

**Speech at the PATA Destination Marketing Forum 2019  
“Thailand Tourism's Role in Redefining a Destination – from the Past 60 Years  
towards the Future”**

**by**

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Friday, 29 November 2019, 1400-1420 Hrs. (20 minutes)  
at Renaissance Pattaya Resort & Spa**

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## **Introduction**

Sawasdee khrap and good afternoon distinguished guests, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to be here with you today at the PATA Destination Marketing Forum 2019 in Pattaya. This resort city has a special place in the history of both Thailand and PATA.

Over the past 60 years, Pattaya has evolved from a sleepy little fishing village to a rest and recreation stop to now being a major tourist spot. Presently, Pattaya is also an ideal family destination. This includes Chon Buri as a whole. The area has diversified its attractions to now include places like the Motion Master Moving Theatre, Legend Siam Pattaya, Nong Nooch Garden, Pattaya Go-Kart Speedway, the Lakeland Water Cable Ski, Bamrung Sailing and Paramotor Centre, and so on.

The history of Thailand's travel, tourism and transportation linkages with the neighbouring Mekong countries can also be traced back to Pattaya. It was at the PEACH Convention Centre, Royal Cliff Beach Resort, the host of the annual PATA conference in 1996, that an agreement was signed to create the Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA). This brought together all the regional national tourism organisations along with TAT and PATA, the Asian Development Bank and the UN Economic Social and Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific in a united effort to help harness the potential of the entire Mekong tourism region.

The fruits of that effort can be clearly seen today. So, I would like to wish all PATA members and supporters a warm welcome back.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin with a few words about Thailand's tourism situation. In 2018, we welcomed 38 million international tourist arrivals, up by 7 percent, generating an estimated 58 billion USD up by 8 percent over 2017. So far this year from January to September, we have recorded 29.4 million visitors, up 3.5 percent, generating nearly 50 billion USD over the same period of 2018.

For 2019, we are forecasting 39.8 million foreign tourists generating an estimated 66 billion USD to Thailand's tourism revenue.

We have come so far, but our paths were not always an easy one. Let's turn back time to the beginning...

## **The Journey of Amazing Thailand (1960-1979, 1980-2002, 2003-present).**

The history of Thai tourism over the past 60 years can be divided into 3 periods. Each period has been influenced by its own economic, social and political dynamics, which have affected the industry. Each period is separated by a “turning point” which I will elaborate on.

### ***Period 1: The Beginning (1960-1979)***

This period began with the establishment of a national agency to promote tourism known as the Tourism Organisation of Thailand (TOT) in 1960.

Do you know how many visitors came to Thailand in 1960? - 81,340 visitors.

The number increased to over 1 million for the first time in 1973, generating tourism revenue of more than 3 billion Baht for the country.

During this period, TAT also established 8 overseas tourism promotion offices as well as 6 domestic offices.

#### **Slide shows**

New York in 1965, Los Angeles in 1969, Tokyo in 1971, Frankfurt in 1972, Sydney in 1974, Singapore and London in 1977, and Paris in 1978.

Also, to boost domestic tourism 6 offices were established: Chiang Mai in 1968, Hat Yai in 1971, Kanchanaburi in 1973, Pattaya and Phuket in 1977, and Nakhon Ratchasima in 1978.

After the establishment of our offices around the world, to support the responsibility to promote Thailand’s tourism, the Tourism Organisation of Thailand was reformed to be the **Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)** in 1979.

Apart from TAT, many private tourism sectors were established during this period; such as, the Thai Hotel Association (THA), Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA), and Professional Tourist Guide Association of Thailand (PGAT).

### ***Period 2: Development amongst crises (1980 - 2002).***

The interesting point of this period was about including the tourism development plan in the fourth National and Social Development Plan for the first time.

In 2002, tourism gained ground gradually with foreign visitor arrivals rising to 10 million in spite of numerous crises; such as, the world economic recession, global political crises including the Persian Gulf War and September 11 (9/11). It was inevitable that these crises affected the tourism industry, but we could bounce back from these challenging times by our strength from within, domestic tourism.

Also, in 2002, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports was established with the authority and responsibilities to support and develop tourism along with the sports and recreation industry. Meanwhile, TAT's responsibility has focussed on marketing and PR since then.

