

High Season - Is It A Myth?

The cost was 500 baht to take a taxi from Patong to the airport. Three days later returning from Bangkok, I was told it was now 550 baht. When I enquired as to why, I was told it was high season. I didn't realise that Patong moved an extra 50 baht away for the high season, so I took a mini-bus instead. Their prices were the same, so maybe Patong hadn't moved to Kata after all.

But what is high season anyway? Usually it is when a destination is in the most demand and services are stretched beyond capacity. Then extra buses, planes and the like have to be enlisted to handle the extra influx. All this cost more and naturally the costs are passed onto the consumer.

Seven years ago when I came to Patong, you couldn't walk on the sidewalk along the beach road in the evening because the tourist traffic was six deep. This was what high season was all

about, a massive influx of tourists for the period over the new year, you couldn't get a hotel room unless you had booked months ahead, and even then that was no guarantee the rooms would be there when you arrived.

But tourism and the patterns of travel have



changed since then. Tourists are now coming from a wider demographic and the

citizens of more countries are travelling as political and economic conditions improve in those countries. They are travelling at different times of the year too. Backpackers of the Seventies and Eighties are now the ones who fill the more upmarket hotels as they "paid their dues" when they were young. But they still shun overtly "tourist" spots and as they have travelled before tend to know a rip-off when they see it. But for all their adventurousness in their youth, they are also influenced by news reports and government warnings about where not to go.

Tourism from within the region has increased markedly over the years and now accounts for over 57% of tourist arrivals to Thailand. These people tend to be flown in, bussed around and back out again inside of the average five-day stay. Europeans stay on average 13 days as they have further to travel and feel as if they should make the most of it.

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