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INBOUND



Photo: AOTGA

PHUKET TOURISM FINALLY PUTS PRE-COVID LEVELS IN THE PAST

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As Phuket enters the New Year with soaring arrivals, strong spending and renewed confidence from long-haul markets, Phuket Tourist Association President Thaneth Tantipiriyakit told *The Phuket News*: “This is the best high season Phuket has seen in the past five years.”

Mr Thaneth said tourism growth from late 2025 and forecast into the first quarter of 2026 clearly surpasses pre-COVID levels in both visitor numbers and per-capita spending. The cause? He says the growth is driven by an expansion of direct international flights,

particularly from Europe, alongside Phuket’s role as host of multiple world-class events.

“During peak periods we are seeing between 60,000 and 80,000 visitors arriving on the island each day,” Mr Thaneth said. “What is different this time is not just the numbers, but the quality. Tourists are staying longer, spending more and travelling outside the traditional peak months.”

Mr Thaneth stressed that the private sector and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) are now aligned on a strategy that prioritises quality tourism over sheer volume, especially as Phuket continues to face infrastructure constraints.

“We are no longer focused on chasing headline visitor numbers,” he said. “Instead, we are focusing on tourists who stay longer, spend more and travel responsibly. If we bring too many people without fixing infrastructure, it will affect residents even more – and affect Phuket’s long-term position as a premium destination,” he said.

The Phuket Tourist Association estimates that international tourists will account for more than 80% of tourism revenue this year, with total tourism income for 2025 projected at about B550 billion, up roughly 10% from last year, Mr Thaneth noted.

“Looking ahead to 2026, revenue is expected to rise further

to around B605bn,” he added. “International arrivals through Phuket are estimated at 5-6 million people annually, exceeding pre-pandemic levels in both numbers and spending per head.”

BOOM BOOM

A recent report by the TAT supports Mr Thaneth’s optimism. Siriwan Seeharach, Director of the TAT Phuket office, said the October-December period saw more than three new international airlines launch direct flights to Phuket.

These include Paris flights from Air France, Norse Atlantic Airways from Sweden and Norway, and Centrum Air flights from Uzbekistan.

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Quality tourism starts paying

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The added capacity has significantly boosted long-haul markets, particularly Europe, the UK, Germany and the United States, as well as the CIS region, Ms Siriwan explained.

“Direct flights are a key factor,” Ms Siriwan said. “They make Phuket more accessible to high-spending markets and encourage longer stays, especially during the winter season.”

TAT Phuket forecasts that, during the New Year holiday period from Dec 31 to Jan 4, Phuket will welcome more than 325,000 visitor trips, with an average hotel occupancy rate of 80.76% across more than 1,883 hotels. The average length of stay is estimated at 4.01 days, with Thai and foreign visitors making up a ratio of 30:70.

Revenue from Thai tourists alone during the New Year period is expected to exceed B1.14bn, with foreign visitor spending pushing total tourism income into the multi-billion-baht range.

Figures from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MoTS) show that between January and November 2025, Phuket welcomed 12.74 million visitors, generating total tourism revenue of B491.6bn – even before the tourism high season began. While this represents a slight year-on-



A family arrives on a 'Norse Atlantic' flight. Photo: AOT Phuket

year decline due to weaker early-year performance, occupancy rates averaged 76.49%, climbing to nearly 79% in November.

Foreign tourists made up nearly 74% of all visitors, with the top five markets being Russia, China, India, the United Kingdom and Australia. Average daily spending stood at B8,700 per person, with foreign tourists spending an average of B9,100 per day, compared with B5,100 for Thai visitors.

Mr Thaneth said these figures confirm that Phuket's tourism recovery is now structurally different from the pre-COVID era.

“The market structure has clearly changed,” he said. “Russia, India and China remain major markets, but Europe and the Middle East are growing strongly. European tourists book earlier, stay longer and

are travelling even during the green season.”

China, he added, is recovering more slowly at around 30% of pre-pandemic levels, but shows strong potential, with spending per trip now averaging up to four times higher than before, and average stays of around seven nights.

FESTIVALS

Ms Siriwan highlighted that beyond direct flights, major events are playing a crucial role in boosting Phuket's appeal beyond traditional beach tourism.

The Thailand Biennale Phuket 2025, running until Apr 30, 2026, is aiming to position the island as a global destination for contemporary art and culture, she noted.

Art installations are spread across key locations, including Sala 4 Gor Art-

land, Sala Yongwon, Nai Harn Beach and other community spaces, encouraging visitors to explore beyond resort areas, Ms Siriwan said.

New Year celebrations have also drawn large crowds, she added, including ‘Patong Festival 2025: Patong Paradise’, the Kamala Bay New Year Firework Extravaganza, and the annual Phuket Local Products Fair at Saphan Hin.

“These events increase per-capita spending and help distribute income across communities,” Ms Siriwan said. “They also strengthen Phuket's image as more than just a beach destination.”

BURDEN

Despite the positive outlook, both officials and industry leaders caution that infrastructure remains Phuket's biggest constraint.

Mr Thaneth warned that unmanaged growth could undermine the island's long-term competitiveness, particularly in areas such as transport, traffic, waste management and public services.

“Phuket still has infrastructure issues,” he said. “Bringing in unlimited numbers of tourists does not support our goal of becoming a wellness and quality-of-life destination and it affects local residents.”

He praised recent police efforts to improve traffic flow, particularly adjustments along Thepkrasattri Rd, noting that travel times between Phuket Town and the airport during off-peak hours have improved to around 40 minutes.

“These measures are not always convenient for people who are in Phuket, but they are necessary,” he said.

ON THE HORIZON

Nationally, TAT reports that Thailand surpassed 10 million long-haul visitors in 2025, marking a historic record. Europe alone accounted for 7.6 million arrivals, up 12.6%, while the Americas contributed 1.5 million, up 7% year-on-year.

The UK market has been particularly strong, with arrivals exceeding one million visitors for the first time since COVID-19,

and spending averaging B60,000-70,000 per trip, with an average stay of more than 17 nights.

Future growth is expected to be supported by airline developments, including British Airways' decision to operate year-round London-Bangkok flights from March 2026, and Virgin Atlantic's planned direct London-Phuket service during the 2026-27 winter season.

Looking further into 2026, Mr Thaneth said Phuket is also preparing to host six world-class international events in 2026, including the GSTC Global Sustainable Tourism Conference, InterPride World Conference, Global Wellness Summit and major music and cultural festivals.

“These events will attract high-quality tourists and help spread revenue across the island,” Mr Thaneth said. “They reinforce Phuket's position as a world-class destination.”

As Phuket steps into 2026, industry leaders agree the challenge is no longer recovery, but management.

“The demand is there,” Mr Thaneth said. “Now the question is how well we manage it – to protect residents, preserve the environment and ensure Phuket remains a destination people want to return to.”

New Phuket ‘Palad’ arrives from Nong Bua Lamphu

RUNGRUENG THIMABUT formally assumed his duties at the new Phuket Provincial ‘Palad’ (Chief Administrative Officer) last week following an order by the Ministry of Interior issued on Dec 15.

A welcoming ceremony was held at Phuket Provincial Hall on Dec 22, attended by Phuket Vice Governor Adul Chuthong and his wife Ms Khemmawan, Deputy President of the Phuket branch of the Red Cross Society of Thailand.

Also present were former Surat Thani Governor Jetsada Chitrat, together with heads of government agencies, private-sector representatives and members of the public, who offered congratulations and presented flowers.

Mr Rungrueng was accompanied by his wife, Dr Nonthikan Thimabut.

After the ceremony, Mr Rungrueng proceeded to commence his first day in office. Before beginning work, he paid respects to sacred shrines at the new Phuket Provincial Hall, including the Phra Phuttha Thammong Ming Mueang Buddha image and the provincial guardian shrine, to bless his tenure. He then entered his office on the 5th floor, where he was welcomed by officials and staff.

Mr Rungrueng previously served as Provincial Palad in Nong Bua Lamphu. He replaces former Phuket Provincial Palad Teeraphong Chuaychoo, who officially assumed his new post as Phuket Vice Governor on Dec 1.



Photo: PR Phuket

PREVIOUS SCRUTINY

Mr Rungrueng has previously drawn national media attention due to past legal scrutiny and accusations reported by Thai investigative media. In 2022, Isra News Agency reported that he surrendered to police after an arrest warrant was issued in connection with an online gambling and money-laundering

case, and that he was later granted temporary bail. At the time, he denied all allegations.

Isra News also reported that his reputation came under further questioning earlier in 2022 when the Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) seized assets in a separate drug-related case in Narathiwat, during which firearms registered under licences previously issued while he served as district chief were found at a suspect's residence.

Mr Rungrueng publicly defended his actions, explaining that investigations were conducted and licences revoked according to law, and he strongly rejected any wrongdoing. He later pursued legal action against individuals who shared allegations online.

Despite the controversy, Mr Rungrueng's career as a government official has also included several awards relating to drug suppression efforts and public administration achievements during his time working in the southern border provinces.

