



Siam Legal International Advises on Thailand's Proposed Changes to Visa-Free Entry Policy Amid Security Concerns

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Siam Legal International, a leading full-service law firm in Thailand with offices in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Pattaya, has issued an advisory following recent government discussions to revise Thailand's visa-free entry policy. The proposed changes come as authorities reassess the balance between tourism growth and national security, particularly in light of concerns over misuse of visa exemption privileges.

Thailand's visa-free entry scheme was significantly expanded as part of post-pandemic tourism recovery efforts, increasing eligibility to 93 countries and extending permitted stays from 30 days to 60 days, with an option for a further 30-day extension. The policy has played a key role in reviving international arrivals and supporting the country's tourism-dependent economy. However, authorities are now evaluating whether the extended stay period has created unintended legal and regulatory gaps.

Recent reports highlight that some foreign nationals have used visa-free entry for purposes beyond tourism,

including unauthorized employment, operating businesses without proper licensing, and involvement in illicit activities such as cross-border scams and organized networks. Immigration authorities have also identified recurring patterns of 'visa runs,' where individuals repeatedly exit and re-enter Thailand to prolong their stay without securing the appropriate legal status.

In response, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is considering reducing the visa exemption period back to 30 days. The proposal is intended to tighten entry controls, improve visitor screening, and encourage individuals planning longer stays to transition into appropriate legal pathways rather than relying on repeated short-term entries.

According to Rex Baay, the proposed adjustment reflects a broader policy direction focused on sustainability and compliance rather than purely volume-driven tourism.

'Thailand remains one of the most accessible destinations globally, but accessibility must be balanced with proper regulation,' said Rex Baay. 'We are seeing increased enforcement against individuals who attempt to use visa-free entry as a workaround for long-term stay or employment. A structured immigration pathway is essential for maintaining both legal compliance and the country's long-term positioning.'

Industry reactions to the proposal remain mixed. Some tourism operators believe that reducing the permitted stay will have minimal impact on short-term visitors, who typically remain in Thailand for less than a month. However, concerns have been raised regarding long-stay travelers, particularly retirees and seasonal visitors, who contribute consistent spending over extended periods. Destinations such as Hua Hin and Phuket, which rely heavily on this segment, could experience indirect economic effects if stay durations are shortened.

Conversely, several business associations and enforcement bodies have expressed support for stricter measures. They emphasize the importance of distinguishing between genuine tourists and individuals seeking to work or reside in Thailand without proper authorization. Immigration authorities have reported that more than 20,000 individuals suspected of abusing entry patterns were denied entry since early 2025, underscoring the scale of the issue and the need for more targeted regulation.

Siam Legal International notes that the potential policy shift reinforces the importance of aligning travel intentions with the correct legal framework. Individuals planning extended stays, remote work arrangements, or long-term residence in Thailand should proactively structure their entry strategy to ensure compliance with Thai immigration laws.

'Rather than relying on repeated short-term entries, individuals should align their immigration strategy with their actual activities in Thailand,' Rex Baay added. 'This not only reduces legal risk but also provides greater stability and predictability for those seeking to establish a presence in the country.'

Siam Legal International advises clients on appropriate immigration pathways, handles documentation preparation, and provides long-term compliance planning, helping individuals establish a secure and legally compliant presence in Thailand.

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For more information about Siam Legal International, contact the company here: Siam Legal International
Rex Baay +662 254 8900 info@siam-legal.com 18th Floor, Unit 1806 Two Pacific Place, 142 Sukhumvit Rd, Khlong Toei, Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Siam Legal International

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Website: <https://www.siam-legal.com/>

Email: info@siam-legal.com

Phone: +662 254 8900



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