



Flash by EIC

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The implication of Maya Bay tourist control measure on the Thai tourism sector

Event

- The Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation ordered closure of Maya Bay of Hat Noppharat Thra – Mu Koh Phi Phi National Park in Krabi province from June 1 to September 30, 2018. In addition, From October 1, 2018 onwards, the number of tourists entering the bay will be limited to the maximum of 2,000 persons per day, in a bid to rehabilitate the bay's ecological system severely damaged by huge number of tourists. Moreover, the Department authorized the Marine Science Association of Thailand and four universities to jointly research the capacity of the six Marine National Parks and tourists' willingness to pay for each of them. This is to examine the possibility of introducing future measures to curb surging tourism numbers. The list includes 1) Khao Leam Ya - Mu Koh Samet National Park in Rayong province 2) Mu Koh Surin National Park in Phang-Nga province 3) Mu Koh Similan National Park in Phang-Nga province 4) Mu Koh Chang National Park in Trat province (only dive spots) 5) Ao Phang-Nga National Park in Phang-Nga province (only certain locations such as Koh Ta Pu, Khao Phing Kan) and 6) Mu Koh Lanta National Park in Krabi province.

Analysis

- **EIC projects that Krabi's tourism revenue would be decline by not more than 6% in 2018.** Although the Maya Bay is the world-famous and symbolic tourism site of Krabi, there are currently a number of alternative tourism sites widely recognized by foreign visitors, such as Koh Porda, the Emerald Pool, the Separated Sea and Hat Railay. Based on the worst-case scenario that there are no visitors in the Maya Bay during the closure period, that the number of tourists stands at 2,000 persons per day from October to December 2018 and that the average length of stay in Krabi falls by 1 day, EIC projects that Krabi's tourism revenue would be decline by not more than 6% in 2018.
- **Going forward, the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation is likely to apply the same measure to other Marine National Parks.** By limiting the number of tourists and ordering partial closure, the measure is aimed at reviving the deteriorating ecological systems caused by overtourism. Particular focus will be given to Mu Koh Similan and Ao Phang-Nga National Parks, which has received surging popularity among Thai and foreign holidaymakers, reflected by the skyrocketing 146% CAGR in the number of tourists between 2015 and 2017. In the past,

the authority used to order permanent closure of Koh Yoong (Hat Noppharat Thra – Mu Koh Phi Phi National Park) in 2015 and Koh Ta Chai (Mu Koh Similan National Park) in 2016, citing the negative environmental impact of tourism on these sites.

Implication

- **The measure to limit the number of tourists is going to improve image and increase tourism revenue for Thailand in medium- to long-term.** The reason is that the measure is primarily intended to revive natural resources which have high potential in generating tourism revenue over a long horizon. In addition to the glamor of nature, future visitors should benefit from the more serene ambience thanks to a fall in tourism numbers following the measure, leaving long-lasting positive image for the Thai tourism sector.
- **The private sector and the government should collaborate in overcoming the problem of high tourist density in certain locations to bring about environmental sustainability.** One possible way is that local tour guides should persuade visitors to explore less popular tourist sites to reduce tourist concentration. Meanwhile, the government should play a role in developing and advertising new tourism sites, as well as develop necessary infrastructure, and use price mechanism to attract potential visitors, such as setting different admission fees based on popularity of each national parks.

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