seems, then, that you can report for your KITAS in a place other than Jakarta. Indeed, anecdotally, it may also be possible that when informing airport Immigration of your research location that they will instruct you to report directly to Immigration and the police station at the provincial capital, thus allowing you to bypass the nightmare that is Jakarta.

5. *The fees for the Limited Stay Visa.*

These are outlined above but have very probably changed by now – am I sounding cynical?

6. *You need to provide a self-addressed signature-required courier pack for your passport/documents to be returned.*

I had to pay NZ\$640 to the Embassy *and* provide my own envelope! Now I am sounding cynical!

7. *The visa must be used within 90 (ninety) days from its date of issue.*

Do I need to outline the potential problems inherent in a system that may require 6 months to approve the visa but where the visa must be used with 3 months of its date of issue? It is possible to enter Indonesia on a tourist visa and then leave the country once your research visa is ready. You can elect, for instance, to collect your research visa from Singapore. I once elected to collect my research visa from Brunei and only found out on the border that I then needed to apply for a visa to enter Brunei!Beware that the date on

your visa is the maximum stay date and that it is the date on your entry stamp that is the date you must leave the country by, as my unwittingly overstaying husband found out! You will be charged Rp100,000 per 24 hours that you overstay.¹

There are a few other requirements for the initial application for a research visa (note that the visa is issued by the Embassy and the research permit is what you need to get once you arrive in Indonesia). If spouses are accompanying you, you need to enclose a copy of your marriage certificate. I do not know about the requirements for de-factor, same-sex couples, or civil unionpartners – all I can say is good luck! If children are coming, copies of their birth certificates need to be sent. Those conducting research must also 'enclose the original copy and a copy of a letter of recommendation from the institution or specific department/division that has assigned them.' For this requirement I just made another copy of the sponsor's letter as outlined above (Figure 4).

All of this material must then be sent to your local Indonesian Embassy. While it states in bullet point one above that you only need to send your application to your local embassy, RISTEK has subsequently told me that you must simultaneously submit your application directly to RISTEK (Email comment by RISTEK, 7 September 2011). I guess I just missed this important caveat. And then, you wait. As I was to find out, there is no interim communication between RISTEK and the Embassy; the Embassy, and by default you, just have to wait for news from RISTEK. RISTEK then sends your application to the Indonesian Department of Immigration who then, hopefully, approves your visa application in a timely manner. Once the visa is approved you will receive an email from RISTEK informing you 'that your research application has been approved ... Based on

¹ This requirement is actually very unclear. You might think that two people with PhDs could figure out by what date they needed to leave the country or renew their visa, but no! The Indonesian visa stamp (which was a full page sticker but as of 2012 is a smaller version) has a line stating, 'Max Stay Until: XX Days/ XX-XX-XXXX. This Visa Must be Used Within 90days from the Date of Issue.' So to calculate when you need to leave by you need to count 60 days from the date stamped not on your visa but on your entry stamp. Clear enough once you know, of course!

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the approval, Immigration headquarters in Jakarta has sent visa 315 authorization for you through the Indonesian Embassy in [your capital city]. Would you kindly please go to the Embassy to collect the visa.' There should also be an option of getting the visa posted to you at an address within the same country.

I received the email congratulating me of my research visa approval on 9th June, 2011. Good thing I started the application process in January, I thought smugly. At the time I received this approval, I had three weeks to go before my scheduled departure. The next day, however, I received another email advising me that my husband's passport expired on 18th June, 2012. We would only be in Indonesia until December 2011 but the requirement is that the passport is valid for 12 months from the date of entry – although RISTEK comments that it now must be valid for 18 months (Email comment by RISTEK, 7 September 2011). Tom's passport expired 3 weeks too soon. So Tom had to apply for a brand new passport. The chances of getting a new passport *and* a new visa stamp within 3 weeks were slim to none, but we were optimistic; naively optimistic as it turned out!

