11

TOURISM IN THAILAND

Growth, diversification and political upheaval

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Introduction

In the span of just a few decades, Thailand has emerged as a major international tourism destination. Steady growth has characterized the tourism industry in Thailand since at least the 1960s when its cooperation with the United States during the Vietnam War led to foreign investment, improved infrastructure, and exposure to an international audience. In the mid-1980s, as Thailand entered a period of rapid economic transformation, its tourism industry began to undergo a "touristic transition" (Cohen 2001). In particular, like many other once remote destinations that become affordable and accessible to mass tourists, Thailand experienced a change in the motivation, composition, and distribution of international tourists. Moreover, as the pre-existing natural attractions of Thailand, including cultural and historical sites, inevitably changed in response to rising tourist demand and visitation, 'new, contrived attractions [were] created to enhance the attractiveness of the destination and to deflect tourists from the declining natural attractions, or even to substitute for the latter' (Cohen 2001: 155). This touristic transition towards mass tourism and the creation or modification of original events and sites has continued since the mid-1980s, and has accelerated at an even great pace in the past few years; the explosive growth of international tourism since 2009 in particular has now made Thailand a top-ten global destination.

There are currently two dominant trends in Thai tourism. First, the diversification of source markets, particularly China and Russia, have enabled Thailand to intensify and expand its mass, package tourism industry. Second, in response to slower, albeit still moderate, rates of growth in Western tourism markets, Thailand has actively promoted small-scale, niche tourism activities such as wildlife tourism, volunteer tourism, and community-based tourism. It is tempting to see these bifurcated tourism products as mutually exclusive and oppositional, but one is in fact related to the other in that an intensification of mass tourism from new source markets motivates some tourists to spatially and discursively distance themselves from conventional tourists. Although there are both immediate and long-term threats to further expansion of tourism in Thailand, most notably the ongoing political crisis, it is likely that mass tourism, and its alternatives, will continue to grow in the coming years.

Thailand's emergence as a top international destination

International tourism arrivals and revenues in Thailand have grown steadily in recent decades, but the past few years have seen an especially dramatic uptick in the number of people travelling to Thailand (Figure 11.1).

As Figure 11.1 indicates, rates of growth for international tourism have grown consistently, with two points in time when the slope of the line increases noticeably. The first discernible increase in the slope of the data line comes in 1985, and continues until 2009, when the slope takes another sharp turn upwards. These two years mark the boundaries of different periods of growth for the tourism industry in Thailand. The first period, which spans the 1960s until the mid-1980s, was characterized by growth in Western tourist markets such as Australia, Europe, and North America. The emergence of an international tourism industry during these early decades had its roots in the military involvement of the United States in Vietnam, which induced foreign direct investment in the construction and service industries, and led to the development of Bangkok as an international air transportation hub (Ouyyanont 2001). The seeds of future tourism development were sown at this time due to the need for businesses and services that could meet the leisure demands of the 322,000 American soldiers stationed in military bases in Thailand, as well as the 310,000 GIs that visited the country between 1966 and 1974 on rest and recreation (R&R) trips (Meyer 1988). The presence of American troops and the international media coverage of the war in Southeast Asia also enhanced global awareness of the region and led indirectly to increased visitation, especially by male travellers from Western countries (Cohen 1996).

Beginning in the mid-1980s, international arrivals from traditional tourist markets continued to grow, but were supplemented with growing numbers of tourists from East Asian countries

