

Thailand down a million tourists amidst recession

By **GEORGE FU**
Epoch Times Staff

Thailand expects some 13.25 million visitors this year, down from an initial forecast of 13.5 million, and over a million visitors short of the 14.57 million that came last year, says the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

The Tourism Council of Thailand, a private sector organization, expects only 13.1 million visitors, this year, a drop of almost 1.5 million from last year.

Tourism accounts for about 6.5 percent of Thailand's GDP and has been hit hard by the global economic slowdown as well as the spread of type-A flu and the country's political instability.

"Thailand's tourism may not improve quickly in the continuing negative environment, but TAT is already preparing for the future expansion of the economy and the industry," said Weerasak Kowsurat, chairman of TAT's Board of Directors.

In a bid to sustain visitor arrivals, a series of marketing campaigns was launched to spur domestic travel and stimulate tourism-related spending.

Other measures included offering loans totalling about CA\$160.8 million to debt-ridden tourism-related small and medium-sized businesses and exempting the tourist visa application fee until March 2010. Thailand is also offering discounts to national parks, and introducing short packages tours around Bangkok for transfer passengers at the Suvarnabhumi International Airport.

Stopping over in Singapore, as part of the "Thailand in Touch" Thai tourism road show, Ms. Juthaporn Rerngronasa, deputy governor for marketing communications at TAT, stressed that tourism is a national priority. She highlighted the importance of travel and tourism to Thailand's economy.

She also pointed to the struggle facing the country.

"While there are some signs of the situation gradually recovering



A young tourist is photographed while sitting on a three-year-old elephant named Lilly at a beach resort in Phuket on July 20, 2009. Phuket has fully recovered from the tsunami that killed around 5,000 tourists and Thais but the country's tourism industry is now being affected by the global economic downturn. ROMEO GACAD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

in many countries, it will take time before many people feel they should be spending on a vacation."

Last year, some 570,000 Singaporeans visited Thailand and TAT hopes to keep those numbers up by focusing on the short-haul South Asian market. Singaporeans generated more than CA\$491.967 million in revenue for tourism businesses in Thailand last year

but only 185,736 have arrived from January to May this year.

While regional markets like Singapore may have shrunk this year, tourist arrivals from the Middle East and South Asia jumped 11.5 and 3.6 percent, respectively.

TAT said that a significant portion of East Asian visitors came from South Korea.

"Koreans usually like to travel abroad in July or August, Thailand's

low tourist season" said Weerasak.

Recently, an online campaign titled "Come to Thailand, Let's Take A Break" has received high circulation in popular entertainment websites. Featuring Thai-born heart-throb Nichkhun Horvejkul (member of popular Korean band 2PM) as Thailand's representative, it aims to draw a younger demographic of Korean tourists to Thailand.

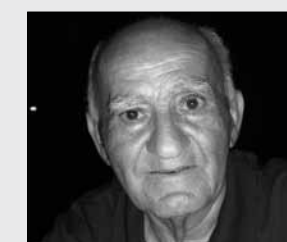
GLOBAL Q & A What's your concept of a fruitful day?

It's hard to always make the best use of our time, much less fill an entire day with only the most worthwhile pursuits. But if you could, what would that day look like? That's what Epoch Times reporters from Rio to Romania wanted to find out when they asked locals, "What's your concept of a fruitful day?"



Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Carmen Hitcas, 23, Copywriter

No hidden and tropical islands, no mountain tops, just a quiet day between my books, my dog, and my boyfriend's smoking pipe. Writing whenever I feel like doing it from my attic room, while playing jazz all over my house, with a forgotten wine glass on my wood table still waiting for me. That day, when I feel peachy, that will be a fruitful day.



Montevarchi (AR) Italy
Adriano Mini, 72 Pensioner and Volunteer for Diabetes Association

A fruitful day? I think we do not have many fruitful days in this life, in this world. If I look at three days of my life, one is bad, the other bad too, and maybe one is a little better. Okay, my concept of a fruitful day... for me this is a day with very good health. If we have good health, that day we are fortunate. Without health we are nothing, we are bad, we cannot live and think about anything else. If one day we are without money, but very good health, we have a fruitful day. If we have a lot of money, but don't have good health, money doesn't serve for nothing.



Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Dimerina Oliveira da Silva, 36, Massage Therapist
A fruitful day for me is when I can get all my bills paid and have a home to return to.



Gold Coast, Australia
Lauren Preston, 23, Travel Agent
I think the concept of a fruitful day is coming home feeling I have been successful with everything I have achieved; fulfilling my client's needs as a travel agent when at work. On a day off, I like to be productive and not waste a moment of our glorious Gold Coast weather.



Laholm, Sweden
Jytte Ortschytz, 86, Retired classical dancer and circus performer

For me that's a matter of which season it is. Now, in the beginning of the autumn, I like to go out for a walk, see the flowers and the fruits, feel the smell of the soil. That makes me enjoy the day. Doing the laundry and other necessary things, at my age I am very satisfied to still be able to do them myself. I also like to bake and cook my own food. And I practice qigong, sometimes I leave my doings for half an hour and do it. I find strength in that.

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Look for the Global Q&A column every week, when Epoch Times correspondents interview people around the world to learn about their lives and perspectives on local and global realities. Next week's global question: What are some of the biggest cultural faux-pas in your country?

States vie for a slice of high-speed rail stimulus

By **IVAN VELINOV**
Epoch Times Staff

Billions of dollars in federal funding may transform the way Americans travel in the years ahead.

