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Filipinos head to Singapore as tourists to look for jobs

RAMZ came to Singapore in March as a tourist but his itinerary did not include visiting the Merlion, Universal Studios or Orchard Road.

Instead, the 29-year-old Filipino had only one goal: to find a job.

He would spend hours scouring employment websites every day, and often had only one meal a day to save money.

Finally, after about four months, he landed a job as a financial analyst at an offshore bank, drawing a monthly salary of S\$2,800 (RM7,280).

Filipino professionals like Ramz, who declined to give his full name, are increasingly taking a route once used mostly by maids to find employment in Singapore: entering the country as tourists. Once they secure jobs, their employers apply for work passes for them so that they can work here legally.

In Singapore, foreign professionals can apply for jobs while visiting. But the authorities "will not grant an

extension of visit passes" if the job prospects are unclear, states the Manpower Ministry on its website.

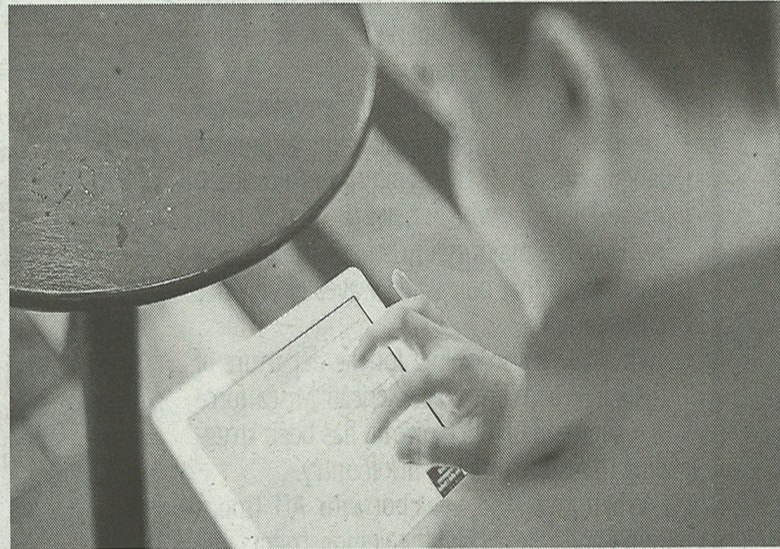
However, Manila frowns on it and has been clamping down on its citizens leaving the country as tourists to prevent human trafficking.

Immigration officials at the airports send people home if they do not have two-way tickets and a sufficient amount of cash to prove that they are genuine tourists.

Daisy Lopez, who owns employment agency WorkHome Personnel in Singapore, said aspiring maids, who are usually from the countryside, have borne the brunt of the tightened rules.

"The immigration officers can tell by one look that they aren't tourists. They don't dress fashionably and cannot answer the questions confidently," she said.

In contrast, professionals, many of whom hail from cities like Manila and Cebu, have a better chance of convincing immigration officers as



Trying his luck: Ramz scouring job websites for a chance to gain employment and a better paycheck in Singapore. — The Straits Times / Asia News Network

they dress better and carry themselves well.

Taking the legitimate route has its advantages, said Filipino bank staff and marketing and retail executives.

It ensures that their rights, such as paying no placement fees, are protected under Philippine laws.

But the process takes several

months and has no guarantee of success.

This is because they have to rely on recruitment agencies in the Philippines which are inundated by thousands of applications from university graduates who want to head to Singapore because of the good pay.

Graduates earn only about S\$510 (RM1,320) a month in the Philippines whereas in Singapore, they can draw over US\$2,000 (RM6,580).

So, many prefer the tourist route.

It allows employers to interview them in person, increasing their chances of getting hired.

If they cannot find a job before their tourist visa expires in a month, they apply to the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority to extend their stay.

In some cases, the extension is rejected.

Filipinos like Ramz then head to Johor Baru for a few days and re-enter Singapore on a new tourist pass.

Headhunters such as Satish Bakhda from Rikvin recruitment consultancy said many foreigners who try the tourist route go home empty-handed as the Manpower Ministry continues to tighten the rules. — The Straits Times / Asia News Network