THAILAND RECOVERY

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE REOPENING OF REGIONAL TOURISM

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The COVID-19 pandemic presents a severe threat to the world economy and, in particular, the global travel and tourism industry. The dark reality is that a vaccine for COVID-19 is at best months away, if not years away. The fact is we need to accept and adapt to the new reality. Furthermore, destinations must begin now working towards economic recovery and for Thailand travel and tourism plays a crucial role in this regard. As the country looks to reopen, the most important question to consider is how Thailand can safely restart the tourism industry while still protecting its citizens and residents from the disastrous impact of a second and third wave of COVID-19.

At the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), we believe in a phased approached to reopening, beginning with domestic tourism followed by a regional travel facilitated through bilateral agreements with destinations that have been declared COVID-19 free or have the health situation well under control, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Bhutan and other regional destinations as the situation evolves and improves.

In order to reopen to regional and eventually international markets, there are a number health protocols that must be implemented. Many of these protocols have already been put into action as domestic tourism slowly reopens in the country such as:

- Mandatory face masks in public areas,
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) for airport staff working in public areas with a large volume of visitors,
- Sanitization protocols for hotels, attractions, shopping malls and restaurants.

However, in the case of international travel Thailand must take further action by implementing the recommended air travel protocols suggested by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) (see attached document), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and Airports Council International (ACI). In addition, digital health information should be provided to authorities prior to travel through the Advance Passenger Information System, rapid COVID-19 testing should be implemented at both entry and exit points, and the use of a contact tracing application should be mandatory for all visitors.

Most importantly, Thailand must look to rebuild traveller confidence and trust by reassuring travellers that their safety and security is a critical priority of the government during these unprecedented times.

PATA applauds the Thai government for its handling of the COVID-19 crisis and the many steps it has taken that are in line with the Association's recommendations as noted above, including the country's plans to rebrand tourism in the post-coronavirus era to "Amazing Trusted Thailand", the examination of "travel bubble" agreements with foreign countries, and the possible use of tracking technology to avoid the 14-day quarantine requirement.

However, it is important to note that according to the most recent research from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the impact of prolonged travel restrictions could wipe out US$5.5 trillion in the sector's contribution to global GDP, with up to 197 millions jobs immediate at risk globally. Their research suggests that if travel restrictions are removed sooner, it could save a staggering 99.3m jobs.

Therefore, we believe that if these various steps are implemented at the earliest, Thailand can mitigate the risk of the infection spreading, safely rebuild tourism - a key economic driver for the country, and save thousands of jobs and businesses.