

February 18, 2022

To: His Excellency General Prayuth Chan-o-cha
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand
Government House
1 Pitsanuloke Road, Dusit, Bangkok 10300

Dear General Prayuth,

Subject: Proposed adjustments for "Test & Go" programme

I strongly support the government on its decision to resume the “Test & Go” quarantine-free program and believe that the country will gradually see international tourists flow back in as fears of COVID-19 begin to subside. However, I particularly want to share a few thoughts on some of the ways we can improve the effectiveness of the scheme and ensure success in welcoming tourists back.

It has been proven that Thailand has failed to successfully bring tourism back, and many of these are attributed to unnecessary entry restrictions and COVID-19 related requirements which no longer make sense. Since reopening, foreign tourist arrivals and tourism receipts that the country has so far received are only a small fraction of pre-pandemic levels. Unless we immediately eliminate all these cumbersome regulations, Thailand will be left behind the rest of the world. And the tourism sector could suffer even more losses than we already have.

The additional conditions that comes with this resurrection of Test & Go which started on February 1st, pose considerable challenges to the recovery of Thai tourism. The extra requirement for a second RT-PCR test on the fifth day at a hotel in which tourists need to stay in and wait for the result is an excessive burden that achieves little in the way of safety. Despite the fact that travelers are allowed to book different hotels to take a mandatory test on both of these days, this strict prepayment of hotel booking prerequisite interrupts travel planning. The government should opt to discontinue this mandatory second RT-PCR test, along with the Thailand Pass pre-approval system and the insurance requirements. These adjustments will not only offer the flexibility and convenience that tourists expect, but they will also help enticing foreign tourists back.

Additionally, the overall reopening process has many regulatory inconsistencies that create confusion for all parties involved. Provincial governors and communicable disease committees have at times issued conflicting orders, forcing tourism operators to undergo lengthy clarification processes just to abide by new rules. The decentralized structure allows local authorities to implement differing policies, resulting in misunderstanding for both hotel operators, travelers and tourist operators. Therefore, I am of the opinion that a centralized system with clear and uniform instruction from the national government is needed. Tourism policy needs to be developed and implemented at a national level, as we have always done during the past crises. Policy makers ought to understand the importance of the tourism sector and support operators in navigating new rules and processes.

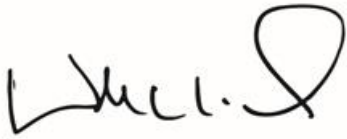
Many restrictions that apply specifically to incoming tourists are no longer necessary as domestic transmission of Omicron has already spread far and wide. The reopening should be as simple as possible, avoiding redundant processes that place excessive burdens on travelers. Thailand should follow the entry rules of those tourism dependent economies such as the Maldives, Dubai, the United States and European nations. Several of these destinations have already seen positive rebound of visitors, climbing back to pre COVID-19 levels. According to the collection of data on entry restrictions and COVID-19 travel requirements around the world conducted by *sherpa*, there are more than 100 countries that are currently applying less stringent entry requirements as compared to those being applied in Thailand. It is also important to note that many of these countries are seeing even higher number of daily new cases than ours. However, they have transitioned to treat this virus as an endemic disease, like seasonal flu. Therefore, any kinds of restriction are no longer necessary. It has been proven that countries with a more liberal reopening approach will see a stronger tourism rebound as compared to those with conservative policies like what we are seeing in Thailand.

I wish to reiterate again that the existing Thailand Pass pre-approval system has outlived its usefulness and is serving as a hindrance to travel rather than a public health safeguard. Pre-departure proof of vaccination and RT-PCR testing, as required by most nations and airlines, are already sufficient and more than enough in today's world. We have accumulated travelers feedbacks on Test & Go scheme and learn that Thailand's policy is too cumbersome (please see our infographic in Appendix 1 below for your reference). Eliminating these regulations should be the government's top priority to unlock our tourism recovery and the Thai economy.

I would expect that we will see more variants after Omicron. In such events, the worst course of action would be reverting back to lockdowns and restrictions. It is time that we learn to live with COVID-19 as

it becomes an endemic. We must get back to normality in our daily lives. I thank you in advance for your consideration on this important matter. Should you have any questions or concerns, I make myself at your disposal.

Yours Sincerely,



William E. Heinecke
Chairman
Minor International PCL.

CC: His Excellency Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Health

His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Mr. Supattanapong Punmeechaow
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy

His Excellency Mr. Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn
Minister of Tourism and Sports

General Suphot Malaniyom
Secretary - General of National Security Council

Mr. Yuthasak Supasorn
Governor of Tourism Authority of Thailand

Mr. Kalin Sarasin

Senior Chairman of The Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand

Mr. Sanan Angubolkul

Chairman of The Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand

Mrs. Marisa Sukosol Nunbhakdi

President of Thai Hotels Association







Mr. Bhumikitti Ruktaengam

President of Phuket Tourist Association



Appendix 1

Traveler Feedback on "Test & Go"



Before Arrival

 Long wait time	 Unusable access code	 Long call center queue (up to multiple hours)	 Email registration (only applicable for some email service providers)
 Several application denials due to the quality of uploaded photos	 Pre-paid hotel bookings for two RT-PCR stays (cumbersome, difficult to adjust, and if there are any changes, must restart the process anew)		


Arrival

 Time spent in multi-step document checking process	 Unnecessary in-person document screening (despite already having Thailand Pass QR code)
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During Stay

 The 2nd RT-PCR test on Day 5 is unnecessary when travelers are vaccinated and have been tested before they fly. This obligation can certainly complicate traveler's holidays, and all.	 Many testing centers are fully booked and many provide poor service
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Insurance

	Required insurance policy still does not cover many expected COVID-19 related situations – in case of positive test or high-risk contact, the expense of hospital/ hotel isolation/ home isolation must be covered by travelers themselves.
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Recommended Solution

Two simple requirements:	
 Proof of full vaccination or proof of past infection	 A negative RT-PCR test result

