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Moving to Jakarta

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Introduction

Welcome to the Big Durian, an affectionate nom de plume for the bustling and frenetic city of Jakarta. Why "Big Durian"? Well, much like the infamous fruit, Jakarta can be an acquired taste. It's complex, sometimes overwhelming, but for those who embrace it, there's a distinctive charm and richness that can't be found elsewhere. Whether you're enticed by the idea of dynamic skyscrapers, vibrant culture, or the prospect of eternally warm weather, you're about to embark on an adventure filled with unpredictability—but one that is uniquely rewarding.

This book is crafted for intrepid movers ready to go beyond the abstract idea of relocation. Whether you're a seasoned traveler seeking new horizons or a domestic explorer venturing to the nation's capital for the first time, this guide is packed with nuggets of wisdom tailored for Jakarta. We're bypassing the platitudes about packing boxes and arranging pet transport. Instead, we're focusing on the nuts and bolts of what makes Jakarta tick, from its infamous traffic jams to the complexities of its visa processes.

Right at the start, here's a friendly reminder: the rules in Jakarta—whether traffic, tax, or transposed to legal affairs—are known to change more frequently than your favorite TV drama plotlines. To avoid any unwelcome surprises, always check with official sources like government websites to get the latest scoop. Surviving in the Big Durian requires flexibility and a dash of humor, as the only constant here is change.

Jakarta greets you with a cacophony of contrasts and diversity - a city where modernity rubs shoulders with tradition. Prepare for weather that feels like a long, comfortable summer and cultural encounters that test your adaptability. In the land of "jam karet" (or "rubber time"), patience is a useful companion. But rest assured, the frustrations are countered by unforgettable experiences and heartwarming hospitality from the locals.

As you read on, you'll discover that Jakarta isn't always straightforward, but intricate and, at times, endearingly head-scratching. Your journey may begin with sweltering taxi queues and apartment hunting, but it'll soon unfold adventures in culinary delicacies, pulsating nightlife, and meaningful friendships. These very quirks make Jakarta an exciting canvas on which expats and locals alike paint their daily lives.

So, embrace the quirks and dive into a city that defies easy categorization. It's time to tune in to Jakarta's rhythm and ready yourself for an unparalleled experience while living in the capital of the world's largest archipelago. Selamat datang di Jakarta, your bright and bustling new home awaits!

CHAPTER ONE: Visa Adventures: More Than Just a Stamp

So, you've decided to brave the Big Durian. Excellent choice! Or perhaps a choice made for you by career, love, or an adventurous spirit that occasionally overrides common sense. Whatever the reason, your first proper introduction to the intricate dance of Indonesian life likely won't be the stunning archipelago scenery or the mind-boggling traffic; it will be the visa process. Think of it as Jakarta's initiation rite, a bureaucratic obstacle course designed to test your patience, paperwork precision, and possibly your ability to decipher forms written in a language you haven't quite mastered yet. It's more than just getting a sticker in your passport; it's your official ticket to the ride.

Forget everything you thought you knew about straightforward border crossings. Entering and staying legally in Indonesia, especially for work or extended periods, requires navigating a specific set of procedures that can feel uniquely Indonesian. The key ingredient, the cornerstone upon which your entire legal residency rests, is the concept of a 'sponsor'. Unless you're arriving on a short-term tourist visa (which strictly forbids work and has its own limitations), you'll almost certainly need an Indonesian entity to vouch for you. This isn't just a character reference; it's a legal undertaking.

Your sponsor is typically the company employing you, an Indonesian spouse, or sometimes a specific agency for purposes like retirement. For those looking to work, this means securing a job *before* you can seriously start the long-stay visa process. The company must be legally registered in Indonesia and authorised to employ foreigners—often a PT PMA (Penanaman Modal Asing or Foreign Investment Company) or a qualified local entity. They aren't just offering you a job; they're agreeing to navigate the bureaucratic maze on your behalf, submit countless documents, and essentially take responsibility for your presence in the country. Choose your sponsor wisely; their competence and reliability directly impact your peace of mind.

Now, let's talk about the alphabet soup of residency permits, starting with the VITAS (Visa Tinggal Terbatas). This is the Limited Stay Visa, your permission slip to *enter* Indonesia for the purpose of getting your long-term stay permit. You don't just show up and ask for one. Typically, your sponsor initiates the process within Indonesia, securing a 'Telex' approval from the Directorate General of Immigration in Jakarta. This telex is then sent to your chosen Indonesian embassy or consulate abroad, where you'll submit your application, passport, photos that meet exact specifications (stern look mandatory, slight smiles usually rejected), and other supporting documents. It's

your first taste of officialdom, Indonesian style.

