

# THAILAND PARALYSED BY ASTROLOGIST PREDICTIONS



While most of 2010 recorded a significant increase in tourist-generated income in Thailand, the last months of this year are becoming a nightmare. A famous astrologist has recently predicted a tsunami will hit the Thai coast in December and cancellations are pouring in.

It seemed to have taken forever to erase the curse of the 2004 tsunami whose horrific power claimed 5,400 lives and left the Thai coast completely bare. **The country's tourism has been gradually on the rise and this year in particular was deemed great for tourism.** Visits to resorts like Phuket, Phangnga, Ranong and Surin have increased compared to 2009. The selection of direct and charter flights was also extended. Nevertheless, when a respected Thai astrologer Warin Buawiratlert announced his December predictions, everything changed.

According to Mr. Buawiratlert, another tsunami will hit the Thai coast this month and in a culture which deeply believes in fortune telling and astrology, such a piece of news does not go unnoticed. **10% of room bookings have already been cancelled and holiday bookings in some resorts have dropped nearly by half.** Many tourism professionals believe such announcements are very irresponsible and the negative impact on tourism in the southern province is inevitable. Experts agree it is highly unlikely for a tsunami to reappear, yet warning towers are always at the ready and several tsunami drills are scheduled for this month in some of the resorts.

**The new important players on the market are Russian tourists;** while numbers of incoming Europeans stagnate or even slightly drop, Russian visitors are eager to come and local businesses need to adjust their offers to 3\* packages. Thai tourist authorities are also expanding their promotion campaigns to previously untouched markets, such as India and the Middle East in the hope of balancing the losses.

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