

## TRAVEL TALK



## The spectre of Phuket looms large over Krabi

***Boom in tourist arrivals and new developments threaten to condemn Krabi to the same fate***

**Globetrotter & team**

I recently went to Krabi and noticed enormous changes there after having not been there for years.

Of course, much is being talked about Krabi these days. Among all destinations in the Andaman, Krabi is now selling like hot cakes. It's said that those fed up with overdeveloped Phuket and Samui are now turning to Krabi for it offers no less dramatic nature but in a more peaceful setting.

"Krabi is growing at a very fast pace. It has the highest growth rate among destinations in the Andaman Sea," admitted Arnont Promnart, Krabi's new provincial governor.

About five years ago, Krabi had only a handful number of tourists. The latest figure revealed that last year the province recorded 1.6 million visitor arrivals and the rate is expected to continue to rise as a result of the ongoing promotion, rise in air traffic and easier access to Krabi.

The figure of tourist arrivals have local authorities beaming with joy. Meanwhile, tourism-related sectors are busy investing in new accommodations and other tourist facilities hoping to cash in on tourist dollars flowing into Krabi.

They are now talking about expanding the airport's capacity. Meanwhile, it's reported that Krabi will soon have direct flights from Singapore and Hong Kong which will surely lead to more tourists flying to Krabi from those destinations.

But the problem is if tourism continues to develop at such a fast pace, how long will Krabi be able to retain its natural charm and tranquility.

Already, some signs of deterioration are beginning to show. An industry insider said Krabi is following the same path of development as other famous tourist destinations in Thailand.

The most serious case now is at Ao Phra Nang, the most beautiful beach in Krabi. A road has been cut running parallel to the beach, leaving only a small section the beach intact. On one side of the road are the lines of shops selling items for tourists just like other spoiled beaches around Thailand. The beach itself has become like a pier for boats and speed boats as a start-off point for tourists wishing to explore islands nearby.

The three major problems facing Ao Phra Nang are noise made by boats and speed boats, the lack of proper water treatment facility and adequate garbage collection system. Fortunately, local authorities admit the problems exist and are trying their best to deal with them.

Apart from Ao Phra Nang, some other attractions are also having problems. Some places such as Ko Phi Phi are so crowded during high season from November to January that there is very little space left for tourists to move around and admire nature.

Some tour operators are definitely happy making money, but the same can't be said of tourists visiting Krabi: not all of them are returning home with fond memories.

However, a high-ranking official said that there's no way to stop tourists from visiting Krabi, so they just let everyone go.

It's good to know that Krabi appeals to so many international tourists but a proper development strategy must be developed to sustain its long-term tourism potential.

For instance, the law should be strictly enforced to protect the natural beauty and environment of Krabi at all costs. Instead of running after money, authorities in charge should rush to prevent its quality tourist attractions from deteriorating any further and not try to create something new at the expense of destroying its old charm.

### Travelling light

One concern most travellers face is how to pack their bags. Some people want to travel light but they just don't know how to go about it, so they end up travelling with a huge suitcase containing unnecessary items.

Most glossy travel and women magazines consistently provide advice on how to keep your kit light like a seasoned traveller, how to prepare your stuff and to pack it tidily and so forth.

I myself don't have this problem though I don't want to say that I'm a pro traveller. For me, it's easy because I just hate to carry too many things. I think it's a burden. Therefore, before I start packing, I take the time to think what I will definitely be needing or wearing on a trip and then tidily arrange them in my suitcase.

I used to be so proud of this ability but recently I began to have some doubts. Is it really good travelling light?

Usually my suitcase is the smallest in the group I am travelling with, smaller than even most of my male companions. Sometimes I even leave extra space for items like souvenirs or travel information.

These days, every time I travel light, people ask why my suitcase is so small and shake their head in disbelief. They might be thinking that I would be wearing the same clothes many times. True, but not all of it.

Normally, my favourite jeans are worn for a maximum of two days in order to avoid others giving me funny looks. But I have also heard of others who wear theirs everyday of the week or even a month. So I'm not that filthy.

Because of this feedback, I may have to reconsider.

Maybe travelling light is not the best policy for everyone to follow. I think it's probably up to individual preference as to how much burden one is prepared to carry.

So there's no need to follow what others have to say as long as you feel comfortable with what you are doing. What I think now is that you'd better be light-hearted when travelling. Good luck on your next foray overseas.