

## Thailand welcomes first quarantine-free int'l tourists

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Dhaka: Thailand welcomed its first quarantine-free tourists to its popular island Phuket as the country attempts to revive its tourism industry following the coronavirus pandemic.

About 250 people, mainly from the Middle East, were expected to arrive on four flights on July 1 as part of the "[Phuket Sandbox](#)" scheme.

None of the arrivals need to quarantine, but they cannot travel to the mainland within 14 days.

Thailand hopes the scheme will bring in USD 278 million in the next three months.

But that is still far short of Thailand's pre-pandemic revenue from tourism, which accounts for about a fifth of the country's economy.

According to reports, Thailand lost around USD 50 billion when visitor numbers plunged following the start of the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020.

If successful, the country will roll out the scheme to other islands, with borders scheduled to open fully in October.

"We know that there is a risk," Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha briefed the media, after arriving on the island himself. "But we have to accept the risk so Thai people can make a living."

But this attempt to revive tourism comes as Thailand battles to get its latest Covid outbreak under control. On July 1, the country reported a record 57 deaths and 5,533 cases. Two Delta variant cases have also been found in Phuket so far.

But the island has been prioritized for vaccination, and some 70 percent of its residents were due to be inoculated before the first tourists arrived on planes from Israel, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar.

The holidaymakers, who need to arrive vaccinated and provide proof of a negative test before entry to Phuket, will themselves undergo screening procedures before being allowed out onto the island.

Their movements will then be monitored by an app they must download on arrival.

Those who want to travel more widely in Thailand will be able to do so after 14 days, so long as they have three negative coronavirus tests.

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