



The tidal wave in Southeast Asia at the end of December 2004 caused immense human suffering in Thailand and destroyed some key parts of the tourism infrastructure. Yet while 90 per cent of the 50 holiday complexes in Khao Lak were completely destroyed, by the end of January a good three quarters of all hotel complexes in the affected southwest of Thailand were undamaged or were already up and running again, the figure rising to 83% in Phuket. Prompt advertising and marketing campaigns run by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT, accessible under: www.tourismthailand.org) in the major source countries are aimed at getting tourism off the ground again very quickly.

Medicine tourism as a new segment of health tourism

The secretary-general of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), Francesco Frangilli, stressed in Madrid that tourism in Thailand and the other countries hit by the tsunami would recover quickly. German tour operators were already reporting in the middle of January that destinations in Thailand not affected by the disaster were being booked again, heavily in some instances. This means that the country with its many attractions and good value for money is still experiencing growth. Anupharb Thirarath, director of the TAT office in Frankfurt am Main, says there is still a huge tourism potential in the country which has not yet by any means been fully exploited. Health tourism covering the whole range of medicine, wellness and anti-aging programmes, is enjoying a particular boom. Thirarath anticipates a substantial increase in this important niche market in the coming years.

More than one million health tourists

More than one million of the around 12 million visitors to Thailand in 2004 used the services of Thai hospitals. The Private Hospital Association of Thailand (PHA) anticipates that patient numbers will double by 2010. This would make Thailand the clear market leader in health tourism in Asia. Efforts here are focused on cutting

Thailand: holiday combination of beach and hospital entices more guests from around the world

by Bernd Kubisch

down red tape and optimizing cooperation between the authorities responsible for tourism, hotels, health services, the service industry, and entry and immigration. They are well aware that the competition is not asleep. Singapore has set up a high-level Health Care Working Group and wants to be the "medical hub of Asia", while in Malaysia the government and private institutions are working closely together to be able to claim the title of "Asia's health tourism hub". India is reporting an annual 30 per cent growth in foreigners seeking medical treatment. Hong Kong too, for example, has an ultra-modern cancer centre.

Thailand's particular strength is that it offers the complete range of health tourism - not only spa and wellness, fitness and anti-aging programmes, but also every type of medical treatment, both ambulatory and inpatient. Cosmetic breast enhancement and nose correction surgery is only a small segment of what is available. The standard in the country's top private clinics is high and internationally recognized, while prices are far below those in the USA, Japan, Australia or Germany.

Medicinal herbs for export

The art of healing has a long tradition in the former Siam. Much was imported more than 2500 years ago from China or India, to be combined and enriched with Thai knowledge. All the massage and health centres in the holiday complexes and hotels, for example, offer traditional Thai massage, as well as the use of Thai herbs for holistic regeneration and therapy. Cuisine and medicine are closely linked. The popularity of Thai cooking has led worldwide to a great interest in herbal medicine from Thailand, says TAT governor, Juthamas Siriwan. The Thai spa concept, she said, was becoming increasingly popular internationally and leading to growing demand abroad for herbal products such as teas and ingredients for food and cosmetics. In

2003 Intelligent Spas, an independent research company with its headquarters in Singapore, awarded Thailand the title of "Spa Capital of Asia". Annual growth rates of 20 to 25 per cent are anticipated for this branch in the future. This makes spas among the most important money-spinners and profit-earners for Thailand's four- and five-star hotels, reports the STSPA (Thailand Sanus Per Aqua) Association (info@thaispaassociation.com - www.thaispaassociation.com).

Shopping for medicines

Holidaymakers from all the continents have known for more than 10 years that drugs in pharmacies, contact lenses and spectacles at opticians and false teeth at the dentist cost far less in Bangkok, Phuket, Koh Samui and, above all, Pattaya, than they do at home. The same applies to cosmetic surgery. But where breast enhancement and nose correction surgery are concerned, many visitors in the past have been put off by negative headlines about botched operations. The Thai authorities therefore always warn people to stay well away from dubious practitioners. After all, they say, there are enough well-respected surgeons and hospitals in the country.

Complete care packages tailored to foreigners in private hospitals

Many private clinics in Thailand now offer a complete medical package tailored to the needs of foreigners with specialist doctors and all facilities under one roof. This includes general physicians, internists, cosmetic surgeons, oncologists and dentists. Most hospitals also have rehabilitation centres, wellness and fitness centres, pharmacies, restaurants, internet cafés, crèches, reasonably priced hotels for family members and interpreting services. Those interested can view details of services and prices on the internet and consult the doctor who will be carrying out their treatment by e-mail, as well as using the internet to ask all

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the important questions and book their hospital stay and holiday hotel. In recent years the health and tourism ministries in Bangkok have stepped up their joint marketing activities abroad in order to interest more international clients – businesspeople as well as tourists – in combining business trips or holidays with a doctor's visit or hospital stay at affordable prices. Every fifth press release sent to the German media by the Thai Tourist Office in Frankfurt am Main (info@thailandtourismus.de - www.thailandtourismus.de - press contact: thai-land@kleber-pr-network.de) from March to December 2004, for example, related to this subject.

