

# THAI POLICE CHECKS MAY SCARE TOURISTS AWAY



The tourist hotspots of Bangkok and areas of nightlife and revelry have been given a rather negative makeover recently as the police have moved in and settled down to perform some rather drastic and intimidating security checks on the tourists and patrons of the bars and nightclubs.

This is not just a case of officers helping out the crowds by administering breathalyzers to test for drunkenness, although this is occurring, there are also tests for drug use and even passport checks in effect. The police are making their presence known and there are worrying reports about the way they are going about doing so.

**Martial law was meant to ensure "safe" holidays, according to those in charge, but it is actually beginning to drive people away.**

There are reports that as the police have made themselves at home, they have also been testing the boundaries of their power and begun extorting money from foreigners. Obviously, not all officers can be tarred with the same brush here and there are many that are simply out doing the job and the appropriate checks that have been assigned to them; however, the allegations of extortion, threats against the public and general harassment by some of those involved cannot be overlooked. Tests are being forced upon foreigners, sometimes with fake positive results, and large fines are handed out for violations, which can include the absence of a passport.

Not only is there the problem of some individuals going beyond the law and harming potentially innocent civilians, there is the knock-on effect on tourism that has many locals and businesses worried. To put things simply, if tourists no longer feel safe and that they can enjoy their holiday as intended, they are more likely to leave and not return. This is already the case with some travelers who have recently experienced these new police initiatives and **arrivals figures for October 2014 show a decline of 8.7%.**

What is also worrying is that there is a sense in Bangkok that the foreign community is being targeted and businesses are being made to suffer unfairly, a concern that has led to fears that visitors and even ex-pats living in the area will leave, especially when some foreign residents are being targeted on a daily basis.

There are problems to solve but the additional concern for Thailand is that this misjudged power and policing is not a new occurrence.

The security checks and pressure on tourists are not new ideas from a junta suddenly deciding it wants to make its presence felt even further in Bangkok; it has in fact been causing problems for tourists and local businesses significantly since the coup of May 2014 and tougher policing is just a part of it.

These breath tests and passport checks are being carried out on people in the streets who are leaving the bars that now have to close their doors much earlier in the night and some tourists are even harassed on the beaches in the daytime. It seems that there is little relief in store in the

immediate future when reports of corruption and bribes are so prevalent and the government continues to insist that martial law is for the best. During the last coup of 2006 tourism did increase but Thailand may not be so fortunate this time.

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