

TOURISM IN THAILAND REGISTERED DECREASED NUMBERS



After years of progress, the tourism sector, vital to the Thai economy, is showing signs of slowing down, affected by the drop in Chinese arrivals and the appreciation of the local currency that makes holidays more expensive in the kingdom.

The country welcomed 19.8 million tourists in the first six months of 2019, representing stagnation (+ 1.48%) compared to the same period of 2018, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism.

In comparison, foreign arrivals jumped 9% from 2016 to 2017 and more than 7% from 2017 to 2018.

Chinese tourists, the first foreign clientele in Thailand, decreased in numbers (-5% compared to the same period last year) since the sinking of a boat in Phuket in July 2018 in which 47 Chinese tourists died. The disaster highlighted safety deficiencies for some operators in Thailand, raising fears in China.

The appreciation of the Thai currency also has a negative impact on tourism in Thailand. Since the beginning of the year, it appreciated by 8% against the Chinese yuan.

"This, of course, has an effect". Tourists "prefer to go to Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia," says Wichita Propergol, president of the Association of Thai travel agents.

In an attempt to stem the industry's slowdown, a vital contributor to the country's economy, last week the authorities announced a \$ 10 billion stimulus package, partly for tourism.

They also plan to introduce a visa-free program for Chinese and Indian visitors, allowing them to stay in the country for up to 15 days.

"This measure will further facilitate the arrival of customers from these two major markets," said Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya of Tourism Authority.

Although the most popular sites are not as busy as usual, Thailand is still a popular destination for its beaches, food and its many shopping centers.

However, for example, Indian tourists number jumped since last year (+ 24% year-on-year in the first half of 2019), reaching nearly one million.

The Thai Ministry of Tourism anticipates the arrival of some 40 million foreign visitors this year.

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