

AIR POLLUTION AFFECTS THE TOURISM SECTOR IN NORTHERN THAILAND



The Thai authorities have indicated that the number of tourists in northern Thailand has fallen in recent weeks, due to the alarming air pollution that continues to plague the region.

The smog, long reported by residents of northern Thailand, has worsened to the point of affecting the tourism sector. **Hotel reservations in the popular provinces of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai have dropped drastically**, with tens of thousands of visitors preferring to turn to other destinations.

The Governor of the Thailand Tourist Office, Yuthasak Supasorn, said that this problem is primarily a problem for Thai visitors, who have canceled about 15% of their hotel bookings in Chiang Mai since last month. He added that in the popular district of Chiang Dao, bookings decreased by nearly 50% in March compared to the same period last year.

A representative of the Chiang Rai Federation of Industries said that the air pollution this year was "particularly bad". He reported that hotel room bookings in the country have dropped by 20% compared to 2018, adding that many tourists have preferred to turn to the south of the country.

Suthirawat Suwanawat, General Manager of Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport, explained that the number of tourists travelling north from Bangkok's two airports has decreased by about 10,000 per day in recent weeks. These figures are falling sharply as the famous Songkran festival, which traditionally generates tens of billions of baht for the tourism sector, gets closer.

Recently, air quality has been "bad" in Chiang Mai and "very bad" in Chiang Rai, according to the AirVisual website. In many northern provinces, including Phayao and Mae Hong Son, the situation is the same. The deterioration in air quality prompted Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha to visit the region.

Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith said that some 40 flights have been grounded in Mae Hong Son since late February due to poor visibility caused by smog and smoke.

This problem has largely been attributed to serious forest fires and agricultural burns, both in Thailand and in neighboring countries.

A public health official from Chiang Rai province said the situation has worsened considerably in recent days, warning of serious health consequences, especially for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, young children and those already suffering from chronic respiratory diseases.

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