

THAILAND: PROTESTS TO SCARE OFF TOURISTS



Renewed violent protests in Thailand have further damaged the country's image as a tourism destination. Experts predict 2 million less visitors will come to the country this year and hospitality industry calls for help from government.

Thailand will have problems convincing tourists it is a safe destination. In past Thai government claimed the unrests were under control and that it was completely safe for tourists to come to the country. Shortly after these reassurances thousands of tourists got stranded in Thailand because the protestors blocked two local airports.

Governments all over the world issued warnings to their citizens about travelling to Bangkok. The last unrests and clashes of government military and police forces with the red-shirted supporters of the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra caused more than 100 injuries and three deaths. According to local experts the protests and the violence damaged the country's tourism image severely. Thai tourism officials expect significant losses for this year. They predict the **protests will cost the industry some US\$2.5 billion** in losses and they expect there will be 2 **million less visitors** coming to the country compared with the 14 million that visited the Asian country last year. It will be another hit to the hospitality industry which is supposedly going to fire some 50,000 employees as a result of the worsening economic situation. In Bangkok the hotel room occupation rates fell to 30 % and in some places even to as low as 5 %.

The industry players want government to intervene and help in the difficult situation. The Federation of Thai Tourism Associations has even suggested the government to issue bonds to help the hospitality sector. According to the Tourism and Sports Minister Chumpol Silpa-archa, the government needs to stimulate the tourism industry in the short term. The minister mentioned e.g. greater tax incentives to operators.

It will take some time however for Thailand to regain the image of a safe tourism destination. Especially tourists from Asia in general are sensitive to the political situation. On the other hand, the British does not seem to be very disturbed or scared off by the protestors.

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