

BUSINESS

BOOM SEEN IN PATTAYA TOURISM, 8M EXPECTED

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THE NATION

Pattaya, the popular Eastern Seaboard beach resort, is on track to welcome more than 8 million hotel guests this year – a record for the city as well as any upcountry tourist destination – thanks to the growth of middle-class consumers in Asia and the development of good infrastructure that allows better access to the city.

The development of the Eastern Seaboard is also drawing many business travellers to Pattaya.

The sharp upturn in the city's prospects can be attributed in part to the growing domestic market, which has responded to the vast improvement in access and transport infrastructure.

Leading hospitality consulting group C9 Hotelworks recently released their "Pattaya Hotel Market Update", which highlights a 9-percentage-point surge in hotel occupancy last year as a clear indication of an upward cycle.

An increase in branded hotel offerings has induced greater demand with the chain-operated properties hitting 74-per-cent annualised occupancy last year. This equated to an 8-per-cent premium over the non-branded hotel inventory.

"With the geographic shift away from long-haul tourists to the Asian and domestic segments, key demand generators such as large-scale retail, tourist attractions and a rising resort residential market has fuelled positive sentiment," Bill Barnett, managing director of C9, said yesterday.

A leading example of the new Pattaya is Centara's Grand Mirage Resort, which has successfully seen its experience-based theme property delivering a "no need to leave" factor for families and couples. Looking forward through this year and into 2013, C9's report points to the major investment into internationally affiliated theme parks in Greater Pattaya, which will broaden demographics. The milestone Central Festival retail complex was the touch point of a major makeover.

With 49,348 rooms in registered tourism establishments, much of the build-up was from 2009-10 when supply increased 28 per cent. This has flattened out to an upward swing of 4 per cent.

One benefactor in a shifting hospitality scene is the upscale international tier with Sheraton Pattaya ranking high.

Hotel developer Aswani Bajaj of Amburaya Hotel and Resorts said: "The increasing demand of more affluent visitors is creating a strong, sustainable financial business model for the hotel."