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www.tourismthailand.org



Happy Thai New Year

AS mid-April's temperature rises, ushering in the beginning of the hot season in Thailand, the whole country reverberates with the sounds of cheerful laughter and merry-making.

The occasion is the Songkran Festival, which ushers in the Thai New Year, celebrated nationwide from April 13-15 yearly.

It is a time when much of the worries of the past year are left behind so that a new beginning could be planned for the year ahead.

The water-splashing that usually accompanies a Thai New Year is certainly most appropriate, especially during the hot month.

Step out of your hotel rooms and you would probably be greeted by young and old alike with buckets of water or water guns, especially designed for the occasion. And if you are lucky, then the splashing would be followed by a face make-up with talcum powder and perfume.

'Songkran' (from the Sanskrit word Sankranti, signifying the sun's shift from one zodiac to another) heralding the beginning of the solar year and is the most important festival for the people

April 13 – 15, 2011

of Thailand.

The festival is celebrated over three days, *Ma-hasongkran* on April 13, that marks the end of the old year, *Wan Nao* (April 14) is the day after and April 15 is *Wan Thaloeng Sok* when the New Year begins.

On New Year's Day, families and friends gather to offer prayers to the Buddha, clean temples and houses, offer alms to the monks and sprinkle scented water on elders as a mark of respect and on each other's hands as an act of wishing good luck.

The pouring of water is symbolic of the cleansing of the spirit, mind and body. The water is also supposed to wash away bad luck – so consider yourself blessed if you get drenched.

In recent years, the tradition of sprinkling water has been interpreted by youngsters as a great excuse for a water fight, and it is not uncommon

to have buckets and containers of water thrown at you by teams of merry makers in the backs of trucks as you make your way down the street – particularly in major tourist areas like Bangkok, Phuket, Pattaya, Chiang Mai and Hat Yai.

The people of Thailand work hard in a very hot climate, so it only makes sense that their biggest party is the world's largest water fight accompanied with music, dancing and tons of splashing, as the typically mellow populace explodes into wild celebration.

In Hat Yai, there is something called the Midnight Songkran, where festivities and splashing of water begin at the stroke of midnight on April 12 to cater to the large number of tourists from Malaysia who trooped to the southern Thai city to join in the fun.

This year, the Thai New Year falls on a Wednesday. Make sure you book your accommodation early as you don't want to miss out on this yearly celebration.

Songkran Venue list in Page 2...

Director's Message

SAWATDI Pee Mai or Happy Thai New Year.

Come April 13, Thais nationwide would go back to their hometown to usher in the Thai new year. Of course, it would always be a wet new year as part of the celebration is the Songkran or water festival.

The water festival could not come at a better time as April is usually the beginning of the dry and hot month with temperatures rising all over Thailand. So a drenching by ones friends or even complete strangers is most welcomed.

The festival has become one of the highlights of the Thai tourism calendar with tourists from all over the world joining in the revelry. Malaysians have also found a way to join in the fun, especially in the southern city of Hat Yai, which introduced the Midnight Songkran from a few years ago.

Anglers would also be happy to note that there would be a fishing competition in Koh Chang, Trat Province. Open to both local and foreign fishing enthusiasts, the event is expected to attract hundreds of participants from all over, including Malaysia.

In the meantime, we would also like to announce that the devastation caused by the hot weather conditions last year had resulted in coral bleaching in a number of areas. To rectify the situation, the authorities had closed seven dive sites temporarily in the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Siam.

At the same time, sun and sea worshippers are warned to take the government's warning about jellyfish seriously. Please watch out for warning signs that had been put up in areas where it had been spotted and avoid swimming in those areas.

Those interested in certain specialised travel publications, that is, Local Insight, Memorable Weddings and Meditation in Thailand can get them by writing in at the email given in the story.

TAT Kuala Lumpur had also set up a new website as some of you would have noticed. This is so that we could keep up with the times. And for those who wanted to read past copies of our newsletter, they may do so by visiting the archive section, where past copies are stored.

Locally, as most travelling enthusiasts are well aware, the MATTA International Travel Fair would be held at the Putra World Trade Centre. Don't forget to visit our booths in Hall 1. You would certainly not be disappointed.

Last but not least, we wish to thank all Malaysians who continue to show their undying support for Thailand. In spite of all the problems that we faced last year, your belief and support had helped turn things around, especially in the month of December.

Thank you and we hope to see you soon in Thailand.

