

# Thailand to Become the Best Tourist Destination for Golfers

It is estimated that if the current trend continues, Thailand will be the top golfing vacation destination within the next three years. Thailand's tourism industry has been experiencing a boom that has resulted in double the number of foreign visitors in the recent seven years, with 2012 seeing more than 22 million. This has had a pleasing impact on golf tourism.



According to Golfasian's Mark Siegel golf tourism has also experienced a positive upswing, with estimated arrivals in 2012 as many as 750,000, an increase of 50 percent in three years. Provided golf tourism continues to grow at its current rate, Thailand will surpass the current world's best golf destination Spain, as early as 2015.

In 2012 Thailand's land arrangements alone were estimated to be worth 86 billion baht (US\$ 2.88 billion) to golf tourism, according to Siegel.

He went on to add that the past year had shown amazing results and that Thailand was enjoying great appeal internationally due to a lack of negative issues such as floods and political unrest. As a result, golf tourism had seen Thailand being chosen over many other golf destinations, including Spain.



Siegel believes that 2015 will see the one million visitor mark being celebrated. While Spain has been the golf tourism leader for more than 10 years, 2015 would see Thailand at the very least on a par. Spain has been competing for golf tourist numbers against newer destinations such as North Africa, Turkey, Portugal and Asia, particularly Thailand, all of which have been grabbing more of the golf tourism market.

Siegel estimates that around nine percent of visitors to Thailand enjoy playing golf, while Vietnam and

Malaysia's estimated golfers amounted to less than 1 percent each.

He believes that a massive promotion campaign, along with quality courses, affordable prices, great weather, safety and the welcoming friendliness of Thailand's people has all contributed to the international perception of the great experience offered playing golf there.

He also indicated that Thailand is far ahead of other countries in the large volume of golfers returning year after year, particularly during the winter in the Northern hemisphere, as well as Asia itself.

Asia supplies around 60 percent of all visitors to Thailand, with a similar percentage being golfers. Approximately 500,000 golfers came from Japan, Korea, India, Malaysia, Singapore and China in 2012. Siegel said that China is providing an increasing number of golf tourists with each passing year and that Thailand expected China to continue to be a major supplier in the future.

Thailand's presence at Florida's PGA Show for the past four years had North Americans becoming more aware of Thailand as a great golfing destination, a trend that Siegel aims to foster.



Banyan Golf Club's general manager Stacey Walton reported record revenues and rounds played on the fairly new course during the high season (December to February), and expects 2013 to be even better. Walton said that Australian visitor numbers had been up considerably and was set to be a major market for Thailand's golf tourism in the near future.

Despite opening as recently as 2007 the Black Mountain Golf Club had been named Thailand's best course twice and has been enjoying maximum visitor numbers during the high season. Club manager Harald Elisson stated that every year since opening they had experienced good attendance, so much so that a full resort had been developed to support the course, with a great range of facilities and activities. According to Elisson the Club's goal is to cater to entire families with everything they could want, in top quality surroundings.

Peter Walton, International Assoc. of Golf Tourism Operators CEO reported that 2012 had been an excellent year for the golf tourist industry as a whole, but not everyone had been so lucky. While Russia and China had been growing with respect to general tourism industry, neither country provided significant contributions to golfing tourism.

The increases in both general tourism and golf tourism has been welcome news both for Thailand's tourism industry and for the country as a whole, and the increasing interest from countries previously not known for high visitor numbers is encouraging.

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