No further updates on the legal proceedings have been publicly reported at this stage, and Mr Rungrueng has consistently maintained his innocence in relation to all allegations.

With his appointment now formally in effect, Mr Rungrueng will oversee the provincial administration's internal management, coordination between government departments and implementation of Ministry of Interior policy in Phuket.

The Phuket News

MNRE ramps up fight against Eva

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The Phuket branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE Phuket) is preparing to fight a recent lower Administrative Court ruling in Nakhon Sri Thammarat that contradicts an earlier Supreme Administrative Court judgment ordering the demolition of parts of the Eva Beach project in Rawai.

MNRE Phuket Director Natthakrit Phonphet, who is also Chief of MNRE Phuket's EIA committee, confirmed that his office has appealed the latest decision, arguing that the project clearly violated its approved environmental impact assessment plan and relevant building laws.

"The Supreme Administrative Court has already issued a clear order. We cannot accept a new ruling that conflicts with the highest court," Mr Natthakrit said. "The consideration must follow the Supreme Court judgment in the original case."

"The recent ruling says



MNRE Phuket Director Natthakrit Phonphet. Photo: MNRE Phuket

the municipality was not negligent, but that contradicts the Supreme Court's order. This case has already passed two courts before; the outcome was clear," Mr Natthakrit added.

The appeal follows years of legal struggle surrounding the controversial coastal development, which Thailand's Supreme Administrative Court ruled in September 2023 had been built unlawfully.

That final judgment upheld earlier findings that Rawai Municipality failed

in its duty to act against structures that breached height and spacing limits and encroached dangerously close to the shoreline in violation of Phuket's coastal protection rules.

Expert inspections cited in earlier proceedings confirmed that some buildings at the Eva Beach development were constructed just 2.9-4.6 metres from the high-tide line, despite regulations requiring a minimum 50-metre setback. The Supreme Administrative Court found that permits

had been improperly issued and ordered the unlawful structures to be demolished.

However, enforcement of the demolition order has repeatedly stalled as successive buyers of units at the project file new petitions seeking further consideration by the Administrative Court. Officials have previously described these filings as attempts to "buy time through legal procedure", extending what has already become one of Phuket's longest-running development disputes.

In the latest developments, the Nakhon Sri Thammarat Administrative Court issued a ruling which, in effect, softened findings of negligence against local officials, creating uncertainty over how the Supreme Administrative Court's earlier demolition order should now be enforced.

MNRE Phuket has now moved to challenge that ruling, insisting that lower courts cannot contradict the Supreme Court's final judgment.

Mr Natthakrit stressed that MNRE Phuket's appeal seeks to bring the case back into alignment with the Supreme Court's decision. If successful, the responsibility to carry out the demolition would be formally returned to the current Rawai Mayor, who would then be obligated to execute the order.

"This is not a new case. It is a matter of ensuring the existing Supreme Court ruling is respected and enforced," he said.

Meanwhile, current owners of units within the project have petitioned

the court as Third-Party Participants, arguing they were not involved in the original proceedings and only became aware of the demolition risk after purchasing or renting properties. Officials opposing these claims maintain that the demolition order applies to the unlawful structures themselves regardless of changes in ownership.

While the latest ruling has added another legal step to an already complex dispute, MNRE Phuket insists it remains confident in its position and committed to seeing the Supreme Administrative Court's order upheld.

The outcome of the appeal will determine whether demolition can finally proceed or whether the Eva Beach saga will continue to move through Thailand's administrative courts.

For now, the unlawful structures remain standing, as Phuket authorities brace for yet another round of legal hearings in a battle that has already stretched on for more than a decade.

Phuket pushes 'Zero E-Cig' drive

PHUKET IS MOVING ahead with its 'Zero E-Cig' policy as provincial authorities intensify efforts to curb the spread of e-cigarettes, strengthen law enforcement and expand smoke-free public areas to protect both residents and tourists.

The initiative was highlighted at the first meeting of the Phuket Provincial Tobacco Product Control Committee for 2025, held at the Phuket Provincial Public Health Office before the New Year break.

The meeting was chaired by Phuket Deputy Governor Suwit Phansengiam, with committee members and experts in attendance to set policy direction and coordinate measures to systematically control tobacco products across the province.

The meeting endorsed the national 'Thailand: Zero E-Cig' policy for fiscal 2026, which aims to reduce e-cigarette use through increased public awareness of associated health risks, proactive inspections and greater public participation in reporting illegal activities.



Photo: PR Phuket

The Phuket Provincial Public Health Office reported that despite ongoing enforcement, Phuket continues to face challenges in restricting access to tobacco products, particularly among children and youth. As of Nov 11, 2025, the number of licensed tobacco retailers in the province had increased by 5.83%, underscoring continued accessibility concerns.


Officials reviewed current Thai laws relating to e-cigarettes, noting that three main agencies are responsible for control and enforcement. The Ministry of Commerce prohibits the import of e-cigarettes and related equipment; the Committee on the Safety of Goods and Services bans the production, sale and provision of e-cigarette products; while the Customs Department and Royal Thai Police are tasked with taking legal action against smuggling, possession and

illegal trade.

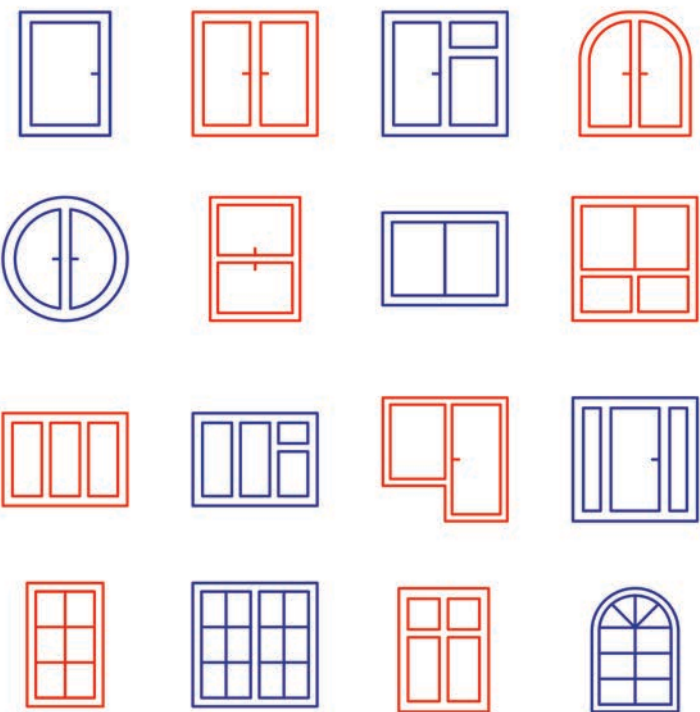
The committee also discussed five key provincial strategies: strengthening provincial-level mechanisms, stricter law enforcement and expansion of smoke-free environments, preventing youth smoking in educational institutions, expanding smoking-cessation services through hospitals, and developing model smoke- and alcohol-free communities.

Government agencies, health facilities, educational institutions, temples, transport hubs, airports and public spaces across Phuket were urged to fully implement smoke-free zones as required by law. The committee also called for cooperation in providing data for the second phase of a provincial study on tobacco control systems, which will be used to further refine policies and future operations.

The Phuket News



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The Phuket News

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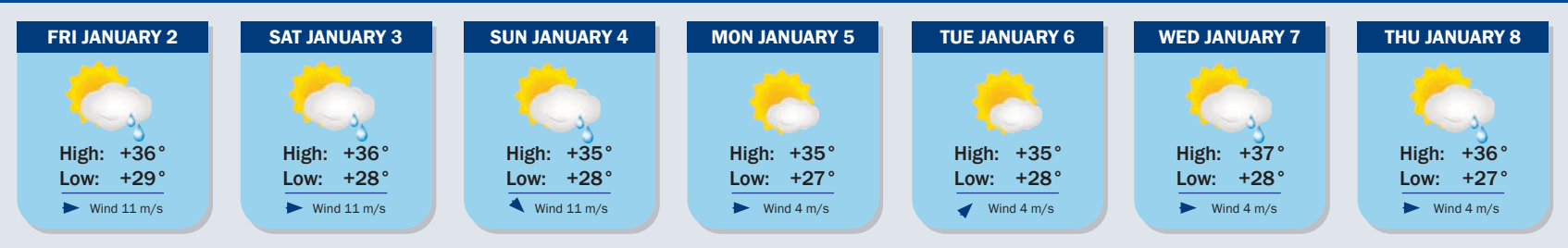
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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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Ranong tightens checks on visa runs

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The Chief of Ranong Immigration Police has clarified the enforcement of Thailand's visa-free entry rules at land border crossings, stressing that foreigners staying on visa-free, visa exemptions and tourist visas are not permitted to accumulate more than 150 days of stay per year, regardless of the entry channel used.

Pol Col Denchai Charoenyut said many foreign visitors misunderstand the regulation, believing the 150-day cap does not apply to land border crossings – a belief he said is incorrect.

