



Airport expansion, rail link to draw more tourists

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The expansion of Suvarnabhumi Airport and the development of a highspeedrail link with China are expected to attract more foreign visitors not only to Bangkok, but also to other key destinations in the long term.

The expansion of the airport is set to be completed in 2015, resulting in an increase in the current capacity of 45 million passengers to 60 million arrivals per year. More airlines using the airport should bring more tourists to the Kingdom.

The highspeedrail link between Bangkok and Kunming in Yunnan province, southern China, is a cooperative venture between the Thai and Chinese governments. Once the project is completed, Chinese tourists will be able to visit the country via an alternative, rapid method of transport, which will provide easier access not only to Bangkok but also to other provinces.

Surapol Sritrakul, president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, yesterday said these two developments would enable Thailand to attract more visitors in long term.

BKK Airport Expansion and Rail Link to Draw More Tourists – The Nation, Jan 2011

"China will possibly become the biggest market for Thai tourism, alongside the other [major] emerging market, India," he said.

Meanwhile, according to a report by hospitality consultancy C9 Hotelworks, Thai hotel openings added 1,389 rooms last year, a 3.2percent increase from 43,036 rooms at the end of 2009.

"Patong [in Phuket] is experiencing wildfire growth and a transformation is underway for the central entertainment district, where projections show more than 50 per cent of new hotel supply will be massed over the next five years," the company said.

Thai developers increasingly dominate the overall hospitality investment horizon on the resort island, mainly in the midmarket segment, contributing 77 per cent of new projects in the pipeline.

Umbrella future development for Phuket sees 5,749 more rooms, representing a 12.9percent increase over existing supply. Delayed openings from 2010 pushed into 2011, of which 723 keys will contribute to a total of 1,472 rooms entering supply this year, the company said.

Last year, passenger traffic soared with 3.5 million arrivals on the island, representing 22percent growth over the previous year. New Russian and Chinese markets drove this growth.

C9 Hotelworks has seen positive indicators of a recovery from the country's recent political turbulence to hit new highs in Phuket.

Managing director Bill Barnett said both Russia and China had emerged as star performers, with charter and directflight capacity fasttracking growth.

Data from the company's report highlight market capitulation and reactive pricing resulting in a marketwide occupancy increase of 4 per cent, offset by a 3percent fall in room rates.