



# Thailand urged to move beyond 'Amazing'

Thailand is being urged to reconsider its marketing position and move beyond cheap mass market tourism to instead focus on the development of new attractions and experiences that will attract higher yield visitors. Liz Sinclair reports.

**DAVID KEEN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE** of global brand strategy and communications agency, Keen, said Thailand's tourism authority needed to re-assess its 'Amazing Thailand' brand and cheap hotel-based strategies to embrace more quality tourism experiences and build iconic mega-attractions.

"To continue along this path means building more hotel rooms that will only end up being discounted," said Keen.

Thailand's prime minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, recently made comment that Thailand needs to focus more on quality tourism that will attract higher yield, higher disposable income, higher spending leisure and business visitors.

Abhisit said Thailand should to move away from its dependence on increasingly irrelevant, low-yield mass tourism that fills hotel beds but generates little income.

So, while Thailand's tourist arrivals continue to grow, analysis of the arrivals data shows that more commonly long-haul, long-stay, higher spending visitors are being replaced by shorter-stay mid-market visitors, who spend less per capita per visit.

Keen said this was creating a new and unsustainable trend where the country has to run faster just to stay still.

"Because more tourists stay shorter and spend less, Thailand needs to maintain double-digit growth in arrivals just to match the preceding year's tourism earnings.

"It's a precarious balance at present. More hotel beds and aircraft seats create over capacity and further discounting. Empty hotel rooms and low load factors are also causing price-dumping and desperate short-term marketing pitches to mass market suppliers, which is also pushing prices down."

Keen believes that the concentration on bringing in more lower yield tourists will deter Thailand's appeal for high yield visitors, thus creating a downward spiral.

Political instability, long queues at Suvarnabhumi airport, over-crowding and environmental degradation are also listed as elements damaging the destination's tourism brand.

"Tourists who are used to high quality travel experiences in Europe, Japan, Australia and the United States are being confronted with some of these negative experiences, which can make Thailand 'amazing' for all the wrong reasons.

"If we don't address this challenge, we risk the further flight of quality visitors to alternative destinations, such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and the Maldives," he warned.

While the trend is a concern for government it is a boon for travellers, with the Thai Hotel Association reporting that 2282 new hotel rooms will be added in Bangkok alone this year.

The over-supply is creating a raft of cheaper hotel rooms, with a similar standard property in Singapore or Hong Kong charging US\$350 a night compared to US\$150 in Bangkok.

Phuket is also growing rapidly on low yield visitors with the *Phuket Insider* reporting arrivals onto the island grew by 27 percent over the first two months of 2011, bolstered by more flights, cheap hotel rooms and great value resort experiences.

Keen said Thailand needed to follow the lead of neighbouring countries and link its premium tourism product with major events and tourism infrastructure.

"Singapore bravely built the Marina Bay Sands, Universal Studios and added Formula

One night races. Hong Kong opened Disneyland and Ngong Ping 360. Malaysia has announced Legoland. By comparison, Thailand has very little new to offer, except more 'amazing' sales and discount prices. It's simply not a sustainable proposition.

"Thailand has the ability to build mega-projects when it wants to. Bangkok has added the skytrain, an underground train network and a new airport in the last decade, so it can deliver on ambitious goals," he added.

## Airport hotel flexi-time

**NOVOTEL BANGKOK** Suvarnabhumi Airport hotel has launched a new rate structure that provides guests with the flexibility of checking in and out during a 24-hour period, rather than paying for each calendar day.

The new '24 Hours Flexi' service means guests can use the hotel for the hours that fit with their flight times, rather than having to vacate the room by the usual 11am check-out time.

The service will be ideal for those travellers taking a quick 'shop-over' enroute to Europe, or those with lengthy connection times.

Guests are free to enjoy the services of the hotel throughout their stay, as well as take one of the hotel's famous 'JetLag Massages'.

The property is a five-minute walk from the terminal and the brand-new Airport Link city skytrain that can whisk you into Bangkok in 12 minutes.

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# Airlines focus on Thailand

From new routes to new aircraft and new codeshare alliances – it's all happening over Thailand. Liz Sinclair reports on the latest aviation developments.

## ETIHAD FAST-TRACKS KOH SAMUI

Etiha Airways has joined forces with Bangkok Airways to offer the fastest service from Australia to Thailand's popular beach resort island – Koh Samui.

Etiha flies three times per week from Brisbane, arriving in Singapore at 6.25pm, where it connects with codeshare partner, Bangkok Airways, at 8.10pm for a 9pm arrival in Koh Samui.