We express posted the new passport application to Wellington. The new passport would have been issued within 3 working days if we had not cancelled our credit card. Patting myself on the back for thinking of such a thing, I ordered a new credit card to save the hassle we would have faced when our credit card expired while we were in Indonesia. But the change from the old to the new credit card happened the day the passport application was processed, so the transaction failed. But this was not too hard to rectify and eventually Tom received his new passport. We couriered the new passport to the Indonesian Embassy in Wellington. I thought the Embassy would just have to put the visa stamp in his new passport. Oh no! The entire application process had to be restarted because the passport number on the original application was now invalid. Noone at the Embassy could fast-track this new application, even for a fee, or give me periodic progress reports. RISTEK could not help either because it was an

Immigration matter. Immigration, apparently, does not have a phone number or an email address; you just have to wait with fingers crossed.

With just two days to go before our scheduled departure, and with no sign of progress on Tom's visa, alternative plans had to be made. I was attending an anthropology conference in Perth on the way to Indonesia and that would have been tricky if Tom had waited in Auckland and I had had to look after our two children. I was still breastfeeding so Olivia, at least, had to come with me. And besides, it could have taken another month or more for the visa to be issued. So we got the Embassy to issue Tom with a SosBud visa, which lasts 60 days. When we arrived in Jakarta the following week I received an email saying that Tom's visa was ready for pickup in Auckland! It was really not feasible for Tom to fly all the way back to New Zealand so we requested that the visa be made collectable in Singapore (you have to get the visa stamped in your passport outside Indonesia). RISTEK told us that this was possible but that it would take time – apparently it is not just a matter of emailing the Indonesian Embassy in Singapore requesting the visa be collectable there. In fact, it took almost 3 weeks for the visa to be ready for collection in Singapore. By this time we were in Lombok and had little enthusiasm for going through the infuriating process one must go through in Jakarta *after* the visa has been stamped in your passport. Tom would just have to try and renew his SosBud visa in-country on a monthly basis.

While getting the research visa stamped in our passports was horrendous, we were about to find out that the real nightmare of getting formal permission to conduct research in Indonesia starts after you exit the airport and enter the sweltering humidity that greets you upon arrival in Jakarta, as I recount in Part Two of this article.

Part Two

We arrived in Jakarta two hours late; it could have been worse. Oh that's right. It was worse. Much worse! We arrived with no more drama than can be expected when travelling

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with a three-year-old and a one-year-old on a flight scheduled to leave at 2.30am but that does not take off until 4.30am. My green suitcase, however, did not arrive at all. Where could it have gone? It was a direct flight from Perth to Jakarta taking less than 4 hours. Moreover, we were first off the plane and first to the baggage carousel; an amazing feat! If the other 11 pieces of our luggage made it, why not this one? Alas, there was no sign of my green suitcase; ten weeks later there was still no sign of it. There was nothing of great personal significance in the suitcase but the thought of having to replace all my underwear brought on a minor breakdown. Trying to find non-padded, non-synthetic bras in Indonesia is near impossible – I know this because it is not the first time I have been separated from my luggage. Jetstar later acknowledged that they were at fault and have emailed me a claim form. All I need to do, Jetstar informs me, is to make a statutory declaration about the contents of my green suitcase and get a notary to witness my signature. Where do I find such a person on Lombok, I asked Jetstar; I have not heard back.

Such a welcome to Jakarta did not bode well for the purpose of my visit. I was in Jakarta to get a research permit. I, along with Adrianus Meliala at the University of Indonesia and John Buttle at AUT University in New Zealand, are looking at policing in Indonesia, so I wanted to make sure I had all the proper permissions and the all-important research permit. After the first day of traipsing around to various departments and feeling completely daunted by the task ahead of me, I confided to my husband that I was utterly bewildered by the steps involved in getting a research permit. I say 'confided' because I have been through this process before and was expecting to find it easier this time around. And yet, I did not.

The experience of getting the research permit is one of the most frustrating of my life. To give just one initial example, after lining up at the Department of Immigration for an eternity, I finally got to the counter to be told, 'Sorry, it's break time, come back in an hour.' I was first in line when the counter reopened. 'Sorry', the man said, 'the computers are down. Best you come back tomorrow.' I returned the next

day. The computers were working. Hooray! 'Sorry', the man told me, 'but the person you need to stamp your application is sick today. He may come in after lunch, but he probably will not be here until tomorrow. He is the only person who can stamp your application. You best come back tomorrow.' This was just the start of the process and already I wanted to bang my head against the counter until I passed out.

