

Push for more European tourists

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Arrivals of European tourists are expected to rebound by 10 per cent in the rest of this year and next year as operators roll out short-term tactics to boost late bookings and promote the single-visa agreement with Cambodia.

James Bell, managing director of Turquoise Holidays in Britain, said yesterday that more visitors would travel to Thailand. The company has pushed out more sales and promotion activities as well as assured customers that Thailand is safe after political unrest culminated in another military coup.

If there is no crisis in the country especially in the remaining months of this year, British tourists will head to beaches and islands in Thailand, he said.

David Kevan, managing director of Chic Locations, reassured Thai operators that his firm would focus more on the Thai market as part of its plans for next year.

A representative of TUI Thomson from London Gatwick said Britain was one of strongest markets within the European region despite the decline in travel generally worldwide. Thailand's long-haul arrivals are increasing because of a short-term boost to late bookings for the high season and preparation for the off season next spring.

The company's charter-flight operation has been successful as expected, with more than 6,700 tour packages sold for Thailand. It is also set to step up marketing to boost sales from individuals in Britain throughout this year.

Online marketing and digital and social media are integral to a UK Thailand Fan Club that counts more than 70,000 fans, and this helps stimulate repeaters.

Eric Hallin, general manager of the Rembrandt Hotel and Towers in Bangkok, who claims the biggest portion of the British market in Bangkok, said foreign tourists were returning during this high season. Many can now fly directly into Phuket as Middle Eastern airlines are offering direct services to the resort island.

Seni Puwasetthawon, managing director of the Coral Cove Chalet Koh Samui, said foreign tourists travelling to Samui would climb by more than 10 per cent next year if there is no crisis.

The hotel basked in acceptance from buyers in Europe during a global world tourism fair held in London this week.

According to the Tourism Ministry, European visitors are among those lingering in Thailand the longest. Last year, Britons stayed an average of 17 days per visit, about double the 9.8-day average of all visitors. Europeans as a whole averaged 16 days.

Of the 26.5 million international arrivals last year, 6.1 million were from Europe, for a market share of 23 per cent, up 12 percentage points. This year, 6.5 million Europeans are expected to visit and, it is hoped, drop Bt458 billion into the country.

Last year, the United Kingdom alone accounted for 840,000 arrivals, increasing by 3 per cent. The figure should reach 879,000 this year, injecting Bt64 billion into the Thai economy.

Tourism Minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul said her ministry was projecting 6.9 million visitors from Europe and earnings of Bt505 billion from them for next year, and 909,000 visitors and earnings of Bt68 billion from the UK market alone.

Many major events have been planned at home next year as part of the country's "Discover Thainess" campaign. They include the Wai Kru Muay Thai ceremony in Ayutthaya in March, the Songkran New Year Festival in April and the Loy Krathong Festival in November.

There is also a bright future for the whole Asean market as the Thai government recently signed an agreement on the implementation of a single leisure visa with Cambodia. The government is set to sign deals with other neighbouring countries to draw travellers from third countries, particularly in Europe.