

# THAILAND'S TOURISM AID PLAN SUSPENDED DUE TO FRAUDS

Signs of fraud have been detected in the government's tourism aid program in Thailand, leading authorities to put on hold a new batch of holiday subsidies, when hotel bookings seem to depend heavily on them.

The Thai government last week postponed the addition of one million overnight stays under the "We Travel Together" program, which secured that the state subsidizes 40% of hotel reservations at participating establishments as well as meal tickets.

**The reason given is that irregularities have been detected in transactions at some 500 hotels and shops participating in the campaign.**

It is believed that some establishments have reported false bookings to pocket the state subsidies.

According to the governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Yuthasak Supasorn, the suspicions of fraud are related to nearly 160,000 transactions at 312 hotels and 200 suspected shops. He said the investigation is ongoing.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha has called for exemplary civil and even criminal prosecutions to prevent this kind of fraud from happening again.

Launched in July with five million subsidized overnight stays, the "We Travel Together" program was an immediate success. **When the subsidies ran out, the travel candidates pushed back their travel plans pending the new campaign.**

The government was supposed to add one million overnight stays starting on December 16, but due to suspicions of fraud, the operation was postponed until at least next month. In the meantime, tourism professionals are observing a sharp drop-in activity.

However, new hope came with the announcement of the government easing the travel restrictions for citizens from 56 countries. While the visitors will be required to undergo a mandatory two-week hotel quarantine, tourism stakeholders believe the measure would attract substantial numbers of tourists.

Visitors from countries including Australia, France and the United States can travel without visas, but would need a certificate to show they were free of COVID-19 72 hours before travel and a reservation at a quarantine hotel.

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