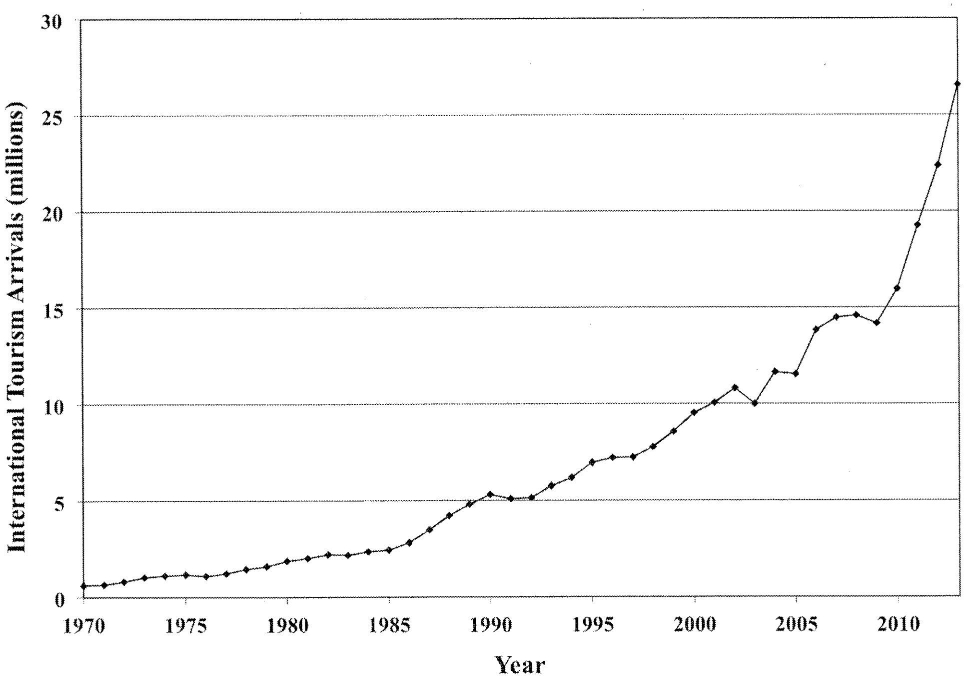

Figure 11.1 International tourism arrivals in Thailand, 1970–2013.
Source: TAT (1998, 2015a).

such as Japan. The rapid influx of foreign direct investment from East Asia following the Plaza Accord of 1985, which led to the devaluation of the Japanese yen and therefore the pursuit of offshore manufacturing opportunities in Southeast Asia on the part of Japanese investors, had a similar effect as the investment related to US military involvement two decades earlier. Further, with burgeoning prosperity within the South-East Asian region, the number of tourists visiting from neighboring countries such as Malaysia also increased from the mid-1980s onwards. During the 1980s and 1990s, the guiding hand of the Thai state that had steered tourism development in the past was joined by the Thai private sector, which worked together with government agencies to boost tourism. One such collaborative effort was the highly successful 1987 campaign titled "Visit Thailand Year," which led to a 24% increase in international tourism arrivals (Chon *et al.* 1993). As Cohen (1996) argues, the tourism industry of Thailand came to take its current characteristics during this period. In addition to moving towards structured mass tourism, Thailand also experienced the dispersion of arrivals and activities along a north–south corridor, which helped to spread tourism to destinations that continue to this day to attract the majority of international arrivals.

The final period, from 2009 onwards, features the most dramatic growth in tourist arrivals of any period in Thailand's recent history. In just four years, arrivals almost doubled, going from 14.1 million to 26.5 million. As Table 11.1 illustrates, the rate of growth stayed relatively similar between 1970 and 2009, but shot up beginning in 2009. However, the magnitude of growth is thrown into even starker relief when considering the additional *number* of tourists per year who decided to travel to Thailand each year between 2009 and 2013.

For many years, Thailand remained in the list of the top 20 international tourism destinations in the world, sitting at 16th, 18th, and 16th in 1995, 2005, and 2010, respectively (World Bank 2015), but its recent growth in tourism arrivals has catapulted Thailand into the list of the top ten tourist destinations in the world in 2013 (UNWTO 2014: 6). In 2013, Thailand also surpassed Malaysia as Southeast Asia's top tourism destination. Partly as a result of Thailand's rapid ascent to the group of countries receiving the most international tourism arrivals, Southeast Asia was the fastest growing region of the world in both 2012 and 2013. It is obvious when considering these data and patterns that Thailand has recently undergone a continued intensification and expansion of conventional mass tourism and everything that this involves, including consolidated transportation and communication networks, global promotional campaigns, and the packaging of travel services for very large groups of tourists.

The astonishing expansion of tourism since 2009 is largely attributable to the surge in arrivals from China (discussed later), and points to the importance of diversified markets in extending the period of "development" identified in Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC). According to Butler's model, the development stage, which in Thailand's case seems to have begun in the mid-1980s, is normally followed by consolidation (with a slowing down of arrivals), stagnation, and then either rejuvenation or decline. Instead of reaching the consolidation stage, as one would expect based on the characteristics of growth from the mid-1980s onwards,

Table 11.1 Historical patterns of growth for international tourism arrivals in Thailand, 1970–2013

Time period	*Average annual increase (%)*	*Average number of additional tourists each year*
1970–1985	9.84	120,600
1985–2009	7.91	487,993
2009–2013	17.07	3,099,221

Source: TAT (1998, 2015a).

Thailand has instead extended the development period itself by tapping into new markets, thereby delaying the consolidation and then stagnation stages. This is true even despite the likely decline in tourism caused by the 2014 military coup, because past declines in tourism caused by natural disasters such as the Boxing Day Tsunami in December 2004 or previous military coups have been followed immediately by a resumed expansion of tourism. In any case, it remains to be seen if the growth of the past few years will pick up where it left off before 2014, or whether the slight decline likely to occur in 2015 is a harbinger of imminent consolidation and stagnation.

Tourism's economic importance

Tourism became Thailand's number one source of foreign exchange revenue in 1982, and has remained the top earner since then (Chancharat 2011). Due to its importance in generating revenues for the state as well as for individual Thai workers and businesses, it is no surprise that Thailand has heavily promoted the expansion of international tourism. Revenues from international tourism have exhibited patterns similar to those found for arrivals. For example, in the ten years between 1985, when tourism arrivals began to start taking off, and 1995, international tourism revenues to Thailand increased by 503% compared to 234% for the world as a whole (WTO 1996). Since that time, revenues have continued to rise at a similar pace, with a sharp rise in growth rates beginning in 2009 (Figure 11.2).

