

CRIME RATE THREATENS THAI TOURISM INDUSTRY



Unless Thailand takes measures to stop the rising number of crimes against tourists, the country's tourism sector is set to suffer greatly. The number of crimes occurring in the areas that are frequented by tourists is on the rise.

The Thai government has a goal of earning revenue 2 trillion Baht annually from tourism by 2015. However, if the rising rate of criminal activity is not dealt with, this might remain a pipe dream.

Even though it is still early to establish whether foreigners are shying away from the destination due to the crime, the government has a lot to do to keep the visitors coming.

After the rape and robbery committed against two Russian nationals in Pattaya on Dec 26th, the public is now demanding that harsher punishments be implemented on offenders. Pol Lt Col Aroon Promphan asserted that although the police are trying their best to help, they are greatly outnumbered by the number of visitors, making it difficult to provide security. Col Aroon added that the number of tourist police in Pattaya is 150 officers and 50 volunteers who are foreigners.

A very large percentage of foreigners that visit Pattaya are Russians. This number has been on the rise since 2009. Back then only about 300,000 Russians visited the area, however, by 2012, the number had risen to 1.2 million.

Due to the fact that the rape case prompted several organizations, most notably the Russian Embassy, to express concern, the government has agreed to improve the state of security in the region.

The measures include an increase in the number of tourist checkpoints; placing of surveillance cameras in areas that are seen as high risk; equipping the tourists with useful information such as a hotline 1155, where they can report any incidences; hotels have been asked to increase the security measures and protect their clients more.

"We are advising our guests to stay off places that are dangerous and to be careful when traveling in cities" said Peerasak Momin. Momin oversees training at the Hilton Pattaya Hotel. He added that big hotels that have tight security measures like Hilton, Marriott, and Sheraton, have very little to worry about in terms of insecurity.

It was reported that most tourists are aware that the areas that have a high prevalence for crimes include popular destinations such as Pattaya, Koh Samui and Phuket. **A small hotel operator in Surat Thani province observed that crime is usually most prevalent in the high tourist season.**

The ministry of tourism and sports reported that in 2012, Thailand received 22.3 million foreign tourists, a number that is way above the targeted 21 million. In addition to that, they generated 960 billion Baht compared to the 500 billion Baht that was generated by local tourists.

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