

Thailand to allow 'low risk' tourist flights from late October

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Dhaka: Thailand is to begin reopening its borders to foreigners in an attempt to kick start a tourism industry battered by the coronavirus pandemic with a flight from China in late October.

The kingdom's economy is highly dependent on foreign visitors but the country is expecting a fraction of the nearly 40 million international arrivals it recorded last year, after the pandemic brought global air travel to a near standstill.

Officials hope to portray the country as a safe holiday destination after Thailand escaped relatively unscathed from the outbreak, with just 59 deaths recorded nationwide.

But the scheme has been designed to forestall any risk of importing new cases, with only visitors from countries deemed low risk allowed to enter the country and all new arrivals required to spend 14 days in hotel quarantine.

The first arrivals will be a group of 150 Chinese tourists travelling to Phuket, a Tourism Authority of Thailand spokeswoman said in a statement, with reports stating that their flight would land on the resort island next week.

Two more flights – one carrying Chinese passengers and another with European travellers – are booked to follow if there are no problems with the first group, she added.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said in early October that only a limited number of travellers would be allowed into Thailand, and that they would be monitored through wristbands and mobile phone apps.

Tourism operators across Thailand have battled to keep afloat during the pandemic and have urged the government to ease border restrictions.

Thailand's economy could shrink by up to 10.4 per cent this year, according to a World Bank forecast released in early October.