MR WIBOON NIMITRWANICH
Director
Malaysia & Brunei

TAT launch mobile application

THE Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has launched the *Amazing Thailand* mobile application to run on iPhone, Blackberry and Android, as well as popular devices such as iPad and iPod Touch.

This underscores TAT's success in promoting tourism through online marketing, and raises the organisation's profile in the digital world, while revealing its digital marketing strategy for 2011.

Mr Suraphon Svetasreni, Governor of TAT said, "We introduced the *Amazing Thailand* mobile application because of our success in promoting tourism online to reach the digital world through digital marketing and social media marketing."

At present, *Amazing Thailand* has more than 120,000 fans on its Facebook fan page, and TAT is currently ranked one of the top three tourism promotion organisations in the world. TAT is also



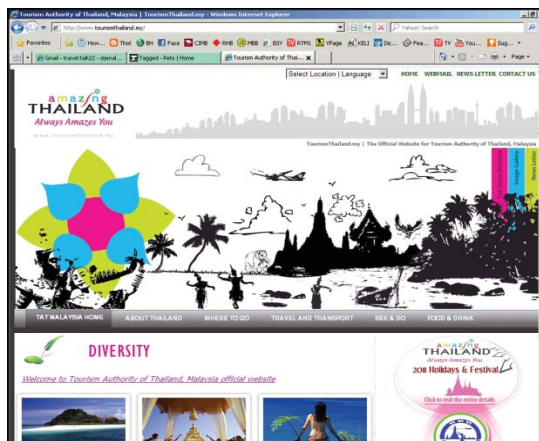
extending its digital reach through Twitter@ThailandFanClub for foreign tourists and @Go2Thailand for Thai travellers.

Mr Suraphon remarked that TAT introduced the *Amazing Thailand* mobile application to develop new channels to promote Thailand's tourism to more than 300 million potential target users worldwide.

This new marketing tool makes the most of the information on TAT's website, expands Thailand's tourist databases, increases the number of fans and followers in social media, and will support new marketing campaigns in the future.

The three key functions of the *Amazing Thailand* mobile application are varied content, geo-localisation search and user experience.

As for the future development of the mobile application, this will target all platforms and devices popular among tourists.



TATKUL's new website

VISIT our new and improved website at www.tourismthailand.my.

The new updated website is a much improved version of our old website with news of the going-ons in and around the country.

Those who would like to read some of our old newsletters can also find them in the archive section of the website.

Songkran Venue

Bangkok	April 13-15	Rattanakosin Island
Hat Yai	Mid-night April 11-April 13	Sanehanusorn Road, Thammanoonvithi Road and Nipatuthit 3 Road
Nakhon Sri Thammarat	April 13-15	At the Phra Isuan and Phra Narai Hall Ratchadamnern Road
Nong Khai	April 13-15	At Wat Pho Chai temple and Hat Chomani beach near the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge that spans the Mekong River
Chon Buri	April 13-15	Beach in Bang Saen, Siricha and Pattaya
Chiang Mai	April 11-15	Tha Phae Gate, Wat Phra Singh
Ayutthaya	April 13-15	Sala Phra Ram & Viharn Phra Mongkol Bophit
Nakhon Ratchasima	April 13-15	Thao Suranari Monument



Country Brand Index: Thailand in top 5

THAILAND ranks fifth out of a total of 25 destinations in the overall ranking for tourism and leads the Top 10 list in Value for Money.

The 2010 Country Brand Index (CBI), an in-depth study that explores the complexity, dynamics and benefits of how nations manifest as brands is presented by FutureBrand in partnership with the BBC New World News at the the World Travel Market in London.

The scores from a number of attributes including attractions, resort and lodging options, food and value for money, determine the overall rankings for the tourism dimension. A very diverse group of countries lead the rankings for tourism in 2010.

Thailand also scores in a few other categories such as Value for Money (1st), Food (4th), Beaches (6th), Nightlife (8th) and Shopping (9th).

Mainly Asian destinations – led by Thailand, followed by Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Indonesia in the Top 10 – are perceived as the strongest performing nations for value for money. New Zealand ranks third for this attribute.

The strength of a country brand is determined in the same way as any other brand. It is measured on levels of awareness, familiarity, preference, consideration, advocacy and active decisions to visit.

However, the most important factors that truly differentiate a nation's



brand are its associations and attributes – the qualities that people think of when they hear a country's name, read or see images of a location, or plan a business or leisure trip.

Country brand strength is a nation's ultimate intangible asset and goes beyond its geographic size, financial performance or levels of awareness.



