

Phuket ready for int'l visitors in July despite Thai covid wave

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 09 May, 2021



Dhaka: Thailand is going ahead with its reopening plan for its resort island Phuket in July even as the country struggles to contain its worst Covid-19 outbreak since the pandemic began amid slow vaccinations.

The national tourism panel met on May 7 and affirmed the timetable for Phuket to be back in business on July 1, when the mandatory two-week quarantine will be dropped for vaccinated visitors, according to government spokeswoman Traisuree Taisaranakul.

The committee also endorsed October 1 openings for nine other popular destinations, including Bangkok and Chiang Mai, with restrictions eased in the rest of Thailand in January, she said.

The success of these plans hinges on the ability of each province to meet the vaccination coverage of 70 per cent of its residents and hospitality workers, Traisuree said. The government will soon accelerate inoculation programs “to build confidence in both the public and foreign tourists,” she said.

Thailand has administered about 1.7 million doses, enough to cover just 1.2 per cent of its population. But in Phuket -- designated a priority region -- about 22 per cent of its residents

are fully vaccinated, according to Bhummikitti Ruktaengam, President of the Phuket Tourist Association. The island region will need an additional 700,000 doses to reach its 70 per cent target, Bhummikitti said.

Southeast Asia's second-largest economy is currently facing its biggest wave of infections, with the total case count and deaths more than doubling since early April. The surge in cases has prompted new restrictions and downgrades to the nation's growth estimates this year.

Tourism, which made up about one-fifth of the economy pre-pandemic, is a cornerstone for any recovery. The government panel forecast 3.5 million foreign tourists in the 10 early-opening destinations in 2021, a fraction of the nearly 40 million people who visited Thailand in 2019. It estimates USD 9.6 billion in tourism receipts this year, compared to over USD 60 billion in 2019.