### **Period 3: Digital Era & Go Green (2003-present)**

This could be cited as the period of the beginning of globalisation along with the advent of technology and the growth of low-cost airlines. During this period, the Thai tourism industry became one of the main sources of income for Thailand.

Various tourism sectors were established during this period; such as, the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) and Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB).

At the same time, we hit some speed bumps in the form of the domestic political situation, natural disasters, epidemic outbreak in Asia (SARS), the increasing of competitors, and the over tourism concern, which led us to the way of sustainable tourism. As a result, TAT established the Green Leaf Foundation in 1998, followed by bringing awareness of green tourism with the 7 Greens project.

### **Successful PR Campaigns**

For many decades, TAT has launched various tourism campaigns to promote the tourism industry of the kingdom. I am proud to say that many of them were highly successful. It is all thanks to the utmost effort from everyone in the public and private sectors, especially the Thai people who were excellent hosts to our visitors.

Let me recollect few of our tourism campaigns;

- The **Visit Thailand Year** was first introduced in 1980 and became a successful campaign with an increase of 10 and 22 percent from visitor numbers and revenue, respectively. This achievement led to the second **Visit Thailand Year** in 1987.
- The long run of the “**Amazing Thailand**” campaign was brought to the world in 1998. It became one of the world's most recognisable and high-profile campaigns.
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- By 2001, **foreign tourists to Thailand were up to 10 million**. In 2004, TAT's Mascot of “Nong Sukjai” was introduced.
- 2003 was a successful year in promoting domestic tourism in Thailand. TAT proposed a tourism promotion campaign called “**Unseen Thailand**”, while stimulating tourism with a domestic tourism project called “**Travel around Thailand can go every month**”.
- Along with our ‘Amazing Thailand’, our latest communication concept “**Open to the New Shades**” has been used since late 2017 encouraging travellers to expand their experiences and uncover a new perception of attractions in Thailand. It is aimed at attracting more repeat visitors to seek the ‘shade’ unexplored and also first-time visitors.

## The Future: 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Thailand tourism

Distinguished guests,

2020 will be a very important year for Thailand, as we will mark the **sixtieth anniversary** of the official establishment of the Thai tourism industry. As earlier mentioned, in the first year, in 1960, we received a little over 80,000 international arrivals which are minute when compared to the number we received last year. So, TAT will be using this historic milestone of the country's tourism industry as an opportunity to take a look back as well as a look ahead. We see a clear need to refresh our value proposition and expand our range of product offerings.

As such, we will have key messages highlighting the importance of responsible tourism and being good hosts under the theme of "Next steps towards a sustainable Thailand".

In our approach, sustainable means to use tourism as a tool to reduce the inequalities and disparities. This is usually framed within the context of boosting earnings from tourism. However, it is more important to be socially responsible and focus on enhancing earnings. Sustainability itself is a very sensitive process and must include the social context as well as the fragility of the environment. Thus, it is equally important to focus on quality as in the quality of our work, and attracting quality clients. Visitors who come to Thailand all come to enjoy our nature, culture, cuisine and all the wonderful aspects of what we call "Thainess".

Apart from that, to celebrate the occasion of 60 years of the Thai tourism industry, TAT's overseas offices will organise an "Amazing Thailand Week" in the last week of May. This is a tactical campaign that TAT will cooperate with strategic partners; such as, airlines, tour operators, Thai restaurants, and all suppliers in Thailand to raise awareness of the Amazing Thailand brand. Many activities will be created together with strategic partners in every overseas region, and we expect this campaign will keep our brand in tourists' mind.

### Conclusion

I would like to conclude by thanking all the stakeholders in Thai tourism industry for their cooperation, in both the public and private sectors.

TAT recognises the role of tourism development and promotion in creating jobs and income distribution for the benefit of the people and Thai society. But managing the entire industry in the face of so many unpredictable economic, political, environmental scenarios is a constant challenge. We have to studying the past in order to understand the present and get some idea of where things may go next. Thailand has experienced many ups and downs over the years, but we are confident in our fundamental strengths and competitive advantages.

Once more, thank you all for being with us today and for your help and cooperation in developing Thai travel and tourism.

Thank you and sawasdee khrap.