Two resorts for the price of one

'**RUSTIC CHIC**' is possibly not a description that comes to mind when speaking of Phuket, but then Centara Villas Phuket, perched on a small hill overlooking Karon Beach, is like no other resort hotel on the island.

"All the new villa properties that have been built on Phuket in recent years have tended to feature contemporary styling," says Alexandre Glauser, General Manager of Centara Villas Phuket.

"The villas here are however evocative of rural Thailand, and as they are equipped with the last word in comfort, we feel the term *rural chic* is very appropriate."

Anyone wishing to temporarily desert their ru-

ral hideaway can make the easy journey a short distance along Karon Beach to the newly opened Centara Grand Beach Resort Phuket.

Set on an incline and with their own natural jungle-gardens, each of the 72 spacious villas faces the ocean.

Some of the villas offer a private pool or spa. Direct access to the wide sweep of Karon Beach is literally just steps down from the pool area by coastal pathway.

There is a split-level swimming pool with waterfall, two restaurants, and a sumptuous ocean-front spa.

These facilities ensures that the resort provides a perfect retreat for couples who like their rustic

holidays to have plenty of style.

"This new property is designed for literally everyone, singles, couples, families, groups and meetings," he says. "It is located right on the beach, and has its own water park with water slides.

"We have a dine-around programme so that anyone from Centara Villas Phuket can sign for meals and drinks and enjoy all the facilities at Centara Grand, making this a very outstanding pair of properties at Karon."

For more information and reservations, call Tel: 0 662 101-1234 Ext.1 or email: reservations-@chr.co.th or visit www.centarahotelsresorts.com.

Journalists visit Trang

A group of journalists from various publications had a glimpse of a wedding with a difference during a familiarisation trip to the Trang Underwater Wedding recently.

They joined a group of romantic couples who came from various countries to tie the knot and make their wedding vows several metres underwater off Pak Meng Beach.

The underwater wedding is held every year on Valentine's Day.

During the trip, the group also visited several places of interest in Nakhon Sri Thammarat and Songkhla.



Koh Chang International Fishing Cup



THE east of Thailand will again play host to a fishing competition aimed at promoting conservation and promote tourism.

The 2nd Koh Chang International Sustainable Fishing Cup – Asia from March 11-13, 2011 is aimed at developing fishing game in Trat at par with universal standard; to promote fishing game to be more popular game in society; to raise fund for artificial coral (house for fishes); to promote etiquettes of the anglers and recognise its own prestige; and to let anglers develop camaraderie and unity with one another.

The venue of the competition is the East Gulf of Thailand and the registration date is March 11, 2011, from 10:00 – 12.00 noon.

Those interested can contact Ms. Udomporn at phone number: 084-7782234 and Mr. Chonnabot: 082-4610101. Application must be received by February 28.



ved by February 28.

The fee is 4,000 Baht per team (this fee will be divided into two parts, the first 3,000 Baht will be kept for building artificial coral and the second part of 1,000 Baht will be used for meals during the closing ceremony).

The number of team members in each team should not be less than four and not to be more than eight persons and all participants should prepare their own fishing equipment.

All fishing participants need to provide their own boat and each

fishing participant has to register by him or her own self. No one is allowed to register on another person's behalf.

All fishing participants and each boat captain without exception have to be ready at the registration point for the briefing on the fishing rules and then all boats leave at the same time.

All the competition boats can leave the departure pier only after 4:00pm. The banquet and award ceremony will be held at Ko Wai Pakarang Resort at 12.00pm and 3.00pm on March 13, 2011.

The competition is jointly-organised by the Trat Province, World Sport Fishing Federation-Asia, Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism - Administration (DASTA), Trat Tourism Association, Tourism Authority of Thailand - Trat Office, Trat Provincial Office of Tourism and Sports, Moo Koh Chang National Park, Fisheries Department - Trat Office, Trat Coastal Aquaculture Station, Koh Chang Tai Local Administration, Ko Wai Pakarang Resort, Sea Hunter Tour and International Cultural Education Foundation-ICEF.



FAM trip to Krabi

TRAVEL agents and journalists from the southern states of Malaysia went on an educational trip to Krabi to look at the various tourism products available that would be of interest to their clients.

Krabi is slowly gaining popularity as a weekend getaway among Malaysians who desire a quiet and peaceful holiday destination. It is also ranked among the best places in the world to visit for rock climbing and island hopping.

Krabi is served by daily flights on AirAsia from Kuala Lumpur.

