



Koh Samui

# Green shoots emerge

Koh Samui revs up for recovery through eco-friendly movement, writes **Sirima Eamtako**

**Access** Koh Samui recorded 1.1 million arrivals last year, 80 per cent of whom were foreign visitors. Tourism revenue came up to 46 billion baht (US\$1.4 billion).

Bangkok Airways flew 651,428 inbound and 668,526 outbound passengers through Samui Airport last year, and expects to grow these figures by six and eight per cent respectively this year. The targets appear within reach as the airline already handled an estimated 403,983 inbound passengers and 426,238 outbound passengers from January to July. It is projected to carry another 288,945 inbound passengers and 298,470 outbound passengers between August and December.

Bangkok Airways will launch a new Trat-Koh Samui-Phuket service four times a week from December 2. Koh Samui is also served by Thai Airways International's twice-daily flights from Bangkok, Firefly's four-weekly services from Penang, and Berjaya's twice-weekly flights from Kuala Lumpur's Subang Airport.

**Hotels** Koh Samui's room inventory is shrinking. According to property consult-

ing firm C9 Hotelworks' Samui 2010 Hotel Market Update, poor market conditions forced the exit last year of 1,800 rooms in guesthouses. This meant an 11 per cent drop in inventory, leaving the island with 14,261 rooms in 362 establishments.

New entrants in the mid- to upper-end categories are, however, expected to fill the gap. Last year saw the opening of 86-room Mercure Samui Buri Resort and 77-key Langham Place Samui. The 78-key Banyan Tree Samui and 74-room Hansar Samui debuted in July.

December will see the entry of 65-key Infinity Residences and Resort and an additional 19 keys at 106-room Anantara Bophut. Joining the fray next year are 65-room Conrad Koh Samui Resort and Spa, 153-room All Seasons Samui Chaweng and 180-room Vana Belle Samui Resort and Spa – a Starwood Luxury Collection.

**Rates** The island's hotels enjoyed a US\$25.2 million year-on-year increase in room revenue in the first half of the year due to a 19 per cent hike in arrival numbers, according to the C9 Hotelworks survey. Hotels reportedly achieved a



**Bill Barnett**  
Managing director  
C9 Hotelworks

"The first half suggests that sustainable recovery for Samui tourism has begun. Prospects for the second half remain dynamic with the potential for topspin"

24 per cent year-on-year growth in revenue per available room, a five per cent hike in occupancy and a 13 per cent jump in room rate between January and June.

The survey said the luxury segment outperformed the market, growing average room rate by 34 per cent to just under US\$150 and occupancy by 14 per cent to around 60 per cent. In contrast, the upscale segment managed a 16 per cent surge in rate to nearly US\$130 but lost three percentage points in occupancy to just under 60 per cent.

**Projects** The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the island's stakeholders are now painting Koh Samui green with eco-friendly projects.

The initiative comes as Koh Samui, which is already battling an insufficient supply of water and electricity, suffers from burgeoning waste as its community and tourism industry expands. The number of palm trees – for which Koh Samui is famed – is also falling as developers pave grounds for new projects.

Hotels have implemented campaigns on waste, water resource management and efficient energy consumption. Stakehold-

ers have launched more community-based tours and embarked on projects raising eco-awareness among school children and planting one million coconut palm trees on the island.

Many resorts also include tree-planting in their packages. The trees bear the names of their planters, who are given periodic updates on their progress.

Saiphayom Somsuk, chief of TAT's Koh Samui Tourism Coordination Centre, said the NTO would support the island's green movement by assisting agents and suppliers involved in eco-friendly activities such as events marketing, zero-carbon tours, and wedding packages that factor in tree-planting activities.

**Etc** Koh Samui is upping the ante on entertainment. Launched earlier this year are two walking streets – at Bophut Beach highlighting boutique eateries and shops from 16.00 to 23.00 on Fridays and at Nathon Beach on Saturdays featuring local food, art and performances.

New events include the first Samui Island Marathon in September and the second Samui Fantasia beach party in October for gay visitors.