

COMMERCE

Thailand tourism looks to spring back from protest-fueled dip

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Four Seasons Bangkok's Mocha & Muffins cafe

By JOE MCCARTHY

Reeling from five months of mounting political agitation, Thailand is trying to project an image of stability to keep the wheels of tourism turning.

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The government lifted a state of emergency March 19 to aid the economic outlook, but the country remains stuck in a precarious political limbo. For luxury hotel brands, maintaining a steady and straightforward dialogue with prospective guests will help to ameliorate concerns.

"The protests were very localized, and even though there was traffic disruption in some areas, for the large part of the city it was business as usual," said Nicola Chilton, senior director of public relations at [Four Seasons Bangkok](#), Thailand.

"The most important thing for us was to make sure that we kept our guests updated with relevant information, both through bulletins that we posted regularly in public areas of the hotel and through our social media channels, so that they could get around the city with the least possible inconvenience," she said.

"The safety and security of our guests and staff is always our top priority, and we always

aim to provide up-to-date information and proactive communications."

Face of change

The Bangkok protests flared up five months ago when a proposed bill that would have granted amnesty to exiled former leader Thaksin Shinawatra was met with indignation.

The mainspring of the unrest then shifted to the long-brewing dissatisfaction with Yingluck Shinawatra's government.

Over the months, a truculent atmosphere emerged. Dissenters called for nothing less than resignation from the prime minister and the formation of a people's council, and have clashed with pro-government citizens.

However, escalating violence and lack of progress sapped the crowd's energy and the city returned to a relative state of normality. To further ensure stability, the prime minister is aiming to expand the Internal Security Act to clamp down on future protests.

Tourism sustained predictable blows during this period. Arrivals dropped 4.1 percent in January and February from the year-ago period, [according to Time magazine](#).

Whether or not tourism can rebound remains unclear. The city certainly has the credentials to recover, having surpassed London in 2013 as the most visited international city in the world, per [MasterCard](#). In fact, Bangkok posted tourism growth rates above 18 percent in 2011 and 2012 and 9.8 percent in 2013.

 **Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok** shared a link.
March 18

We're delighted to be able to inform you that the caretaker government of Thailand is today, March 19, 2014, lifting the state of emergency that had recently been imposed on Bangkok. Please see the link below for further details.

We look forward to welcoming you to our wonderful city soon - with Thai New Year, or Songkran, coming up next month there's never been a better time to visit!



**Thailand Political Update from Tourism Authority of Thailand:
Thai Cabinet Lifts Bangkok's State of
shout.it**

FS Weekly brings you the latest news and info, straight to your inbox.

Four Seasons Bangkok Facebook post

Although the environment has cooled, the country could tip into even greater turmoil following renewed outrage over election outcomes.

Reuters reports that "more upheaval would scupper chances of the recovery in private spending and therefore in the economy in the second half of the year, that Bank of Thailand Governor Prasarn Trairatvorakul had tentatively forecast in a speech on March 20."

Those involved in tourism are staying optimistic.

The government predicts increases in revenue from tourism again this year. Four Seasons stressed that all shops, hotels and shopping malls in Bangkok and throughout Thailand remained open and were always easily accessible throughout the protests.

Hot potato

Conflicts sprouting up around the globe have tested the resilience of international and domestic brands. How can hotel brands balance the safety concerns of guests with the push for increased traffic?

As Russia prepares to annex Crimea, global tensions will escalate and tourism may shrivel in the region.

Admonishments from Western countries led by the United States and Russia's continued defiance may impinge upon leisure plans of luxury consumers. With so much solemnity marking diplomatic rhetoric and media coverage, luxury consumers may feel impelled to reconsider travel until the atmosphere cools (**see story**).

Also, the volatile political climate in the Middle East has haunted tourism, forcing luxury hotels to distance themselves from what is happening all around.

The crisis occurring in Syria has burdened neighboring nations with displaced citizens and Egypt's hostile situation has wounded a tourism sector that had played an integral role in its economy. As the ongoing events cast a dark shadow over the luxury travel industry in the area, hotels need to find a way to safely increase foot traffic (**see story**).

Even if a hotel is far away from any foreseeable danger, media coverage can discourage travelers. Consequently, brands must always keep prospective guests informed on a regular basis.

"Although traffic to some parts of the city was affected by the recent protests, we were fortunate that we didn't encounter any problems in getting our guests to the hotel," Four Seasons Bangkok's Ms. Chilton said.

Final Take

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