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TOURIST SAFETY TO IMPROVE

The government has agreed to concentrate on tourist safety and welfare after an international report concluded that Thailand still has too many problems. According to the World Economic Forum in a competitive safety report, Spain was ranked as the world's most tourist-friendly country whilst Thailand was limited to 35th place. However, Thailand's ranking has improved from the same report in 2013, coming 8th in Asia behind Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, South Korea and Taiwan.

Spain's top showing was attributed to its cultural resources, first-class airports, infrastructure strength, accessibility of tourist help services and top-class wireless internet services. The next best destinations were said to be France, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom. Specifically on tourist safety, the report states, "Thailand experienced a decline in tourists' confidence beginning in December 2008

when international airports started closing and many foreign tour agents quit the country." The report also mentions prolonged street disturbances in 2013 and 2014 which were brought to an end by the military putsch on May 22 last year and the imposition of martial law.

Other factors which have acted detrimentally to Thailand are several well-publicized murders of tourists, especially on holiday islands, and high-profile street crimes including the recent case of a tourist being injured in Pattaya by the shoe of a transvestite whose offer of a sexual service had been rebuffed. There has also been negative international reaction to scams such as Jet Ski rip-offs which led to a diplomatic outcry in Phuket. According to John Venables from the Association of British Travel Agents, "Thailand is seen as a newsworthy destination, especially in Britain, and isolated incidents are likely to be picked up and broadcast more readily than in some other countries."



The Thai government has acknowledged the country's perceived weaknesses and has sought to address them. In particular, the Jet Ski menace has been addressed in Phuket and Pattaya in particular. A spokesman for the tourist court in Pattaya said that the number of reported instances of overcharging had shrunk to practically zero. The establishment of tourist courts, a surviving initiative of the defunct Yingluck

Shinawatra administration, has been a valuable asset in Pattaya as it has powers to arbitrate a dispute in some circumstances and can take witness statements from foreigners without their having to wait months until a court case is actually held.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has taken a personal interest in addressing the issue of the

► Continued on page 4

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Discover Thainess tours to be featured at TTM Plus



Wat Phumin in Nan

by Tourism Authority of Thailand, www.TATnews.org

From biking tours by night to a homestay experience in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Ayutthaya, some of Thailand's best emerging tourism destinations, products and services are to be prominently highlighted at the Thailand Travel Mart Plus Amazing Gateway to the Greater Mekong Subregion (TTM+) during 3-5 June 2015 in Bangkok.

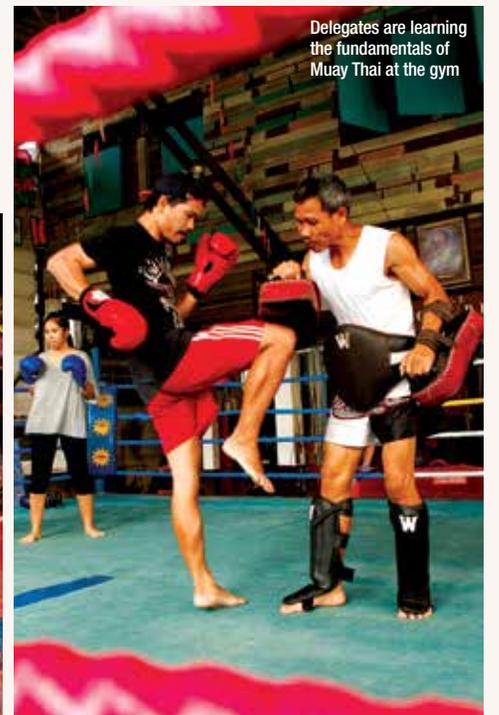
Designed to reflect the "Discover Thainess" slogan, the diverse range of options will include many activities featured for the first time at the TTM+ such as Street Food Tours, visit to a mask-making museum in Loei province, a monkey-training centre in Surat Thani province, and a riverboat cruise to the

Laotian city of Luang Prabang, also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Now in its 14th year, Thailand's largest annual B2B tourism and travel trade event will be held at Impact Muang Thong Thani. The region's leading trade show for Thailand and the GMS countries of Vietnam,

Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and China (Kunming Province), its primary objective is to help small- and medium-sized enterprises get cost-effective marketing exposure in a highly-competitive global environment.

>> continued on L4



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