Pol Col Denchai's response follows *The Phuket News* receiving reports of confusion at the Ranong Immigration Office last week, where foreigners had arrived in order to conduct a 'visa run' – only to be told that they would not be permitted re-entry.

"The intention is to not allow foreigners to use tourist visas to stay for other reasons," Pol Col Denchai told *The Phuket News*. "When stays exceed 150 days in a year, Immigration considers that longer than what a



Photo: Ranong Immigration

tourist would normally need."

Under current rules, visa-free nationals are granted a stay of up to 60 days per entry, which may be extended by 30 days, for a maximum of 90 days per visit. However, Immigration policy limits the total accumulated stay across multiple entries to no more than 150 days per calendar year, Pol Col Denchai explained.

Pol Col Denchai emphasised that enforcement is particularly strict at land border crossings, such as the Ranong checkpoint, because entry and exit via land routes are easier than through airports.

"Land routes are where people can most easily

obtain visa-free entry," he said. "That is why Immigration must be especially strict at land borders, more so than anywhere else."

Pol Col Denchai said the issue has become more prominent following government measures aimed at stimulating tourism, which he said have coincided with an increase in attempts to misuse visa-free privileges.

"Before, this wasn't a problem," he said. "But with tourism stimulus [visa-free] policies, we've seen more cases of people sneaking in and then working."

He added that enforcement is not intended as a blanket prohibition, but as a safeguard against abuse

of visa-free privileges, particularly in cases where individuals repeatedly re-enter Thailand without clear tourism plans.

"It's not exactly a ban," he said. "But the policy from the government and the Immigration Bureau is clear: whether entering by land, air, or sea, the total stay should not exceed 150 days in a year. That's already longer than what tourists can realistically expect."

Pol Col Denchai said exceptions may be considered in limited circumstances, provided the traveller can clearly demonstrate genuine tourism intentions. These include presenting confirmed flight itineraries, accommodation bookings, a detailed travel plan and sufficient funds for the stay.

"If the documents clearly show they're not here to work, then Immigration should allow entry," he said.

Ranong Immigration has never permitted entries that exceed the 150-day limit without strong supporting evidence, he added. In some cases, travellers have been allowed to cross if they could prove participation in legitimate and costly tour

packages, such as island tours or travel onward to Myanmar.

"If they buy a tour package that costs tens of thousands of baht, it shows they are genuinely travelling," Pol Col Denchai said. "They wouldn't buy it and throw it away."

In contrast, travellers with a history of lengthy stays who arrive without any concrete travel plans may be denied entry.

"If someone comes with no plan at all, has already stayed more than 150 days, and is just trying to get another visa-free entry, we will reconsider and may not allow it," he said.

Foreigners intending to work or study in Thailand should apply for the appropriate visas, such as business or education visas, instead of relying on repeated visa-free entries, he added.

According to Ranong Immigration, the checkpoint handles approximately 400 to 500 entries and exits per day. Of these, about 70% are Myanmar nationals, 20% Thai nationals, and the remaining 10% are other foreign nationals, reflecting Ranong province's typical cross-border movement patterns.

AMLO seizes B1.1bn superyacht in Phuket

THE ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING Office (AMLO) has seized a superyacht in Phuket valued at more than B1.1 billion as part of a major crackdown on assets tied to a vast transnational scam network responsible for more than B9bn in damages.

At 10am on Christmas Day (Dec 25), AMLO Deputy Secretary-General Kamolsit Wongbutnoi, together with AMLO officers and Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) personnel, inspected the vessel at Yacht Haven Marina in Mai Khao.

The operation was carried out under temporary seizure Order No. Y.302/2568, AMLO reported.

The seized vessel is a 2017 'Atlas' leisure yacht, registered in the Cayman Islands and



Photo: AMLO

equipped with full safety and luxury amenities. The yacht is valued at approximately B1.125bn and is among the key assets identified in the case against "Ms Taengthai and others", an extensive online fraud and money-laundering investigation, an AMLO report explained.

AMLO explained that the action follows a Cabinet resolution issued on Oct 21 declaring the suppression of technology-related crimes a

national agenda item. The seizure order for assets linked to the network was formally issued on Dec 22.

The ongoing investigation has already led to the freezing and seizure of assets worth more than B9bn, including another yacht flying a Swiss flag that was temporarily seized on Dec 2. AMLO's financial tracing found that money used to acquire the vessels and other assets originated from online scam operations that relied on layers of proxy accounts, nominee owners and authorised third-party financial operators.

Further inquiries revealed that although the yachts are registered abroad, they are owned by Thai nationals, with some funds linked to Cambodian suspects before being channelled back into Thailand for business activities.

AMLO said the money trail clearly points to the beneficiaries of the criminal proceeds.

The case dates back to 2018 and now involves more than 90 related investigations, with additional assets still being examined. The operation is the result of close cooperation between AMLO and the Central Investigation Bureau, leading to arrest warrants, asset seizures and continued efforts to block criminal proceeds from re-entering the economy.

Under the seizure order, the temporary freeze is valid for up to 90 days. Any party wishing to contest the order must file a written request with the AMLO Secretary-General within 30 days of receiving official notice and provide evidence proving the assets are unrelated to criminal activity, AMLO noted.

The Phuket News

Workshop tackles ‘digital violence’

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Phuket authorities have launched a coordinated push to address violence against children, women and family members in the digital era, highlighting rising domestic violence and the growing impact of technology on family relationships.

The initiative was underscored during a workshop held at the Phuket Administrative Court Office in Phuket Town on Dec 19, chaired by Phuket Vice Governor Suwit Phansengiam under the theme ‘Ending Digital Violence for Women and Girls’. The meeting was attended by Phuket Social Development and Human Security Office Director Sukanya Phokaew and representatives from the Good Shepherd Home Foundation.

Vice Governor Suwit stressed that technology is increasingly linked to weakened family bonds and emotional wellbeing, as reduced face-to-face communication undermines family structures and heightens the risk of conflict and violence.

Funded by the Good Shepherd Foundation Phuket Branch, the workshop brought together 135 participants from local administrative organisations, multidisciplinary



Photo: PR Phuket

teams, schools, state agencies and the private sector. It focused on sharing experiences, strengthening cooperation and building capacity to better respond to domestic violence, particularly cases influenced by digital behaviour.

Ms Sukanya reported that violence against children, women and families remains a serious threat to household and social stability. Citing Department of Women and Family Affairs data, she said Phuket recorded 62 domestic violence cases in fiscal 2025, ranking sixth highest in the country. Anger was the leading trigger, along with alcohol and drug abuse, jealousy, dominance, ongoing conflicts and financial hardship.

Authorities confirmed that all reported victims received assistance, including counselling, welfare protection, hospital

coordination, legal support, home visits and ongoing follow-ups. Prevention mechanisms have also been strengthened through Community Family Development Centres and Subdistrict Domestic Violence Prevention Operations Centres, now operating across all 18 administrative areas of the province. Participants also discussed expanding successful community prevention models to build stronger protection networks for women, children and families across Phuket.

Speaking in connection with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on Nov 25, Minister of Social Development and Human Security Akkhara Prompow reaffirmed the government’s commitment to tackling both physical and digital violence. He warned that rapid technological advances risk fostering behaviour

that undermines dignity and social responsibility, as people of all ages gain constant access to online information without sufficient awareness or maturity.

Violence inflicts emotional stress and long-term psychological harm, while also affecting income stability, increasing debt burdens and impacting broader social conditions, he said.

To address these challenges, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) has rolled out its ‘MSDHS Close to You’ policy, aimed at delivering practical results under the goal ‘Reduce Expenses, Generate Income, Restart Life.’ Restart Centres provide counselling and support to vulnerable groups and people facing social difficulties.

The government is also expanding the use of digital technology and artificial intelligence across state agencies to improve service efficiency, accessibility and transparency, confirmed Minister attached to the Prime Minister’s Office Paradorn Prisanantakul.

Marking the same international awareness day, Mr Paradorn said violence against women and children – including sexual harassment – remains a serious national concern. The aim, he added, is to ensure Thai

society “does not remain indifferent”, while improving inter-agency coordination so victims receive timely protection and assistance.

A key development is the upgraded digital system operated by the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the MSDHS, which integrates data and operations across social welfare agencies. The platform provides round-the-clock support for vulnerable groups and recently received the Digital Government Awards 2025 in the policy and coordination category from the Digital Government Development Agency.

In the past, many people needing assistance did not know which office to contact and faced fragmented systems, repeated questioning and difficulty travelling to government offices. Lack of case tracking also caused anxiety over whether help would arrive in time.

The enhanced MSDHS platform is designed to address these problems. It includes the 1300 hotline linking callers to multidisciplinary response teams; a shared database to reduce duplicated information; emergency reporting via the MSDHS SMART system and ESS Help Me channel on LINE covering five crisis categories.

Attempted murder charge for drunkenly shooting wife

THALANG POLICE HAVE CHARGED a 41-year-old man with attempted murder after he fired gunshots while intoxicated, with one bullet striking his wife in the shoulder at their house near Ton Sai Waterfall.

