

Thailand to scrap on-arrival COVID tests from May



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A tourist wears a face mask to prevent spread of the coronavirus disease during sunset near the Grand Palace in Bangkok

BANGKOK (Reuters) - Thailand will next month remove a requirement for arrivals vaccinated against COVID-19 to undergo a test and brief quarantine on arrival, an official said on Friday, the latest measure to revive its battered tourism industry.

Visitors are encouraged to perform antigen self-tests during their stay, instead of the current "Test & Go" scheme, where arrivals must isolate in a hotel while awaiting the result of a test on arrival.

The new measure follows the removal last month of a pre-departure test requirement.

"Adjusting measures has an impact on drawing in tourism receipts," Taweessin Visanuyothin, spokesperson for the coronavirus taskforce, told a news conference.

Tourism is a crucial driver of the economy in Thailand, one of Asia's most popular holiday destinations, representing about 12% of gross domestic product before the pandemic, when visitor numbers hit a record high.

Although Thailand is seeing a pickup in tourism, numbers are still down sharply from that level, with 210,800 arrivals in March, up from 6,700 in the same period last year, but far short of the monthly average of 3.3 million in 2019.

Still required for visitors, however, is online travel clearance for which proof of vaccination and insurance must be presented. The "Thailand Pass" has long been a source of frustration over the time taken to be granted approval.

Other rules eased on Friday include reducing the required insurance coverage to \$10,000 and granting entry to unvaccinated visitors, providing they show a negative pre-departure polymerase chain reaction (PCR) result.

(Reporting by Chayut Setboonsarng and Panarat Thepgumpanat; Editing by Martin Petty)