The Bangkok Airways flight returns three times each week, departing Koh Samui on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays at 4.30pm, touching down in Singapore at 7.20pm, connecting with Etiha's 11:15pm Singapore to Brisbane service which arrives in Brisbane at 9.05am the next day.

Cramer Ball, Etiha Airways' regional general manager Asia Pacific South and Australasia, said the new services were Etiha's first ever to Koh Samui.

"These are exciting times for our customers and for the airline's global network.

"The new route from Koh Samui to Brisbane shaves two hours off the journey, making our codeshare service the market's fastest and most convenient."

All Etiha customers on the codeshare service are invited to enjoy the comforts of

the Bangkok Airways boutique lounge in Koh Samui prior to boarding the flight to Singapore, and of course, chauffeur-driven transfers to and from Brisbane International Airport are available for Etiha's business class customers.

Round trip fares from Brisbane to Koh Samui start from \$1205 in economy class, and from \$4375 in business class.

Visit [www.etihad.com](http://www.etihad.com)

## STRATEGIC ADDS THAILAND

The acquisition of a wide-body Airbus A330 has seen Australia's newest full-service airline, Strategic, expand its international operations to include new non-stop flights to Phuket from Melbourne and Brisbane.

Strategic Airlines head of commercial, Damien Vasta, said early passenger loads and forward bookings on the flight were above forecasts.

"We launched these routes after other airlines had dropped them and this has proved to be a good move. The market is supporting the services and passenger loads are exceeding expectations," he said.

Strategic Airlines is now the only full-service airline flying directly from Melbourne and Brisbane into Phuket.

Vasta said after months of commercial passenger services, the broader travel industry was now moving to support the airline.

"It's taken a little while to eventuate, but consumers and the travel industry are now more aware of what is being offered by Strategic.

"The launch of the new wide-body services has provided them with a greater level of comfort that Strategic is an airline with credibility and longevity, so you can expect to see more of our product in wholesale brochure and retail promotions, which will further build sales."

Vasta said the addition of an A330 to the fleet opened a number of new opportunities.

"From a commercial perspective, the A330's range and economics open a lot of new destinations for us.

"For passengers, it means a better flying experience with more room, more washrooms, more cabin crew and a bigger business class cabin.

"These economics allow us to price our flights at the lower end of the market, while providing a full-service product that rivals anything in the region.

"Compare prices and you'll find our business class is often around the same price as a full-economy seat on other full-service airlines."

The wide body aircraft is configured with a 30-seat business class cabin, with 243 seats in economy. Fares include onboard meals, beverages, inflight movies and a baggage allowance.

Visit [www.flystrategic.com](http://www.flystrategic.com)

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# Outrigger opens Koh Samui

Outrigger Hotels and Resorts Asia has opened the doors to its newest leisure resort – the stunning Outrigger Koh Samui Resort and Spa in the picturesque Bhoput Beach precinct.

## THE NEW FIVE-STAR FULL SERVICE

Outrigger Koh Samui Resort and Spa offers 81 villas and suites configured as high-end pool villas, spacious pool-access suites, and beach deco rooms.

Guests enjoy a full range of resort services and amenities, including a beachside restaurant, wellness centre, a fitness centre, three swimming pools (one absolute beachfront), two bars and a kids club.

Tranquil Bhoput Beach – in the northeast corner of Samui Island – is known for its breathtaking sunsets and family-friendly atmosphere. It is also home to the Big Buddha temple statue overlooking the sea.

Bhoput is five minutes away from Samui airport and 20 minutes from the main tourist area at Chaweng.

*Image:  
New Outrigger for Koh Samui*

Destination: Thailand



## Thai resumes Perth-Phuket non-stop

**THAI AIRWAYS WILL RESUME** its non-stop flights between Phuket and Perth from 16 April, with a four-times weekly service.

Flights will depart on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings from Bangkok, travelling via Phuket and back to Perth. The late departure allows travellers to take full advantage of the day in Bangkok, or Phuket, before travelling overnight, arriving back in Perth at 7.45am the following morning.

Perth-Bangkok return flights will continue to operate, with afternoon departures providing convenient connections to and from Europe.

All Thai flights between Perth and Thailand operate using an Airbus A330-300 configured with business and economy class seating and personal in-flight entertainment.

Visit [www.thaiairways.com.au](http://www.thaiairways.com.au)

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