Police said the incident, on Dec 21, was first reported at about 1:50pm, when the couple’s son, Wichayut Pothisri, contacted officers to report that his father, Tatpong Pothisri, had become drunk and fired several shots into the air at their home near the popular waterfall located behind Wat Phra Thong.

Police and security support units rushed to the scene, where they apprehended Tatpong.

His wife, 35-year-old Wipaporn Janthawong, was taken to Thalang Hospital with a gunshot wound to her right shoulder, which police said exited from the front of her body. Luckily, the bullet did not hit any vital organs.

She told officers that after being informed her husband had fired three shots into the air, she went to collect some belongings. While driving away, she heard another gunshot and realised she had been shot. Neighbours then helped take her to hospital.

Police conducted a search at the house linked to the incident and reported seizing a 9mm handgun, two homemade firearms and a large quantity of assorted



Photo: Thalang Police

ammunition, including 9mm, .38-calibre, 11mm and 12-gauge rounds. Officers said the 9mm handgun was found on the suspect’s person at the time of arrest.

A background check revealed that the suspect had previously faced legal action in another assault case. Police said he had no legal permit to own firearms and claimed he had bought the weapons online. He allegedly told officers that he acted due to stress and ongoing marital conflict. The couple have two children and have been married for 19 years.

Thalang Police confirmed Tatpong has been charged with drunk and disorderly conduct, discharging a firearm in public, illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, and attempted murder. He remains in custody as further legal proceedings continue.

Eakkapop Thongtub

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Phuket luxury property market surges

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Phuket's luxury residential property market has entered a period of exceptional performance, underpinned by record tourism revenue, sustained international buyer demand and strong absorption across high-end segments, according to new research released by AYANA Phuket and Colliers Thailand.

The 71-page study, analysing 269 villa projects and 56 condominium developments across the island, found that Phuket's residential sector is benefiting from demand fundamentals that have strengthened well beyond pre-pandemic levels, with branded residences and compact, investment-grade units delivering standout results.

Phuket generated B497 billion in tourism revenue in 2024, the highest in a decade and a 28.2% increase year-on-year. Average tourist spending rose to B51,428 per trip, exceeding 2019 levels, with accommodation accounting for nearly half of visitor expenditure, up from 38%

before the pandemic.

"The scale and quality of tourism demand we are seeing in Phuket is directly translating into residential demand," said Phattarachai Tawewong, Director of Research Services at Colliers Thailand.

"This is being reinforced by continued interest from international buyers across Russian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Indian and Western European markets."

Bang Tao emerged as the island's dominant residential hotspot, accounting for more than 40% of new condominium supply launched between Q1 2024 and Q2 2025. During the

period, 7,993 of the 18,767 new condominium units introduced to the market were located in the Bang Tao area, positioning it as one of Southeast Asia's most active luxury residential zones.

The research highlighted a clear market shift toward smaller, investment-grade units with strong resale and rental appeal. One-bedroom units sized between 31 and 50 square metres represented 57% of total supply, or 9,561 units, while recording the lowest levels of remaining inventory. Studio units demonstrated the fastest absorption across all segments.

High-end condominiums priced between B10 million and B20 million achieved a take-up rate of 76.4%, indicating continued depth of demand despite a record volume of new supply entering the market in 2024.

Branded residences were identified as the strongest-performing product category. Across the Q1 2024 to Q2 2025 period, branded projects recorded average price appreciation of 18.52%, more than double the 9.08% achieved by traditional condominiums. Top-performing branded developments delivered gains of up to 38%, while leading traditional projects

achieved appreciation of up to 19%.

Low-density developments with fewer than five units per floor commanded price premiums of approximately 10-12%, with branded residences averaging B180,000 to B210,000 per square metre, compared with B140,000 to B176,000 per square metre for non-branded projects.

"What stands out is the sustainability of demand," said AYANA Board Director Jimmy Yan. "Buyer composition, product quality and location are aligning in a way that supports long-term value creation rather than short-term speculative activity."

From a supply perspective, 2024 marked a peak year, with 14,718 condominium units and 1,942 villas launched, representing a combined project value of B124bn. The market is expected to moderate in 2025, with approximately 8,000 to 10,000 new condominium units forecast, while annual project values are expected to remain stable at B70-80bn.

The villa market conti-

nued to show resilience, with 4,903 units across 269 projects recorded as of Q2 2025. Total demand stood at 2,597 units, with the sub-B15mn segment showing the highest monthly absorption rate at 6.7%, followed by the B70-100m luxury segment.

While demand fundamentals remain the primary driver of market performance, the report noted that Phuket's long-term outlook is further supported by a B148bn infrastructure programme scheduled through to 2033.

Key projects include new expressway links, port upgrades, a major sports and entertainment complex and expansion of Phuket International Airport, all of which are expected to enhance accessibility and reinforce the island's position as a regional luxury residential destination.

The research concludes that Phuket's property market is transitioning into a more mature growth phase, led by tourism-driven demand, product differentiation and strong international buyer confidence.

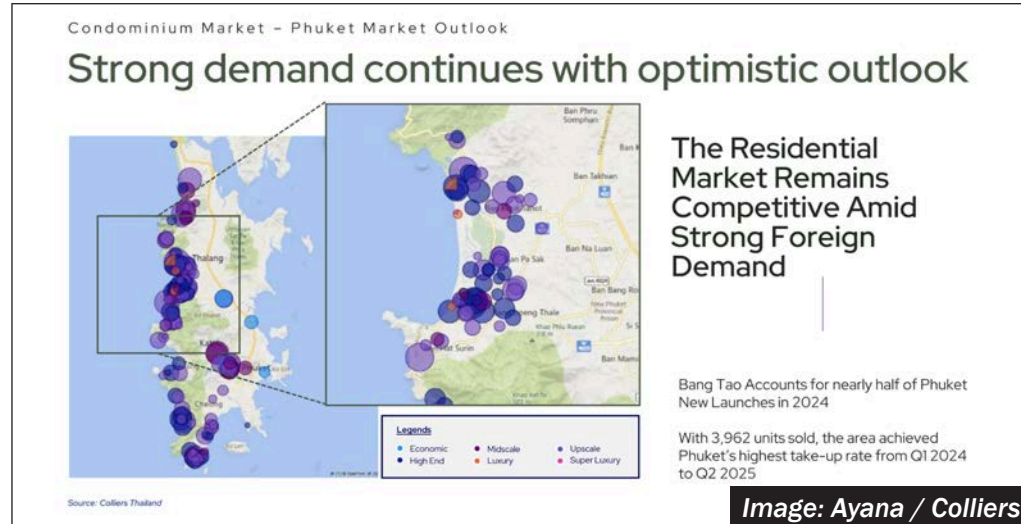


Image: Ayana / Colliers

AI advances highlighted as crucial for industry in 2026

THE RISE OF AGENTIC artificial intelligence (AI), multi-agent systems, and the evolving demands for security and privacy are the keys to success for Thailand's AI startups, according to local industry pioneers.

A push for AI sustainability is also expected given the vast global market opportunities for startups.

"By 2026, the AI industry is expected to advance towards more agentic, autonomous, and multi-functional AI systems," Sathapon Patanakuha, chief executive of Guardian AI Lab, an AI-driven solutions firm, said at a seminar on the 2026 outlook held by the AI Entrepreneur Association of Thailand.

Agentic AI refers to autonomous agents that can run tasks and communicate through shared protocols within systems.

Mr Sathapon said the AI industry is moving towards multi-agent, interoperable networks that operate seamlessly across systems.

Agentic commerce is an example, with AI enabling progressively automated end-to-end shopping journeys,



Image: Bangkok Post

with full autonomy expected to emerge over time. This represents a new model of e-commerce and marks a major shift from traditional "click-based" shopping to AI-driven autonomous purchasing.

Moreover, when agents communicate with other agents, the interactions become more complex and can introduce new security concerns.

"We need to identify whether an agent is genuine – what we might call 'Know Your Agent' – and we should start seeing this emerge next year," he said.

Winn Voravuthikunchai, chief executive of Botnoi Group, said the company's core mission is to address societal challenges in areas where human experts are in

short supply – such as nursing and teaching – by creating AI agents that can help fill those gaps.

He said chatbots, voicebots, digital human kiosks and humanoid robots are simply different interface formats for the same underlying AI agents.

Botnoi's technology has evolved from a friendly, conversational chatbot into professional-grade agents, including an AI nurse designed for patient screening.

Mr Winn said AI should augment human work, not replace it. The future lies in multi-purpose agents capable of performing diverse tasks, he said.

The return on investment is already visible, particularly in

healthcare where AI agents help reduce the workload of nurses by screening patients, an impact that is both measurable and meaningful, said Mr Winn.

Future agents must be equipped with tools and able to collaborate with one another through agent-to-agent interaction. This orchestration of multiple agents will be a major trend next year, he said.

Mr Winn also highlighted the importance of building platforms that allow non-technical users, such as sales and marketing teams, to create their own AI agents to boost individual productivity.

This vision is driving the next move to empower users to build agents for marketing, sales, and other business functions, he said.

