

# THAILAND LOSING CHINESE TRAVELERS DUE TO SECURITY CONCERNS



Thai tour operators have begun to lay off employees and close some parts of their businesses after several weeks of waiting for Chinese travelers. The most affected facilities include restaurants, souvenir shops, and tour bus services, which are suffering of a low Chinese traveler influx, says Ronnarong Chewinsiriamnuai, president of the Thai-Chinese Tourism Alliance Association.

The director admits that the issue is expanding at a serious rate, to the point that they have been forced to ask many tour guides to stay at home because there is no work for them. **To the same extent, tour bus companies are suffering the consequences, reporting less and less activity.** That impacts salary of drivers who charge per hour. If their regular income was 30,000 Bath per month, it is now at 7000 to 8000.

However, not all regions suffer from the lack of Chinese travelers the same. The situation in the north of Thailand is worse as tourist agencies have removed the destination from their travel itineraries due to the absence of customers. The next issue is that the high season is coming, and if the crisis continues, it will have serious consequences for employees. To get a rough idea on how large this industry is, Thai tourism sector has 345 wholesale agencies specializing in transport of Chinese travelers, and all have guided tours.

Expectations are that the arrivals of Chinese visitors will keep decreasing even during the last two months of 2018, and probably at the beginning of next year.

**The reason for the critical situation for Thai tourism has been linked to the latest safety incidents,** especially the one where 47 Chinese tourists drowned in a shipwreck after a boat sunk near Phuket, last July.

Thai travel agencies are attending permanent board meetings, but coming up with solutions is not simple. So far, arrivals have decreased by 300,000 visitors, and the figure is expected to lose another 700,000 next year. The decline has been reported as follows: 22% in July, 36% in August, 39% in September, and 31% in October.

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