

DESTINATIONS

ASIA | TRAVEL CORRIDORS

Q&A

**CHRIS LEE, PATA BOARD MEMBER
AND HEAD OF MARKETING, TOURISM
AUTHORITY OF THAILAND**

INTERVIEW BY Katie McGonagle

Q. Grant Shapps announced last week that Thailand had been added to the UK's travel corridors list, but borders remain closed to British holidaymakers – can you explain?

A. If you go to Thailand and return to the UK, you are no longer required to do a 14-day quarantine. That's great news, because previously there were two lists – the Foreign Office advice against all but essential travel had been removed, but we were still on the quarantine list. The Thailand cabinet met last week and have agreed a long-stay visa, which will be issued from October, allowing some international visitors to go into Thailand, although it requires a 14-day quarantine on arrival, which needs to be in an appointed state-quarantine hotel, so it only really suits long-stay customers.

Q. So this won't mean a flood of travellers going back to Asia?

A. From a trade perspective, we don't think this will suddenly generate huge amounts of business again, but it is a stepping stone. Thailand has only had 58 Covid-related deaths since February, so want to take a slowly but surely view. By getting some passengers in on this long-stay visa and showing that it doesn't cause a big spike in cases, it will allow them to do a phased opening in the following months – that's what we're looking to achieve.

Q. Is this a good sign for the rest of Asia?

A. It's very positive for Asia as a



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CHRIS'S TOP TIP

Ask customers how they're feeling about travelling to gauge what sort of holiday they're looking for – some will want to get back to the holidays they did before, but others will be more nervous.

region and it recognises – perhaps long overdue – that yes, Covid started in Asia, but the impact there compared to Europe, North America and South America is at a very different level. If Thailand is granted this, then there's no reason why others shouldn't follow.

Q. What can agents do with this new information?

A. There may be a type of customer out there who, in the past, has done a long winter-sun stay to get away from the UK weather for a few months in Thailand, so if they are the sort of customers you have, we should have details of the long-stay scheme any day now. But for the classic two-week tourist, it makes sense for agents to be looking at 2021. I've spoken to many agents in the past few weeks and the best advice is to be honest – if you book a customer for March or April next year, at this moment we don't know

if those borders will be open by then. As long as the customer goes in with eyes open, that's fine – you can only stick to the facts.

Q. What differences might visitors notice in Thailand now, and how might travel to the country change in future?

A. Thailand created the Safety and Health Administration Certificate that hotels across Thailand have signed up to; sanitation and health and safety protocols have been raised; and there's also a track-and-trace app. We've always sold Thailand as a multi-centre destination, but I think in the early stages people may want to do less travelling around. **TW**

**CARRIE KWIK,
EUROPE EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, SINGAPORE
TOURISM BOARD**

Q. Singapore was also added to the quarantine-free list last week along with Thailand – what does this mean for travel to the country?

A. We were pleased to learn that Singapore has been added to the UK government's list of travel corridors, although short-term visitors from the UK are not allowed entry into Singapore. Singapore has been open to investment and trade, and we are progressively reopening our borders in a careful and calibrated manner, with the necessary public health safeguards in place. Our businesses are also adhering to rigorous standards of hygiene. Many are being certified under SG Clean, our national mark of excellence for safety and hygiene; as of September 18, more than 22,000 premises had been certified island-wide.



PICTURES: Raymond Toh; Sarah Lucy Brown