

THAILAND MAY SOON REOPEN ITS DOORS TO INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS



Thailand's plans to reopen to international tourists are gaining momentum as the country has successfully controlled the second wave of the virus.

Last week, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha ordered officials to review the vaccine passports for international travel after signaling that the tourist-reliant country is prepared to scrap the two-week quarantine for vaccinated visitors.

The local tourism industry wants the mandatory quarantines to be lifted as early as July 1st so that the country can open up to millions of potentially vaccinated travelers.

Thailand managed to contain a flareup in Covid-19 infections at the start of the year, and its overall caseload is relatively low at about 26,000, with 84 deaths.

A successful reopening by Thailand could spur other tourism-dependent nations to follow suit, though the World Health Organization this week warned about the risks of easing restrictions too fast.

"A gradual reopening, accompanied by appropriate precautionary measures, will undoubtedly save businesses and jobs and bolster the economy," said John Blanco, managing director of the luxury hotel Capella Bangkok.

"Given the global dynamics of immunization, it would be wise to start planning the necessary steps".

Tourism Is Essential for Thailand's Economic Recovery

Thailand's central bank says tourism, which accounted for about one-fifth of the country's gross domestic product before the pandemic, is key to returning Southeast Asia's second-largest economy to growth. Thailand's GDP contracted by 6.1 per cent in 2020, the highest rate this century.

While the country has made some efforts to reopen its borders to international tourists, strict quarantine rules have kept most of them out.

A Petition to Reopen the Country in July

William Heinecke, president of Minor International Pcl, which manages 500 hotels worldwide, is leading a campaign to petition the government to reopen borders from the third quarter, after the pandemic forced hundreds of hotels and tourist businesses to close.

"The current situation is unsustainable," says the online petition, which gathered nearly 6,000 signatories in two days.

"The July 1st reopening would be a strategic opportunity for Thailand to show leadership role among Asian countries and pave the way for a solid recovery of the Thai economy in 2022".

Vaccine Passport - Cooperation Is Necessary

The Prime Minister warned against the hasty issuance of vaccine passports and called for better coordination with other countries. The European Union is still a few months away from issuing the Covid-19 certificates of immunity, and Britain is not expected to conclude a review of the "certification of Covid status" until June 21.

Thailand, which began deploying the vaccine, aims to vaccinate at least 50 percent of its population by the end of the year. Vaccines are also planned to be distributed to tourist hotspots such as Phuket and Koh Samui for wider reopening. The government has eased business and travel restrictions after controlling a recent outbreak of the virus. But having averted a national lockdown to deal with the resurgence, Thailand may not return to zero cases any time soon, according to Thira Woratanarat, an associate professor at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Medicine.

" Finding a way to reopen the country to tourists is just as important as planning for vaccine distribution," said Somprawin Manprasert, chief economist of the Bank of Ayudhya Pcl, "the sooner the country can reopen to tourists, the sooner the recovery will be felt. "The second wave just delayed the recovery, rather than derailing it," he said. "Even though we're still in the dark, there's light at the end of the tunnel."

Minister of Health Presents Vaccination Passport

Thailand's Minister of Public Health, Anutin Charnvirakul, went on Facebook to show what he hopes all Thais will soon have in hand.

The passport is officially entitled "International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis" and has parts in English to facilitate international travel. **Every Thai who has been vaccinated will receive one.**

On this basis, local media said that the opening of Thailand was "imminent" and quoted the minister who said that soon, for Thais, everything would be "relatively normal".

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