Back at the hotel later that night I wondered out loud how anyone got their permit with such a lack of information. My husband suggested I keep a journal and write an article specifically about the process. Initially, I thought that it would be too traumatic to relive the nightmare, but as it turned out, it was quite therapeutic. So instead of self-harming every time someone said 'Sorry, but...', I calmed myself with the thought that this will be a useful snippet for the article.

This article outlines the steps you may (or may not!) have to go through to get the research permit that allows you to conduct research in Indonesia. Be aware that you only have 7 days to report to the Department of Immigration after your arrival in the country. Make sure that immigration control at the airport stamps the correct date of arrival in your passport or you will have to contest the mistaken US\$50 per day late fee. The first part of the process of applying for the research visa must be conducted outside of the country. I outline the process of getting the research visa stamped in your passport before you enter Indonesia in Part One of this article. Whilst in Jakarta getting your permit you will be in search of the following letters and cards:

- **KartuIjinTinggalTerbatasElektronik** (KITAS) or Electronic Limited Stay Visa issued by Immigration (Figure 2).
- **KartuIzinPenelitiAsing** or Foreign Researcher Permit Card issued by RISTEK (Figure 5);

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- **Buku Pengawasan Orang Asing** or Immigration Control Book, referred to as Buku Biru or Blue Book, issued by Immigration (Figure 6);
- **Surat Keterangan Jalan** or Travelling Permit Letter issued by the police (Figure 7);
- **Surat Keterangan Lapor Diri** or Certificate of Police Registration issued by the police (Figure 8).

Figure 5: Kartu Izin Peneliti Asing Foreign Researcher Permit Card



Figure 6: Buku Pengawasan Orang Asing (Immigration Control Book, referred to as Buku Biru or Blue Book)

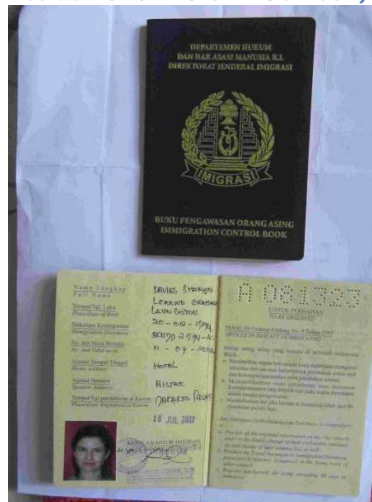


Figure 7: SuratKeteranganJalan or Travelling Permit Letter

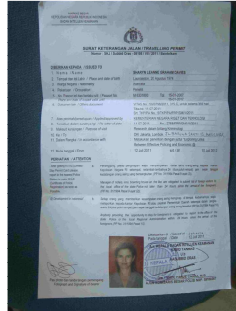


Figure 8: SuratKeteranganLaporDiri or Certificate of Police Registration



The KITAS card, in particular, is quite useful in that it allows you to open a bank account. Note, though, that when you open a bank account you also need to provide the bank with a copy of the *Surat Keterangan Lapor Diri*, which should have an address in the same town as the bank branch. For instance, if you want to open a bank account at a branch in Makassar your *Surat Keterangan Lapor Diri* should have a Makassar address. A KITAS also allows you to pay local prices for entrance admissions, at some expensive hotels, and for hospital stays (as I found out when I contracted dengue fever just after arriving in Lombok). Do not lose your KITAS. It is nearly impossible to get your KITAS replaced; it is almost easier to go through the whole application process again. Indeed, if your KITAS gets stolen you will be under criminal suspicion of selling it to make money, as a friend unfortunately found out!

