### **Tourism is not a “smoke-free” industry**

Travel is an activity enjoyed and loved by many people globally. However, tourism is not a “smoke-free” industry.

We all love travelling! It's a beautiful process that provides us with opportunities to meet new people, learn new things and experience a range of cultures. Based on the estimation provided by the United Nations [World Tourism Organization](https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284419029) (UNWTO), more than 1.2 billion international visits were recorded in 2016, reaching a seventh consecutive year of above-average growth after the 2009 Financial Crisis. Global spending on trips has supported a tourism industry that contributes more GDP than that of banking, mining, agriculture, and automotive manufacturing. For many island countries and developing states, tourism is one of the major economic pillars. While the economic contribution of tourism is well recognized, the side effect of our travels and their impact on the environment and climate change remains less quantified and acknowledged. Especially, a popular mindset exists believing that tourism is a "smoke-free industry" and pursuing tourist number and consumption is determined as a high priority for many countries

In the old days, when the word industry was mentioned, most people thought of the factories with belching smoke stacks and noisy machineries. Also, the dictionaries are still defining the term “industry” as an economic activity where goods are manufactured in factories. Later after the advent of electric-powered machineries, smoke producing factories become lesser. The term industry still applied to the manufacture of goods. However, the times have changed and the usage of many English words have also evolved to mean other than the usually accepted meanings. One good example is: the use of the word industry, which once applied only to businesses involving factories and machineries for manufacturing solid goods, now become widely used in other sectors too. The most visible and often heard usage is in the tourism sector, which lacked physical substance. People started to metaphorize the tourism as an industry: the smokeless industry.
Today, every country, including the rich and the developed ones, turn to tourism industry as a good source of income, creation of jobs and employments for the people. Some use it as an alternative income source, but many poor and developing nations without valuable natural resources or technological know-how are promoting tourism as the main source of income. However, as there are gains to be made from it, there are many downsides or pitfalls involved in the tourism industry.
Lately, with the opening up, relaxations of travel restrictions and easy availability of the visas, our country is enjoying an unprecedented increase in tourists. Tourists are interested to travel to new destinations, where no foreigner have ever set foot. Our country have many such virgin territories to offer, as we had isolated ourselves from the rest of the world for over half a century. We have many pristine and unspoiled beaches, many ancient cultural edifices, scenic and breath-taking views, multicultural ethnic races, diverse varieties of wildlife, different types of climate ranging from warm and humid climate in the south to cool and pleasant conditions on the highlands in the north. Also our diverse culinary culture, evolved through fusion with the Indian, Chinese, Thai and our own cuisines made our food distinct and attractive to the foreigners, especially the Monhingar—rice noodles in fish broth. These provide us with very good settings to attract tourists who have diverse interests and tastes.
Tourists traveling the world have varied intentions and interests. Some travel for business, some for pleasure, some for sight seeing, some to explore the ecosystems, some to study the culture, customs and traditions of different countries, some to sample the different cuisines from around the world, some for medical treatments and some, but few travel with criminal intentions. Unlike other businesses, where the bright side is making money and the dark side is losing money, the dark side of the tourism has much more to lose than just the financial losses. The most important is the breach of security of the country in this age of criminals and terrorists without borders.
We had already experienced the incidents of ATM scamming by foreign tourists, con-artists from a neighbouring country selling imitation golds and stealing of money from some of our citizens on the incoming flights by tourists from that same country. Such activities have been going on in Thailand for quite sometimes and that country have become a haven for criminals from around the world. Murders, rapes, drug traffickings, human traffickings, child prostitutions, extortions, currency counter-feighting, ATM scamming, faking of travel documents and passports, bombings at busy tourist spots are just some incidents to mention as examples. All these activities poses security risks.
Second important problem is the ignorance of, or disregards to, our culture, customs and traditions, especially the religious ones that could cause ugly incidents. The incident of the foreign tourists wearing foot-wears on the Shwedagon Pagoda, which is much revered by the Buddhists and the recent case of the unplugging of the amplifier at a Buddhist religious building in Mandalay shouldn’t have happened. The foreigner in the later incident may not have any ulterior motive to insult the religion, but his ignorance of our culture, customs and traditions and the ear-spliting blasts of the loudspeakers late in the night might have driven him to the breaking point and led on to such unacceptable behaviourism.
To avoid such ugly incidents in the future the authorities in the tourism industry, both the government and the private sectors should make our cultures, customs and traditions known to the visiting tourists. Brochures explaining the DO and DON’TS in our country should be distributed through the airlines and tour operators at home and abroad. It’s a common practice in most countries.
Those who are involved in that trade should be aware of the adverse consequences of promoting the tourism without proper precautionary measures taken to avert the dangers that could befall upon the country. Thailand have learned a good lesson and now they are trying to tighten their grip on the tourists. They are considering to make the use of tracking phone SIM cards compulsory by the tourists, so that their where abouts can be located at anytime and clamping down on people with tourist visas doing businesses or working in their country. Such actions should also be taken in our country too. We should not let our security or our cultures, customs and traditions to be compromised just to make money out of the tourist industry. They are absolutely not worth it.In the early 1970, the tourism industry was centered mostly on ecotourism, which was largely dependent on the using and developing of the natural and cultural resources. In those days it was considered to be smokeless because it significantly contributed to the “greening” of the tourism, which helped in conserving the enviroment. However, that led to financial losses and thus the tourism industry had to be diversified into other fields and since then it’s becoming less smokeless in the opinions of the environmentalists. Anyhow, whether it may or may not be still as “smokeless” as before, the tourism industry is not without adverse effects.