This influence led to the development of the Botnoi.ai platform, designed to help businesses enhance employee productivity, said Mr Winn.

AI FOR SUSTAINABILITY
Warodom Khamphanchai, chief executive of AltoTech Global, an AI-driven building efficiency tech company, said energy optimisation is emerging as one of the strongest and most sustained opportunities in the market,

driven by global commitments to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

AltoTech's core technology focuses on creating "self-driving buildings" capable of automatically adjusting lighting, cooling and power consumption to maximise energy savings.

"The total electricity cost across Thailand is 700 billion baht. Saving just 10% amounts to 70 billion," he said, adding this optimisation is highly complex, relying on multi-agent systems.

Kla Tangsuwan, chief executive of Wisersight, warned that rising AI investment resembles past bubbles in the e-commerce business and affiliate marketing, urging companies to be more selective and disciplined in how they allocate capital.

AI startups and businesses must focus on use cases that can generate revenue, reduce costs, or improve productivity.

Mr Kla added Thailand must think beyond its borders, as domestic capital alone is insufficient to support long-term AI growth.

"Attracting foreign investment will be essential, especially as AI startups tend to secure higher valuations in global markets," he said. *Bangkok Post*

Thaksin's nephew up for PM

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Thaksin Shinawatra's nephew will top the Pheu Thai Party's list of candidates for the prime ministership as the party fights to return to power at the coming general election.

Party leader Julapun Amornvivat said last month that Pheu Thai will propose Yodchanan Wongsawat as its first choice for prime minister if the party wins the Feb 8 polls.

There will be two other candidates also on the list: Mr Julapun himself and veteran politician Suriya Juangroongruangkit.

"From internal party discussions it is clear that the most suitable person to propose for prime minister for the Pheu Thai Party is Mr Yodchanan," Mr Julapun said at a media briefing on Dec 16 after the official introduction of the three candidates.

The party leader praised Mr Yodchanan for his leadership ability and knowledge of new technologies needed in running the country if Pheu Thai is returned to government.

Pheu Thai is struggling to redeem itself after falling from grace over the controversial phone conversation between then-prime minister and Thaksin's daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra and Cambodian senate president Hun Sen in June, after the outbreak of border hostilities.



Yodchanan. Photo: Pheu Thai Party Facebook

Mr Yodchanan, 46, has been with Thaksin since he founded the original Thai Rak Thai Party, since dissolved and subsequently reformed under several names, the latest being Pheu Thai. He is a son of former prime minister Somchai Wongsawat and Yaowapha, Thaksin's sister.

The youngest candidate of the three, he has a background in engineering with expertise in technology.

As for the other two candidates, Mr Julapun, 50, is a former deputy finance minister with experience in economic management, and Mr Suriya, 71, has served in several ministerial positions, but mainly at the Transport Ministry, and is currently in charge of the party's preparations for the coming general election.

Mr Yodchanan said he will bring voters back to Pheu Thai as they get to know him better, and how he can best

serve them, during election campaigning.

At the press conference, Mr Yodchanan was centre-stage, flanked by Mr Julapun and Mr Suriya. "His position here (on stage) speaks for itself," the party leader said.

Pheu Thai said in a statement posted later on social media that its three candidates were the answer to the problems facing the country.

"The profiles of the three prime ministerial candidates of the Pheu Thai Party comprehensively answer all challenges for the country to 'step forward' for 'the reengineering of Thailand'," the party said in a Facebook post.

During the presentation, Mr Yodchanan credited Thaksin with leading Thailand onto the global stage. He vowed to follow in his footsteps, to restore the party.

Rayong oil spill lawsuit dismissed

BANGKOK

A LAWSUIT SEEKING environmental rehabilitation and B5 billion in compensation from Star Petroleum Refining Plc and PTT Global Chemical Plc over a crude oil spill that occurred in waters off Rayong in early 2022 has been dismissed.

The Rayong Provincial Court dismissed the lawsuit on Dec 22 that was filed by a small-scale fisheries association in Rayong and 832 fishermen.

The court ruled that the plaintiffs lacked legal standing to demand court-ordered environmental rehabilitation and said the evidence failed to prove the spill caused losses to marine resources or income damage as claimed.

The plaintiffs had asked the court to compel the defendants to restore marine ecosystems, breeding grounds, and coastal environments, while also seeking substantial damages under the Environmental Quality Promotion and Preservation Act 1992.



Photo: AFP

However, the court said no law empowered the plaintiffs to bring such a claim in this form, though it noted they retain the right to appeal.

On whether the defendants were liable for individual damage claims, the court acknowledged that Star Petroleum Refining was in possession of hazardous crude oil and could be held responsible if it was proven that the spill harmed the fishermen's livelihoods.

However, the court found no convincing evidence to support the plaintiffs' assertions. It said there was no reliable data showing reductions in marine species, income losses, or tourism decline attributable to the spill.

Bangkok Post

Bangkok world's most visited city in 2025

BANGKOK

BANGKOK HAS CLINCHED THE title of the world's most visited city in 2025, welcoming 30.3 million international tourists, according to Euromonitor International's latest "Top 100 City Destinations Index."

The government hailed the achievement as a milestone for Thailand's tourism sector and a testament to the country's global appeal.

Deputy Prime Minister's Office Spokesperson Aiyarin Panrit said the ranking underscores the success of Thailand's tourism promotion policies and highlights the warmth and hospitality of Thai people. "This recognition reflects our commitment to making Thailand a premier destination for travellers worldwide," Aiyarin noted.

The accolade comes as Thailand's aviation sector reports robust growth. Aeronautical Radio of Thailand Ltd (Aerothai) revealed that total flight volume for the 2025 fiscal year, spanning September 2024 to October 2025, reached 904,796 flights, with traffic peaking during the year-end festive season.

December alone recorded 84,543 flights, and January 2026 is projected to climb further to 87,835 flights. Looking ahead, Aerothai forecasts total flight movements for fiscal year 2026 at 928,165, comprising 473,364 interna-



The Temple of Dawn. Photo: Bangkok Post

tional flights, 343,422 domestic flights, and 111,379 overflights. This represents an average of 2,543 flights per day – a 3% increase from the previous year.

Authorities are bracing for a surge during the upcoming New Year holiday period from Dec 29 to Jan 7, when flight volumes are expected to hit 27,632, averaging 2,763 flights daily. Officials have been instructed to implement comprehensive measures to ensure safety, smooth air traffic management, and minimal delays during the peak travel season.

Industry analysts say Bangkok's top ranking reflects strong recovery in global travel demand and Thailand's strategic efforts to diversify tourism offerings. With cultural landmarks like the Temple of Dawn shimmering against pastel skies and vibrant city life drawing visitors from every corner of the globe, Bangkok continues to cement its status as a world-class destination. Bangkok Post



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Todd cycling across Europe last year. Fitness blends naturally into travel, especially when the mode of transport is a bicycle. Photo: Todd Miller

One New Year's Resolution That Can Transform Your Life



GLOBETROTTER

Todd Miller

Every year as the calendar resets, many engage in the same global ritual: the New Year's resolution. We pledge to exercise more, drink less, eat better, sleep earlier, declutter and finally become who we want to be. And by February, most of these promises quietly disappear.

But there is one resolution – a single, powerful, life-altering commitment – that can deliver many of the benefits we chase, often without exertion. It's a resolution that enhances physical health, improves mental well-being, deepens relationships, expands worldviews, and increases our sense of meaning and vitality.

That resolution is simple: Travel more. Travel is a shortcut that bundles many of the traditional "happiness

habits" into one seamless experience. And unlike going to the gym or counting calories, travel is inherently enjoyable, intrinsically rewarding and highly memorable. Here's 10 reasons why travel deserves to be your New Year's resolution for 2026.

1. Travel Makes You Move (Without Trying)

You can vow to exercise more this year – or you can book a trip and let fitness blend naturally into your day. When we travel, we're mobile. We climb stairs, explore museums, wander markets, hike to viewpoints, swim, ride bicycles and wander through side streets simply because they call to us.

Exercise becomes effortless because it's woven into discovery.

2. Wonder, Curiosity, and Learning Reignite the Mind

One of the overlooked keys to wellbeing is awe. When you stand before an ancient temple, feel the spray of a water-

fall, or watch a city come alive at dawn, your mind lights up. Travel restores childlike wonder and stimulates imagination.

It also opens the door to learning new skills – navigating a foreign metro, ordering food in another language, taking a cooking class, or even figuring out how to cross a chaotic street. These small challenges strengthen confidence and keep the brain agile.

Research consistently shows that learning a new language – particularly through immersion – delays cognitive decline and dementia. Even modest exposure helps. Travel nudges you to pick up words, listen actively and engage your brain in new patterns. Far from being frivolous, travel is brain-care.

3. A Boost to Relationships and Human Connection

Travel deepens relationships in a way daily routines rarely do. Couples reconnect. Friends bond through shared adventure. Solo travellers form unexpected friendships across cultures. The novelty of new surroundings encourages meaningful conversations and shared decision-making – two of the most reliable predictors of relationship satisfaction.