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I originally scheduled a full week in Jakarta to get all the relevant permissions and ID cards. All you need to do is go to RISTEK, the Immigration Department, and the police station. Seriously, how hard could it be? Oh, that's right. Why make it easy when you can make it hard! It ended up taking me two weeks to get all the permissions and ID cards. I think, though, that if you do the following you may be able to complete the process in five full working days (with the exception of getting the SuratKeteranganLaporDiribut apparently you can pick that up when you return to Jakarta at a later date): arrive at RISTEK at 9am on a Monday, take taxis (save the phone number somewhere handy) and the super-efficient busway, always have exactly the right amount of money required, be prepared to spend all day waiting and running around, do not get lost, make sure your taxi does not get lost, avoid street protests and demonstrations (especially where 8000 people are marching against the possible arrest of a popular imam), avoid public holidays, make sure there are no computer failures, have sufficient passport photos of the right size and colour, make sure your passport or application do not get misplaced in the toppling stacks of other applications, avoid Friday prayer times, do not let 14 Russians line up in front of you, make sure you are wearing suitable attire when they take your official photo, avoid Ramadan, be unencumbered by offspring no matter how cute, and make sure that the one and only person who can stamp your Blue Book, take your fingerprints, or staple your Red Folder together, is not on holiday, sick, or otherwise unavailable. If you manage to do all of the above (no chance!), it is within the realms of possibility to get all the permissions and ID cards within a week.

Step One: Go to RISTEK

RISTEK (*Kementeriaan***RIS***et***dan****TEK***nologi* or the Ministry of Research and Technology) is the name of the organization that arranges research permits (Figure 1). Once you find the office (see Part One), the English-speaking staff will make the process of getting the research permit seem wonderfully simple: 'You just have to go to the police station and then Immigration, fill in the forms, and then you will get your

permit.' Technically this is true and I was lured into a false sense of optimism. I began kicking myself for paying for a week's accommodation in Jakarta in advance when it now seemed I would only need a couple of days. Yeah right!

The staff at RISTEK are friendly and conscientious but Indonesia's bureaucratic machinery means they are not able to track the progress of your application or liaise on your behalf with Immigration or the police station. Additionally, because of the lack of clear guidelines, staff are not privy to information about wider issues of visa extensions. I visited the RISTEK office three times during the application process and spent less than an hour there each time. RISTEK staff usually break for lunch from 12-1pm.¹

Step Two: Go to the Police Station

After your initial visit to RISTEK you will need to go to the police station – RISTEK will give you the address of the closest station. Compared to the Department of Immigration, the police station is the epitome of efficiency. While this does not say much, dealing with the police station is unlikely to permanently alter your personality as dealing with Immigration does. I heard different reports of when the police station closes for lunch, with some people saying it did not shut at all; might be best to avoid 12-2pm just in case.

The taxi dropped me right at the front of the police station, which, as it turned out, was quite far from my actual destination. See Figure 9 for a poster on a wall of the police station stating that they are committed to stamping out corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Taking this photo got me questioned so I thought it wise not to photograph anymore of the police station, including the office you are looking for. As I approached the guards to ask for directions, I tried to decide whether their casual approach to gun safety, evident from their haphazardly slung assault rifles, made me feel more or less nervous. The officer I asked directions from

¹ RISTEK has replaced LIPI as the institution that grants research permits and while the RISTEK building is a bit tricky to find first time around, it does at least seem immune to floods; one researcher remembers wading through knee-deep flood waters on the ground floor of the LIPI building trying to submit his stack of forms!

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had braces, not the ones he might use to hold up his thermal-like uniform that would be better suited to Arctic conditions than an equatorial country in July, but the ones on your teeth. This would not normally be notable except for the fact that he was the second officer I had seen that day with braces. Were the police starting to be paid a decent wage or were these officers particularly brazen in requesting bribes?

Figure 9: Outside the South Jakarta Police Station: No Corruption, Collusion, or Nepotism – That's Our Commitment.



The officer pointed me in the direction of the office I was looking for. His directions seemed simple enough and yet it took me another thirty minutes, and the inquisition of five more random people, to actually find the office. Part of the difficulty is that 'the office' does not have a specific name so you have to explain to people that you are trying to get a research permit and then they may, or may not, know where that can be achieved. When I eventually found 'the office', which is around the back of a big building, off a carpark, the non-descript sign above the door states simply, *Pelayanan Masyarakat* (Serving Society).

