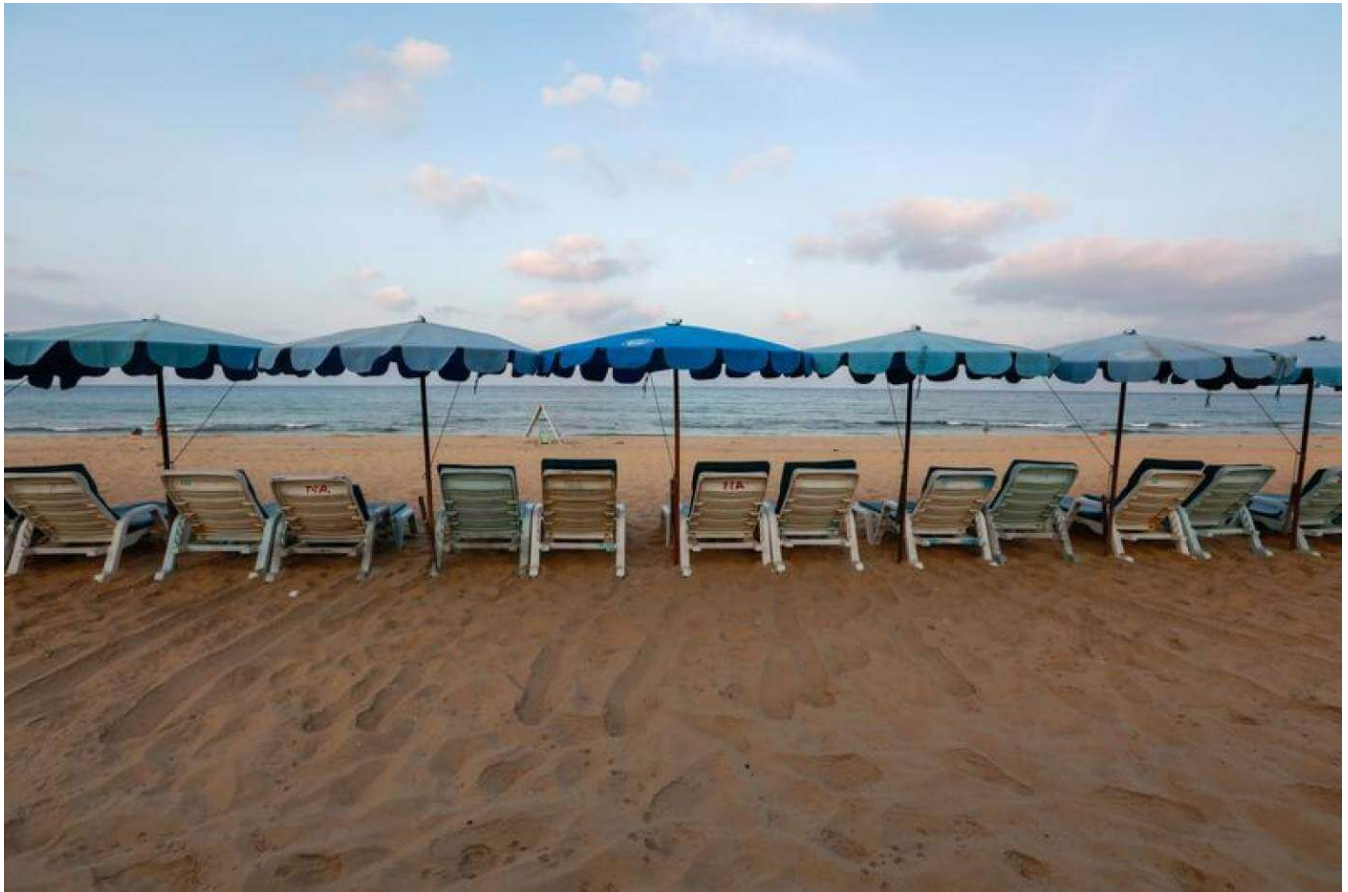


Thailand's Phuket eyes October reopening for tourism

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: Thailand's resort island Phuket is planning private coronavirus vaccinations for 250,000 residents in the hope the government will allow it to fully reopen to foreign tourists by October and save its battered economy, industry officials said.

"The people of Phuket are losing hope," Phuket Tourism Association President, Bhumikitti Ruktaengam said, adding that the island's economy was at its lowest point in recent history.

About 10.5 million of the nearly 40 million foreign visitors to Thailand in 2019 visited Phuket.

The Southeast Asian nation had only 6.7 million arrivals nationwide last year due to its coronavirus border closures.

[Foreign tourism revenue in Phuket dropped 78 percent](#) to THB 87.5 million (USD 2.92 million) in 2020 with 2.1 million arrivals.

At least 10 Phuket industry associations including hotel, tourism and chambers of commerce have agreed to pool resources to procure vaccines and inoculate at least 70 percent of the island to create sufficient immunity by October 1 to receive tourists.

Phuket's population is at least 400,000 and the private vaccination drive would cover most adults before a nationwide government immunization programme for the public starts in June.

"We are in talks with three major hospital networks to procure AstraZeneca and Sinovac vaccines," Bhumikitti said, declining to provide details.

He also argued foreign tourists vaccinated abroad should not have to undergo quarantine.

Quarantine should be relaxed or eliminated for vaccinated foreigners, chief strategy officer hotel operator Minor International Pcl, Chaiyapat Paitoon told a panel discussion. Tourism Authority of Thailand governor Yuthasak Supasorn said a "vaccine passport" was being discussed by the country's coronavirus taskforce.

Thailand, which has recorded 21,249 coronavirus infections and 79 fatalities, will largely use 61 million locally made doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine for its immunization drive and will use a limited number of imported ones in the early stages.