Zeavola Resort introduces Wedding Package

ONCE in a lifetime, make your wedding day unique and unforgettable at Zeavola Resort, the only luxury villa resort on Phi Phi Island.

Zeavola Resort introduces the 'Wedding Package', where you can enjoy your 'Barefoot Dream Wedding' on Phi Phi Island like no other and create wonderful memories to last a lifetime.

The 'Wedding Package' is priced from THB 58,000* for Western Wedding Ceremony and THB 69,000* for 'Thai Wedding Ceremony'.

Prices are inclusive of ceremony set-up and flower decorations, champagne and

wedding cake cutting ceremony, Bridal bouquet, and the Groom's corsage, wedding floral hearts decoration in your villa, a planting of the 'love tree' and releasing of the ceremonial fish and presentation of the Zeavola's marriage certificate.

Wedding Packages are available from now until December 31, 2011.

For more information, please visit www.zeavola.com or contact Tel. 075 627 000 or email reservation@zeavola.com or call Bangkok Sales & Marketing Office Tel. 02 656 0818 or email sales@zinchospitality.com.





BETONG: A town in the mist

SITUATED in the province of Yala at the San-
kalakhiri mountain range and bordering the Ma-
laysian states of Kedah and Perak is the border
town of Betong.

With an area of 1,328 sq. km, its terrain is
mostly mountainous and hilly with forested pla-
teaus. About 1,900 feet above sea level, it is 140
km from Yala and 1,224 km from the capital city
of Bangkok.

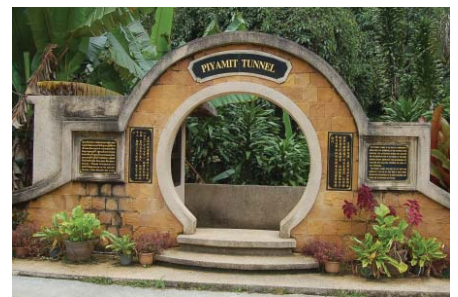
Betong, which means bamboo in Malay, is ad-
ministratively divided into four villages or tam-
bons – Yarom, Aiyerweng, Tanah Merah, Tan
Namtip, and one municipality – the Tambon Be-
tong Municipality.

Climatically speaking, Betong is under the in-
fluence of the Southwest and Northwest mon-
soons. Therefore, there is a lot of rain and the
weather is nice and cool with fog in the morn-
ing. This is perhaps how it got its name – ‘A Town
in the Mist with Beautiful Flowers’.

Betong also lays claim to the world’s largest
mailbox, located at the Clock Tower Intersection
in the town centre. It was built in 1924 by Mr Sa-
Nguan Jirajinda, the former head of Betong Post
and Telegraph Office and the Lord Mayor of
Betong.

The purpose of this mail-box is to distribute
news and to give services in posting and distri-
buting mails for the people of Betong. It is made
of reinforced concrete, with a cylindrical shape
divided into 2 parts – the base and the box. The
circumference of the base is 265cm and that of
the box is 240cm. At a total height of 320cm, it
is at present used as an ordinary mailbox.

Betong is also famous for her wonderful and
gastronomic cuisine at an affordable price. A va-
riety of Thai, Ethnic Chinese & Malay food has
become a favourite to visitors especially from
Malaysia, one of which is the Betong chicken
rice.



Another tourist attraction is the Piyamit Tun-
nel, an underground tunnel built by the Commu-
nists in the 1970s. Used as a hideout during
former times, the tunnel located at the Friend-
ship Village, just outside of Betong town, had
been turned into a tourist attraction. Entrance fee
is 50 Baht.

Meanwhile, located on a foothill in Rattakij
Road is the most gorgeous and biggest stupa of
the south, in Buddhathiwad temple. The Phra Ma-
hathat Chedi Phra Buddha Dhamma Prakat is
both famous with the locals and visitors alike.

Betong is also famous for its Siberian swal-
lows, hundreds of thousands of which migrate
there every year to perch on the city’s rooftops.

Betong has a population of about 50,000, the
majority of its people are farmers. It is multi-
cultural with a population mix being 50 per cent
Muslims, 40 per cent Chinese and 10 per cent
Thais.