Once through the front door there is a desk to your right on which sits a book where you have to sign in. There may or may not be someone at the desk. You then go a little further down the corridor and into a waiting room on the right. It comes as a surprise to find the waiting room full of people as

you feel like you are the first person ever to have discovered this 'secret' room. You must then go to the *LoketOras* (**LoketOrang Asing**– Foreigner Counter). It would seem that 'Foreigner Counter' would be a more useful sign than *LoketOras*, but why make it easy! You will be given a stack of forms in English and when you are part way through filling them in, you will no doubt stop and curse the fact that pens in Indonesia never, ever, work properly. In fact, my pen performed so poorly that much of my application was barely legible. This did not seem to be a problem, though, and it made me wonder just how important filling in the litany of forms really was. Indeed, the address I wrote on my son Alfie's form was so illegible that his official *SuratKeteranganLaporDiri* lists his address simply as 'Hotel'. Once you have completed all the forms and put them in the supplied orange folder, the *LoketOras* will give you a receipt and ask you to come back at a later date, probably after Immigration has issued your KITAS.

When you return to the police station, the woman at the *LoketOras* will give you back your old forms, a new stack of forms to fill in (yes, these will be nearly identical but need to be filled in again for some unfathomable reason), and a list of things to photocopy (including your passport and forms you have received from RISTEK and Immigration). The photocopy place is so close, and yet so far. I will save you the pain of reading about my travails and suffice it to say that the photocopy place is down an ally where you have to squeeze through triple parked motorbikes (do avoid burning your calf on a hot muffler) and where eventually you will come to a small shed with a guy and a photocopy machine inside. It pays to double check that all the requested material has been photocopied the specified number of times or, like me, you will have to come all the way back. You then need to take all this material back to the *LoketOras*.

Back at the *LoketOras* you will have to provide two more passport size photos (in addition to those that you provided on the first day you came). I only had one left of Alfie (although I swore I originally had more than enough) and I was about to surreptitiously rip one off his Blue Book when the woman said it was alright, she could work with one. She

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must have sensed by impeding breakdown. This sense must have helped when she then asked if I had anymore photos of myself as they seemed to have misplaced mine. The only extra passport size photo I had of me was with a white (not red) background. The woman mercifully superimposed my white background passport photo onto a red background – you can make this out on my SuratKeteranganLaporDiriif you look closely (Figure 8).

When you have handed over the passport photos and photocopies of your Blue Book, visa, passport and RISTEK letters, you wait. The free hot sweet tea provides some relief. At a later point you will be called back to the counter and you will be asked to pay Rp300,000. I was not aware of this and, of course, I only had Rp275,000 so I had to head out and search for an ATM. This took a very long time. After I had paid I was told that the SuratKeteranganLaporDiri would not be ready for at least another week, perhaps more (I think this is the card that you do not need to collect straight away but can pick up ‘next time’ you are in Jakarta or get someone to pick up on your behalf). Seeing the desperation in my eyes the woman was, however, miraculously able to have my card ready the very next day.

Step Three: Department of Immigration

Dealing with Immigration is for most people the most frustrating process of getting the research permit. Everything happens so painfully slow, computers crash, only one person can do fingerprints and they are invariably on holiday, applications get lost, photos get mixed up. Apparently Immigration in Central Jakarta is somewhat more efficient than in South Jakarta, if that is possible. I went to Immigration on 5 different days spread over two weeks. I remember arriving one day and looking enviously at a PhD student from the US. He had set himself up with a laptop, a pile of unwatched DVDs, two novels, and food and drink to last a week. That is the way to approach Immigration: set yourself up for the long haul and consider it an experience in honing one’s patience.

The Central Jakarta Immigration Department is located in a non-descript building on a non-descript street. RISTEK will give you the address and a map. The map is especially important as the building is not actually located on the street for which the address is given (Figure 10). The section that deals with foreign research permits is located on the fourth floor. Only after five days of going to Immigration, lugging bags, kids, prams and assorted paraphernalia up and down four flights of stairs did I discover, out the back and hidden from view, a lift. And not just any old lift, but a functioning lift!

