Domestic Tourism May Not Offer Lifeline Needed For Thailand Tourism Recovery

Amidst the political turmoil in Thailand, the domestic tour- ism recovery is getting stalled and delayed, reminding the tour operators that COVID-19 is not the only barrier for recovery. Domestic tourism revival has offered hope for many during this pandemic but for Thailand, this may not be the case, says GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company. Thailand is renowned as one of the most tourism-reliant destinations globally, receiving 39.7 million international visi- tors in 2019. Its domestic tour- ism contribution way sur- passes this, with 113 million domestic trips taking place in 2019. The significance of do- mestic travel cannot be over-stated. Johanna Bonhill-Smith, Travel and Tourism Analyst, GlobalData stated: "GlobalData forecasts international tourism to Thailand will decline by 38 percent in 2020 and domestic will drop by almost 25 percent mainly due to COVID-19. For the travelers' confidence to return, a united front is not only essential for its destination image internationally but also to encourage the domestic flows across the country." A number of Thailand's top ten source markets such as the US and India also remain badly affected by COVID-19. This suggests that the inter- national tourism recovery will be slow for the destination as lack of spending and arrivals from its main contributors may cause further damage in the foreseeable future. Domestic tourism has been declared the 'lifeline' for COVID-19 tourism recovery, followed by regional travel but with protests occurring across Thailand this may not be the case. The demonstrations, which remain silent, have been growing over the past few weeks. If change does not happen, this social unrest could escalate and thereby, jeopardize any domestic tourism plans. Bonhill-Smith commenting on this, stated: "COVID-19 is one of the greatest crises the travel industry has ever faced and it has decimated industry revenues across the supply chain. However, the situation in Thailand reminds that travel and tourism companies should not ignore other circum-stances/events. The pandemic has certainly rattled the travel sector but there are other fac- tors that can still significantly hurt the demand." The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has been active in its response in encouraging the international tourism to the destination to fuel future growth. Tourism Authority of Thailand also shared an an- nouncement from the Office of Insurance Commission (OIC) that

foreign visitors will be able to purchase a COVID-19 insur- ance policy online prior to visiting. A new visitor visa – Special Tourist Visa (STV) was an- nounced and launched in early October 2020 to reboot inbound travel. Bonhill-Smith concluded by stating: “As a tourism reliant destination, certain initiatives have been taken to ignite travel recovery. However, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and other travel and tourism related companies need to tread carefully while marketing amid protests as this may spark further concerns if extravagant tourism campaigns are rolled out when the country is suffering social unrest.”