Calendar of Events

March	Lim Kor Neo Festival	Pattani
March	Fire Walking Festival	Yala
March	Barred Dove Singing Contest	Narathiwat
April	Saiburi Fishing Competition	Pattani
April	Betong Variety Fair	Yala
April	Luang Pu Thuad Image Bathing Ceremony	Pattani

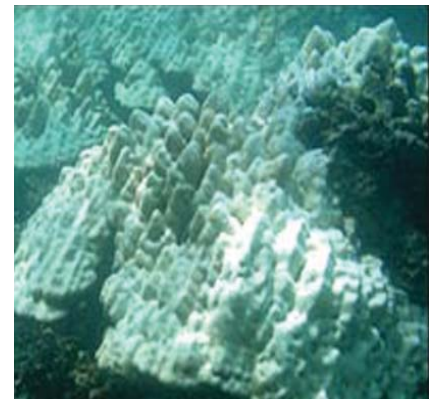


CORAL BLEACHING: 7 diving sites closed

THE National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department (DNP), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, has reported that coral reefs at several sites along Thailand's Andaman coast and in the Gulf of Thailand have been affected by coral bleaching – a phenomenon in which coral loses colour and becomes paler or completely white. Corals that have been exposed to environmental stress for an extended period of time are vulnerable to bleaching.

The key to stopping and reversing the situation is to immediately alleviate the environmental stress to prevent further damage to the affected reefs and create a more favourable environment that allows the coral colonies to recover and regenerate.

Hence to facilitate the speedy recovery and rehabilitation of affected areas, the DNP, announced the temporary closure of several key diving sites in seven marine national parks in January. Coral bleaching at these sites extends over 80 per cent of the areas concerned.



SAFETY WARNING

VISITORS are advised to avoid swimming in the sea where jellyfish are present.

October to May is the season for jellyfish.

Please avoid affected areas where local authorities have posted signs warning of the presence of jellyfish.

Marine National Parks

Diving sites temporarily closed as a result of extensive coral bleaching covering over 80 per cent of the concerned areas

Hat Chao Mai Marine National Park in Trang province	Koh Chueak island
Mu Ko Petra Marine National Park in Satun province	Koh Bu Lone Mai Pai island
Tarutao Marine National Park	The islands of Koh Takieng, Koh Hin Ngam, Koh Rawi, Hat Sai Khao and Koh Dong
Chumphon Marine National Park	Koh Ma Prao
Hat Nopparattara – Mu Ko Phi Phi Marine National Park	Hin Klang
Mu Koh Surin Marine National Park in Phang-nga province	Ao Mae Yai bay, Ao Mangkon bay, Ao Jak bay, Ao Tao bay, Koh Torinla
Mu Koh Similan Marine National Park in Phang-nga province	Ao Fai Wap bay, Koh Payu or East of Eden

NOTE: All other marine national parks remain open and are operating normally.



RarinJinda Wellness Spa opens branch in Phuket

RARINJINDA Wellness Spa has opened in Patong Beach, Phuket adjacent to the back of Jungceylon Shopping Center, the third branch of the RarinJinda Wellness Spa Chain.

Designed to a modern contemporary style, the spa features over 20 treatment rooms with single and double rooms and private suites for couples over 2,000 square meters area in the new four-storey building.

Besides RarinJinda's various signature treatments such as *Shirodhara Treatment* and *Elements of Life*, other range of spa experiences is the After Sun Paradise, which brings together the newly created *Cold Stone Massage* with *Aloe Vera Body Wrap*, designed to relieve the sunburn after a long day at the beach.

For more information, visit <http://www.rarinjinda.com/>

Amazing Thailand Grand Sale 2011 briefing

VISA Thailand did a briefing to selected travel agents in Kuala Lumpur recently to update them on the upcoming Amazing Thailand Grand Sale from June 15-Aug 15, 2011. The travel agents were informed of the various promotions that can be obtained from the various establishments.

The Amazing Thailand Grand Sale, Thailand's annual shopping extravaganza offers world-class shopping, a diverse selection of quality products and services, special discounts of 10-80 per cent.

The discounts and promotional offers are being extended by leading department stores, shopping complexes, King Power Duty Free shops, airlines, hotels, spas, golf courses, online travel agencies, hospitals, jewellery shops and participating retail outlets along designated *Shopping Streets* in Bangkok and at special events held in the popular tourist destinations of Chiang Mai, Phuket, Pattaya, Hua Hin, Koh Samui, Udon



Thani and Hat Yai.

The *Shopping Streets* provide a convenient opportunity to spot great buys in an exotic range of unique crafts and cottage industry products, including exquisitely hand-crafted decorative items and fashion accessories, available in the tradi-

tional as well as contemporary design.

In addition to discount offers from participating establishments, check out the special promotions offered by retail and service outlets displaying the *Thailand Grand Sale* decal. These include free gifts, vouchers and lucky draw prizes.