



# PATTAYA TODAY

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## 8 MILLION TOURISTS COMING TO PATTAYA



Experienced-based activities have delivered a no need to leave ethos at the Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya

Thailand's favourite destination is expected to welcome eight million hotel guests during 2012, a record for Pattaya and the highest ever for any Thai resort. The sharp upturn is partly due to a surge in the Thai domestic market of the upwardly growing middle class attracted by recent improvements in transport and infrastructure.

The influential hospitality consulting group C9 Hotelworks, paradoxically based in Phuket, highlights in a new report a recent nine percent increase in Pattaya hotel occupancy with chain-operated properties doing particularly well with 74 percent of rooms filled on an annualized basis. A leading example of the new Pattaya is Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya which has seen their experience-based theme property delivering a "no need to leave" factor for quality-seeking families and couples.

However, the consultants point out that the overall Pattaya profile is changing quickly. "There is a geographic shift

away from local-haul tourism from Europe and the United States to the Asian and domestic segments led by large-scale retail tourist attractions and a rising resort residential market which has fueled positive sentiment." Looking forward to 2013, C9 Hotelworks says that major international investment in branded parks, such as the Cartoon Network Amazone water-theme facility near Sattahip, will fuel further growth.

Last year, Thailand, Russia and China were the top three markets for Pattaya with a combined market share of 59 per cent. They were followed by Germany and Taiwan, thus displacing the British who have traditionally been seen as the largest foreign group. The consultants state, "Looking back, tourism growth in Pattaya entered a new age with the opening of Suvarnabhumi international airport in 2006 and the subsequent opening of the fast-track motorway linking to the Eastern Seaboard resort."

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The milestone of the Central Festival Pattaya Beach retail complex is seen as the touchstone of the major makeover. More than any other single development this huge retail and entertainment complex, housing the five-star Hilton Pattaya, has marked the emergence of Pattaya into a diversified and business-orientated resort rather than simply a centre for night-life.

Registered accommodation establishments in Pattaya have now grown to around 60,000 rooms. In the pipeline are 12 more projects including The Montien Hotel North Pattaya, Centara Av-

enue Residence and Suites Pattaya, Centara Grand Residence Pattaya and Movenpick White Sand Beach Resort in Jomtien. Of the dozen or so new-start projects due to be completed in the period 2012-2014, offering around 1,800 further rooms in total, about a third are based in increasingly popular area of Jomtien boosted by its new Number Two Road.

A surprising feature of Pattaya, according to Bill Barnett the managing director of C9 Hotelworks, is how quickly the resort rebounds after temporary setbacks such as the global crisis of 2008, politi-

cal troubles during 2009 and 2010 and the floods of 2011. "We note that Pattaya is particularly resilient with visitor arrivals at the beachside resort destination doubling in 2010 alone."

Pattaya's City Hall has called for a tripling of visitor numbers and tourist revenue by the end of this decade, promising that massive road and rail links, a beach renovation project and various environmental improvements will be the basis of huge expansion. But government approval is still awaited for some of the more ambitious infrastructure projects.

## New UK envoy fluent in Thai

GLOBETROTTING diplomat Mark Kent, the latest British ambassador to assume powers in Bangkok, is a multi-talented man indeed. Apart from being a big fan of Arsenal football club, he can speak six European languages, some Vietnamese and near-fluent Thai. In fact his tenure in Bangkok has been delayed for some months whilst he perfected his Thai language skills, the fill-in having been Asif Ahmad who delighted the British expat population with his

frank public orations on what the embassy can and can't do.

Kent has also signed up for a political science course at Chulalongkorn University and looks set to impress Thai observers of the foreign diplomatic service unlike any other. He says he listens to the news in Thai every day to help perfect his Thai, although he still finds Thai soap operas bewildering, a sentiment he shares with every Englishman or woman who has ever set foot in the land of smiles.

A member of Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office since 1987, and with a distinguished career that has extended into Latin America and Asia, Kent is likely to be a solid source of global analysis in the news media here. It remains to be seen whether, like his predecessor, he will find time to answer expats' inquiries about embassy opening times and the huge expense of getting an immigration letter signed by a junior official.

## Disabled march for equal rights



A caravan of physically challenged Thais began a march from Pattaya to Nong Khai to promote equal rights and work opportunities for the disabled, and to raise funds to build Phra Mahathai Vocational College in Nong Khai.

The event was sponsored by General Pisarn Wattanawongkhiri, who has been an activist for the disabled for the past 20 years, and General Aekachaiyath Shinawatra, adviser to the Prime Minister.

## Food donation to Open Zoo



APIDATE Singhsaene, assistant director of Khao Khiew Open Zoo, seen here with representatives of Siam Public Food Company

who donated 5,000 tonnes of food. This is the second-year in succession that the company has helped feed the zoo animals.