Strong growth in the private health care sector – many top hospitals

The number of private hospitals in Thailand has increased hugely over the last ten years as a result of new foreign companies opening up, international investment and tourism. Today they provide over 30 per cent of hospital beds in the Kingdom. The Private Hospital Association of Thailand (PHA) has 208 member hospitals. Of these the organization recommends 16 certified clinics in particular for international patients. In the major tourist cities these include the Bumrungrad Hospital (www.bumrungrad.com) in Bangkok, Bangkok General Hospital (www.bangkokhospital.com), the Bangkok Pattaya Hospital near Pattaya (www.bph.co.th/pages/main.html), the Chiangmai Ram Hospital (www.chiangmai-ram.com) and the Bangkok Phuket Hospital in Phuket (www.phukethospital.com).

Bumrungrad – a top international hospital treating patients from over 150 countries

Bumrungrad is one of the absolutely top hospitals on the Asian continent. Curtis Schroeder, the hospital's Californian-born CEO, puts the hospital's success down to five-star service at three-star prices. The main entrance features glass facades and shimmering silver pillars, while the lobby and reception are more reminiscent of a luxury hotel than a hospital. The inpatient and ambulatory areas are spread over 12 storeys. A total of more than 900,000 patients – including 300,000 from 154 different countries – are treated each year, mostly as out-patients, by 2600 members of staff, including over 600 doctors and 800

nurses. A third of the patients are foreigners from 154 different countries. The spacious hallways which serve as waiting rooms are filled with a mix of all the skin colours and fashionable outfits of the world: women in colourful saris with their children sit next to worthy gentlemen in flowing white robes and turbans, or bankers in dark suits clutching the obligatory briefcase.

The hospital has 554 beds, including the intensive care unit, as well as 80 luxury rooms and suites to treat a good 30,000 inpatients each year. Departments include allergy treatment, paediatrics, dialysis, cardiology, dermatology and neurology, and the hospital also offers crèche facilities, a Japanese restaurant, McDonalds, a café and a fast-food restaurant. The CEO can often be seen eating at the same table as nurses and patients.

Quality seal from the USA and favourable prices

Bumrungrad Hospital trades as a public company on the Stock Exchange of Thailand. The main shareholders are the Bangkok Bank PCL and the Sophonpanich family, one of the country's best known entrepreneurial dynasties. Marketing director Ruben Toral (40) from South Carolina is delighted by the growth in foreign business and the hospital's turnover of 114 million US dollars in 2003. But he is also equally upbeat about a very important document, an accreditation certificate issued by the US-based Joint Commission International (www.jcaho.org), which, he says, testifies that the hospital meets the highest international quality standards. For patients this means a guarantee that they will receive the best possible care. Dr. Visit Thienpaiboon (61), an internist who studied in Münster and practised for a few years in Germany, says that doctors and nursing staff at the hospital spend more time looking after each patient than is the case in many other countries and that this is the case in most of the private hospitals in Thailand. "Every patient is encouraged to describe exactly what's troubling them. We listen very carefully and take what they say very seriously."

Health care project to attract retired people

In Thailand today even the real estate trade is working in collaboration with the private clinics. Fits of the Health Care

Greece partner country at ITB Berlin 2006



Collaboration with Greek National Tourism Organisation

by Teyrin Ramos

Agreement has been reached: the official partner country at the International Tourism Exchange ITB Berlin from 8 to 12 March 2006 is to be Greece.

The decision was announced by Dr. Martin Buck, Director of Travel and Logistics at Messe Berlin's Competence Center and Panagiotis Skordas, Director of the Greek National Tourism Organisation.

Martin Buck: "Greece very successfully organised the 2004 Summer Olympics and is also hosting next year's Eurovision Song Contest, so we are especially glad for this country to be our partner at the International Tourism Exchange ITB Berlin 2006. Greece is well known to many Germans as a tourism destination. Well over 2 million German tourists travel to Greece each year. We are already looking forward to very special opening



ceremonies at the ITB Berlin 2006, with our partner country Greece as the main theme."

Panagiotis Skordas is also looking forward to this collaboration: "Among our worldwide activities promoting Greece as a tourism destination the ITB Berlin is an annual highlight. This collaboration as the official partner country at the ITB Berlin 2006 gives us an opportunity to be at the forefront of presentations for tourism experts from around the world."

As the official partner country at the ITB Greece will be organising a significant part of the opening ceremonies on 8 March 2006 in the International Congress Center ICC Berlin, which will be attended by over 3,000 guests.

photo: Greece partner country at ITB Berlin 2006. Official announcement by Panagiotis Skordas, Director of the Greek National Tourism Organisation, and Dr. Martin Buck, Competence Center Director Travel and Logistics of Messe