4. Travel Makes You Feel Alive

There's a particular energy we feel when waking up somewhere new. Colours seem brighter. Food tastes better. Time feels richer. Our senses sharpen and the world feels fresh again. That feeling – vitality – is one of the core components of long-term wellbeing.

5. The Joy Begins Before You Even Pack

One of travel's most underrated benefits is anticipation. Research shows that planning a trip can elevate happiness for weeks or even months before departure. Choosing destinations, imagining experiences and simply having something to look forward to provides an emotional uplift that few other activities can match.

6. Travel Expands Time

As adults, our years often feel compressed and indistinguishable. But travel stretches time. A week abroad often feels longer than a month at home because the brain forms richer, more detailed memories when days are filled with novelty. Travel makes life feel fuller – literally adding to our subjective sense of time.

7. The Benefits Continue Long After You Return

Travel is the gift that keeps giving. Savouring the experience – through photos, journaling, discussing it with friends or reliving moments months later – creates repeated waves of joy. These memories become resilience



Travel boosts relationships and human connection, as Todd's Natai Beach neighbour and travel companion Louisa Wong recently experienced in Tunisia. Photo: Todd Miller

tools. On difficult days, recalling a sunrise over desert dunes or a meal shared with strangers can lift your spirits instantly.

8. Gratitude and Appreciation Deepen

Travel makes us appreciate home more. After witnessing how others live – their challenges, their creativity, their culture – we return with a renewed sense of gratitude for the lifestyle, security, freedom, and opportunities we enjoy.

9. Travel May Even Help You Live Longer

Studies link travel with lower stress, improved cardiovascular health, and the adoption of healthier routines. Long-term wellbeing is shaped not only by diet and exercise but by emotional richness, social connection, and mental stimulation – the very essence of travel.

10. Transformation Is Real – and Common

According to a recent American Express survey, 70% of travellers now say they travel primarily for mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. Travel is widely recognised as a catalyst for transformation. It shifts worldviews, challenges assumptions, broadens empathy, and often resets our internal compass.

Make 2026 the Year of Going Somewhere New

If you pick only one New Year's resolution this year, choose travel. It doesn't have to be far or expensive. It can be a weekend trip across Thailand, an exploration of a neighbouring country, or the major journey you've always dreamed of. Travel improves body, mind, relationships, and soul – without the pressure or discipline traditional resolutions require.

Travel works organically, and powerfully. That's a new year's resolution worth keeping.

Adventurer Todd Miller has explored more than 120 countries. He authored the best-seller *ENRICH: Create Wealth in Time, Money, and Meaning*. www.ToddMiller.asia

The February/March 2026 hard copy issue goes to print very soon

Distributed in resorts/hotels lobbies, in a high number of restaurants and coffee shops, plus inserted in one issue of *The Phuket News* each month, it is a great way to Talk to Phuket.

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Laguna Phuket embraces regenerative transformation



The innovative initiative contributes to a sustainable future, strengthening the group's commitment to regenerative transformation and environmental responsibility. Photo: Laguna Phuket

Press Release

Laguna Phuket has made a significant advancement in its sustainability efforts by launching eight new fully electric shuttles, featuring the Rava Beach Club's identity. This initiative coincides with the grand opening of the Rava Beach Club and represents a significant step forward in promoting low-carbon mobility and responsible tourism at Asia's premier integrated resort destination.

Supplied by Anuphas NEX, the shuttles operate entirely on electric power and feature 11 premium forward-facing seats, as well as onboard speakers, providing guests with a seamless and comfortable transport experience throughout the journey.

The EV fleet is an integral part of Laguna Phuket's comprehensive sus-

tainability roadmap, which encompasses a phased transition of its transportation network to electric vehicles and the expansion of EV charging infrastructure across the integrated resort destination by 2026. Together, these initiatives reinforce Laguna Phuket's commitment to reducing carbon emissions and enhancing the overall guest experience with modern, environmentally responsible mobility solutions.

"The arrival of the new EVs represents a significant milestone in our journey toward a more sustainable future," said Paul Wilson, Managing Director, Laguna Phuket.

"As we prepare for the grand opening of Rava Beach Club, these electric vehicles not only enhance the guest experience but also underscore Laguna Phuket's commitment to reducing carbon emissions and setting new standards for responsible travel in the region.

"We are excited to partner with Anuphas NEX to bring this innovative fleet to life, and we look forward to expanding our electric fleet and charging infrastructure throughout Laguna Phuket."

A Greener Destination: 2.5km Regenerative Transformation for 2025-2026

In addition to its new EV fleet, Laguna Phuket is rolling out a multi-year regenerative placemaking plan aimed at transforming 2.5 kilometres of the estate into interconnected parks, cultural installations, wellness spaces and biodiverse landscapes. This initiative embodies Laguna Phuket's long-term vision of integrating sustainability, culture, community and wellbeing into one cohesive guest experience.

Designed to enhance nature-led experiences and outdoor immersion, this transformation represents one of the region's most significant landscape-led

destinations. It invites travellers to connect deeply with the environment and heritage of Phuket.

A Destination Evolving with Purpose

With sustainable electric mobility now integrated into its guest experience, and a regenerative landscape framework unfolding across the estate, Laguna Phuket is shaping a refreshed, future-focused innovative model of responsible travel.

Through phased openings in 2025-2026, the destination will offer an elevated, nature-rich experience that reflects a new era of integrated resort travel – one rooted in wellbeing, ecology, culture and supported by a cleaner, climate-conscious transportation network.

RAVA Beach Club, 109 Moo 4 Cherng Talay, Thalang, Phuket, Thailand, Phuket. Tel: 076 372 456 / Email: ravabeachclub@banyanree.com



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POP QUIZ

1. In which European city was the first organised marathon held?
2. What real person has been played most often in films?
3. In Japan what colour car is reserved for the royal family only?
4. What do you give on the third wedding anniversary?
5. What is the second most common international crime?

Answers below, centre

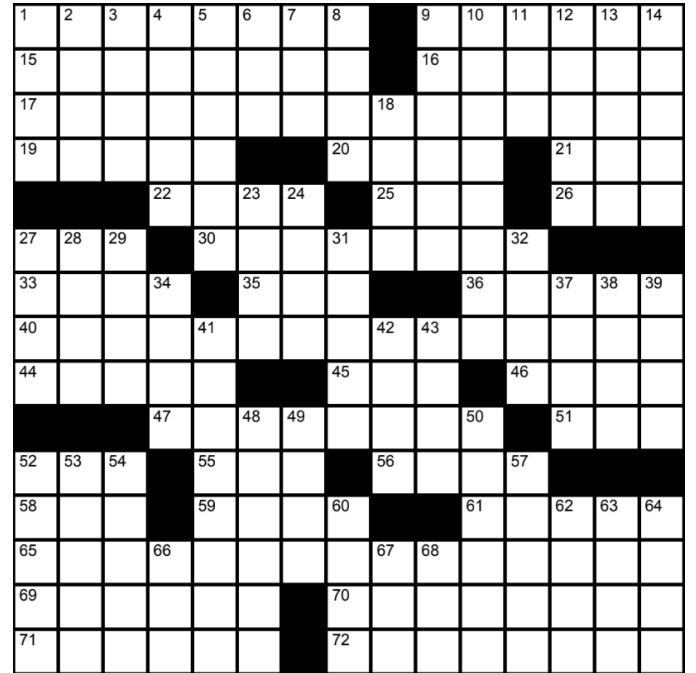
SUDOKU

Easy

2			4	9			7
	6			5		1	2
4		8		2	6		3
		4		3	1	9	
3							1
		5	2	9		8	
9		3	7			1	4
6	1		5				2
5			9	3			8

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
1. Antis
 9. Becomes limp
 15. Scene in a Western
 16. Body of work
 17. Easily achieved goals
 19. Early stage
 20. Road ___
 21. Moldovan money
 22. It's outstanding
 25. Lady's man
 26. Unproven ability
 27. Your, of yore
 30. Preference
 33. No Mr. Nice Guy
 35. ___ borer
 36. Observe Yom Kippur
 40. Showing contrition
 44. Gallic goodbye
 45. Neighbor of a Vietnamese
 46. Suburban sight
 47. Collapsible canopy
 51. The Pointer Sisters' "___ So Shy"
 52. A Welsh valley
 55. Georgian, for one
 56. Unbending
 58. "So that's your game!"
 59. Starting point for riches
- Down**
1. Home of Vigeland Park
 2. Unit of loudness
 3. Some captives
 4. Expressed admiration
 5. Indicated by a symbol
 6. Quite a while
 7. Prayer ___
 8. ___ crazy
 9. Pooch
 10. Direction to a source for help
 11. "___ Town"
 12. Fertilization site
 13. Jimmies
 14. Arrangement
 18. Car until 1957
 23. Act the blowhard
 24. Rear
 27. "___-Team"
 28. Top dog
 29. Cycle maker
- Across**
31. Town in Greenland
 32. Goblet feature
 34. Poker diva
 37. Moonfish
 38. "Blue" or "White" river
 39. They're caught in pots
 41. Count
 42. ___ liquor
 43. Gaucho's weapon
 48. Audacious
 49. Music of India
 50. Signs
 52. Imogene and family
 53. "___ Stop the Rain" (Creedence Clearwater Rival tune)
 54. Cabbage
 57. Adagio and allegro
 60. Atlantic fish
 62. Waist circlers
 63. Ding
 64. Units of work
 66. Kit and caboodle
 67. World govt. in TV's "Futurama"
 68. Rotter.