In the four years since 2009, at the same time that Thailand was experiencing a dramatic surge in international tourism arrivals, revenues grew by 2.6 times, going from $14.9 billion to $39.3 billion and resulting in Thailand occupying the number-seven spot in the world in 2013 when it comes to international tourism receipts (UNWTO 2014: 6). Thailand now receives more revenue from international tourism than such well-established and popular destinations as Germany and the United Kingdom. Enhanced revenues have certainly raised the profile of the tourism industry in Thailand, but by global standards, Thailand cannot yet be characterized as

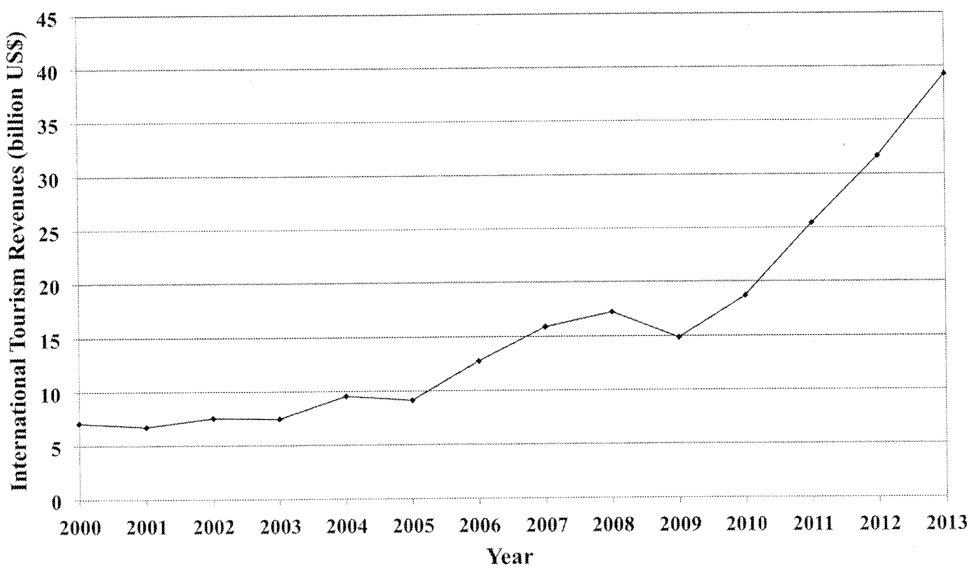

Figure 11.2 International tourism revenues in Thailand, 2000–2013.
Source: TAT (2015b).

a country dependent on tourism. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism in 2013 directly accounted for 9% of Thailand's GDP and 6.6% of total employment: this ranks 25th and 38th, respectively, on a global scale (WTTC 2014: 8). Nevertheless, by regional standards, Thailand depends more on international tourism as a percentage of total export revenues than all but two other Southeast Asian countries (see Chapter 10). Further, unlike other countries in Southeast Asia, where the contribution of tourism to export earnings has either remained flat or grown very slowly in the past few years, tourism's contribution to Thailand's exports has risen from 10.4% in 2010 to 16% in 2013: this represents a 53.8% increase in just three years (WTTC 2015).

Regional distribution of tourism benefits

It is obvious that Thailand has benefitted economically from international tourism, both in terms of income as well as employment and export earnings. These benefits are not, however, distributed evenly throughout the entire country. Domestic travel undertaken by Thais tends to occur in a wide number of destinations throughout Thailand, but international tourism is spatially concentrated in four specific locations (Figure 11.3). First, Bangkok is the entry point for the majority of tourists arriving in Thailand by air, and has long represented the central hub of the Thai tourist economy. As mentioned earlier, investment in construction, services, and

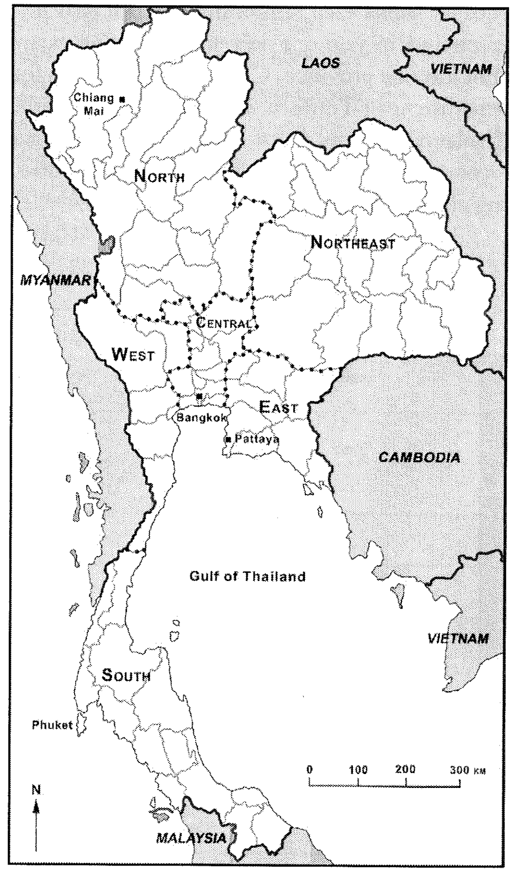

Figure 11.3 Map of Thailand with regions and key tourism destinations.