Once the VITAS is stamped into your passport, you have a limited window (usually 60 days from issuance) to travel to Indonesia. Don't mistake this visa for your final residency permit; it's merely the key to unlock the next stage. Upon arrival at Soekarno-Hatta (or another designated port of entry), ensure the immigration officer stamps your passport correctly, noting your VITAS entry. This stamp activates the countdown – usually 30 days – within which you must convert your VITAS into the all-important KITAS (Kartu Izin Tinggal Terbatas), the Limited Stay Permit Card. Missing this deadline is not advisable, leading to potential fines and complications.

The KITAS conversion process usually involves a trip (or several) to the local immigration office ('Kantor Imigrasi') designated for your area of residence in Jakarta. This is where you'll experience the full bureaucratic ballet: submitting more forms, providing biometric data (hello, fingerprint scanner and official mugshot!), and waiting. Your sponsor, or their appointed agent, will likely handle the heavy lifting, guiding you through the steps. Once approved, you'll receive the KITAS card itself, a physical ID that you should technically carry with you. This card typically specifies your sponsor, address, and the permit's validity, usually six months to a year, often tied directly to your work permit's duration.

For those settling in for the long haul, the KITAP (Kartu Izin Tinggal Tetap), or Permanent Stay Permit Card, is the next potential step. 'Permanent' here means five years, renewable, offering a greater sense of stability. Eligibility usually requires holding a KITAS consecutively for several years (often three to five), depending on the basis of your stay – employment in certain high-level positions, marriage to an Indonesian citizen (often after two years of marriage and holding a KITAS), or significant investment. The application process for a KITAP is considerably more involved, requiring more extensive documentation and scrutiny. It signifies a deeper commitment to residing in Indonesia and is seen by many long-term expats as a significant milestone.

Given the complexity, the endless forms, the potential language barriers, and the time commitment involved, many expats and their sponsors rely on visa agents. These are individuals or companies specializing in navigating the immigration labyrinth. A good agent knows the procedures, the potential bottlenecks, and sometimes even the right person to ask a polite question to at the immigration office. They handle the submissions, follow up, and keep you informed. However, the quality of agents varies wildly. Seek recommendations from trusted sources – colleagues, expat forums, your embassy, or HR department.

Be wary of agents promising guaranteed approvals, unusually fast processing times, or suggesting legally dubious shortcuts. Stick to reputable providers who are transparent about the process and fees. An agent facilitates the process based on

existing regulations; they cannot magically circumvent legal requirements. Their fee buys you expertise, time savings, and reduced stress, but ultimately, the approval rests with the Indonesian authorities based on your eligibility and your sponsor's validity. Think of them as experienced guides through a dense jungle, not wizards with magic wands.

For those coming to work, the KITAS process runs parallel with obtaining the IMTA (Izin Menggunakan Tenaga Kerja Asing), the Expatriate Work Permit issued by the Ministry of Manpower. Your sponsor must first have an approved RPTKA (Rencana Penggunaan Tenaga Kerja Asing), essentially a plan outlining why they need to hire a foreigner for a specific position. They need to justify that the role requires skills not readily available locally. The IMTA specifies the exact job title, location, and duration for which you are permitted to work. Your KITAS validity is directly linked to your IMTA; if the work permit expires or is cancelled, the stay permit usually follows suit.

This link between work permit and stay permit is crucial. You cannot legally work in Indonesia on just any visa; you need the appropriate KITAS sponsored by your employer *and* the corresponding IMTA for your specific role. Working outside the scope of your IMTA (e.g., doing freelance consulting on the side while employed as a teacher) is illegal and can lead to severe consequences, including deportation and blacklisting. The authorities take adherence to work permit regulations seriously. Similarly, if you change jobs, you generally need to cancel your existing KITAS/IMTA (a process involving an Exit Permit Only, or EPO stamp) and start afresh with the new sponsor.

Family members accompanying the primary visa holder (usually spouse and unmarried children under 18) can typically obtain Dependent KITAS. The process is linked to the primary applicant's sponsorship and visa status. You'll need official documents like marriage certificates and birth certificates, often requiring certified translations and sometimes legalization from your home country and the Indonesian embassy there. It's vital to note that Dependent KITAS holders are generally not permitted to work in Indonesia. If a spouse wishes to work, they usually need to secure their own job offer, sponsor, IMTA, and work-sponsored KITAS.

While work and family reunification are the most common routes, other visa categories exist, each with its own intricate set of rules. The Retirement Visa, for instance, is available to individuals over a certain age (check regulations for the current minimum, it tends to shift) who can demonstrate sufficient financial means and health insurance, and agree not to work. It requires sponsorship, often through a designated agency. Investor KITAS/KITAP options are also available for individuals making substantial investments in Indonesian businesses, with specific capital requirements and conditions. These routes offer alternatives but demand careful research and adherence to strict criteria.

