



## Tourism looks set to grow

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TOURIST visitors to the Kingdom increased by 16 percent in 2010 compared with the previous year, with about 2.5 million foreigners entering Cambodia.

Improved ease of transportation, promotional deals, and strong security in 2010 had benefited the tourism industry, according to Kong Sophearak, director of the department of statistics and information at the Ministry of Tourism.

"I think tourism will still grow in the coming year because of linkages through flights between Cambodia and European nations, and visa exemptions with Thailand," he said.

According to the ministry, tourism-generated revenue also increased, rising to US\$1.78 billion from \$1.56 billion in 2009.

The statistics show Vietnam was the largest source of arrivals to Cambodia, with 466,695 tourist visits – a 47.6 percent increase on 2009.

Minister of Tourism Thong Khon said yesterday the average expenditure by tourists inside Cambodia was considerable, regardless of which country the tourists were from.

Although European tourists may spend more on airfares, the money went to the air carriers rather than directly into the Cambodian economy, he said.

South Korea was the second largest source of visitors, with 289,702 entering the Kingdom last year, a 46.5 percent increase on 2009.

China came in third with 177,636 visitors, while some 151,795 Japanese entered the Kingdom.

President of the Cambodian Association of Travel Agents, Ang Kim Eang, said the resumption of direct flights by Air France and the visa exemption for Thai visitors should assist in boosting tourism further in 2011.

"We hope the new year will bring Cambodia further inflows of tourists," he said.

The Ministry has forecast 2.73 million visitors for 2011, and expects revenue from the sector to total \$1.91 billion.

The total number of registered travel and tourism companies also increased to 392 companies, from 374 in 2009, according to ministry statistics.

"In this year, we saw better growth in the tourism sector and we saw more new entrants enter to do business in the industry," said Tourism Industry Department director Prak Chan Dara.

"Some of the companies, they feel confident to do business in the tourism sector because the number of tourists coming to our country is increasing every year — that is why they decided to do this business."

Ang Kim Eang said private industry was noting an increase in tourism in the Kingdom.

"I think that now is the right time to be doing business in the tourism sector. The economic situation is recovering and the sector is beginning to grow again," he said.

CATA has 200 members operating tours and travel agency in Cambodia. It is considering setting an internal regulation

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among its members to the same service fees charged from customers for all tour and travel companies, which Ang Kim Eang claimed was to avoid price dumping.

Heng Saut, the director of Cambodian Visa Service & Tours, who started operating his company two months ago, said: “I feel confident with the tourism sector growing and as I also have knowledge and skills in this sector, that’s why I decided to do this business.”

“Our country is full of attractive heritage and eco-tourism sites with much potential for tourism, so I hopefully have a good chance to start up in this business,” he added.

The Phnom Penh-based firm recently received its operating license from the tourism ministry.