

WHAT NEXT? THAI TOURISM AT A CROSSROADS



The Covid-19 pandemic is having a significant effect on the tourism industry worldwide, with the lives and businesses of millions around the world being influenced by this unprecedented crisis. However, some countries are struggling more than others, mainly because their economy relies heavily on the tourism sector. One of these countries is also Thailand, which has seen a drastic drop in visitors in the last couple of months.

Sharp Increase in Searches

However, there are some indications that better times are ahead for Thai tourism. According to Airbnb, **there has been a sharp increase in searches for stays in Thailand in recent weeks since the announcement of the country's reopening for fully vaccinated visitors from 63 countries.**

The well-known rental platform elaborates that searches from international customers for stays in Thailand in the next six months have more than doubled compared to a year ago, based on the data from the penultimate week of October.

Phuket Most Popular, US Tourists Most Keen

According to the data, the popular island Phuket remains the country's top destination for international customers, along with Bangkok, Koh Samu, Pattaya and Chiang Mai.

The top 10 countries of search origin are the USA, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, South Korea, Australia, Canada, Sweden, and Switzerland.

New Standard of Thai Tourism

In the context of this reopening, Thailand's Prime Minister announced the introduction of a "new standard of tourism".

In response to this new vision, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has launched a new campaign called "Amazing Thailand, Amazing New Chapters" to promote the sector next year, with emphasis on the new normal, health and safety.

In this campaign, authorities have called for a diversification of the targeted audience, suggesting that both nearby markets such as ASEAN countries, as well as long-haul markets such as the USA, Europe and Russia, should be targeted.

Moreover, **the Thai government aims to create a sector with an emphasis on quality rather than quantity, thus shifting the focus of the Thai tourism sector radically.** In other words, the idea is to attract a smaller number of wealthy tourists instead of millions of "low-quality" ones. However, not everyone is thrilled by this new strategy.

In fact, most of the stakeholders in the sector are against such a policy. According to their estimates, focusing on high-class tourists may bring money to luxury hotels, but it will not benefit most of the

industry as well as the “average Thai citizen”.

Thus, it remains to be seen how Thai tourism will develop in the future, but what is certain is that the government will have to find a common speech with the stakeholders to return the country back among the top destinations worldwide.

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