

# THAILAND FOCUSES ON ECO-RESPONSIBLE TOURISM



After the closure of Maya Bay beach and thanks to the absence of visitors during the Covid-19 pandemic, nature has begun to reclaim its rights on the Thai islands, ravaged by mass tourism. The country is taking advantage of this to accelerate its shift towards eco-responsible tourism, of which the Similan Islands archipelago could be the showcase.

The worldwide success of the movie *The Beach* had turned this paradise into hell: a tide of tourists had flooded on the white sand, and gradually destroyed the seabed. To save the beach of Maya Bay, on the island of Phi Phi Ley, off the coast of Thailand, it had to be closed. **It was closed to the public for three years.** A shock treatment which, thanks to the absence of tourists during the Covid-19 pandemic, allowed nature to regain its rights: the water became clearer, the coral reefs grew back, and even sharks returned.

The Thai government has seized the opportunity to accelerate its green shift. In September 2021, it announced the annual closure of its 127 national parks for several months to allow nature to breathe. This policy is already being applied in the Similan Islands, in the west of the country. They have become the laboratory of a new form of tourism, under high protection.

The government is now giving itself the means to preserve natural sites: this is the message it visibly wishes to convey to the camera of "Envoy special". In front of the journalists, a battalion of armed rangers, in trellis and black vest decorated with a crab. They are in charge of protecting the fauna and flora of the Similan Islands National Park. Their mission is also to control the boats: none can cross the limits of the park without authorization.

The team of "Envoy special" embarks with the commander, who exposes the new rules. **Since 2018, no more question of welcoming here nearly 10,000 tourists per day.** Now, their number is limited to 3,850 and 525 divers. The hotel boats cannot accommodate more than 500 people. Spending the night on the archipelago is now forbidden, and the bungalows that housed tourists have been removed.

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