transportation in the Bangkok area spurred a nascent tourism industry in the 1960s and 1970s, and although Bangkok's legendary traffic problems and poor air quality serve as a deterrent for some, the sprawling capital continues to attract many visitors. In 2013, 17.5 million tourists stayed at least one night in Bangkok: this represents 66% of all tourists visiting Thailand that year.

Second, the beach resort of Pattaya, located along Thailand's Eastern Seaboard, first emerged as a tourism destination when it served as a popular R&R stop for American servicemen during the Vietnam War. As a result of being located less than two hours from Bangkok, Pattaya is often included in tour packages for those visiting Bangkok, and currently attracts approximately nine million international tourists each year (Amnatcharoenrit 2014). Third, marketed for decades as the "Pearl of the Andaman," the island of Phuket in southern Thailand received eight million tourists in 2013, making it the third most popular destination in Thailand, after Bangkok and Pattaya (Department of Tourism 2015a). Lastly, the ancient city of Chiang Mai now hosts over two million tourists each year. Tourists are attracted to the area because the mountainous landscapes of northern Thailand provide the setting for popular activities such as visits to elephant camps, national parks, famous Buddhist temples, and indigenous "hilltribe" communities. Other than these four locations, there are also several minor destinations throughout the country that attract, in some cases, hundreds of thousands of annual visitors.

The concentration of international tourism in the handful of sites mentioned above is the primary reason why there are wide discrepancies in the number of tourists received by each region of Thailand (Figure 11.4). In addition to some regions benefiting more than others from tourism, there is also inequality *within* each region since tourist arrivals, and therefore revenues, are usually heavily concentrated in just one key location. For example, northern Thailand consists of 17 provinces, but just one province, Chiang Mai, accounts for 66% of all international tourists in the region (Department of Tourism 2015a). Similarly, Phuket alone attracts 49% of all tourists in southern Thailand. The key point to draw from these data is that tourism, while beneficial overall to the country, nevertheless reflects and contributes to the uneven regional development that has long characterized Thailand (Doner 2009).

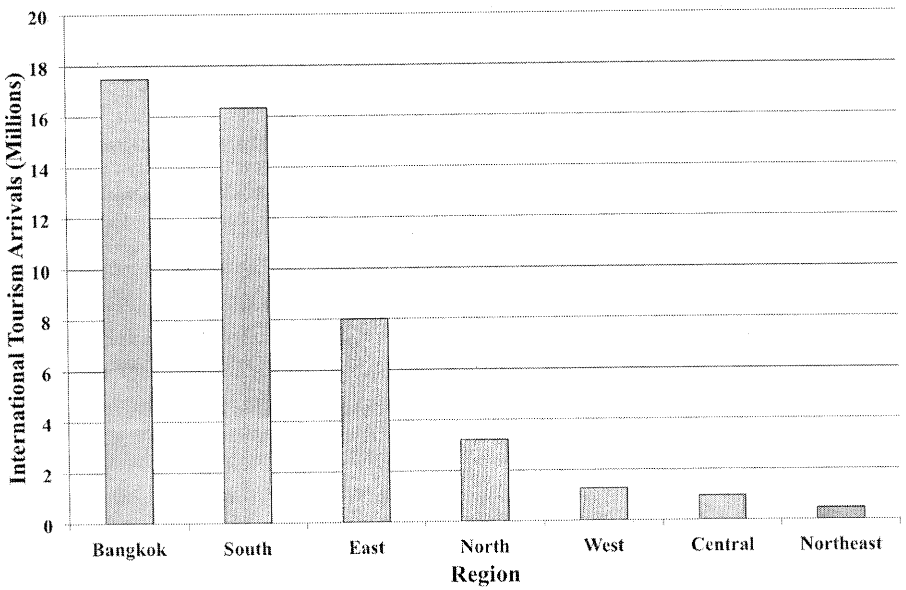

Figure 11.4 International tourism arrivals by region, 2013.
Source: Department of Tourism (2015a).

Diversification of source markets

As mentioned above, the post-war tourism industry in Thailand was heavily oriented towards visitors from high-income countries in Europe, North America, and Oceania. This began to change in the 1980s, as East Asian tourists and tourists from neighboring Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia began to visit Thailand in ever-increasing numbers. Currently, Thailand attracts tourists from a diverse range of source markets, but the majority (60%) of international tourists come from East Asian countries (Table 11.2).