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

R	E	M	A	D	E	M	E	T	E	G	N	P		
A	N	O	N	Y	M	E	X	A	M	T	O	U		
S	A	T	I	N	B	O	W	E	R	B	I	R	D	S
E	T	H	E	E	N	C	R	A	D	L	E	S		
D	E	B	S	R	E	A	I	R	E					
F	A	L	L	C	H	E	S	S	S	E	T			
A	L	L	A	Y	E	R	A	S	T	A	O			
V	E	L	V	E	T	B	E	N	T	G	R	A	S	
E	V	E	R	O	A	D	M	I	R	T	H			
R	A	D	I	O	I	N	G	T	A	B				
N	O	B	E	A	R	L	O	A	M					
S	E	V	A	S	L	U	G	H	I	S	A	D	D	
C	O	T	T	O	N	L	E	A	F	W	O	R	M	S
O	N	O	G	A	E	L	L	A	D	D	I	E		
T	S	P	Y	L	E	M	E	G	E	S	T	S		

8	7	2	9	5	3	1	4	6
4	5	6	8	1	2	7	9	3
3	1	9	4	6	7	5	2	8
1	3	8	5	9	4	2	6	7
5	2	4	3	7	6	8	1	9
9	6	7	2	8	1	4	3	5
7	8	3	1	4	9	6	5	2
2	4	5	6	3	8	9	7	1
6	9	1	7	2	5	3	8	4

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

- 1) Athens; 2) Napoleon Bonaparte; 3) Maroon; 4) Leather; 5) Drug trafficking

GOT YOUR NUMBER

6.5

times a year on average Jupiter is hit by meteors big enough to generate fireballs visible from Earth (774.01 million km).

20

moves are the most needed to solve any Rubik's cube.

150

years is how old female Greenland sharks need to be before they start reproducing.

3,500

guns per 100,000 people bought back by the government correlated with a 74% drop in gun suicides, according to an Australian study.

488 million

social media comments a year are fabricated by China's government to distract its citizens from bad news and political debates, said a Harvard study in 2016.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



Birds at sunset. Photo by Chris Pahlman

Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket? Email it to editor3@classactmedia.co.th

This week in history

Jan 2, 366

The Alemanni Germanic tribes cross the frozen Rhine in large numbers, invading the Roman Empire.

Jan 3, 2009

The first block of the blockchain of the decentralised payment system Bitcoin, called the *Genesis block*, is established by the creator of the system, Satoshi Nakamoto.

Jan 4, 1912

The Scout Association is incorporated throughout the British Empire by royal charter.

Jan 5, 1953

The play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett receives its première in Paris.

Jan 6, 1838

Alfred Vail and colleagues demonstrate a telegraph



Waiting for Godot.

system using dots and dashes (this is the forerunner of Morse code).

Jan 7, 1610

Galileo Galilei makes his first observation of the four Galilean moons: Ganymede, Callisto, Io and Europa.

Jan 8, 1867

The United States Congress passes the bill to allow African American men the right to vote in Washington, D.C.

Source: Wikipedia

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The only English-speaking Rotary Club in Phuket, we welcome Rotarians from around the world! With members from 18 nationalities, we are a diverse, dynamic, and well-known club in Thailand. 1st Tue each month - Fellowship dinner at different locations in Phuket, 3rd Tue each month - dinner meeting at Four Points by Sheraton Phuket Patong. Join us! if you are passionate about making a difference. More info - www.facebook.com/RCoPB

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Photo from Infuse Restaurant by Diamond Resort (p18)

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Revving up for the 2026 F1 season

FORMULA ONE

AFP

Lando Norris's success with McLaren in ending Max Verstappen's four-year reign as world champion on Dec 7 last year ushered in a winter of radical change for Formula One.

The 26-year-old Briton's title win at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix came in the final race before new cars and technical changes arrive in 2026 – and signalled an end to a “winning by any means” culture in the sport.

Norris said he won the title his way and with a team that respected its own “papaya rules” of equality under immense pressure.

His triumph prompted a wave of emotion not only for his win, but the way in which he won and then managed the impact of the occasion.

“I feel like I have managed to win it the way I wanted to win it, which was not by being someone I'm not. Not trying to be as aggressive as Max or as forceful as other champions



Photo: AFP

might have been in the past – whatever it may be.

“My style (is) of just trying to be a good person and a good team member.”

Even Verstappen, seen by many as a natural heir to Ayrton Senna and Michael Schumacher, uncompromising in taking a “killer” approach to the job, as 1996 champion Damon Hill described it, softened his style this year.

The departure from Red

Bull of long-serving and successful team boss Christian Horner created a less divisive atmosphere in the paddock too with respect for McLaren's onus on fair racing without team orders setting a new trend for the future.

“I'm not proud because I get to say I am a world champion,” added Norris. “I'm proud because I feel like I made a lot of people happy.”

His team-mate Oscar Piastri showed total respect for McLaren's rulebook during the season, even if he was at times exasperated by his ill fortune, and he will be a strong rival again in 2026 with new teams, cars, rules and line-ups.

MERCEDES FAVOURED

Mercedes have been tipped to set the pace next season having developed a new

power-unit that many of their rivals believe will launch their recovery as a leading team.

The team have been developing and testing for a long period with major investment in the project and expect Kimi Antonelli, who shone in many parts of his rookie season, to rise and challenge George Russell.

The cars will be lighter, smaller and more agile under the new regulations with the weight reduced by 30 kilos. They will also be shorter and slimmer.

Mercedes will supply their own factory team and also McLaren, Williams and Alpine, while Red Bull and sister team Racing Bulls will run Red Bull Powertrains, their own development following the break from Honda.

Ferrari will run their own engines as always and will continue to supply Haas and power the new Cadillac team.

AUDI HOPES

After a mixed 2025 season ended with one podium, but only 70 points, Audi – formerly Sauber – hope to

become a serious midfield contender in 2026. They finished ninth ahead only of Alpine last season.

Audi will have an unchanged driver line-up of Nico Hulkenberg, who started his 250th Grand Prix in Abu Dhabi, and Gabriel Bortoleto, while new boys Cadillac, bringing in much American cash and colour with the backing of GM, will rely on the experience of Valtteri Bottas and Sergio Perez.

Verstappen will have a new Red Bull team-mate after the promotion of Isack Hadjar from Racing Bulls, following an outstanding rookie season. His seat will be taken by 18-year-old Briton Arvid Lindblad alongside Liam Lawson.

The era-ending switch to new cars was welcomed by many drivers, but notably by seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton after a dismal debut season at Ferrari. Of his record 105 wins, only two have come since the end of 2021. Team-mate Charles Leclerc said the team, without a drivers' title since 2007, faced a “now or never” moment this winter.

SEA Games coach dies in road accident

SEA GAMES

THE THAI SPORTING community is in mourning after the loss of Kanokporn Donsumran, a member of Thailand's national karate coaching staff, who died in a road accident in Loei province after completing her duties at the recent 2025 SEA Games in Bangkok.

Kanokporn, 38, was killed when her car collided with the rear of a sugarcane truck in Wang Saphung district of the northeastern province on Dec 18.

The accident occurred on a poorly lit stretch of road, with investigators finding that the truck's tail lights were obscured by sugarcane stalks and leaves. The truck was travelling in the overtaking lane when the collision happened.

Thaweasuk Chiaochanpreechakul, secretary-general of the Thailand Karate Federation, who was a passenger in the vehicle, also received treatment at Loei Hospital.



Kanokporn. Photo: Bangkok Post

Kanokporn was instrumental in the success of the Thai karate team at last year's SEA Games, where the squad claimed four gold medals, five silvers and two bronzes. The total of 11 medals tied Thailand with Vietnam but the latter finished first by virtue of having six golds.

Authorities later discovered that the sugarcane truck owner had not renewed its compulsory motor insurance since 2020, and road tax for its trailer section had not been paid since 2023. Officials said most sugarcane trucks operating in Loei have similar compliance issues.

Bangkok Post

ONE Championship goes big in 2026

MMA

ONE CHAMPIONSHIP HAS announced plans to host more than 70 events in 2026, marking one of the most ambitious annual schedules in the promotion's history.

The martial arts organisation confirmed on Dec 11 that next year's calendar will include its usual slate of weekly ONE Friday Fights cards from Lumpinee Stadium in Bangkok, alongside 12 monthly ONE Fight Night broadcasts on Prime Video in the United States – including a long-planned return to Denver on June 26.

That leaves room for more major numbered events, with several possibly to be added to the schedule in the coming months.

