

Bookings hit the roof for south Thailand

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BANGKOK – Thailand is seeing unprecedented confirmed bookings to Phuket, Khao Lak and Krabi this high season.

Tour operators told *TTG Asia* Phuket and Khao Lak in particular, devastated by the December 2004 tsunami, were seeing an absolute turnaround and Krabi was hot on their heels.

Diethlem Travel Asia chief operating officer, Mr Richard Brouwer, said: "For us, the absolute winners are Phuket and Khao Lak: hotels are full and right now, some have even stopped selling."

In terms of clientele, Mr Brouwer said Khao Lak was a gathering place for Germans and Scandinavians while Phuket enjoyed a mix of tourists from every market worldwide.

Stockholm-based TUI Nordic product area manager for Italy and South-east Asia, Ms Lin Wessblad, said her company saw about 6,000 clients booked for Phuket per month this high season from October 2007 to April 2008. Krabi and nearby Koh Lanta were also doing very well in terms of volume at about 3,000 clients a month.

That translates to about 84,000 room nights monthly for Phuket hotels from TUI Nordic alone, Association of Thai Travel Agents president, Mr Apichart Sankary, said.

Scandinavian tourists stay in Thailand for an average length of 14 days. Some stay as long as three weeks. Scandinavian

tourists' average daily expenditure was 5,000 baht (US\$165) per person.

Mr Apichart, who is also managing director of inbound AED Travel Company, handling the Stockholm-based My Travel account, said the company would be handling at least 420,000 room nights for 80,000 passengers on My Travel's winter charter flights to Phuket and Krabi – a more than 50 per cent increase compared to 2006. Phuket enjoys the largest share of the pie, 80 per cent, followed by Krabi and Trang (19 per cent) and Khao Lak (one per cent).

Ms Wessblad said her company saw an increasing demand for Khao Lak with 1,500 tourists per month – almost reaching the tour operator's pre-tsunami volume of 2,000 tourists monthly.

Go Vacation Thailand reports it booked more than 45,000 room nights at the destination for the German market from November until April. Managing director, Mr Christoph Mueller, said the bookings were still coming in on a daily basis. He said: "For (Go Vacation Thailand) the winner for the German market will definitely be Khao Lak, which we expect to see grow by several hundred per cent."

Asian Trails CEO, Mr Luzi Matzig, said his company's Apollo Scandinavia account saw about 25,000 tourists visiting the three Andaman coastal areas of Phuket, Khao Lak and Krabi. He said Koh Samui, Hua Hin and Pattaya were also flourishing.