Table 11.2 International tourism arrivals by nationality, 2013

Nationality	*Number*	*% share*	*Nationality*	*Number*	*% share*
East Asia	15,911,375	59.94	United Kingdom	905,024	3.41
ASEAN	7,282,266	27.43	East Europe	346,230	1.30
Brunei	14,205	0.05	Others	138,688	0.52
Cambodia	481,595	1.81	The Americas	1,166,633	4.39
Indonesia	594,251	2.24	Argentina	21,035	0.08
Laos	976,639	3.68	Brazil	37,263	0.14
Malaysia	3,041,097	11.46	Canada	229,897	0.87
Myanmar	172,383	0.65	United States	823,486	3.10
Philippines	321,571	1.21	Others	54,952	0.21
Singapore	955,468	3.60	South Asia	1,347,585	5.08
Vietnam	725,057	2.73	Bangladesh	82,418	0.31
China	4,637,335	17.47	India	1,050,889	3.96
Hong Kong	588,335	2.22	Nepal	25,455	0.10
Japan	1,536,425	5.79	Pakistan	78,986	0.30
Korea	1,295,342	4.88	Sri Lanka	76,260	0.29
Taiwan	502,176	1.89	Others	33,577	0.13
Others	69,496	0.26	Oceania	1,021,936	3.85
Europe	6,305,945	23.75	Australia	900,460	3.39
Austria	106,278	0.40	New Zealand	118,395	0.45
Belgium	101,109	0.38	Others	3,081	0.01
Denmark	163,186	0.61	Middle East	630,243	2.37
Finland	141,692	0.53	Egypt	28,175	0.11
France	611,582	2.30	Israel	134,874	0.51
Germany	737,658	2.78	Kuwait	71,173	0.27
Ireland	63,522	0.24	Saudi Arabia	21,452	0.08
Italy	207,192	0.78	UAE	123,926	0.47
Netherlands	218,765	0.82	Others	250,643	0.94
Norway	154,049	0.58	Africa	163,008	0.61
Russia	1,746,565	6.58	South Africa	75,748	0.29
Spain	123,084	0.46	Others	87,260	0.33
Sweden	341,398	1.29			
Switzerland	199,923	0.75	Grand total	26,546,725	100.00

Sources: Department of Tourism (2015b); TAT (2015a).

Table 11.2 reveals that six countries – Malaysia, China, Japan, Korea, Russia, and India – each send more than one million annual visitors to Thailand, with several other countries (Laos, Singapore, the United States, and Australia) each sending more than 800,000 tourists. This list not only reflects the ongoing importance of Asian and European markets (and, concurrently, the rather insignificant role played by regions such as South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa), but also the emergence of China and Russia as key tourist markets for the Thai tourism industry. When examining the top sources of international tourism in Thailand, it is obvious that although there are some consistent patterns across time, Thailand has successfully diversified its tourism industry by expanding into new markets (Table 11.3).

Among the trends displayed in Table 11.3, three stand out in particular. First, the role of Malaysia has changed over the past 20 years. Despite being the leading source of tourists in Thailand since the late 1980s, Malaysia lost its top spot to China in 2012. Even though the number of Malaysian tourists visiting Thailand annually tripled between 1995 and 2013, Malaysia's share of all tourists slipped from 15.8% to 11.5% during that span. It should be noted, however, that if it were not for the meteoric rise of Chinese tourism in Thailand, Malaysia would still occupy the top spot and command a large share of the total. Second, certain markets that have for many years provided tourists to Thailand appear to be reaching saturation, or at least growing at much slower rates than the newer markets into which Thai tourism is now reaching. In particular, countries such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Germany, and the United Kingdom have indeed increased the number of tourists visiting Thailand, but the slowing of growth rates indicates that new opportunities for expansion are to be found mostly in alternative markets. Third, the most stark and significant trend illustrated in Table 11.3 is the rapid ascent of the Chinese and Russian tourist markets.

The sudden emergence of Russia and especially China as key tourist-generating countries is a principal reason why the number of international arrivals in Thailand has recently experienced such a steep climb. It is also clear evidence that Thailand has intensified its orientation towards conventional mass tourism, despite both the well-documented problems associated with

Table 11.3 Top ten international tourist markets in Thailand, various years

1995			*2005*			*2013*		
Country	*Number*	*% share*	*Country*	*Number*	*% share*	*Country*	*Number*	*% share*
Malaysia	1,101,670	15.8	Malaysia	1,373,946	11.9	China	4,637,335	17.5
Japan	840,186	12.1	Japan	1,196,654	10.4	Malaysia	3,041,097	11.5
Taiwan	475,523	6.8	Korea	815,512	7.1	Russia	1,746,565	6.6
Korea	446,222	6.4	China	776,792	6.7	Japan	1,536,425	5.8
China	380,619	5.5	United Kingdom	773,843	6.7	Korea	1,295,342	4.9
United Kingdom	359,456	5.2	Singapore	650,559	5.6	India	1,050,889	4.0
Germany	355,076	5.1	United States	639,658	5.6	Laos	976,639	3.7
Singapore	346,917	5.0	Germany	441,827	3.8	Singapore	955,468	3.6
United States	328,260	4.7	Australia	428,521	3.7	United Kingdom	905,024	3.4
Hong Kong	220,791	3.2	India	381,471	3.3	Australia	900,460	3.4