So far, only two have been officially confirmed: ONE 175, set for Apr 29 at Ariake Arena in Tokyo, and ONE 174, scheduled for Apr 3 with the location still to be announced.

It is understood more cities and new markets are under evaluation for future numbered events as the schedule becomes more internationally focused.

Further announcements are expected in early 2026, including championship headliners and additional host locations.

The Friday Fights series – now a cornerstone of ONE's calendar –



Petnamtan. RIP. Photo: ONE Championship

Ariake Arena in Tokyo. Photo: ONE Championship

is set to deliver 45 events in 2025, showcasing up-and-coming Muay Thai, kickboxing and MMA talent while producing breakout stars and rapid-fire highlight reels.

That format will continue next year with a similar volume, while four quarterly “tentpole” events are again expected.

FINAL FIGHT

Meanwhile, tributes have been paid to Muay Thai fighter Petnamtan VWin Gym, who died at the age of 21, less than three weeks after making his promotional debut with ONE Championship.

The martial arts organisation confirmed on its social media pages that the young Thai prospect passed away peacefully on Dec 10, after complications from influenza A, which spread into his bloodstream and brain.

Petnamtan, born on Dec 7, 2004, was from Koh Samui district

in Surat Thani province and was widely regarded as one of the most promising fighters of his generation.

He made his ONE debut at ONE Friday Fights 134 on Nov 21, where he announced himself in impressive fashion with a unanimous decision victory over Aomsin Por Patcharawat in a flyweight Muay Thai bout at Lumpinee Stadium.

That performance, which showcased his composure and technical skill on a major stage, was expected to be the beginning of a long career at the highest level. Tragically, it proved to be the final fight of his life.

In its statement, ONE Championship expressed deep condolences to his family and loved ones, saying the organisation would “forever remember his love for Muay Thai, his dedication, and his fighting spirit”.

Bangkok Post

The ever-expanding Phuket darts scene

DARTS

Carl Webb

The popularity of darts continues to grow globally and Phuket is no exception. The longstanding Phuket darts league is set to expand with venues in the south of the island looking to get into the action.

The existing Phuket league is based around the north of the island with current league leaders Doo Duck Bar playing in Kamala, closely pursued by last seasons winners Kindee Flames. Kindee Bistro in Cherng Talay has made a name for itself by offering both steel tip and soft tip darts. Kindee also boasts two teams, the Flames and the Bulls with some team members also playing national competitions in Bangkok.

Anyone in the Bang Tao area is spoilt for choice with Local Bar, Orange Corner and Ozone 8 Bar all in close proximity. Phuket League matches are played Tuesday evenings, often attracting spectators and all are welcome to come and watch. All the bars have darts available seven days a week for anyone that may wish to join a team or simply enjoy the social side of the sport.

In addition to the Tuesday night Phuket league, friendly darts



Players at The Little Mermaid in Kata. Photo: Carl Webb

competitions are played across the island each week. Monday evening sees Devils Bar in Kamala take centre stage, with Kindee Bistro running its weekly competition each Thursday. For those in Patong, Friday evening is the time to visit Phuket's longest running darts competition at Star Fish Bar, which now boasts the island's only dedicated multi-board darts lounge.

The south of the island is now getting into the act with both Happy Days Bar and Tank and Throttle Bar both combining pool and darts for the full pub sport experience in Chalong. Gozar in Rawai also offers both pool and darts, while Little Mermaid Guesthouse and Restaurant in Kata has a dual board darts area. All these bars are now recruiting for players to

begin a friendly darts league in southern Phuket.

Whether you are an experienced player or a total novice, all the island's darts venues offer a friendly welcome. Contact them direct or simply drop by for a drink and 'have a chuck'.

Meanwhile, global brand Mission Darts will soon launch in Thailand. They bring a full range of professional quality equipment plus support and advice on how to make darts work for your business. For players they offer the services of Asia's only PDPR qualified darts coach.

With much more planned it is an exciting time for Phuket's darts scene and no matter where you are on the island, there is a local darts bar waiting for you.

Thailand turns focus to 2026 Asian Games

ASIAN GAMES

AFTER RECLAIMING the mantle of overall champions for the first time in a decade at the recent SEA Games, Thailand has quickly shifted focus to next year's Asian Games in Japan.

"The SEA Games have given us confidence, but the Asian Games demand a different approach," said Sports Authority of Thailand and Governor Dr Gongsak Yodmani on Dec 21.

"We will reduce the size of the delegation, emphasising quality over quantity. Selection will be rigorous, and we expect higher standards of performance. In Nagoya, we want athletes capable of delivering results."

The 20th Asian Games will take place from Sept 19 to Oct 4 next year in Nagoya. Forty-one sports are scheduled, 32 of them part of the Paris 2024 Olympic programme. Some 15,000 athletes and officials from 45 nations are expected.

For Thailand, the event is both a proving ground



Gongsak. Photo: Bangkok Post

and a stepping stone towards the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028. The SAT has already begun discussions with national federations to ensure continuous training camps and closer collaboration.

The medal table at the SEA Games revealed striking contrasts with combat sports such as boxing, Muay Thai, taekwondo and jiu-jitsu exceeding expectations while traditional powerhouses football and sepak takraw faltered badly.

Eight federations, including bowling, shooting and triathlon, returned empty-handed.

By contrast, 18 sports surpassed their targets, among them badminton, gymnastics, billiards, golf and indoor volleyball.

Bangkok Post

New kids on the block frighten Patong Penguins at the ACG

CRICKET

THE RUN-RATE AT the Alan Cooke Ground (ACG) in Thalang on Dec 15 matched the ever-increasing temperature in Phuket as a combined 463-runs were scored in a 25-over clash between the Patong Penguins and newcomers Cherngtalay Cricket Club.

With the latter playing in their inaugural match and being mostly comprised of AFL/Rugby players, many would be forgiven for predicting a straight-forward victory for the long-established Penguins. However, this wouldn't be the case as the veteran-side were forced to dig-deep and work hard for their 29-run victory.

Jagsir Brar won the toss and elected to bat first, a decision that seemed justified as Simon Wetherell (11) and Anthony Van Blerk (16) cantered along before a sharp Usman Khaleeque removed the former in the 3rd over with the score 19-1.

Ajay Sampige (38) maintained the high-tempo as both he and Van Blerk added a further 31-runs before Anthony Dupont saw the back of the South African opener in the 6th over, Josh Linthorne holding onto a tough chance in the gully. In-form Pelham Myburgh (46) then stepped to the crease and the left-hander wasted little time in showing his class as he peppered the boundary with regularity before sportingly declaring his innings post drinks-break.

Further middle-order contributions by Brar (24) and Sam (29) pushed the score well beyond the 200-mark, before a late Mayur Deuskar (17*) cameo left the batting-side on a colossal 246/7 from their allotted 25-overs.

SEISMIC

Requiring a shade under 10-runs per-over, Cherngtalay knew they would have to put together a near-perfect chase to get anywhere close to the seismic total. The innings started disastrously how-



Photo: Supplied

ever, as opener Aian Mclenan (2) lasted just four deliveries before being cleaned-up by Deuskar in the first over.

Mitchell (13) then joined Khaleeque (79*) at the crease and the pair steadied the ship with a much-needed 69-run stand before the former could only chip to Brar at mid-off in the 11th over, Lenny Leerdam

claiming the scalp.

An unfortunate injury ended McMillans (6) innings after just four balls faced and brought Craig Morgan (77) to the crease. A circumspect start navigated his side to 77-3 after 12 overs as both teams headed for a much-needed drinks break.

Following the cool refreshments and now re-

quiring a daunting 13 runs per over, the left-handed pairing of Khaleeque and Morgan wasted little time in getting stuck into the bowlers as the duo upped the ante with gusto, adding a staggering 121 runs (including 15 boundaries) from the next 10 overs.

PANIC

With balls flying all over the ground and genuine panic now starting to settle-in amongst his teammates, Brar entrusted his fellow countryman Sajal Gaur with finding the breakthrough. That faith was instantly repaid as some clever bowling found Morgan's outside edge in the 22nd over and, when Deuskar gleefully snaffled the chance behind the stumps, the fielder's were finally afforded a collective sigh of relief.

Following Morgan's departure, the Penguins quickly regained control of the contest and conceded just 19 runs from the remaining 5 overs to put the seal on a hard-fought win.

Although on the losing

side, the clear man-of-the-match was Morgan for his destructive innings of 77 from 38 deliveries, including a quartet of monstrous sixes. Khaleeque's supporting role of 79 not-out ensured his team remained in the contest until the very end.

Myburgh's stock continues to rise each game as the Namibian struck 46 from just 23 balls-faced, whilst Sampige's 38 from 33 proved crucial in helping his side set an insurmountable total. Deuskar's all-round performance was also pivotal in his teams success.

A differential of 26 extras between the teams proved key in the end and whilst Cherngtalay will no doubt be disappointed with the result, they will leave with a certain amount of optimism in the belief that with more training sessions and match practice behind them, the gap between the two sides can be closed.

Curt Livermore

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