Siam Legal Phuket Explains What Phuket's Record Tourism Numbers Mean for Long-Term Residents

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Siam Legal Phuket is noting that Phuket's first-half 2026 tourism figures, which show the island attracted nearly 7 million visitors and generated 263 billion baht in revenue between January and June, reflect a structural shift in how foreign nationals are engaging with Thailand rather than simply a strong season for the hospitality sector.

The figures, confirmed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand on July 30, 2026, show an average hotel occupancy rate of 81.85% across the six months. Russia remained Phuket's largest international source market with 574,315 visitors, followed by China with 314,130, the United Kingdom with 123,413, Australia with 123,332, Germany with 98,143, France with 96,712, Kazakhstan with 77,022, Malaysia with 76,445, and South Korea with 69,958. Several international airlines have launched or announced new services to Phuket for the second half of 2026 to sustain this momentum, including ITA Airways increasing direct Rome to Bangkok services to five flights per week in August, and Neos planning charter flights from Milan to Phuket from November 2026 to April 2027.

What the headline numbers do not capture is a quieter but equally significant trend running alongside the

tourism figures. The nationalities that dominate Phuket's visitor data are increasingly the same nationalities that make up Phuket's long-term foreign resident population. Russians, British, Australians, and Germans account for four of the top nine source markets and also represent the dominant demographics among foreign nationals seeking long-term visa arrangements, property ownership, and business registration in Phuket. The island has reached a point where the line between visitor and resident is becoming structurally blurred, with more foreign nationals treating extended stays not as holidays but as trial periods for permanent relocation decisions.

"What we are seeing in practice mirrors what the tourism data shows at a macro level," said Omar O Manee, Attorney at Law at Siam Legal Phuket. "The foreign nationals arriving in Phuket today are more informed, more intentional, and more likely to be evaluating the island as a long-term base rather than a short-term destination. The questions we receive have shifted from how to extend a tourist visa to how to structure a decade-long stay, what the tax implications are, and how to purchase property compliantly. That is a different conversation from the one we were having five years ago." A practical overview of the long-term visa options available to foreign nationals is available in Siam Legal's How to Stay Long-Term in Thailand guide.

For foreign nationals at the point of making that transition from visitor to long-term resident, the visa framework matters considerably. The Thailand Privilege Visa provides multi-year residency ranging from five to twenty years and suits retirees, investors, and globally mobile professionals who do not require local employment authorization. The Long-Term Resident Visa targets high-net-worth individuals, retirees, remote workers, and highly skilled professionals, offering a ten-year visa with accompanying work authorization for qualifying applicants. The Destination Thailand Visa is designed for remote workers and digital nomads seeking extended stays with renewal options. For those with Thai family connections, the Marriage Visa and Retirement Visa remain established pathways for qualifying individuals.

Each option carries compliance obligations, including 90-day reporting, annual extensions where applicable, and tax residency considerations for those spending 180 or more days in Thailand in a calendar year. Thailand's 2024 foreign income tax reforms brought foreign-sourced income remitted into Thailand within the scope of Thai personal income tax for tax residents, making early legal and tax planning an important part of any long-term residency decision. Property acquisition adds a further layer, with foreign freehold ownership limited to condominiums within the 49% foreign quota and direct land ownership prohibited.

Siam Legal Phuket is a full-service law firm providing legal and regulatory advisory services to both foreign and Thai clients, with a focus on property law, corporate structuring, immigration, family law, and litigation.

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Siam Legal Phuket

Siam Legal Phuket provides litigation, immigration, family law, contract drafting, real estate conveyancing, and corporate services. Our lawyers assist foreign clients with effective, cost-efficient legal strategies in Southern Thailand.

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