Source: TAT (2015a).

package tourism in Thailand and the rhetoric of sustainability and sufficiency espoused by Thai tourism officials. In 1995, Russia was the 26th most important tourist market in Thailand, and this barely changed ten years later in 2005 when Russia sat in 25th place and accounted for only 0.89% of the share of all tourists (TAT 2015a). Nevertheless, in a span of less than a decade, Russia became the third largest source market and, in 2013, featured a 6.6% market share. As of late 2014, however, Russian tourism had declined by 5.5% from the previous year due to the falling value of the ruble, and this has had an immediate impact on areas popular with Russian tourists, such as Phuket and Pattaya (Spector 2014).

Even more spectacular than the rise of Russian tourism in Thailand is the dominant role played by China in the current inbound tourist market. In 2013 there were 11 times more arrivals from China than in 1995; with a 17.5% market share, China is now coming close to providing one-fifth of all international tourists in Thailand. Aside from rising prosperity in China, which has boosted outbound tourism and made China a rising source of international tourism generally, another reason for the additional interest in Thailand is the popular Chinese film *Lost in Thailand*, which was released in December 2014 and became the highest grossing domestic film in Chinese history. The comedy, which depicts a search by two businessmen, and a tourist they meet along the way, for their boss in Thailand, greatly enhanced familiarity with Thailand among Chinese travellers and led to an immediate increase in Chinese tourism, particularly in Chiang Mai where much of the filming took place.

The success of *Lost in Thailand* corroborates the point made by several film-tourism scholars (Grihault 2003; Hudson & Ritchie 2006) that product placement in a successful film, with the destination serving as the product itself, can be a highly effective means of generating additional tourism. However, despite its positive economic implications, the influx of Chinese tourists has been met with concern among Thai commentators and locals residents. After reviewing social networks and online forums, Li (2013) points out several complaints made about Chinese tourists in Thailand, including communication problems, littering, ignoring posted rules at tourist sites, spitting in public, and a perceived tendency to be loud or rude. In a survey of 2,220 Chiang Mai residents conducted in early 2014, 80% of respondents complained about problems caused by Chinese tourists, while 70% reported a loss of privacy and peacefulness in public areas (Zander 2014).

What is interesting about these criticisms of Chinese tourists, aside from the possibly racist underpinnings that motivate them among some observers, is that they mirror criticisms made in the 1960s and 1970s of Western mass tourists, who were likened to barbarians and golden hordes (Turner and Ash 1975). Much like other low- and middle-income countries that have had to rely on early mass tourism for economic growth, Thailand must nevertheless accept various problems associated with large groups of Chinese tourists because they will ultimately help to compensate for the maturation of traditional markets, as well as the steep decline expected in Russian tourism in 2015 due to the depreciation of the ruble in 2014–2015 (Phillips 2014).

Diversification of tourism products

The sun, sea, and sand formula of mass tourism is clearly working for Thailand, as it continues to attract large numbers of pleasure-seeking tourists. The addition of "sex" to the triple-S formula above also applies quite strongly to Thailand, which for many decades has represented the quintessential example of a sex tourism destination, particularly to those that do not know very much about the country beyond hackneyed media or popular culture depictions. While there continues to exist a very visible sex trade aimed at foreign tourists, Thailand has in recent years deliberately moved away from this type of tourism in favor of tourism products that attract a wider range of visitors, including female travellers and families. In addition to efforts to make mass tourists aware of aspects of Thai culture and society that counter the stereotypical eroticized depictions of the past, Thai government planners and entrepreneurs have also begun to promote services that broadly fall into the category known as alternative tourism. Consequently, just as there has been an intensification and expansion of package tourism in Thailand, there has also occurred a simultaneous move towards alternative tourism products aimed at long-established tourism markets in Europe, North America, and Oceania.

