

THAILAND TO LURE MORE VISITORS BY EXTENDING THE VISA WAIVER PROGRAM



The Prime Minister of Thailand, Srettha Thavisin, announced last week that tourists from India and Taiwan can enter Thailand without a visa from November 10, 2023 to May 10, 2024. This decision was made to attract more tourists during the upcoming peak season.

In September, Thailand also announced a visa waiver program for Chinese tourists, the country's leading source of visitors before the pandemic. **In 2019, Thailand received a record 39 million visitors, of which 11 million were Chinese tourists.**

From January to October 29, Thailand welcomed 22 million visitors, who spent 927.5 billion baht (\$26 billion), per recent government data.

According to the latest data, India is the fourth-largest market for Thailand's tourism industry in 2021, with approximately 1.2 million visitors. Malaysia, China, and South Korea are the top three markets. The Indian inbound tourism sector has increased activity due to increasing attention from airlines and hotel chains.

The government of Thailand aims to attract around 28 million tourists this year to make up for the weak export sector that has hindered economic growth. The Tourism Board of Thailand (TAT) proposed visa-free travel for tourists from Taiwan and India if the visa waiver program for mainland China became permanent, as Prime Minister and Finance Minister Srettha Thavisin suggested.

During the signing of a letter of intent between the TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand) and eight Chinese companies on October 19 in Beijing, Srettha, who was leading a Thai delegation to the Belt and Road Forum, stated that **the temporary visa waiver for Chinese travelers, which is scheduled to end on February 29, 2024, might become permanent.**

According to the latest data from the Thai Tourism Board, Malaysia had the most significant number of tourists this year, with over 3 million visitors. The Chinese, the largest group of visitors to Thailand before the COVID-19 pandemic, came in second with 2.65 million visitors as of October 15. The Thai tourism agency has announced that they expect Chinese tourists to increase from 4 million to 4.4 million by 2023.

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