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Bangkok bomb: Q&A for travellers - is the city safe?

An explosion in central Bangkok has left 20 dead, including four foreigners, raising fears about tourist safety in the city

By Oliver Smith

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An explosion in central Bangkok in which 20 people have been killed, including four foreigners, is likely to raise concerns about tourist safety of tourists in the city - and the timing is particularly bad for Thailand's travel industry. A second explosion, thought to have been a device thrown from a bridge into the Chao Praya river, did not harm anyone, although the river itself is busy with passenger boats that are used by a great many tourists.

The country is popular among backpackers and winter sun seekers, and the bombing comes as many Britons are returning from their summer holidays and starting to think about a winter break. A-level results have also just been announced and thousands of students are planning their gap years. Around 900,000 Britons visit Thailand each year, according to the Foreign Office.

Is Thailand safe?

While Bangkok has been the site of occasionally violent political protests in recent years, attacks such as this are extremely rare.

The bomb exploded in the heart the city, at the Erawan Shrine, a popular attraction for both tourists and locals at the Ratchaprasong intersection in the busy Chidlom shopping district. Several major hotel chains have branches in the vicinity, including Holiday Inn, InterContinental, Renaissance and Grand Hyatt. Lumpini Park, Bangkok's only bit of green space, lies a few blocks to the south. Prawit Wongsuwon, Thailand's defence minister, said the bombers had "targeted foreigners... to damage tourism and the economy."

The second explosion occurred near Sathorn pier which is used by tourists and is close to the Shangri-La hotel.

Hong Kong authorities are warning residents to avoid travel to Bangkok, but in Australia, Tony Abbott, the prime minister, has urged his fellow citizens to not be intimidated by extremism.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) said security in the city has increased but that all transport links and tourist attractions are open as usual. It has urged tourists to avoid the Chidlom shopping area however and asked visitors to remain vigilant when travelling through busy parts of the city and report anything suspicious to police or security officers.

Frances Geoghegan, currently in Bangkok and managing director of Cleveland Collection, a tour operator that offers packages to Thailand, said extra security had already been put in place at some of the city's larger hotels.

The Foreign Office website is currently advising Britons to monitor news reports and take extra care. It has not issued any warning against travel to Bangkok, but says it is monitoring the situation.

It states that there is a “high threat” from terrorism in Thailand. “Bomb and grenade attacks have been indiscriminate, including in places visited by expatriates and foreign travellers,” it adds.



Historically, the biggest problems have been in the far south of the country, where the Thai military has been fighting a separatist insurgency since the 1960s.

The Foreign Office advises Britons against all but essential travel to the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla, 1,000km south of Bangkok. “Since 2004, there have been almost daily attacks in the far south of the country, including arson, bombings and shootings,” it adds. “Targets have included civilians and members of the security forces, government offices, tourist hotels, discos, bars, shops, marketplaces, supermarkets, schools, transport infrastructure and trains. More than 5,000 people have been killed and several thousand more injured. No British nationals have been killed in these attacks, but some foreigners have been.”

Previous terror attacks in other parts of the country include two bombings at night markets in Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand, in 2010, and an explosion in the underground car park of a

shopping mall in Koh Samui earlier this year. A series of explosions in Bangkok in 2012 injured five; Thai authorities said they were a failed attempt by Iranian nationals to assassinate Israeli diplomats. In February 2015 two small bombs injured one person near the entrance to the Siam Paragon shopping mall, some 500 metres from the site of Monday's attack.

Is there any travel disruption?

Flights are continuing to operate to and from the city. According to TAT, all transport links in central Bangkok are running as usual but while the intersection is investigated there may be disruption to traffic there. Hotels and shopping malls in the surrounding area will be open as usual from Tuesday. All other tourist attractions and services are open and operating as usual, it said.

Will the attack deter visitors?

"In the wake of the February explosions, security was tightened," said Tom Vater, Telegraph Travel's Bangkok expert. "But Monday's blast was far worse, both in size and impact. With at least 20 dead, many more injured and a scene of carnage around one of the country's most sacred places, in one of the areas most frequented by foreign visitors, it is likely that this disastrous event will have longer term consequences for Bangkok.

"Whether Thailand's teflon image as the Land of Smiles will win the day once the dust has settled remains to be seen. To some extent it will depend on whether the culprits are caught and which group they belong to. The blast may also lead to more tightened security and a bigger military presence on the streets which may in turn affect tourism."

Frances Geoghegan from Cleveland Collection added: "We have clients in Bangkok at the moment. I was near to where the explosion happened and was able to personally contact all of them and reassure them. While some were anxious, the hotels, notably the Mandarin Oriental and The Siam, were exemplary in handling what was a difficult situation. Nobody has chosen yet to alter their plans, and so far none of our clients have chosen to cancel their trips. This may change of course, with some clients perhaps choosing to cancel their Bangkok stopover."



Can I cancel my holiday?

You could, but you don't have a legal right to a refund unless the Foreign Office advises against travel to the destination concerned. Some tour operators may let you postpone or change your holiday – but they are under no obligation to do so.

Similarly, for those travelling independently, airlines are unlikely to offer alternative flights or a refund unless you pay a rebooking or cancellation fee. For hotel bookings and car hire reservations made independently, you will lose your deposit should you choose to cancel, unless you can convince the owners/companies otherwise.

Most insurers will not cover the cost of cancelling your flight or holiday because of what they will see as “a disinclination to travel”. The exact terms vary from policy to policy. Check the small print.

Check the Foreign Office website for the latest updates: gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/thailand