Alternative tourism activities seek to provide visitors with experiences that go beyond the packaged resort experience sold to millions of mass tourists. Such activities can be grouped, on the one hand, into niche activities that often enhance or supplement the mass tourism experience, thereby perpetuating rather than challenging the industry as a whole, and on the other hand, those that actually serve as viable alternatives to mass tourism. Medical tourism, whereby visitors travel to Thailand to receive specialized medical care or procedures that are much more expensive or inaccessible at home (Cohen 2008), is a niche form of tourism that contributes to the existing tourism industry, albeit in a minor way: there are roughly 400,000 medical tourists in Thailand, which not only represents a small percentage of all tourist arrivals, but is also probably an inflated number since it counts foreigners already living in Thailand that seek medical treatment (Connell 2013). Another alternative to standard 4-S tourism activities is wildlife tourism, which in Thailand involves tourist engagement with 'captured wild animals in "semi-contrived" settings, like zoos, and especially with tamed, trained or humanized ones in "fully-contrived" settings, like establishments offering elephant shows' (Cohen 2009: 100). In many ways, heightened tourist demand for experiences with animals has improved the welfare of elephants by creating income-earning opportunities for their owners (Kontogeorgopoulos 2009), but wildlife tourism is certainly far from ideal as a conservation strategy and, at a broader level, illustrates the neoliberal repackaging of nature for global consumption (Duffy & Moore 2010).

In contrast to medical and wildlife tourism, which have merely supplemented existing offerings available to conventional tourists, activities such as volunteer tourism and community-based tourism (CBT) represent more genuine alternatives to mass tourism, both in how they are framed discursively as well as practiced on a day-to-day basis. Tourists who volunteer for short periods of time (typically, two weeks to three months) interact with locals in everyday, "backstage" settings that are inaccessible to typical mass tourists. While legitimate criticisms have been leveled against volunteer tourism in Thailand, most notably its inability to tackle the structural causes of poverty and inequality in Thai society (Mostafanezhad 2013), it nonetheless stands as a possible antidote to the highly scripted and superficial nature of many (but not necessarily all) tourist–host encounters. Similarly, small-scale tourism in rural communities pursuing CBT provide tourists with intimate experiences, such as homestays, while also creating economic opportunities for locations normally bypassed by the conventional tourism industry. However, as Case study 11.1 illustrates, successful CBT in Thailand depends on several specific factors that make it difficult for many rural communities to participate.

Case study 11.1 Mae Kampong Village: a successful model of community-based tourism

In order to counter the negative consequences associated with mass tourism, Thai non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in concert with rural communities, have over the past decade pursued CBT, which aims to transfer ownership, control, and benefits of tourism to locals. For many communities, remoteness and a lack of knowledge, capital, and experience have made it difficult to participate in

tourism, community-based or otherwise. One community that has overcome such challenges is Mae Kampong, a village located 50 kilometers from Chiang Mai, northern Thailand's largest city and a key national tourism destination. Mae Kampong is located 1,100 meters above sea level, which ensures a cool climate that attracts middle class Thais living in congested urban environments. Visitors are also drawn by the bucolic surroundings of the village, as well as opportunities to participate in jungle treks, watch traditional music and dance performances, and observe local religious rituals and activities. Despite containing only 312 people, and not having a paved road until 2000, Mae Kampong today receives close to 5,000 annual visitors, 80% of whom stay overnight in homestay programs. In the past decade or so, tourism activities have tripled individual incomes in Mae Kampong while also allowing village revenues to rise from US$2,730 in 2000 to US$88,737 in 2012.

Most assessments of CBT indicate that success depends on outcomes such as community ownership, environmental sustainability, cooperative profit sharing, and mutual learning, but recent studies of Mae Kampong point to three success factors not often mentioned in other studies: luck, external support, and individual leadership. Mae Kampong is lucky in both its geographical location and recent history. Mae Kampong's close proximity to a major tourist hub and its lush, tranquil surroundings make it an attractive destination, while an existing profit-sharing system established before the arrival of tourism facilitated the implementation of community participation and shared benefits. Aside from fortunate pre-existing circumstances, Mae Kampong also received external support in the form of training, marketing, and funding support from Thai government agencies. Mae Kampong also received ample support from NGOs such as the Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute, which brought the first homestay visitors and continues today to provide marketing and promotional assistance. Finally, the transformational leadership of the long-time village headman has been indispensible in the establishment and ongoing success of the village's CBT program. The leader managed a thorough and deliberate process of consultation, coordinated the efforts of external actors, and gained the trust of the villagers by demonstrating fairness, competence, and vision. Mae Kampong demonstrates that successful CBT in Thailand is indeed possible, but remains difficult for those rural communities that lack particular circumstances.

Sources: Boonratana (2011); Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014); Leksakundilok & Hirsch (2008); Suansri & Richards (2013)

Thailand's concurrent and sometimes contradictory promotion of both mass tourism and alternative tourism is reflected in government planning and marketing materials. Thailand's National Tourism Development Plan for 2012–2016 centers mostly around the maximization of tourism arrivals and spending through several strategies, including the development of infrastructure, the rehabilitation of tourist sites in order to accommodate more tourist arrivals, and the improvement of Thailand's international image 'so that the country will welcome a greater number of tourists who will spend more in Thailand' (Thai Foreign Office 2011). Meanwhile, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), which is the agency responsible for marketing and promotion, mentions in its 2015 Tourism Marketing Plan the need to promote 'Thainess, happiness, sustainability, as well as balanced and equitable growth' (TAT 2014). Building on the highly successful Amazing Thailand campaign first initiated in the late 1990s, the TAT in 2015 launched a campaign titled "Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess." This latest campaign clearly targets alternative tourists interested in escaping the very same mass tourists currently being lured by other Thai government bodies. For example, the opening page of the *Discover Thainess* online promotional booklet states that