Figure 10: The Department of Immigration in Central Jakarta



The fourth floor contains ten *loket* (counters). Behind each *loket* there are around 15 people painstakingly copying, by hand, one form onto another. Some people multi-task; I saw one woman wearing a head veil which conveniently held her cellphone against her ear so she could talk and copy forms at the same time. After looking at the precarious piles of folders and passports it did not surprise me that applications get lost. What did surprise me was that anyone actually gets their permit at all!

Step 1: Your first stop on level four is the *Loket Fotocopy dan Penjualan Map* (Photocopy and Folder Sales Counter). Here you need to photocopy an assortment of documents (Rp1,000 per page) and buy the Red Folder (*Map Merah*) for Rp5,000. Change is hard to come by at

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Immigration (as elsewhere in Indonesia), so it is good to have a lot of small money. Make sure you get the Red Folder and not the Yellow Folder (*Map Kuning*) as the latter is for a different type of application. You need one Red Folder per application.

At the *LoketFotocopydanPenjualan Map* (unless it has changed by the time you read this!) you will also be handed a stack of forms to fill in; six forms per person in fact. All the forms at the Immigration office are in Bahasa Indonesia only. Moreover, the forms are repetitive and on each form you have to fill in your passport number, visa number, address, etc. Moreover, many of the questions seem irrelevant, reminiscent of later when I tried to open an Indonesian bank account and I was required to list all of my hobbies. Hopefully you receive all of the required blank forms otherwise at some point one of the officials will notice that a form is missing and you will have to repeat the whole process.

*Step 2:*When you have filled in the forms and put them in the Red Folder you need to go to the *LoketPermohonanKitas* (KITAS Application Counter) (Figure 11). Someone behind the counter will give a cursory look over your forms, stack them on top of an impossibly high pile (from which random passports are spilling out), and most likely tell you to come back the next day.

Figure 11: LoketPermohonanKitas (KITAS Application Counter)



*Step 3:*When you come back you need to go to the *LoketPendaftaran Orang AsingdanPengambilanDokim* (Foreign Registration and Immigration Document Collection Counter). There is a sign on the door that states that only officials are

allowed to enter – ignore this. You need to go inside to pick up your Red Folder.

*Step 4:*Next you need to take your Red Folder and go to the *Loket Stempel* (Stamp Counter); there is no sign in the window but someone will point you in the right direction. Depending on such things as the time of day and whether the computers are functioning, getting your forms stamped may or may not happen in one day.

*Step 5:*The next step is to go back to the *Loket Permohonan KITAS* and hand over your newly stamped forms in the Red Folder. If everything is working well and the right person is on duty, you will, sooner or later, be handed over an invoice. I was handed my invoice at 11.55am; knowing that the office closed for lunch at 12 noon just added insult to injury.

*Step 6:*Next you need to take your invoice down to level 1 to the *Kasir* (Cashier) (Figure 12). On level 4 the man said I would need to pay Rp2.5 million for myself and two children but I was only charged Rp2.3 million – presumably the Immigration fee is thus around Rp770,000 per person. After you hand over the money, move slightly to your right where there is literally a small hole in the wall and wait until a hand pokes through with your receipt.

Figure 12: Inside Immigration, looking towards the Cashier



Step 7: Take your receipt back up to the *Loket Permohonan KITAS* and wait.

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Step 8: You will be called up, at some point, to go back to the Locket Pendaftaran Orang Asian dan Pengambil Dokim. Hopefully your name is called out loudly and clearly. At this loket you need to fill numerous details into a registration book in order to get issued with your Blue Book (*Buku Biru*, Figure 6). The Blue Book should be ready later that same day or the following day.

Step 9: Once you have the Blue Book you need to hand it to the person at the Locket Permohonan KITAS. They will then tell you something which you may or may not be able to decipher. Talking to anyone behind a loket requires great skill as a thick pane of glass extends down almost to the top of the counter meaning that you have to crouch down, tilt your head sideways, and yell at the person through an impossibly small gap. You then either need to reposition your ear near the gap and listen, or stand up and try and lip read through the haze of swirling cigarette smoke.

