

THAILAND INCREASINGLY INCAPABLE OF HANDLING MASS TOURISM



Tourism in Thailand is registering massive growth. In the first quarter of 2018 there was an increase of 15.4% compared to 2017 (10.61 million arrivals). Last year, the country was visited by a total of 35.38 million tourists, which was a growth of about 3 million in contrast with the year before. The country expects a total of 37 million tourists by the end of the year and is expected to exceed 40 million in 2019.

However, with increasing numbers more responsibility must be taken, as it seems that Thailand is having big problems in handling mass tourism, mainly from China.

In June, the death of a whale that swallowed plastic bags in Southern Thailand caught attention and stressed the problem of sea pollution connected to mass tourism. According to Bangkok Post, a total of 27.4 million garbage was dumped in Thailand in 2017. A resident of Bangkok uses an average of 8.7 bags per day. These are alarming numbers that have led the government to take measures.

Last week, about 40 Chinese tourists died on a sinking boat off the coast of Phuket. The Phoenix, with 105 people on board, went down in bad weather.

The sustainability of mass tourism in Thailand is proving to be increasingly more difficult. Thailand's Tourism Minister Weerasak Kowsurat sees the death of the whale as a symbol of the ecological burdens resulting from the tourism boom.

Thailand expects 40 million foreign visitors in 2019, which represents more than half of the country's population. To relieve popular tourist destinations, the minister now wants to promote less frequented places in the country. He also wants to encourage Thai and foreign travelers to deal responsibly with the culture and environment.

Another example of how mass tourism has affected Thai tourism is the Maya Bay on Phi Phi Island. The bay has been closed down for four months in order to restore the bay from environmental damage made by boats, trash and tourists. The tourism minister is looking to regulate the number of visitors of the bay as well as the boat docks.

"The increased influx of tourism is already having very visible impacts on the Thai seas and coasts," Eike Schoening, from the marine environmental group COREsea.

However, despite all the issues, **tourism remains the key industry for the country of Thailand.** It is expected to generate revenues of over \$60 billion next year and continues to be a driver of the Thai economy. Many investments are planned in the sector but will have to be made in accordance with the Tourism Ministry's view of more sustainable tourism in the country.

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