> [f]or "tourists," a week might suggest days on the beach and partying by night with some sightseeing stops here and there...But for a "traveller" who looks beyond just having fun, Thailand has much more to offer such a discerning spirit.
>
> (*TAT 2015c: 2*)

It would seem, therefore, that Thai tourism planners are trying to have it both ways by attracting greater numbers of mass tourists from new markets while simultaneously trying to convince "discerning" travelers from mostly Western countries that this influx of tourists has not yet managed to tarnish Thailand's attractiveness as a destination.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Thailand has undergone a transformation of sorts in recent years, as new source markets such as China and Russia have boosted international arrivals dramatically, thereby allowing the tourism industry to continue its decades-long trajectory of expansion and consolidation. At the same time, though, Thailand's tourism planners have countered this growth in conventional 4-S tourism with an effort to appeal to alternative tourists interested in more personalized, novel, and authentic experiences. Mass and alternative tourism may be positioned in promotional materials as dissimilar, and may draw from different tourist markets, but all international tourism in Thailand, whether it is the standard "sun, sea, sand, and sex" variety or small-scale alternative tourism, relies in many ways on a particular view of Thailand as an exotic, enchanting, and enticing destination. Further, rather than indicating contradictory market trends or diverging directions for the Thai tourism industry, the intensification of mass tourism and the development of niche alternatives have in fact gone hand in hand.

The greatest similarity or connection between the various types of tourism in Thailand is that they share several common threats to their further growth and success. First, tourism in Thailand has suffered from a lack of thoughtful environmental planning or adequate consideration of carrying capacity (Cohen 2005). As a result, the natural environments of popular tourism destinations such as Pattaya and Phuket have declined significantly in the past several decades, and in sites such as these that depend on natural resources to draw tourists, this poses a potential threat to future growth. In theory, ecotourism offers a possible way of ameliorating, or at least not further contributing to, these environmental problems, but much of what is advertised as ecotourism in Thailand fails in practice to fulfill the goals of all but the loosest definition of the term. Second, even though Thailand is generally considered a safe travel destination, recurring media accounts of tourists being robbed, cheated, or harassed has perhaps begun to threaten Thailand's otherwise safe reputation (Chinmaneevong & Siripunyawit 2014). Particularly damaging, especially in European markets, was the grisly murder in September 2014 of two British backpackers on the southern island of Koh Tao. This incident, the botched investigation, and the government's reaction (which included a proposal, never actually implemented, for tourists to wear identification bracelets) tarnished the country's image and was partly blamed for an anticipated decline in tourist arrivals in 2014.

In the immediate future, and perhaps over the long term depending on how events unfold, the greatest threat to the further growth of international tourism in Thailand is the ongoing political crisis, the roots of which lie in the 2006 military coup that ended the elected rule of Prime Minister Thaksin Shiniwatra. Since 2006, opponents of Thaksin, known as the "yellow shirts," have clashed with his "red shirt" supporters, with the highest level of violence coming in 2010 when at least 90 people died after the Thai military cracked down on red-shirt protestors calling for the government at the time to hold elections. Since 2006, Thaksin-affiliated parties have won elections twice, including in 2011 when Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shiniwatra won power in a landslide victory. In May 2014, after Yingluck was removed by Thailand's Constitutional Court from office due to allegations of corruption and abuse of power, the military acted again and dissolved the National Assembly, repealed the constitution, and declared martial law.

The current regime, known as the National Council for Peace and Order, has cracked down on dissent and, for the first month of its rule, imposed an overnight curfew. The curfew, international publicity about the coup, and the sight of military personnel in popular tourist sites scared off potential tourists and temporarily halted the rapid growth of tourism in Thailand. As a result, according to preliminary data published at the very beginning of 2015, international tourism arrivals declined in 2014 by 6.6% (*Bangkok Post* 2015). Nonetheless, if the past is any guide, this latest downturn will be followed by renewed growth, at least until the next crisis occurs. International tourist arrivals in Thailand have never, since at least 1970, declined for two straight years, and overall numbers declined on an annual basis only seven times in the past 45 years. In short, although the 2014 military coup may have dampened the explosive growth of recent years, the Thai tourism industry will likely follow its familiar pattern of two steps forward and one step back in the near future.

Key reading

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Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT): www.tourismthailand.org

Tourism Authority of Thailand Newsroom: www.tatnews.org

Thailand Community Based Tourism Network Coordination Center: http://cbtnetwork.org/#sthash.sxxiiUyj.dpuf: http://cbtnetwork.org

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