

Speech by
H.E. Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand
“*Amazing Thailand ...Amazing Value*”
at Royal Lancaster Hotel, London
13 March 2009

Your Excellency Mr. Chumphol Silpa-archa, Minister of Tourism and Sports,
Mrs. Phornsiri Manoharn, Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand,
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be here in the United Kingdom once again and to welcome you all here this afternoon. I believe many of you are already frequent guests of Thailand and would have continuously enjoyed visiting the various destinations and attractions around our country. So there is no need for me to invite you with sun, sea, sand, and all that anymore, though we still have plenty of them for you to enjoy in our land.

2. For many years, tourism has been one of Thailand's most successful industries. Billions of pounds worth of investment have been poured into this industry. In 1960, we attracted 81,000 visitors and earned approximately 7 million pounds. Fast forward almost 50 years later to 2008, when we welcomed 14 million visitors and earned over 10 billion pounds. The previous figure in 1960 looks pale in comparison.

3. But those of you who have frequently visited Thailand and who are Friends of Thailand, and have been following the developments in Thailand would know that the past three years have not been easy for us. Today, however, my message to you today is clear and firm – Thailand is back in business, and the business of tourism is at our forefront. Not only in business, but Thai politics is also back on its proper course, and I can assure you that my government will be guided by the principles of democracy, good governance, transparency, respect for justice, and the rule of law.

4. The greatest challenge facing us and most governments today is the global economic downturn. Following the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the stringent financial measures put in place have enabled us to pull through and strengthen our financial institutions.

5. To revitalise the tourism industry, the government has swiftly mapped out medium and long-term development strategies for our tourism industry and has introduced a stimulus package that includes lower landing fee for aircrafts, waiving tourist visa-fees for three months and allowing 50% free entry to national

parks. We value the high number of British and EU tourists who travel to Thailand – at almost 900,000 British a year.

6. Prior to the introduction of these measures, the latest results from the UK Post Office® Holiday Costs Barometer show that Thailand has “unbeatable value for money”. From this survey, costs in Thailand are under half the price for meals, drinks and other tourist items than the most expensive of the Euro zone destinations, and 41% less than the lowest priced in the Euro zone. I am also pleased to share with you that Thailand has recently been given in Oslo, Norway, the Grand Travel Award 2009 as the Best Tourist Destination for the 6th consecutive year. In addition, Sweden has also given Thailand the same award as the Best Tourist Destination.

7. Indeed, Thailand remains one of the top tourism destinations in the world, with a vibrant history that we have inherited. Thais are indeed service-minded and have that “signature smile” that you all are familiar with. Visiting Thailand, you will be mesmerized by the experience with 3 V’s : value for money, variety, and very Thai, in cultural grace and beauty. We are also focusing our attention on developing Thailand as a medical tourism hub for high-quality, low cost health and medical services. We are also equipped with many world-class facilities to make us a leading meetings, incentives and conventions centre in the world.

8. Thailand’s Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan has put emphasis on the development of the tourism sector as a key engine for our country’s future economic growth. As such, we will continue to look for fresh opportunities to attract more people to Thailand. We will also work to make the development of tourism more beneficial to local communities.

9. Thailand has been at the forefront of tourism development worldwide, with innovative marketing programmes and unique products that are avidly sought out. Travel and tourism remains a primary pillar of our national economic development policy, playing a major role in the preservation of our unique culture and heritage, helping to distribute income nationwide, and creating jobs and opportunities for our people. Our success story in tourism has also illustrated that a strong partnership between the government, industry, society in general, and the local community is a core component to effective planning and managing of natural and cultural assets.

10. So with the challenges of the global economic downturn, my government plans to ensure that Thailand remains a peaceful, stable and hospitable country to visit, with investment and business flowing again and tourism driven forward. It is the Royal Thai Government’s top priority that Thailand remains a friendly and welcoming country, where the safety, security, and well being of international visitors is paramount – be they leisure travellers or investors coming to do business in Thailand.

11. We are pleased to see that the total number of visitor arrivals is on the upswing again. Although the number is lower than it would be for this time of the year, we are aware that travel all over the world has been affected by the ongoing global financial and economic conditions. The fact that visitors are still streaming into the country is a clear testimony to the fact that people still do see Thailand as a safe, friendly, and value-for-money holiday destination. I hope that as long-time friends of Thailand, you will take the time to come and visit to see for yourselves and be witness to the growth in calm and stability.

12. To facilitate tourists in getting around Thailand, the airport rail link project will be completed this year, which will enable tourists to shuttle from the Suvarnabhumi International Airport to Bangkok in no time; the sky train will also offer more routes and destinations. Other incentives for tourists which will be implemented shortly include: free visa fees for three months, a decreased landing charge for aircraft, and 50% free entry for national parks.

13. In the long-term, measures and partnerships with the private sector will take many forms to promote tourism. We have launched campaigns, like the “7 Wonders of Amazing Thailand” and encouraged domestic tourism. We are developing standards for tourism-related businesses and showcasing Thailand as a world-class tourism hub, a centre for international conferences and medical tourism. We have prioritised ecotourism and environmentally-friendly tourism and have worked closely with fellow ASEAN Member Countries to promote “Asia’s Perfect 10 Paradises.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. In my recent travels outside Thailand as Prime Minister, I have confirmed to government and business leaders of the world that the situation in Thailand is now back to normal, back in business, and we will always open our arms to foreign tourists and investors. Since my government took office, the country has indeed seen substantial progress.

15. Indeed, a fortnight ago, I was in Cha-Am and Hua Hin beach resort, just 2 hours away from Bangkok, to host the 14th ASEAN Summit. This historic Summit marked a new beginning for all 10 countries of the ASEAN region, and also helped Thailand restore confidence amongst our foreign friends.

16. For frequent visitors of Thailand, as well as prospective customers, I can reassure you that Thailand can and does offer a great selection of activities and facilities for you to work, as well as for your pleasure, which include a variety of things to do, to see, to taste, to shop, and to enjoy the very Thainess in our culture, at a cost you can happily afford. While visiting the country for work or pleasure, you will experience our hospitality. You can even combine the visit with a medical check-up at one of our world-class hospitals. Simply put, working and visiting Thailand is obviously value for your money.

17. After assuming office as Prime Minister, I mentioned in my first speech that I would pledge to restore Thailand as the land of freedom, land of opportunity, and land of smiles. I know the challenges ahead, but I can tell you that in the past 3 months were a world of difference. I hope that you will visit Thailand again and in no time, see Thailand indeed as the land of freedom, land of opportunity, and land of smiles.

18. Thank you.