Government subsidies will soon send funds to a stimulus program designed to jump-start high-speed rail in the U.S. Funds for projects in different states will be announced in late September, U.S. officials said on Monday.

California alone submitted 42 applications on Tuesday for US\$1.1 billion (CA\$1.2 billion) from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding available through the high-speed and intercity passenger rail program.

"On top of stimulating the California economy, federal investment in California's rail systems will help lay a sustainable foundation for economic growth, help us meet our environmental goals and improve quality of life here in California," Gov. Schwarzenegger said on Tuesday.

The U.S. Department of

Transportation announced last month that it received an overwhelming number of requests from state and local governments seeking financing for high-speed rail systems.

Among the states vying for a slice of nearly US\$8 billion (CA\$8.78 billion) in government stimulus are Virginia, which is seeking financing to lay more than 11 miles (18km) of track along the busy I-95 corridor south of Washington, D.C., and North Carolina, which sent proposals for establishing faster passenger rail service heading north from Raleigh.

The stimulus package passed in February by President Barack Obama's administration allocated the \$8 billion as the first step toward building a national high-speed rail network. More than \$1 billion is budgeted each year for the next five years.

But one factor that could influence the Federal Railway Agency decisions is how much money the states themselves are willing to contribute. Since 1990, California

has reportedly invested more than US\$1.3 billion (CA\$1.42 billion) in railway infrastructure and equipment. California voters last year approved an additional US\$9 billion (CA\$9.9 billion) in state borrowing for high-speed rail service that would move people and products from the southern to the northern parts of the state in a matter of only a few hours.

"By approving a nearly US\$10 billion (CA\$11 billion) bond in November, voters spoke loud and clear that rail, including intercity, commuter, and high-speed, must play a greater role in addressing the transportation and environmental challenges we face in the 21st century," said Gov. Schwarzenegger.

Similar projects are being studied for Canada, where the St-Lawrence River area, from Quebec City to Windsor, and possibly Chicago, could be linked by a high-speed railway system. While the Conservative government hasn't yet pushed the project forward, Quebec City Mayor, Regis Labeaume,

recently told La Presse newspaper he had received support from the three opposition parties' leaders.

Despite the enthusiasm, the United States still lags far behind Europe and Japan where passenger bullet-trains move across at a speed of up to 350 km per hour. Most likely, many of the allocated subsidies from the US\$8 billion (CA\$8.78 billion) stimulus program will finance projects with trains traveling not faster than 128 km per hour, because passenger trains often share tracks with slower moving freight trains.

California's finance applications focus on improvements to existing passenger rail lines, including the integration of high-speed rail with intercity passenger service.

The intercity passenger rail corridors in California are the busiest in the nation. With nearly 5.6 million annual passengers, California has more than 20 percent of all Amtrak riders and represents half of the total ridership on Amtrak's state-supported intrastate and intercity services.

Business-friendly Israel battling image problem

CONTINUED FROM P1

Although statistical export information clearly indicates that Israel has many customers around the world, Wharton professors suggest that Israel is not producing and marketing its products well enough. Many Israeli firms end up selling innovations and ideas to other companies.

"Israel has developed a lot of technology... and [the Israeli companies that have developed that technology] have made money not by going to market with it, but by selling [the business producing that technology

to other companies]. It's hard to think of Israeli companies that have a large presence in the marketplace," Reibstein says.

Experts suggest that Israel and its private sector should allocate resources to tell the world that it is not a nation at war, but a nation with a vivacious and brilliant business environment that delivers through innovation and hard work.

"They [Israelis] need to get to a stage where they recognize the importance of hearing from customers and making sure that their views are what the

market responds to," Reibstein said.

INVENTION ORIENTATION CAPTURES MARKETS

"Israel is a powerhouse when it comes to technology and medicine," according to the Real Israel Web site.

Inventions that have come out of Israel include: "instant messaging (iCQ), firewall security software, Intel wireless computer chips, numerous medicines, and miniature video camera capsules to examine internal organs... the cell phone (invented by Motorola, Inc. with its largest R&D

center being in Israel), most of the Windows NT operating system, voice mail technology, and VoIP [Voice over Internet Protocol] technology," the site said.

The General Electric Co., Johnson & Johnson Services Inc., Pfizer Inc., and other medical system providers all have a presence in Israel to take advantage of the research abilities of the Israelis and the highly advanced university and government research facilities.

Israel has registered more patents, especially in the medical device and technology fields, with the United States Patent and Trademark Office than Russia, India, and China combined.

Romania has highest inflation in EU

CONTINUED FROM P1

"The recent economic downturn is mainly due to the decrease of exports on the European markets. The European Union's recovery is a good condition for the recovery of the Romanian economy as well," the Romanian Minister of Economy Adriean Videanu told reporters.

Poland and Slovakia's economies showed the best signs of improvement during the second quarter, analyst Aurelian Dochia told AFP. He added that Baltic countries will take longer to recover while countries like Romania, Bulgaria or Hungary are somewhere in the middle in terms of their speed of recovery.

Romania's economy during the

second quarter shrank 1.2 percent, compared to the first three months of the year. Recently, representatives of the IMF came to Bucharest to evaluate the economic situation of Romania.

"The IMF's forecast for 2010 is a positive 0.5 [percent]. I'm a bit more optimistic, but it is important that both we and the Fund foresee an economic re-launch in 2010," Adriean Videanu told the press.

However, Bucharest authorities still face huge budgetary constraints. The government is compelled to send all state employees, including MPs and the Prime Minister, on a compulsory 10-day holiday to lower the federal payroll expense.