

The 35th International Travel Expo
第三十五屆香港國際旅遊展

The 16th MICE Travel Expo
第十六屆商務及會獎旅遊展

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Travel



Phuket places hopes on 'sandbox'



Dreams take flight
MISSING AIR TRAVEL? Hyatt Centric's new package, Centric Flycation (HK\$3,380 for two), is the one for you. Not only do you get to fly again, you will also return with souvenirs from your trip. Available only on July 24, the trip starts with a flight to nowhere on board Hong Kong Express. Upon landing, you will be taken to the hotel by coach. Waiting for you inside your room will be a skin-care gift set from Belli, a Nissin gourmet pack and a Paprika travel kit. Also included in the package is a Mediterranean-themed buffet at The Farmhouse. To help you enjoy your stay to the fullest, check out the next days is at 6pm. The offer is available until July 18 and, as you may expect, it has limited availability. Website: hyattcentrichongkong.com IVY ONG-WOAT



THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL travelers touched down last Thursday in Phuket under a quarantine-free scheme, as Thailand tries to reboot its battered tourism industry while also enduring its worst coronavirus outbreak. Tourism makes up almost a fifth of the Thai economy, and the Covid-19 pandemic has led to its worst performance since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The kingdom is pinning high hopes on a revival of the "Phuket sandbox" – a model that will allow vaccinated travelers to visit without quarantine. The launch of the quarantine-free scheme comes as Thailand grapples with its worst-ever Covid-19 wave. But Phuket remains relatively unscathed as Thai authorities have rolled out a mass vaccination campaign in preparation for the quarantine-free arrivals, with 70 percent of residents receiving at least one dose. A command center will track foreign visitors' movements via a mobile app – which tourists are required to install on arrival – and also monitor for potential outbreaks. Despite the fanfare, tourism operators are lukewarm on the resuscitation of the island's economy, which has seen nearly 90 percent of hotels shutter. "I think the restrictions make people travel less," said Kongsak Khoopongsakorn, president of the Thai Hotels Association Southern Chapter, who also runs a resort on the island.

Besides being fully vaccinated, tourists must remain in Phuket for a fortnight if they wish to travel to the rest of Thailand, and take three coronavirus tests during this period – a substantial expenditure for a family. Kongsak added that authorities had downgraded its sandbox entry forecast of 129,000 visitors in the third quarter to 100,000. Delays in government approval for the scheme have caused headaches for scores of prospective travelers, who flocked online to air their grievances. "It is disappointing the communication has been so poor and new requirements without any detail are being created after the fact," said an American traveler. She added she had spent hours calling consulates across the United States to get her paperwork processed to no avail.

But even a trickle of visitors will be a lifeline for desperate vendors such as Thewan Phromyang, who rents out deck chairs at Phuket's Patong Beach. "I barely have any income. We can feed only ourselves," said the 49-year-old. Before the pandemic, Thailand had expected 40 million visitors to arrive in 2020, a far cry from the 6.7 million who made it through strict border restrictions. Another regional tourist hotspot, Bali, had been eyeing a July reopening but Indonesian authorities appear to have backed down as virus cases surged to record levels. While the Indonesian government has not announced an official cancellation, comments from the tourism minister suggested that any bid to welcome back tourists is likely to be delayed until infections are curbed. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Are you all set to travel again?

With the easing of the pandemic after an extended global lockdown, the question on many people's mind is how soon they can resume travelling. The answer is probably quite imminent with the recent announcement from Europe on reopening their borders, and the launch of travel bubbles.

It's never too early to start planning for your next trip, and the International Travel Expo (ITE) Hong Kong has assembled some brilliant ideas and great deals. Organized by TKS Exhibition Services Ltd., it will be held from July 29 to Aug 1 at halls 1B & C of the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Although the scale of this year's expo will be somewhat reduced as the recovery gets under way, visitors will still be able to pick and choose from a myriad of travel options offered by overseas exhibitors from alluring destinations like Argentina, Mainland China, Japan and Taiwan. While representatives from various economic and cultural offices in town will be present to answer your questions, you may also meet their consultants online.

The pandemic has pushed safety to become a key focus for vacationers. A recent survey has revealed that 75% of the 1,400 respondents shared that they are willing to pay more for a safer holiday. In fact, the subject of hygiene is a priority subject at this year's ITE Expo which will offer more information on ways to look after yourselves on a vacation.

Meanwhile, before when we can again all hop on a plane to visit the destination of our dreams, ITE Expo will

be presenting a kaleidoscope of inspiring local tours to ease your travel anguish. For example, there will be a glamping pavilion designed for outdoor activity enthusiasts, as well as booths that present themed restaurants to satiate the appetite of discerning gourmands on the lookout for something extraordinary.

For more, visitors can check out the winner works of the Green Tourism Photo Competition; attend the trade and public seminars themed on study tours; or join a forum held by ILEA Asia Chapter on utilizing domestic resources in post-pandemic times.

The Convention and Exhibition Industry Subsidy Scheme enables the organizer to offer all ITE exhibitors a 20% discount, while Hong Kong exhibitors can also apply for the Export Marketing Fund (EMF) with maximum subsidy 50% of booth rental.

Only registered visitors can visit the travel fair on July 29 and in the morning of July 30, while remaining days and sessions, visitors can buy ticket at entrance for admission. All participants are advised to follow the fairs' health and safety regulations and check the admission policy at the Expo's website.



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