Then there's the Sosial Budaya (Social/Cultural Visa), often used for longer visits, internships (check legality carefully), volunteering, or family visits beyond typical tourist allowances. It requires an Indonesian sponsor (can be an individual citizen) and is typically granted for 60 days initially, renewable monthly at an immigration office for up to four times, totaling a maximum stay of six months. Crucially, it does not permit any form of employment. Attempting to work on a Sosial Budaya is a common violation that authorities actively look for. Each renewal involves paperwork, fees, and another visit to the immigration office.

Ah, the immigration office visit. Prepare yourself. It's rarely a quick in-and-out affair. You might find yourself navigating crowded waiting rooms, taking a queue number, and waiting patiently (or impatiently) for your number to be called. Dress respectfully – long trousers or skirts, covered shoulders. Showing up in beach attire is a surefire way to be politely (or not so politely) turned away. Ensure you have multiple photocopies of every conceivable document; the Indonesian bureaucracy runs on paper, often in triplicate. Politeness ('sopan santun') goes a long long way when interacting with officials. Losing your cool achieves nothing except possibly delaying your case further.

Remember that your KITAS has an expiry date, and renewals are not automatic. Start the renewal process well in advance – typically one to two months before expiry. The requirements are similar to the initial application: updated sponsor documents, your passport, the existing KITAS card, and possibly another round of biometrics or a brief interview. Letting your KITAS expire, even by a day, counts as an overstay, incurring daily fines. Significant overstays can lead to detention, deportation, and being blacklisted from re-entering Indonesia for a period. Keep meticulous track of your expiry dates; set reminders, put it in your calendar, tattoo it on your arm if necessary (okay, maybe not the last one).

When your time in Jakarta eventually comes to an end, or if you change employers necessitating a change of sponsor, you must officially close out your KITAS. This involves obtaining an Exit Permit Only (EPO) stamp in your passport from the immigration office that issued your KITAS. This confirms you have fulfilled your obligations and are leaving under that particular permit. Failure to get an EPO can cause significant problems if you wish to return to Indonesia later on a different visa, as the system might still show you as residing under the old, expired permit. It's a final bureaucratic hoop, but an essential one for a clean exit.

Be prepared for occasional frustrations. Documents might get misplaced (always keep your own copies!). Requirements might seem to change subtly between visits or differ slightly between immigration offices. Communication might be unclear. Sometimes, a seemingly simple process hits an unexpected snag. This is where patience, persistence, and perhaps the help of your sponsor or agent become invaluable. Deep

breaths are recommended. Trying to argue aggressively or demand exceptions based on how things work "back home" is generally counterproductive. Adaptation is key.

Common pitfalls often involve paperwork. Ensure your passport has sufficient validity (usually at least 18 months remaining for KITAS applications) and enough blank pages. Get marriage and birth certificates officially translated and potentially legalized as required – don't rely on unofficial translations. Double-check that all names and dates match exactly across all documents. Small discrepancies can lead to delays or rejections. If your sponsoring company faces financial trouble or administrative issues, it could potentially impact your visa status, highlighting the importance of a stable sponsor.

Overstaying your visa is perhaps the most serious pitfall. As mentioned, fines are levied per day of overstay. Beyond a certain period (usually 60 days), deportation becomes highly likely, along with a potential ban on re-entry. Immigration officials at the airport are very strict about this upon departure. Don't assume leniency. If you foresee any issues with renewing on time, engage with your sponsor and immigration authorities proactively *before* the visa expires. Pleading ignorance after the fact rarely works.

You might hear whispers or suggestions about "alternative" ways to expedite processes or overlook certain requirements, often involving unofficial payments. While navigating the system can be frustrating, engaging in any form of bribery or using illicit shortcuts carries enormous risks. If caught, the consequences can be far more severe than mere visa denial, potentially involving legal prosecution, hefty fines, detention, and permanent blacklisting from Indonesia. Adhering to the official procedures, however slow or convoluted, is always the advisable path.

Despite the hurdles, the moment you finally hold your actual KITAS card is a moment of triumph. It's tangible proof that you've successfully navigated one of Jakarta's most notorious challenges. It's your license to live, and for working expats, the license to earn your keep in this bustling metropolis. It might seem like just a piece of plastic, but it represents countless forms filled, stamps acquired, queues endured, and regulations met. It's the key that unlocks the door to your Jakarta adventure, allowing you to move beyond the paperwork and start truly experiencing the city.

The visa journey is often the first, and arguably one of the most complex, administrative processes you'll face when moving to Jakarta. It demands meticulous preparation, unwavering patience, and a healthy dose of realism about timelines and potential complications. Having a reliable sponsor and potentially a good agent can smooth the path considerably. Understand the specific requirements for your visa type, keep track of deadlines, and always engage with the system respectfully and legally. Mastering this initial bureaucratic mountain sets the stage for navigating the many other unique aspects of life in the Big Durian.

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