Step 10: After handing in your Blue Book you will sooner or later be told to go back to the Locket Permohonan KITAS. In my case, this took three days. Unfortunately, the only way to check the progress of your application is by physically going to Immigration and asking them. They cannot tell you how your application is going only if it is ready or not at the precise moment that you ask.

When you are called back, you will need to be fingerprinted and photographed. Each person accompanying you also needs to have the same done. Fingerprinting a one-year-old is a challenging endeavour. Photographing a tired, clingy, one-year-old, where no support person is permitted to be visible in the photo, is almost impossible. As a consequence, Olivia's KITAS photo is blurred and does not quite show all of her face. Each person must be appropriately dressed for their photograph. Men need, according to the etiquette poster stuck to the wall, a collared shirt, long trousers, and shoes (sandals are not acceptable even though it is only a head shot). Women must have their shoulders and knees covered. My husband was wearing a t-shirt and was lectured passionately in Indonesian about how

his attire was not appropriate; because of numerous administrative hiccups (see Part One) Tom was not able to apply for a KITAS otherwise he said he would have bartered for one of the batik shirts of an Immigration official.

Accompanying people theoretically only need to go to Immigration for fingerprinting and photographing. However, since you never know when this will be done, they either need to go with you each time, or you will have to wait at Immigration for them to arrive once you have been called up.

After fingerprinting and photographing the whole process should be over. Yet, as with hiking, there always seems to be just one more obstacle to overcome. After fingerprinting and photographing, you need to go over to the desk opposite. When they handed me a number of forms to sign I noticed that they had mixed up Alfie's and Olivia's photos. The mix up occurred because Alfie and Olivia both got passports when they were just a few weeks old and in their passport photos they look almost identical. I debated about whether to say anything. I should have kept the secret. Needless to say, rectifying this mix up took a long time. Finally, though, I was told to come back in three working days and everything would be ready and we could also pick up our passports. Miraculously, it was!

Sukses!

When I returned to RISTEK waving my newly acquired KITAS card I was expecting a brass band to trumpet my success. No brass band materialised but someone did say well done! RISTEK photocopied all my cards and letters and wished me the best of luck with my research. I do not think I need to contact RISTEK again until I apply for my Exit Permit Only (EPO).

A little worse for wear I strode triumphantly out of the RISTEK office knowing that I could now book my plane ticket to Lombok – of course I had to pay an exorbitant price because not knowing when my KITAS would be ready made it too risky to buy the ticket in advance. If you are desperate to fast-track your application bribes may help. I saw one

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Indonesian man surreptitiously slip money into the fist of an official behind a counter. The one and only time I have tried to offer cash to fix a bureaucratic problem was in 1999, just after the downfall of Suharto. You only have a certain number of days to get from Jakarta to the place where you are researching – once you get your KITAS make sure you find out the date by which you must report to the police station and the Immigration office in your area of study. I was late reporting in Makassar and had to pay a fine. When I offered the official the equivalent of half the fine to make the problem go away he sternly told me that, 'This is the reform era, Suharto has gone and corruption is no longer acceptable.' Another option to make the application process a little less painful is to appoint a representative (*wakil*) and then, theoretically, all you need to do is go to Immigration to have your photograph and fingerprints taken. I do not know how you go about finding a wakil whom you can trust with your passport and millions of rupiah but perhaps in the future RISTEK might provide such a list. So, best of luck with your application for a research visa and a research permit and stay tuned for Part Three, which will be about getting your exit permit and leaving Indonesia with your sanity intact.¹

Part Three

So you've made it!! Research all done and it's time to go home. All that is left to do is get your EPO (Exit Permit Only). Easy! Actually, in my case, it was surprisingly easy, well, comparatively easy. This is all you will need to do, theoretically.

Three weeks before you need to leave Indonesia, email a report and a 'permission to leave' letter to RISTEK. The 'permission to leave' letter can merely state: 'Having completed my research I would like to request permission to leave Indonesia on the following date XX.' The report to RISTEK needs to cover the following, which I have cut and paste directly from the email they sent me:

¹ Sanity intact maybe, but I am expecting a much lighter wallet after a friend just emailed saying he had to pay Rp1 million to smooth the way for getting his exit permit!

- a. Introduction, include:
 1. Background information
 2. Scientific justification on the selection of subjects and sites to be investigated
 3. Review on and comparison with other studies that have been conducted previously on the same subject and or in the same region or else where with similar conditions.
 4. Hypotheses to be tested (if any).

- b. Objectives, include:
 1. Objectives and scope of research have to be described clearly.
 2. Local research description in detail covers physically aspects (geography, topography, climatology) as well as Biology, social-economic, cultural, and other aspects which relevant to scope of research.
 3. Detail reason of chosen method that being used.

- c. Result and Discussion, include:
 1. Description in detail of research result which has been acquired.
 2. Discussion of research result cover its valuation, interpretation and

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significance, as well as suggestion for subsequent research.

3. The benefit for Indonesian development program.

d. Conclusion, include:

Crucial points which may encountered from research result.

Problem solving of research, encouraging or discouraging of hypotheses

stated in the research objectives. Please visit

www.ristek.go.id under

Foreign Research Permit.

If you are lucky, within a few days of emailing the letter and report, RISTEK will email you back a letter giving permission for you to leave. Print this out. When you arrive back in Jakarta (which you will need to do unless you obtain permission to exit Indonesia from another place), go to the Department of Immigration at the address on the letter from RISTEK. When you go to Immigration remember the times that it is shut, especially on a Friday when it is closed from 11.30am–1.30pm, or at least that was what the sign said above the counter where I had to buy the EPO forms.

Once you are at Immigration you will need to purchase your EPO forms. To do this, go to the carpark, of course! I eventually found out this vital piece of information after going to level 4, where the man said go to level 1, where the lady said go to level 4, where another man said go to level 3. Just when I was about to burst into frustrated tears a young man said he would take me there. It was raining heavily and you have to actually leave the Immigration building to go down to the basement carpark (there are internal stairs but they can't be found by mere mortals). Once you are in the carpark look for a counter and a small cubby hole; you will have to navigate through numerous randomly parked cars. The sign above the cubby hole says *RuangKoperasi*

(Cooperation Room). Here you need to ask for the *Formulir EPO* (EPO Forms). You need one set of forms per person. The forms will come in a red folder. At this counter they will also photocopy your passport, blue book, letter from RISTEK, and your KITAS. It should all cost about Rp10,000.

The forms (actually a two-sided piece of paper) are all in Bahasa Indonesia. The form is called the *Formulir Perubahan Data Orang Asing* (Foreigner Detail Change Form). The first section is 1. *Perubahan* (Change). You have three main options: General Change; Extend; Shorten. One of the options for reasons why you are shortening your stay is, put bluntly, *meninggaldunia* (death). Nowhere on the form is there an option of getting an exit permit so I just left this section blank and no one said anything. On the back page all you have to do is sign at the *TandaTangan* (Signature) space. Again, no one seems very interested in what you actually write on the forms, but what they do worry about is the colour of your pen. I had accidentally written a wrong year – I wrote my passport expiration date rather than the date of issue. No one worried about this. But I wrote the date in the wrong pen colour. Of course if I had read all the fine print I would have clearly seen the statement indicating that I must write in black pen (*tintahitam*). I missed this and wrote in blue. I had to fill it all in again. Once you have correctly filled in your forms and collected the photocopies, take this material back up to level 4 and you will probably be told to come back in two days. No receipt was given and I walked out of Immigration somewhat worried about the fact that I had just handed over my passport to a random chain-smoking guy behind a counter where he carelessly stacked it in a pile. If I came back and they couldn't find my passport I would have absolutely no way of proving that I handed it in. Despite my passionate protests, no one would give me a receipt. But four days later I returned, the man found our passports, the EPO was complete, and no money changed hands. Too easy! And that was that! Back in New Zealand I am still traumatised by the whole ordeal, but it's certainly not enough to put me off researching in Indonesia. Best of luck with your application; I am sure it will go swimmingly!

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Figure 13: The RISTEK Team



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